



Yorkminster Presbyterian Church

Child Protection Policy Adopted October 19, 2015

General Purpose Statement

Yorkminster Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Yorkminster Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations. This policy does not apply to outside organizations which use the Yorkminster facilities.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “youth” refers more specifically to children in grades 6-12. The term “adult” refers to persons age 18 and older. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule for Volunteers**

Only persons who been involved with Yorkminster Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months will be considered for any position involving contact with minors. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by Yorkminster Presbyterian Church, either online or in person. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church, or in a secure system online.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the volunteer application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position. Persons seeking paid positions must be interviewed.

d) **Reference Checks**

First-time applicants will be required to provide at least two personal references. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Yorkminster Presbyterian or in a secure system online.

e) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check and search of the National Sex Offender database is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in our school/preschool/daycare center;
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;
- Those counseling children;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children (such as, church sponsored athletic team coaches and vehicle drivers).
- In addition, a statewide criminal check is recommended for persons who will work with youth on overnight trips, and persons who have been active in the church for less than one year. In these cases, the search should include all states in which the candidate has lived within the last 3 years.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church/synagogue/meeting to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

Disqualifying Offense: What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Yorkminster Presbyterian Church Personnel Team on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the Yorkminster Presbyterian Church, or online in a secure system.

Prevention policies

Two adult rule: It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be at least two students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation. Counseling should be conducted in a visually public, acoustically private setting, such as an office with an uncovered window, in which the counselor is in plain view.

Open Door Policy: Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Off-site Youth Trips: At least two un-related adults shall be present on all off-site youth trips, and at least one chaperone for each sex when participants represent both sexes. Care will be taken to house adults separate from youth when feasible. Unless a parent is housed with their own child, there must be at least two youth in a room with an adult.

Mentors: In youth programs, it is appropriate that an adult mentor be assigned to a youth. The mentor and youth should meet in a public location. The mentor should not transport the youth in his/her own vehicle unless either written permission is obtained from the youth's parent/guardian specifically stating the name of the adult driver and the youth to be transported, or additional persons are present in the vehicle.

Minimum age

All primary volunteer workers must be 18 years of age or older. Younger persons may assist adults, but may not take the place of adult workers. The church may employ responsible teens (under the age of 18) only in positions with and under the direct supervision of an approved adult worker.

For overnight events, such as lock-ins and off-site trips, at least one adult will be age 21 or older.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Yorkminster Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult a pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Supervision Ratio

Yorkminster will strive to maintain these ratios of adults to children/youth. It may not always be possible to adhere to these recommended ratios. However, every effort should be made to achieve the best level of supervision of children at all times.

Participant Age	Number of Adults	Number of Participants	Number of participants for each additional adult
0-1 years	2	6	3
2 -5 years	2	10	5
6–8 years	2	12	6
9–14 years	2	16	8
15-18 years	2	20	10

Off-site trips or overnights will require additional supervision, and at least one adult of the same gender as the participants represented (eg.a lock-in with both male and female participants requires at least one male and one female adult leader)

The Yorkminster Presbyterian Pre-School maintains its own supervision ratios and discipline policies as reviewed by the Department of Social Services.

Worker training

Each new worker will be given a copy of the Commonwealth of Virginia's "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect" booklet and Yorkminster Presbyterian Church's Child

Protection Policy. Workers must sign a statement indicating they have received and read both documents before they can begin working with children. All workers should participate in Child Protection Training, either online or in person, at least every three years. YPC will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this Yorkminster Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to a pastor or clerk of Session for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Yorkminster Presbyterian Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. A pastor, or in the event the pastor is the accused, the Clerk of Session, will be contacted. The person making the report will immediately document the incident in writing, noting the names of child, the accused, all persons who witnessed the incident, and the details of the incident.
2. The Pastor or Clerk of Session will notify the parent or guardian of the child.
3. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
4. Civil authorities will be notified, and Yorkminster Presbyterian Church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The Yorkminster Presbyterian Church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
5. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

6. The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. In the event the Senior Pastor is involved, the Session will designate a spokesperson. Yorkminster Presbyterian Church will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.