



CHILD & YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Manual Of Operations

Approved September 19, 2017



PRESBYTERY OF WABASH VALLEY
PO Box 225 – 707 Main St. Rochester, IN 46975

General Purpose Statement

Presbytery of Wabash Valley, a middle-governing body (“Presbytery”), seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in programs and activities sponsored by the Presbytery. By implementing the practices below, our goal is to protect the children of Presbytery of Wabash Valley from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff, leaders and other volunteers (“worker”) from false accusations. We will maintain the strongest sense of integrity, safety, nurturing, and care involving all interactions with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The *Book of Order* states, “The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life,” and Presbyterians believe this baptismal commitment to be a serious one, understanding it to apply to all in the church’s care, including children, youth, and vulnerable adults (*Book of Order* W-2.3013).

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” and “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in a day care or Presbytery event, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, in one-on-one mentoring of minors, and who participates at any level at Presbytery-sponsored events or activities involving children and/or youth.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities must be at least 18 years of age and will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with a congregation of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley for a minimum of six (6) months and is recommended by an active participant in presbytery- this may be pastor, clerk, ruling elder commissioner or others. 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 Presbytery of Wabash Valley and consent to a criminal background check. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous Presbytery of Wabash Valley affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence in a secure file at the Presbytery of Wabash Valley office.

c) Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a video or face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) Reference Checks Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. 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 Presbytery of Wabash Valley.

e) Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteer workers as defined above. Presbytery of Wabash Valley presently uses ProtectMyMinistry who will send an email form seeking written consent for PWV to use its services. The written report will be retained in a confidential, secured file at Presbytery of Wabash Valley.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the Presbytery of Wabash Valley to run the check.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Presbytery Administrative Head of Staff (Visioning & Connecting Leader) 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, driving records, 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 in a secured file at the Presbytery of Wabash Valley.

f) Training and Annual Affirmation

Presbytery of Wabash Valley will provide training at no cost to volunteers on this child protection policy and Indiana mandatory reporting requirements for all childcare workers and 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. Participation in safe child training approved by the Presbytery is mandatory and is required every three years of service with children and youth. All volunteers and staff who work with children and youth engaged in Presbytery events will read and agree to abide by the child and youth protection policy annually.

g) Exceptions

Persons from PWV congregations that have a Protection Policy and have been screened by that congregation to work with youth at a PWV event need not duplicate this process. PWV will review and honor submitted materials from PWV congregations.

Two Adult Rule and Ratios

It is our policy that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times (including during overnight events, transportation in a vehicle, or break times) when children or youth are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth events 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 no fewer than three 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. This policy applies to Triennium programs, confirmation retreats, Presbytery-sponsored childcare, and any other programs for children provided by the Presbytery.

The adult to child ratio for all child-related events/activities is 2:10. The adult to youth ratio for all youth-related events/activities is 2:17. There shall also be one adult of each gender when there are one or more minors of each gender in a group.

Responsibility of Parents

The legal guardians of each minor must provide the appropriate information and medical forms for each activity/event. The information form should include all contacts for legal guardians and the medical form must include a copy of the minor's health insurance card for all overnight events. Consent forms must be signed by legal guardians for events requiring travel. Any photos of individuals at the event that are used in social media or published material by the Presbytery of one its organizing entities must be released by a signed consent form from a participant's legal guardian as well as the minor. The Presbytery of Wabash Valley is not responsible for photos or other posts put on social media by the youth. Parents are encouraged to discourage their children from doing so without the permission of the subjects in the photo. All appropriate information and medical forms must be stored in the Presbytery office in a secure place with restricted access. A code of conduct and prohibited and expected behaviors should be given in written form to each youth participant and legal guardians, as well as discussed thoroughly at the beginning of the event/activity.

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.

- **Misuse of technology** – use of technology that results in the harassing or abusing of a child/youth. This includes using technology to send suggestive message and images to a child or youth. Adults should not have any technological contact with a child or youth that is not either preapproved by the child/youth's legal guardian with a signed waiver, or the contact is on an open public medium, such as a church website or other social media program.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In Indiana, any person who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect has a duty to make a report to Child Protective Services (CPS) or to the police. "Reason to believe" means that the evidence available to that person, if presented to other individuals of similar background and training, would make those individuals think that the child was abused or neglected.

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this Presbytery of Wabash Valley event becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to Presbytery of Wabash Valley head of staff and the Stated Clerk, designated as the Safe Child Response Team along with a third person recommended by the Head of Staff and approved by Council, who will respond including reporting to authorities as mandated by state law. The head of staff will handle the legal and pastoral matters and the Stated Clerk will handle allegations of teaching elder or ruling elder misconduct for which the PC(USA) Rules of Discipline may apply; the Safe Child Response Team will consult with one another as appropriate.

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

1. Immediately provide for the safety of the alleged victim involved.
2. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
3. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
4. All allegations of abuse shall be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
5. The Presbytery's insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company and to the Stated Clerk.
6. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the Presbytery. All other representatives of the organization will refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.

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.

Additional Provisions Regarding Child Protection Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open while children or youth are in the room, 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.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children under the age of eight years, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a "child check" for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present the "child check" in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the "child check," Presbytery of Wabash Valley will be contacted. Presbytery head of staff or designee will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Presbytery of Wabash Valley. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of Presbytery of Wabash Valley not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care without permission. Ordinarily, medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

However, with appropriate medical information forms provided, the event nurse or designated health coordinator may dispense approved medications. Permission must be given from an accompanying adult before the nurse can administer any medications other than basic first aid.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Presbytery of Wabash Valley not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing,

Policy concerning Children with Special Needs

Presbytery of Wabash Valley is unable to provide staffing to care for children with special emotional or physical needs as identified by parents or school authorities. For special services for their child wanting to engage in Presbytery-sponsored activities, parents will consult with the Presbytery head of staff to arrange and fund those special services in advance of the event.

Policy for Activities Planning

Presbytery events will be planned to provide for the safety of children and youth, such as appropriate security for the premises, age-appropriate activities, providing life jackets and/or life guards and adult supervision for water activities, sufficient number of volunteers and staff to assure ratios of supervision at all times as required by the policy, appropriately licensed and insured vehicles and drivers over the age of 21 for transportation of children and youth, safe facilities for children and youth, and other aspects of planning Presbytery activities. Presbytery will seek to assure safe space for events attended by children and youth. Known sex offenders will be prohibited from volunteering in a building when and where a children and/or youth event is being held. Guidelines for appropriate behavior will be provided during training sessions and acknowledged by caregivers for children and youth.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the caregiver's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.