

Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

Presbytery of Plains and Peaks

May 2022

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Rationale

Children, youth, and vulnerable adults are a gift from God and the Church has a divine mandate to provide for their safety and nurturing. The Church is called to be a place that reflects the open arms of Jesus. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me." The Church is to be, at all levels of council and in all entities, a place of safety and nurture reflective of the arms of Christ.

The Presbytery of Plains and Peaks seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in programs and activities sponsored specifically by the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks. Our goal is to protect participants from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false reports.

Purposes

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
2. Provide a process for screening individuals who are entrusted with the care and supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

In addition to this policy, all members of Presbytery (see *Standing Rules* for membership requirements), all persons on other rolls of Presbytery (commissioned pastors, commissioned church workers, inquirers, and candidates), all employees of the Presbytery, whether or not ordained to church office, and all who serve in the work or function on behalf of the Presbytery as volunteers or as specific agents of the Presbytery are subject to the *Policy and Procedure on Sexual Misconduct of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks*.

Scope

This policy shall apply to all persons employed by or volunteering for activities sponsored specifically by the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks. All churches and Highlands Presbyterian Camp and Retreat Center shall have their own Child and Youth Protection Policy as required by the *Book of Order* (G-3.0106).

Definitions

The following terms used herein are defined as follows:

1. *Child/Youth*: For the purposes of this policy, any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
2. *Vulnerable adult* is defined as any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday and has developmental disabilities or otherwise lacks mental capacity to make appropriate decisions concerning his/her health, safety, and welfare. Such persons shall be included within the scope of protection of children/youth set forth in these procedures.
3. *Adult*: Any person who has reached the age of majority as defined by Colorado (18) or Nebraska (19) state law.
4. *Volunteer*: Any unpaid adult person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of children/youth/vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control over children/youth/vulnerable adults.

5. *Sexual Misconduct*: Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth/vulnerable adult, whether at the church, at home, or any other setting. Such activity includes, but is not limited to, direct or indirect contact or interaction with a child/youth/vulnerable adult for the sexual stimulation of the abuser; the use of or interaction with a child/youth/vulnerable adult for profit, labor, sexual stimulation, or other personal or financial advantage; grooming or soliciting a child/youth/vulnerable adult for sexual stimulation. The abuse may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
6. *Emotional Abuse*: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying or as defined by state law.
7. *Neglect*: Depriving a child/youth/vulnerable adult of his/her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.
8. *Staff*: Any paid adult person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of children/youth/vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control over children/youth/vulnerable adults.

Screening Procedures

Paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of children/youth/vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over children/youth/vulnerable adults will complete a boundary training and background check through the current Presbytery provider.

1. The screening procedure will be initiated by the Stated Clerk and the information will be returned to the Stated Clerk.
2. Time Frame – a minimum of two weeks is usually needed for screening to be completed.
3. The process will be done according to the current Presbytery provider.
4. Background checks will be done every three years for ongoing participants.

Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating situation exists, the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks, or person engaged in an activity or event directly sponsored by the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks:

1. Will know the whereabouts of children in their care at all times utilizing face counts or head counts, attendance, roster lists and the “rule of three” while maintaining at least minimum ratios. The “rule of three” specified that there shall always be at least three people present – i.e. one employee and two or more children, or two employees (unrelated) and one child (a volunteer may be included in the “rule of three” when it includes an employee with a child). No child shall ever be left without adult supervision.
2. Will have an adequate number (a minimum of two, unrelated) of screened paid staff or volunteers present at events involving children/youth/vulnerable adults.
3. Will instruct staff or volunteers to release children/youth/vulnerable adults only to a parent, guardian, or other person authorized by a parent or guardian, and will, as is reasonable under the circumstances, utilize sign-in and sign-out sheets.
4. Will obtain written parental/guardian permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, before taking children/youth/vulnerable adults on trips and should provide information regarding the trip.
5. Will use at least two paid staff or volunteers (unrelated) in each vehicle when transporting children/youth/vulnerable adults.
6. Will escort a child, or a group of children, under the age of six to the bathroom. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside, one at a time. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child or children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child’s name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door as they assist the child.

7. Will let children over the age of five use the bathrooms by themselves, when at least two adults (unrelated) will be within hearing distance at all times. For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never to be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each event.
8. Will recognize that they have an obligation and duty to protect children/youth/vulnerable adults at all times from abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, exploitation, and other harm.

Reporting

The procedure for reporting a suspected prohibited action is documents in the Presbytery's "Policy and Procedure on Sexual Misconduct", in the section titled, "Reporting Procedure".

Response

The procedure for responding to any report is documented in the "Policy and Procedure on Sexual Misconduct" in the sections titled "Pastoral Care", "The Investigating Committee", and "Roles of Staff".