

Riverside Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy

Preamble (Adapted from the Presbytery Safety Guidelines)

As part of our mission statement, Riverside Presbyterian Church is charged with nurturing the spiritual life of each individual. Therefore, we are committed to treating each child as a gift from God, respecting each child and honoring their opinions, creativity, spirituality, and personal, sexual, and emotional boundaries, and protecting the physical safety and personal well-being of each child.

Definitions (Adapted from the Presbytery policy and the John Knox policy)

Adult: person over the age of eighteen

Abuse: conduct that harms or has the potential to harm a child physically, sexually, or emotionally with inappropriate aggression, sexual contact, verbal harassment, or negligence

Accused: the person against whom an accusation of abuse or neglect is made

Accuser: the person claiming knowledge of sexual misconduct, neglect, or abuse by a person covered by this policy. The accuser may or may not be the victim of alleged sexual misconduct.

Activity: a program or event sponsored by Riverside Presbyterian Church

Child: a person under the age of eighteen years. For the purposes of this policy, non-adult volunteers do not apply under this definition when they are in a supervisory role.

Child abuse:

- Engaging in any sexual activity (defined as any non-accidental exploitative physical touching or verbal remarks which propose sexual contact of any variety to a party in question) with a child

- Endangering a child by engaging in abusive conduct, including, but not limited to torture, cruel conduct, corporal punishment or physical discipline of any sort, excessive physical restraint which could injure or cause pain to the child, repeated excessive discipline which could endanger the child's mental health or development, or any obscene, sexually or nudity oriented conduct with a child

- Punishing a child by denying necessary sustenance, education, medical care, or other care necessary for the child's health and well-being

- Administering prescription drugs to a child without the written approval of the parent or guardian, or in the case of emergency, the supervision of a licensed physician

- Providing alcohol or controlled substances to a child

- Committing any intentional act that results or could result in death or injury to a child

- Inflicting physical or mental injury that threatens or could threaten to harm a child's health, welfare, or safety

Mandated reporter: a person required by law to report to the appropriate state agency all suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect that come to their attention. Under this policy, all church members are expected to report suspected instances of child abuse to the parent of the child an/or a staff member of RPC.

Neglect: the failure of a parent or responsible caretaker to provide adequate supervision, food, clothing, shelter, or other basic necessity to a child

Non-adult volunteer: A non-adult volunteer may supervise an activity provided there is also an adult supervising. A non-adult volunteer must be five years older than the oldest child in the room and adhere to the same standards as adult volunteers.

Child sexual abuse: abuse against a child that is sexual in nature. The behavior may or may not include touching. Sexual contact or interaction between an adult and child is always considered forced and abusive whether or not the child consents to the contact or interaction.

Parent (non-volunteer): a parent or legal guardian of a child participating in an activity who is providing transportation only and/or is participating in the activity in his/her capacity as a parent.

Person in charge of activity: The person designated to lead and take responsibility for the activity. She/he **MUST** be a staff member or volunteer as defined by this policy and must have completed all required training and screening.

Response: The action taken by the governing body or entity when a report of sexual misconduct or child abuse is received. It may include inquiry into facts and circumstances or possible disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Sexual misconduct: Misconduct that results in or has the potential to result in child sexual abuse

Staff member/employee: a person employed by Riverside Presbyterian Church

Victim: A child who has allegedly suffered an act of sexual misconduct, abuse, or neglect

Volunteer: A person who provides services for the Church and receives no remuneration. Volunteers include persons elected or appointed to serve on boards, committees, and other groups. For the purposes of this policy, parents or legal guardians of a child participant are not considered volunteers if they are only providing transportation or participating only in their capacity as a parent.

Reporting Obligations

When a staff member or volunteer working with children becomes aware of a possible situation of child abuse or neglect, they are to contact DCFS. They should also inform the parent of the child and the director of Christian education. All members of RPC, however, are expected to take these steps when they suspect child abuse regardless of whether they volunteer with children.

Guidelines for Volunteers with Children

Prior to working with children, volunteers should attend Riverside Presbyterian Church for six months. The six month rule may be waived in situations with extenuating circumstances. In these situations, the affected ministry leader shall document the situation and why the rule is being waived.

Each person who wishes to volunteer with children shall complete an application. Each applicant will furnish three adult references. Two of the three must be from non-relatives and one must be from an adult with no affiliation to the Chicago Presbytery or any of its member churches.

