

New Hope Child/Youth Protection Policy

SUMMARY

A) Purpose

B) Safeguards

- Approval of Activities
- Approval & Screening of Volunteers and Employees
 - Safeguards Team
- Disqualifying Background Check and Driving Offenses
- Confidentiality
- Supervision
- Communication / Activity Plan
- Sign-in
- Parental Permission
- First Aid and CPR
- Safety
- Prohibited Acts

C) Procedures For Handling Allegations of Misconduct

- Reporting Prohibited Acts
- Response to Reported Prohibited Acts
- Consequences of Committing a Prohibited Act

D) Policy Implementation and Oversight

E) Church Member Awareness

F) Compliance

APPENDICES

Confidential Information Form / Application to Lead or Drive

Children and Youth Activity Plan

Visitor Sign-in Sheet for Nursery and Little Angels

Sunday School Registration Form

Children and Youth Activity Participation Release

Medical Release

Publicity Release

Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

Confidential Incident Report

Leader's Checklist - for activities at New Hope

Leader's Checklist - for activities away from New Hope

ADDITIONAL "JOB RESPONSIBILITIES" FOR THE SAFEGUARDS TEAM
(CE Director, CE elders, CDC elder), AS GENERATED BY THE
CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

- Oversee the annual review of the policy by the Session.
- Post copy of the reviewed policy in the Fellowship Hall for one month.
- Collect annually, from each participating child and youth, the following releases and forms:
 - a) Participation Release
 - b) Medical Release
 - c) Copy of the front and back of medical insurance card
 - d) (Optional) Publicity Release
 - e) Sunday School Registration Form
- Collect annually, for approval or review, a Confidential Information Form from each volunteer activity leader or driver.
- Arrange for background checks of drivers and overnight chaperones.
- Maintain an up to date list of approved volunteers and employees.
- Periodically check that all above-mentioned forms are up to date.
- Give signed originals of above-mentioned releases and forms to the office manager, for secured storage.
- Give copies of the signed releases and forms to the CE Director, CE elders, CDC elder, and activity leaders, as needed.
- Give blank copies of the Activity Plan to each activity leader, for distribution to participants.
- Maintain a plentiful supply of releases, forms and checklists.
- Conduct (together with the Buildings and Grounds Committee) semi-annual safety checks of the New Hope facilities.
- Arrange for First Aid and CPR training as needed.
- Periodically remind the congregation of the existence and purpose of the policy (and summarize its main guidelines).

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

**NEW HOPE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
1350 N Mason Rd
Katy, TX 77449
(281) 492 6520**

**E mail: nhopepcusa@ev1.net
www.newhopepckaty.org**

The mission of New Hope Presbyterian Church is to know, proclaim, and serve Christ, while growing, living, and caring together in Christ.

Our congregation affirms.....

.... all children are a gift from God.

.... all children depend upon adults for safety and security.

.... we take seriously our baptismal vow to nurture all children committed to our care.

*Excerpts from "A Vision for Children and the Church"
Adopted by the 205th General Assembly of the PC(USA) in June 1993*

Purpose

New Hope Presbyterian Church and its members acknowledge the gift and privilege of ministry to children and youth, and strive to share their gifts and model the love and grace of God. The congregation believes it must strive to provide safety and security for children and youth (meaning all those 17 years of age and younger), as well as for the adults to whom they are entrusted.

The policy and guidelines adopted seek to balance the security and welfare of the children and youth, and the legitimate expectations of privacy of staff and volunteers.

SAFEGUARDS

Approval of Activities.

- All activities for children and youth must be approved by a minimum of two elders on the Session.

Approval and Screening of Volunteers and Employees.

