



Security for All Involved with Children and Youth Ministries

*As God who called you is holy,
Be holy yourselves in all your conduct.
1 Peter 1:15*

INTRODUCTION

The ethical conduct of all who minister in the name of Jesus Christ is vitally important to the Church. We convey an understanding of God's character and the meaning of our Christian faith by our words and our deeds. Our manner of life in the church and in the world should be a demonstration of the Gospel that honors Jesus Christ and gives glory to God.

The ministries at West Side Church involve administering to the spiritual welfare of the children and youth and their families and providing them a safe environment in which this ministry can be performed. To this end, West Side Church has taken specific measures to provide for a safe environment for our children and youth. The key attributes of these measures include our policies and procedures, congregational awareness, and employee and volunteer screening and training processes. We desire to treat every person with the respect, dignity and concern that is consistent with Christian principles of justice and grace, so that God's call to righteousness is upheld and Christ's ministry of redemptive transformation in every person's life through the work of the Holy Spirit may be fulfilled.

PURPOSE AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this policy is (1) to maximize the safety of children and youth while they are engaged in programs, projects, or ministries of the church and (2) to establish expectations and procedures for employees and volunteers for ensuring a safe environment for our children and youth.

To that end, employees and volunteers who work with children and youth at West Side Church in connection with any program, project or ministry of the church will be required to comply with the Basic Procedures for Enhancing Security as stated in this policy.

All records relating to this policy will be kept confidential and will be stored in a secure environment separate from the Administrative and Program files of West Side Church. Any allegation of misconduct or abusive behavior will be carefully evaluated. In addition, all parties shall be provided care and the offer of appropriate counsel by West Side pastoral staff members, if desired.

The church welcomes and depends on employees and many volunteers in the conduct of its ministries. Any individuals who have been identified as abusive or as prone to misconduct, or who know themselves to be potentially abusive to children or youth, will be prohibited from participation in programs involving children and youth, and will be allowed to participate only in programs or activities of the church where there is no risk of temptation to them or harm to others from their presence and participation.

DEFINITIONS FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS POLICY

Abuse means any action of a person towards others, including the use of language, that violates the trust that is implicit in the responsibility of church volunteers and staff toward children and youth.

Adults are persons eighteen (18) years of age or older that are no longer attending high school.

Children are infants through 5th graders.

Emotional abuse means a pattern of crushing a child's spirit and attacking his/her worth through rejection, threats, sarcasm, or bullying, isolating or belittling him/her privately or in the presence of others. This definition includes harassment behavior between children and/or youth.

Employees – For the purpose of this policy, employees are those individuals that are compensated for performing work at West Side Church in support of children and youth program ministries and include, but are not limited to, Ordained Ministers, Directors, Ministry Associates, Pre-School Staff and Teachers, Child Care providers, and Interns.

Minors - are children infant through 5th grade (Newborn through 10) and mid-high and high school students, or young people in that same age (11-17).

Misconduct refers to any action that would constitute abuse of another person under the definitions of this policy.

Physical abuse means touching another person using undue force, or with the intent to inflict bodily harm, regardless of whether a physical injury actually results.

Screened means that the West Side Child Security Administrator has completed national criminal history records check and followed up on reference material.

Sexual abuse means sexual contact, or any other interaction between a worker and a child or youth for the purpose of sexual stimulation, regardless of whether actual touching is involved or whether the child or youth consents to the conduct.

Summer Trainees - individuals that are not volunteers under this policy. Due to the application, interview, selection, and training program that they are in, they are considered representatives of the staff at West Side and do not need to meet the three month association period to be considered a trained and screened adult.

Trained - means having completed a child security training class at West Side Church.

West Side Church property – those facilities and surrounding parking lots located at 1007 Wright, 605 Wright, and 615 Wright also known as West Side Center, West Side South, and West Side North.

Youth -Mid-high and high school students, or young people in that same age (11-17).