Prior to accepting an applicant, the Riverside Presbyterian Church will screen the applicant as follows:

- RPC will confirm that individual has never been convicted of nor pled guilty to child endangerment or abuse
- RPC will confirm that the individual has never been convicted of nor pled guilty to contributing to the unruliness or delinquency of a minor
- A staff member from the appropriate ministry area of RPC will conduct and document an interview with the applicant
- RPC will provide appropriate training
- RPC will obtain a signed statement from each applicant stating that he or she has read, understood, and agrees to the terms of this policy
- For paid staff, RPC will obtain the applicant's fingerprints and use them to conduct a background check

General Protocol (compiled from Presbytery resource Center documents and policies of churches within Chicago Presbytery)

Open Door Policy:

As a general rule, all events will be held in a room with an open door. If the event calls for or would benefit from having a closed door, the door may be shut if any combination of two trained volunteers or employees of RPC are in the room. Parents of participating children may observe the program at any time and should be welcomed by the adults in charge.

All employees and volunteers should actively work to ensure that there is no impropriety or appearance of impropriety between a child and employee or volunteer, between or among children, or among children and third parties. It is understood that children may develop crushes or other romantic feelings towards employees or volunteers. It is up to employee or volunteer to recognize this possibility, discourage such a situation, and report a situation if it does occur to the director of Christian education.

Employees and volunteers should be aware of the influence their speech to children has. They are not to use language that is derogatory or stereotypical of any particular race, sexual orientation, sex, age, national origin, or religion. They are not to use language or gestures that are vulgar, sexually suggestive, mean-spirited, or hurtful.

If an employee or volunteer has an encounter with a child in which the employee or volunteer deems a significant misbehavior or misunderstanding of behavior might be possible, the employee or volunteer should immediately advise the director of Christian education and/or another member of church staff on the situation.

An adult employee or leader should arrive at a scheduled activity at least fifteen (15) minutes before the scheduled start time and must stay with children at the conclusion of an activity after the last child has been picked up. No child should be left unattended waiting for a ride and children are only allowed to leave an activity unattended with the express consent of a parent/guardian.

Classroom Guidelines:

Visual access to a classroom should be left as unimpaired as possible. Windows into classrooms should not be obstructed and classroom doors should be left open whenever possible.

Parents should not leave children under the age of twelve (12) in a classroom unless an adult employee or volunteer is present

Parents must complete and update as necessary Registration-Emergency cards that are kept on file for each of our participating children. When a new child attends class, an employee or volunteer should ask the parent/guardian to complete the card and forward the card to the director of Christian Education promptly.

Unless a parent has requested otherwise, adult employees and volunteers in the Nursery may change diapers when necessary. The door to the changing area should be kept open at all times and at least one other employee or volunteer should have visual contact with the child.

Two classes may be combined if a staff shortage necessitates it. If such a situation occurs, notices will be placed on the door of the classroom not being used and in the main foyer of the church.

The church may cancel classes or childcare if a staff shortage necessitates it. Parents will be given notice if this situation occurs.

The following guidelines should be followed with respect to bathroom use:

- An adult should check the bathroom to make sure that it is empty and functioning
- Whenever practical, children should use the bathroom in same gender groups
- If a child requires assistance in a stall, an adult employee or volunteer may assist, but the stall door should remain open
- An adult employee or volunteer should remain in the bathroom until all children are ready to leave.
- Older children should go to the bathroom with a same gender buddy
- Parents are encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom before attending church

Off-site activities:

All off-site activities must receive approval from the director of Christian education

Written consent and medical releases are required from the parents/guardians of all participating youth

If the Church is providing transportation, all drivers must be adults over the age of 21 and fully licensed and insured. If the Church is not providing transportation, each parent is responsible for arranging transportation for his/her child and will inform the Church as to who will be transporting the child.

At least two adult employees or volunteers will supervise each and every off-site activity.

The Church may bar a child from participating in an activity if they are not of an appropriate age, if the child does not have correct forms on file, or if the Church determines that participation would be inappropriate.

Overnight Activities:

Overnight activities must be approved by the director of Christian education. All guidelines for off-site activities apply to overnight activities even if the overnight activity takes place on church property.

No one under the age of seven will be allowed to participate in overnight activities without the accompaniment of a parent.

If young males attend the overnight activity, an adult male employee or volunteer must be present and if young females attend the overnight activity, an adult female employee or volunteer must be present. Regardless of the sex makeup of the group, at least two adult employees or volunteers must be present and these employees/volunteers must be from different families.

Children participating in overnight activities must sign-in when arriving and are not to leave the activity without direct supervision of an employee or volunteer who is supervising the activity. When the children are picked up, the adult who picks them up should sign them out.

Approved by Session: ____7/18/07_____
(date)

Clerk of Session: ____MaryAnn Sadilek_____
(signature)