- In general, all volunteers who work with children and youth must have had a minimum of six months of active involvement as members of New Hope Presbyterian Church.
- Exceptions to this volunteer policy may be made at the discretion of the Session or a body authorized by the Session. In these cases a new member will be paired with an approved volunteer.
- All volunteer leaders and helpers, all volunteers who drive children and youth, and all employees who work with the children or youth, must complete a Confidential Information Form (Appendix A), and be approved by the Safeguards Team (comprising the Christian Education director, and the Christian Education and Child Development Center elders).
- In addition, volunteers who accompany children or youth on overnight activities (on or off church property), and volunteers who drive children or youth, must give written consent for the church to carry out background checks and driving safety checks (part of the Confidential Information Form, Appendix A).
- The pastor will review each background report, and if it shows a “Not Clear” status, will discuss the report with the individual.
- If the individual wishes to continue pursuing his or her application to work with children or youth, the report will be submitted to the Session for review.
- The pastor will determine any appropriate pastoral response throughout this screening process.
- Background checks will be repeated every three years (arranged by the Safeguards Team).
- A designated member of the Safeguards Team will be responsible for gathering the volunteer application forms, for maintaining an up to date list of approved volunteers, and for keeping Session informed.
- All volunteers will be requested to review their applications and statements on an annual basis.
- Volunteers who drive children or youth should be at least twenty-one years old. Younger drivers (e.g. senior high students) must have written permission from the parents of their passengers.
- Drivers must show a valid driver’s license, and proof of car insurance.
- Drivers must transport children and youth in groups. In ordinary circumstances, an adult should not drive a single child in a church-related activity without the permission of the child’s parent or guardian. Whenever possible there should be two adults in any vehicle used to transport children and youth.
- Our session, at this time, feels that it is appropriate to exclude our non-overnight and non-driver volunteers from background checks (criminal and driving). For these volunteers (e.g. Sunday school teachers), the focus will be on other safeguards such as the two-adult rule, and the visibility rule (see “Supervision”).

Disqualifying Background Check Offenses.

- Whether disclosed voluntarily or as the result of a background check, the following offenses will disqualify a person from participating in the leadership of any activity involving children or youth.
 - a) any indictment alleging the offense of, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution, or display of material harmful to a minor; employment harmful to children; or
 - b) any other offense, particularly those involving moral turpitude or the use of alcohol or drugs, designated by the Session at its discretion.
- Whether disclosed voluntarily or as the result of a driving history check, conviction of any of the following during the preceding three years will disqualify a person from driving children and youth.
 - a) driving while intoxicated; aggravated assault with a motor vehicle; driving under the influence of drugs; murder with malice with motor vehicle; or failure to stop and render aid.
 - b) Disqualification from driving children and youth will otherwise be determined through a performance point system. Under this system, the three-year period preceding the report date will be used to review the eligibility of drivers. One point will be assigned for conviction of any hazardous driving violation that does not contribute to an accident (speeding, running a red light, improper turns, failure to yield, reckless driving, driving the wrong way on a one way street, violation of any license restriction). Two points will be assigned for conviction of any hazardous traffic violation that contributes to or causes an accident. The Session may assess points for non-reportable accidents or other observed unsafe driving. A point total of three or more disqualifies a person from driving children and youth.
- If the individual disputes information that appears on his or her background check (criminal or driving), he or she may appeal through the appropriate governmental agency.

Confidentiality

- Our Session believes that the safety of our children and youth outweighs the invasion of personal privacy inherent in this process.
- All personal information voluntarily disclosed, all results of background history checks and driving history reports, and the refusal of any person to make such disclosures, will be considered confidential.
- This information will be handled only by the pastor, the Session, the Christian Education director, and the office manager.
- The church will maintain a secured storage facility in its business office for all confidential information.

Supervision

- Programs that involve children or youth must, whenever possible, have two approved adult leaders present (the two-adult rule).
- Interactions between children and youth, and leaders, volunteers and employees should be conducted in ways that promote visibility by others, and that remove opportunities for secrecy and isolation. Leaders, volunteers and employees should avoid, to the greatest

extent possible, any situation in which they would be alone, out of sight of others, with a child or youth (the visibility rule).

- When working alone is unavoidable (e.g. in the case of some classroom-based activities) the classroom window blinds must remain open, and the windowless doors must be ajar (a safety gate will be available, if needed for the younger classes).
- No exceptions to the two-adult rule will be made for overnight activities at the church (e.g. lock-ins), or for activities occurring away from the church property.
- When dropping off their children, parents must confirm that adult supervision is present. No child or youth should be on church property without adult supervision.
- Supervision must be maintained after the event/activity, until all participants have been picked up.
- Only a parent, legal guardian, or person designated by the parents or legal guardian (either in writing before the event, or following phone confirmation during or after the event) will be permitted to pick up a child or youth after an activity.
- Any adult assigned to lead activities involving children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest participant. An exception will be made if a second, older, (and approved) adult is present.
- For overnight activities, there must be a male assigned to provide leadership if boys are present, and a female if girls are present.