BASIC PROCEDURES FOR ENHANCING SECURITY AND REDUCING THE RISK OF ABUSE

*Tend the flock of God that is your charge,
Not under compulsion but willingly,
Not for sordid gain but eagerly.
Do not lord it over those in your charge
But be examples to the flock.*

1 Peter 5:2

Screening and Training

Before a prospective employee is offered employment by the church or a Summer Trainee is accepted, he/she shall be screened by the West Side Child Security Administrator. After hiring or acceptance, the employee or trainee must complete the West Side training in child security procedures as soon as possible, and in no case later than six months after hiring. Summer Trainees will be trained during their first week of Orientation.

Volunteers who work directly with children or youth shall be screened and trained by West Side Church and have been associated with West Side Church for at least three months. Screening of all new volunteers shall be initiated immediately upon the beginning of their involvement.

Standard Practice

As part of our children and youth ministry, conditions will arise where one-on-one situations will be encountered (for example - counseling or Adult/Youth teams in child care or ministry situations). As such, for activities involving these situations, the following requirements are established:

- 1) The staff/volunteer providing the ministry is to be screened, trained, and have been associated with West Side Church for at least 3 months.
- 2) The location of the ministry shall not be in seclusion (e.g., behind closed doors without windows, office windows blocked with blinds or curtains so that no one can see in).
- 3) Another adult is advised of the activity.

Committee guidelines can cite exceptional circumstances in which one-on-one situations are allowed providing the situation is in line with the principles of this policy. All other activities involving children and youth on West Side Church property will operate under the two adult leadership rule. The two adult leadership rule requires:

- That at least two adults are present in all child care, classroom, recreational, and fellowship activities.
- At least one of the two adults will have been screened, trained, and associated with West Side Church for at least 3 months.

Implementation and Reporting

Specific guidelines on implementation of this policy are determined and approved, respectively, by either the Children and Family Ministries Committee or the Youth Ministries Committee, depending on the program that is developing the guidelines. These guidelines will also address extenuating circumstances in different situations, including West Side Church sponsored activities that occur off of the two church property grounds of West Side Church. These guidelines may be updated and improved as necessary or as experience or circumstances necessitate.

The Children and Family Ministries Committee and the Youth Ministries Committee shall be responsible to:

- Establish a Child Security Oversight Committee.
- To make an annual report to Session regarding the status of child security at West Side Church, including copies of the guidelines currently approved and in use.
- To approve any guidelines developed on implementation of this policy.

The Child Security Oversight Committee shall be responsible for:

- Supervising the screening process and training classes.
- Monitoring compliance with policies and guidelines in children and youth programs.
- Appointing and overseeing the Child Security Administrator.

The duties of the Child Security Administrator are to:

- Screen applicants for employment and volunteer workers.
- Maintain and protect security records.

Response Procedures

When an allegation of misconduct or abuse is first brought forward, the Head of Staff shall be notified without delay. Although the first person to whom a report of abuse may be made cannot be controlled or predetermined, the next step is always the same: take the information directly and without delay to the Head of Staff (or the Acting Head of Staff). This procedure shall be made clear and emphasized during Child Security Training.

Note: in the event the allegation of misconduct or abuse involves the Head of Staff (or the Acting Head of Staff), then the Associate Pastor(s) shall be notified without delay.

The response required in alleged incidents of abuse depends on the status of the person accused in relation to West Side Church.

Ordained Ministers

If allegations are made against ordained ministers of the church, including the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, Associate Pastors, Parish Associates, or other ordained ministers serving in the ministries of West Side Church, the Presbytery of Central Washington must be notified immediately through the Presbytery Office. A pastor accused directly—that is, if he or she is the first person aware of the accusation—should initiate this report to the Presbytery himself or herself and also inform the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff. Whether or not the accused pastor is aware of the accusation, however, or initiates a report himself or herself, a report must be made by another pastor or staff member, or by the Clerk of Session or another Elder of the church. After an accusation has been reported to the Presbytery Office, further response to the allegation shall be handled by the Presbytery.

All Others

If allegations are made against non-ordained church staff members, employees, or volunteers, the Head of Staff (or the Acting Head of Staff) should be notified without delay, as indicated above. The church's response in cases such as these will be handled at the local level, subject to the provisions of this policy and the ultimate authority of the Session.

