

# West Valley Presbyterian Church

## Child Protection Policy

### General Purpose Statement

West Valley Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of West Valley Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

### Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

### 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 applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with West Valley 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 West Valley Presbyterian Church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at West Valley Presbyterian Church.

c) **Criminal Background Check**

Any adult worker, whether paid or volunteer, who will be responsible for the welfare of a child or will have direct contact with children must obtain (1) a report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police and (2) Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services. In addition, all adult workers who are either applying for a paid position or who have resided outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the previous 10 years will need a fingerprint based federal criminal history (FBI) submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent.

All volunteer workers must also complete a Volunteer Affirmation Form stating in writing that they are not disqualified from service based on a conviction or offense pursuant to the Pennsylvania law.

All checks/certifications must be renewed every five years (60 months). If a worker is arrested or convicted of an offense that would disqualify him/her from participation as someone who works with children at West Valley Presbyterian Church, or is named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, the worker must report the arrest, conviction, or notification in writing to the senior pastor.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will not be permitted to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children is defined under Pennsylvania law. Further the elders, in their sole discretion and on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances, reserve the right to determine whether an individual will be permitted to work with children at West Valley Presbyterian Church. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at West Valley Presbyterian Church.

Additional information can be found at: [keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov).

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth 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, and then only under appropriate circumstances.

## **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Child abuse is defined under Pennsylvania law and includes intentional, knowing, and reckless acts and which also includes certain acts even if there is no resulting injury or condition. Workers at West Valley Presbyterian Church should review the FAQs at <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/faqs/index.htm> to understand what child abuse means under the law and each individual's legal obligation to report suspected child abuse if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is the victim of child abuse.

In addition, purposes of this policy, "child abuse" includes any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development, which can occur 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 become aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child either directly or indirectly. In the event that a worker becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child and has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is the victim of child abuse, the worker must immediately (1) notify the senior pastor (or, if notifying the senior pastor would not be appropriate for any reason, notify a church elder) and (2) directly report suspected abuse to the appropriate authority either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313. An individual who makes an oral report of suspected child abuse via the toll-free telephone number must also submit a written report within 48 hours to the department or the county agency assigned to the case using the form found at [http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c\\_137044.pdf](http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/c_137044.pdf).

West Valley Presbyterian Church workers and staff shall comply with all applicable mandated reporting laws.

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, or involving a West Valley Presbyterian Church worker, the following procedure shall be followed as appropriate:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The church's insurance company will be notified, and the church will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. Pastor Mark Howard and Elder: \_\_\_\_\_ will be the church's spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. The church leadership will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A shepherding visit will be arranged for those who desire it.

7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from his/her position working with children or youth. The elders may take additional action as they deem appropriate in their sole discretion

## **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors must remain open when a child is in the room unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

## **Teenage Workers**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) 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 age 13
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

## **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

For children in the nursery area, the child(ren) will be signed in by a parent or guardian and then signed out by the parent or guardian when picking up the child(ren).

### Check-in

1. Parents must sign-in child upon drop off (printing their initials legibly).
2. An information form must be completed (or on file) prior to the parent/caretaker leaving the nursery. This will include:
  - a. Child's name
  - b. Date of birth
  - c. Special information or allergies
  - d. Parental signature
3. Please bring all items for child(ren) in a bag. Stickers will be used if necessary to identify what items belong to which child.
4. Parents are permitted to remain in the nursery with their child(ren) if desired.
5. Parents must inform nursery volunteer of their destination (i.e. worship service or classroom)

### Check-out

1. A child will only be released to his/her parent. Children will not be released to an older sibling unless otherwise arranged.
2. A child must be signed out upon pick-up.

Please note that nursery workers will not change diapers. If a child needs his/her diaper changed, the worker will notify the parents to come and change the child's diaper.

Non nursery age children will be escorted from the main worship space by an adult partway through the service and will be shown to their grade appropriate classrooms. Attendance of children in the classrooms will be taken by the teacher or helper and recorded weekly at the beginning of the class. It will be noted if a child left the classroom before being escorted back to the service by the teacher or helper.

## **Sickness Prevention Policy**

It is our policy that any child suffering from an active cold or other contagious illness should not be brought into a children's class.

If a child is signed in and begins to exhibit behavior indicating the onset of illness, the child will be made comfortable and the parent will be contacted immediately.

Disinfectant gel will be applied to every child's hands before snack time. Hands will be washed with soap following visits to the restrooms.

Each classroom will be provided with a box of tissues, disinfectant gel, and a trash bag. Teachers will regularly use the disinfectant gel as needed.

Children's Ministry toys and equipment will be regularly disinfected to prevent spread of illness.

## **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of West Valley 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 Children's Ministry Leader(s) to develop a plan of action.

## **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 in addition to the worker's supervisor. 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.

## **Discipline Policy**

While the role of the workers at West Valley is not to teach the children discipline, West Valley has implemented a discipline policy in order to keep the environment safe for the children and conducive to glorifying God.

Therefore, these steps will be taken when a child's behavior is disruptive, unsafe, or disrespectful toward the teacher or peers.

1. First Warning-The child is respectfully told what classroom rule he/she has broken and asked to change his/her behavior.
2. Second Warning-If the first warning is ignored, the child will be moved to a remote part of the classroom by the adult assistant and warned a second time, and talked to about participation. The classroom adult helper may pray with the child. The child is told he/she can rejoin the activity in 5-15 minutes and the adult assistant may sit with the child upon return to the activity.
3. Third Warning-If the child rejoins the class and persists in rebellious behavior, he or she will be taken out of the classroom. The adult assistant will escort the child to his/her parents. The child will sit with his/her parent(s) for the remainder of the worship service.

Unless otherwise prompted by the parents, behavior problems that require a second warning will be handled by the teachers and not reported to the parents.

We do welcome and encourage parents to ask the adult helpers to inform them of their child(ren)'s behavior, good or bad. This allows the parents to have more information to shepherd the hearts of their children.

West Valley workers are strictly forbidden from spanking or otherwise engaging in corporal discipline of children who are under the care of West Valley.

## **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.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female 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.

## **Training**

West Valley 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.

At a minimum, all West Valley workers should review the FAQs at <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/faqs/index.htm>