Communication / Activity Plan

- Prior to any planned activity for children and/or youth, leaders must make information about the event available to the children and youth, and their parents. This information will include the names of all activity leaders and volunteers, and the drivers who may provide transportation.
- For any overnight activity, or any activity occurring outside the Katy area, an Activity Plan (Appendix B) must be completed and signed by the participants' parents.

Sign-in

- Visitors using the nursery (for children ages birth to approx. three years old), and utilizing the Little Angels Program (children's church, ages around three years to first grade) are asked to sign in their children (see Appendix C).
- All participants in the Christian Education program's Sunday morning classes must have a completed registration form on file with the teacher/leader (Appendix D).

Parental Permission

- The following documents must be obtained once a year, by the designated Christian Education elder, from the parent(s) or guardian(s) of each participating child and youth;
 - A Participation Release (see Appendix E)
 - A Medical Release (see Appendix F), with a copy of the medical insurance card
 - A Publicity Release (see Appendix G) - optional
- These releases will be reviewed on a regular basis (and updated as necessary), and especially before a child or youth participates in an overnight activity, or an activity occurring outside the Katy area.
- Originals of the signed releases will be kept in a secured location in the church office, and copies will be given to the designated CE elder, and to the activity leaders (to be carried at all activities).

First Aid and CPR

- Volunteers and employees who interact with children and youth are encouraged to obtain training in first aid and CPR.
- Opportunities for this training will be provided.

Safety

- In order to ensure the safety of all persons on the church premises (and especially the children and youth), semi-annual checks of the facilities and grounds will be performed by members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee and the Safeguards Team. Any safety hazard (e.g. missing electric socket covers, tripping hazards, defective electrical wiring, broken chairs, damaged playground equipment, fences etc.) will be corrected as quickly as possible.
- Safety hazards noted by any member of the congregation should be reported immediately to a member of the Session, for prompt referral to the Buildings and Grounds Committee.
- Age-appropriate safety tips will be provided to volunteers and employees as part of the ongoing training process.

Prohibited Acts

- The following acts are prohibited during any organized activity for children and youth. Additional information about identifying child abuse and neglect is attached as Appendix H.
- The infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury, to a child or youth.
- The physical neglect of a child or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to organized activities. Adequate supervision means the type of supervision that a responsible person would provide in the same or similar circumstances.
- The causing of mental or emotional injury to a child or youth.
- The possession of illegal drugs, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
- The consumption of, or being under the influence of, alcohol while participating in any activity for children and youth.
- The carrying of any kind of weapon.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct toward a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child or youth.
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a child or youth.

PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

The following provisions establish the roles and responsibilities of both individuals and committees under these circumstances. Failure to report a prohibited act will be treated by Session as grounds for termination of an employee, or as grounds for the suspension or prohibition of that person's participation in church activities involving children and youth.

The Reporting of Prohibited Acts

- Any concerns or suspicions regarding inappropriate conduct or relationships between a church employee or volunteer and a child or youth should be reported immediately to the Christian Education Director, and the Moderator of the Session (usually the pastor), and to the leader of the activity or program involved.
- Anyone witnessing the occurrence of a prohibited act is asked to follow the steps 1-8 outlined below.
- Anyone receiving a report from a child or youth, of a prohibited act which involved church volunteers or employees at any time or place, is asked to follow the same eight steps.
 1. Personally secure the safety of the child or youth.
 2. Do not leave the child or youth alone, in order to report the incident.
 3. Do not confront the alleged or accused violator.
 4. Report the incident immediately to the pastor, (or the clerk of session if the pastor is unreachable), who will then inform the CE director, and the CE elders and the remainder of the Session.
 5. Complete a Confidential Incident Report (Appendix I) and deliver it to the pastor (or to the clerk of session if the pastor is unreachable). If neither is reachable then deliver the report to the CE director, a CE elder or any member of Session.
 6. If allegations are against a church member or non-ordained staff person, the clerk of session shall notify the General Presbyter (currently Mike Cole, Tel # (713) 526 2585; email: mcole@pbyofnewcovenant.org), or the Stated Clerk of New Covenant Presbytery (currently Diane Prevary, Tel # (713) 526 2585; email: dprevary@pbyofnewcovenant.org).
 7. The pastor shall see that any reported incident of child abuse and/or neglect is relayed to local authorities, as required by law. In Harris County that report is made to Child Protective Services at (713) 394 4000.
 8. If the report is against the pastor, the clerk of session shall immediately contact the General Presbyter (Mike Cole, see step 6) and request guidance on the procedure to be followed in processing the allegation and in obtaining a moderator for the session.