Any allegation of misconduct or abuse of a child or youth that gives rise to a reasonable suspicion of truth shall result in the immediate suspension of employment, with pay, or the immediate suspension from volunteer participation, pending investigation and resolution of the allegation. "Reasonable Suspicion" exists where there are facts and circumstances that lead a reasonable person to conclude that abuse may have taken place and that there is a need to inquire further, to take protective action, or to report to authorities. In all cases, it is the intent of this policy that the response of the church shall comply with State and local laws regarding incidents of actual or suspected child abuse.

Responsibility

The Head of Staff (or Acting Head of Staff) is responsible to make an initial assessment and initiate appropriate action in response to allegations or reports of incidents of possible misconduct. Various steps may be taken to make an initial assessment of the allegation as are deemed reasonable, prudent, and appropriate, depending on the nature and circumstances of specific incidents. These include, but are not limited to:

- Consulting with the church's legal counsel to determine when a report to civil authorities is advisable or required by law.
- Consulting with Staff members or volunteers who may have insight or information relevant to assessing the situation, excluding any person who is the subject of the allegation.
- Convening a meeting of the Child Security Response team, excluding any member who may be the subject of the allegation.

The Head of Staff is not authorized by this policy to conduct investigations that properly should be made by civil authorities, the police, or professionals skilled in working with children or youth who may have been victimized. Neither is the Head of Staff authorized to make judgments concerning the legal issues involved in certain cases without qualified legal counsel. However, this policy does endorse and support the responsibility of the Head of Staff, as a Minister of the church bearing pastoral responsibility for the spiritual welfare of individual persons and the congregation as a whole, to make discrete inquiries, to seek council and wisdom from others, and to consult with staff colleagues and others who have information relevant to a situation for the purpose of making an initial assessment of the situation, discerning God's guidance, and reaching informed and reasonable decisions.

If the Head of Staff believes, in his or her own judgment, that further action is likely to be necessary or that further wisdom and consultation is needed in regard to any allegation, then the Head of Staff should convene a meeting of the Child Security Response Team without delay.

The Child Security Response Team is comprised of the Head of Staff, the Children Family Ministries Director, the Youth Director, and the current Elders assigned to the Children Family Ministries Committee and the Youth Ministries Committee. The Response Team will serve as a council of wisdom and expertise for the Head of Staff and Session, and as an advisory group to coordinate and manage the Church's response to incidents of alleged abuse, subject to the ultimate authority and responsibility of the Session. The purpose of the Response Team is to ensure, to the best of human ability and with God's help, that a full appropriate response is made to all who may be involved in incidents of alleged or actual abuse, and that the Church's calling to offer a ministry of compassion, justice, and redemptive grace is fulfilled.

Action and Documentation

Once an initial assessment of an allegation has been made, the Head of Staff and/or a member of the Child Security Response Team should document the time and date of the allegation, the person(s) involved in the incident, their findings in the initial assessment, whether or not any further action is deemed necessary or appropriate, the actions to be taken and the persons assigned to initiate action. This document is to become part of the permanent records maintained by the Child Security Administrator. Every allegation received, or report of possible instances of misconduct, should be documented, regardless of whether further actions are deemed necessary or appropriate.

If it is determined, after initial assessment, that there is reasonable suspicion of truth to the allegation, then further action that is consistent with this policy in its overall purposes and specific requirements shall be initiated by the Head of Staff in conjunction with the Child Security Response Team. Complete running documentation shall be maintained of all actions taken in connection with specific cases.

The Session is ultimately responsible for the response of West Side Church to all allegations of misconduct or abuse covered by this policy, excluding those where the responsibility rests with the Presbytery. The Session is responsible both as the Board of Directors of the Corporation, and as the Elders charged with spiritual responsibility for the congregation.

The Session shall be notified at the earliest opportunity whenever allegations have been received and response actions have been initiated following initial assessment.

Procedure for Policy Changes

Any changes to this policy must be reviewed and approved by the Session.

Revision 2 approved by Session: August 16, 2007