

# **Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children at Covenant Presbyterian Church**

Approved August 3, 2014

Covenant Presbyterian Church is committed to the protection of the physical and emotional well-being of children, particularly in ministries under the supervision of Covenant ministry personnel. Covenant works to foster a culture wherein children are nurtured and protected, thus working to prevent emotional or physical abuse. The primary goal of any policy is the protection of the child, as well as the spiritual development of a nurturing covenant community. Child abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional) or neglect is not in keeping with the gospel, and therefore is not tolerated by Covenant. Anyone who is determined to have committed, been convicted of, or confessed to child abuse is disqualified for service that brings them into contact with children or youth.

## **Using Visibility to Protect Children**

Covenant leadership will plan all ministry involving children in a way that minimizes as much as possible the risk to the physical and emotional endangerment of children. Minimizing risk when working with children includes ensuring the activities of adult staff and volunteers are visible to other adults. Planning events in areas where other adults are present and at a time when other activities are occurring enhances visibility.

When possible, leaders should ensure classroom doors have windows to improve visibility. If the door does not have a window, leaders should leave the door open.

## **Overcoming Isolation to Protect Children**

At least two adults shall be present when working with children (“two-person rule”). When this standard is not possible, staff will reduce isolation by 1) having a minimum of two children present, 2) informing the parents of the children about the meeting, and 3) conducting the meeting during a time and/or in a location where interaction with the children is visible to others. The “two person rule” will be in effect when Covenant paid and non-paid leaders drive children to activities associated with Covenant ministries. Covenant leadership teams will ensure that an adequate number of adults will supervise children/youth events, especially overnight activities.

## **Accountability**

Ordinarily, ministry to a child at Covenant should not involve one on one contact. In the rare case that it does, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable:

- Covenant leaders shall always be accountable to other adults regarding interactions with children/youth.
- Counseling or other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in common areas with open doors (if inside) and visible, well lit areas if outside and only when another adult is 1) in close vicinity, 2) aware that the meeting is occurring, and 3) willing to stay in the vicinity until the meeting is completed.
- In an emergency situation, Covenant leaders shall attempt to find someone to accompany him/her when transporting the child/youth to a medical facility. If another person is not readily available, the staff member shall notify the Pastor of the situation.

## **Parental Involvement**

Covenant will keep an “open door policy” for parents. The Pastors and leadership will make themselves available to parents to answer any questions or concerns that may arise. In emergency situations, Covenant leaders will communicate with parents as the nature of the emergency. By fostering a culture of parental awareness, the risk of abuse at Covenant is reduced.

## **Supervision**

The supervision of ministry personnel also reduces risk. Pastors and leaders shall periodically and randomly check ministry areas where children and adults are together.

## **Technology**

Staff should use technology appropriately to protect children or youth from abuse and exploitation. For example, Covenant leadership teams shall develop guidelines and implement safeguards to prevent downloading harmful material from the Internet. The goal shall be to prevent access to pornographic material or inappropriate emails/chat rooms/music/movies.

## **Discipline**

According to Scripture, parents possess the primary responsibility and authority to discipline their children. In a ministry situation, Covenant ministry leaders possess a derived and limited authority to discipline in a way that teaches (when the issue is ignorance or inexperience) and corrects (when the issue is willful misbehavior) the child. Biblical discipline involves development, not punishment. Therefore, discipline in a ministry context shall not include slapping, hitting, shaming, yelling at, or belittling a child.

## **Touch**

Healthy, caring touch can edify and encourage a child; yet, unhealthy touch causes distress and is abusive. Staff and volunteers shall observe the following guidelines:

- Touch should always be open and public rather than secretive. A hug given in the context of a group is very different than a hug given behind closed doors.
- Touch should be in response to the need of the child, and not the need of the adult.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult.
- Touch should be with the child's permission. If the child resists, the staff member shall respect the child's response and stop touching him/her.
- Touch should always communicate respect for the child. Adults should avoid doing things of a personal nature for a child that he/she is able to do for himself, including dressing, bathing, etc.
- Touch should not include violent behavior. Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold a child against his/her will, or in any way assault a child.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts:

- verbal praise; side hugs; shoulder to shoulder hugs; pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate).
- for smaller children, touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms; placing your arm around the child's shoulders; hugging or holding the child when others are present.

The following behaviors are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate; therefore, staff and volunteers shall refrain from:

- touching a child's buttocks, chest, genital area, or thighs;
- showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child;
- sleeping in bed with a child;
- making inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development;
- making flirtatious or seductive looks (even in a joking way);
- showing any form of affection that is unwanted by the child;
- showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually-suggestive games with a child;
- engaging in any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature;
- making or participating in jokes that are sexual, or degrade other people groups.

Leaders shall monitor each other regarding physical contact with children and hold each other accountable by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted. It is always better to confront gently someone whom you believe is behaving in a way that could be interpreted as inappropriate. The goal is to create a culture where children are safe and adult workers strive to remain above reproach regarding interaction with children/youth.

### **Verbal Interaction**

Words can do much to support and encourage a child, especially words of praise, positive reinforcement, and appropriate jokes. Inappropriate verbal interaction can harm a child and includes language that is shaming, belittling, humiliating, or threatening. Name calling, cursing, harsh rebuking, or making derogatory remarks about the child is prohibited.

Adults shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to particular children/youth to the exclusion of others (e.g., "You are my favorite student.").

Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling personal secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children/youth.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

If a Covenant leader witnesses inappropriate or abusive behavior, he/she must take action to ensure the safety and well-being of the child/youth. Inaction and indifference are not in keeping with the work of the Holy Spirit among God's people. God calls all ministry personnel to help each other as "iron sharpens iron" (Pr. 27:17) to develop a safe environment for children/youth.

- When anyone has reason to suspect or has knowledge of child abuse within the scope of the ministry of Covenant, he/she must report it immediately to the Pastor or Pastoral Assistant.

- The Pastor will report the incident to the Session.
- The individual witnessing the inappropriate or abusive behavior should make the report expeditiously, without taking any other action or doing any preliminary investigation.
- The individual making the report must remember that the safety of the children is the primary goal. Reporting inappropriate behavior is not equivalent to making an accusation of child abuse; rather, it demonstrates a necessary commitment to a culture where children and youth are protected.

## Acknowledgement Form

I acknowledge that I have received, read, understand and agree to the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct of Covenant Presbyterian Church. Further, I understand and agree to the procedures for reporting inappropriate behavior and suspected abuse.

I agree that it is my responsibility to read and comply with any future updates of the Child Protection Policy, the Code of Conduct, or the reporting procedures.

I understand the procedures for reporting reasonable suspicion of and/or allegations of misconduct and agree to pursue a culture that protects children and youth.

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge I have not been accused of, been investigated for, or prosecuted for instances involving any form of abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child.

I agree not to engage in behavior that is abusive to a child.

I further agree that as an individual who serves in a position of trust in ministry to children/youth, I will not tolerate the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect of a child/youth.

I agree to immediately report any reasonable suspicion of, or disclosure of, inappropriate behavior between adults and minors, or between an older youth and a younger child, to the appropriate leadership immediately and cooperate in helping assist the children and youth of our community to remain safe.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number