

SAFE CHURCH POLICY
HANOVER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FINAL DRAFT

Purpose

The members of Hanover Presbyterian Church believe that we are called by God to create a safe place for all the children and youth in our care, nurturing, protecting, and empowering them through faith and trust. This commitment includes taking appropriate steps to reduce the risk to the young people in our care. The following policy, to be implemented for all church-sponsored events, is intended to minimize the risk of any of our children being subjected to sexual, physical, or mental abuse. These policies and procedures are also intended to respect the rights afforded due process to person accused of improper conduct.

Definitions

1. Child means anyone under the age of 18 and/or any adult who is developmentally disabled.
2. Child safety and protection means “preventing physical, mental and/or emotional injury to a child, including the prevention of sexual abuse.”
3. Workers means any person providing his or her time or services to the church with or without compensation, including speakers, music leadership, small group leader, and all other volunteer leadership or paid leadership, at events in which children or youth are in attendance or in circumstances in which he or she will come into contact with children or youth as part of the service offered.
4. Child Care Workers means any person providing his or her time or services to provide child care, nursery care, or babysitting for children both paid or unpaid for a church sponsored activity.
5. Work with children means teaching, supervising, chaperoning, or otherwise serving in a class, program, or event involving one or more children.
6. Activities mean classes, programs or events presented or sponsored by the church.

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**

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Hanover Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. 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 us. 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 in a locked file at the church.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a 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. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at church.

e) **Background Checks**

Each applicant must complete a consent for a criminal background check, unless they can provide documentation that an equivalent background check has been performed within 3 years by their employer or by another organization. These forms will provide personal and confidential information necessary to perform criminal background and reference checks. The background screening will be completed by the Pastor or Session designee. The forms will kept in a secure file at Hanover Presbyterian Church. The results will be reviewed by the Pastor, and any relevant information will be passed on to the Spiritual Education Committee.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by the result of the background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a person from participating in or leading activities involving children with Hanover Presbyterian Church:

Any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance with a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful materials or prohibited substances to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child. All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Spiritual Education Committee.

Behavior & Leadership Expectations

1. At all times, workers, to the best of their abilities, shall ensure the safety of the children and youth.
2. Workers shall model positive and appropriate behavior.
3. Workers shall behave respectfully toward others and the property of others.
4. Leadership, chaperones, and advisors engage only in positive and appropriate forms of showing affection. The following examples are not intended to be all inclusive.
 - Some examples of positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Brief hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back.
- Handshakes.
- “High-fives” and hand slapping.
- Verbal praise.
- Sitting beside small children.
- Some examples of inappropriate behavior with children and youth are:
 - Any form of unwanted affection.
 - Lengthy embraces.
 - Kisses on the mouth.
 - Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers.
 - Occupying a bed with a child or youth.
 - Wrestling with children or youth.
 - Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic, social media) that relate to physique or body development.
 - Giving personal gifts or money to individual children or youth outside of special events (i.e. birthdays, graduations)
- 5. Workers and children or youth shall remain at the site of an event for the duration of the event. No child or youth shall leave an event early without permission. Permission will be granted only with written consent of a parent or guardian.
- 6. Safety concerns may infrequently require staff and volunteers to employ physical measures. Leadership, chaperones, and advisors may only employ the minimum amount of physical measures required to ensure the safety of all those involved.
- 7. Corporal punishment (e.g., spanking, hitting, kicking) and verbal and/or emotional abuse are prohibited.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers who are not married to one another 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 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. In that case, counseling must take place with the knowledge of the pastor or event leader, and must take place in an area where both can be seen by other adults without being overheard.

One adult transporting one child or youth in a vehicle to or from a church-sponsored event shall be prohibited. One adult driver may transport two or more children or youth, or two adults may transport one child or youth.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Unless there is an imminent threat, doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Photography Policy

Only those with express permission from the Pastor, the Event Leader, or the Session will be allowed to take photos or video of children for official church purposes. Before any photographs are published or distributed in any way, each child in said photos must have a signed photo release on file. While we cannot restrict parents or friends from photographing their own children, parents or family members who take photos at church events are strongly encouraged to publish only photos of their own children or to obtain permission from parents/guardians of other children.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for youth who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least four years older than the children/youth they are supervising.
- Must fill out an application, including references.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Hanover Presbyterian Church. 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 Hanover Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the teacher, event leader, and/or Pastor to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Hanover 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 with the Pastor or event leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the 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, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

When escorting children to the restroom, at least one male worker should take boys to the restroom and at least one female worker should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Children 1st grade and up may use a hallway restroom without an adult escort.

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. 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.

Training

Hanover Presbyterian Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new 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.

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 church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law. If there is no regular pastor currently employed, reports should be made to the Clerk of Session.

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

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and 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.

3. All allegations of abuse should 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.
4. The 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.
5. 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 congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. 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.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Policy Monitoring and Review

The Spiritual Education Committee shall review these guidelines and recommend changes, as necessary, to the Session. Our goal is to ensure that all I leaders adhere to these guidelines and to ensure that our children are well cared for.