The Response to Reported Prohibited Acts

- When the pastor or session receives a report involving a prohibited act, they must consult with others as needed, and take such immediate steps as deemed appropriate.
- The pastor, or a representative of New Covenant Presbytery, shall guide the Session through discussions of the necessary actions.
- The reported incident will be referred immediately to a Response Team, comprising the pastor, current elders on session, the clerk of session, and up to three additional

persons appointed by them (e.g. the Christian Education director, and the Child Development Center director).

- The Response Team will take such action it deems appropriate in the investigation and handling of the report.
- The Response Team will be responsible for the timely contacting of law enforcement authorities, and Child Protective Services, as required by law.
- Designated members of the Response Team will be responsible for all communications on behalf of the church, including those with the victim's family, civil authorities (e.g. police, Child Protective Services), Presbytery, the church's insurance company, and the media.
- The Response Team is responsible for ensuring that the proper written documentation of the allegations and proceedings is maintained.
- If necessary, the Response Team shall have access to an attorney, and to counselors for both the alleged victim and the alleged abuser.
- The Response Team will ensure that pastoral needs are addressed, and will notify the accused and the accuser that they have the right to retain their own counsel.
- The church's counsel will represent the church, but not individual interests.

The Consequences of Committing a Prohibited Act

- Any person who is accused of committing a prohibited act, whether an employee or a volunteer, will be suspended automatically from any further participation in any church activity for children and youth.
- The suspension will continue until a disposition of the report has been made by the Response Team.
- The disposition will be based upon such evidence as the Response Team deems appropriate. The evidence may include the results of any investigation (by the church or by law enforcement agencies, or by child protection agencies), or the filing, prosecution, or outcome of any criminal charges or other legal proceedings.
- The Response Team may, at its discretion, delay disposition pending the outcome of any investigation or proceeding involving the alleged violation.
- Upon disposition, if a majority of the Response Team believes from the evidence that any person has committed a prohibited act, such person shall be prohibited from future participation in all church activities for children and youth, either permanently or for such a length of time and in such a manner as the Response Team shall determine at its discretion.
- If the person is an employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.
- If the Response Team determines that the allegations are false, the pastor will determine any appropriate response.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND OVERSIGHT

- The pastor and his or her designee(s) are responsible for implementation of these guidelines, in conjunction with the Session and the relevant committees.
- A designated member of the Safeguards Team (CE director, or a CE or CDC elder) is responsible for gathering (annually) Confidential Information Forms from each child/youth activity leader and volunteer, and for maintaining an up to date list of approved volunteers and employees.

- A designated member of the Safeguards Team is responsible for gathering parent-signed releases (participation, medical and publicity), and Sunday school registration forms.
- The Session may vote to allow the church's committees to adopt and implement additional procedures (consistent with these guidelines) as may be necessary to accomplish the purpose of this plan.
- This policy must be reviewed, amended as needed, and approved by the Session, annually.

CHURCH MEMBER AWARENESS

- A copy of this policy will be given to each church family unit with children or youth.
- A copy will also be given to each volunteer leader, teacher, helper, and employee who has contact with the children and youth of the church.
- A copy of this policy will be given to all new member families and, upon request, to visitors.
- Following annual approval of the Child/Youth Protection Policy, copies will be posted for one month in positions which are readily visible and accessible to the congregation, and will thereafter be available upon request, from the church office.
- In addition. An up to date copy of the policy will be available on the church's website.
- The congregation will be reminded annually of the existence of this policy, and its intentions.
- Review of the policy's intentions will be included in annual teacher and youth advisor recruiting drives.

COMPLIANCE

- All New Hope Presbyterian Church volunteers and employees, who work with the children or youth in the congregation, must sign a form stating that they have read and understood this Protection Policy, and will abide by it (Appendix A).
- It is the responsibility of each volunteer and employee to comply with this policy and its procedures.

Prepared by Janet Rainey (CE elder)

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