



# Youth Protection Policy

## PURPOSE

Village Presbyterian Church understands the importance of protecting youth in the community and in our programs and therefore wishes to provide a safe and secure environment. Village understands that the church is not immune to the potential that its youth could be abused, either by its members or those in leadership positions. Realizing that incidents of youth/child abuse or neglect cut across every racial, social, economic, and religious boundary, Village Church has adopted this Protection Policy as a way to assure youth are loved and demonstrates our efforts to protect youth from harm. This policy applies to all volunteers and paid staff of Village Presbyterian Church.

## DEFINITIONS

### A. Persons

1. **Youth:** Any student that participates in a sanctioned Village Church Youth Activity in the grades 7-12, even if that student is 18 years of age.
2. **Compensated workers** include hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employees who work with youth.
3. **Volunteer workers** refer to anyone working with youth in any Village Church Youth activity.

### B. Abuse includes, but not limited to, the following:

1. **Physical Abuse** is that which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, burns, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.
2. **Emotional Abuse** is that which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child's performance, and isolation from normal social activities.
3. **Sexual Abuse** is that which consists of unwelcome sexual contact or interaction with a youth, including physical conduct (i.e. fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).
  - a. Sexual Abuse is a violation of the role of pastors, employees, volunteers, counselors, supervisors, teachers, and advisors of any kind who are called upon to exercise integrity, sensitivity, and caring in a trust relationship. It breaks the covenant to act in the best interests of parishioners, clients, co-workers, and students.
  - b. Sexual Abuse is a misuse of authority and powers that breach Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relation to gain advantage over another for personal



pleasure in an abusive, exploitative, and unjust manner. If the parishioner, student, client, or employee initiates or invites sexual content in the relationship it is the pastor's, counselor's, officer's, or supervisor's responsibility to maintain the appropriate role and prohibit a sexual relationship.

- c. Sexual Abuse takes advantage of the vulnerability of persons who are less powerful to act for their own welfare, including youth. It is antithetical to the gospel call to work as God's servant in the struggle to bring wholeness to a broken world. It violates the mandate to protect the vulnerable from harm.
4. **Rape** is sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation.
5. **Sexual Conduct** is sexually suggestive language, behavior, visual contact, touching, or fondling of a youth that is injurious to the youth's physical or emotional health.
6. **Sexual Malfeasance** is defined by the broken trust resulting from sexual activities within a professional ministerial relationship that results in misuse of office or position arising from the professional ministerial relationship.
7. **Misuse of Technology** is use of technology that results in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages and images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography on church property. When this includes a person under the age of eighteen, it is considered child abuse. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by a church or church entity or within the context of ministry.

## SCREENING FOR VOLUNTEERS OR PAID WORKERS WITH YOUTH

The following procedures reflect our commitment to provide protective care of all youth and volunteers who participate in Village Church Youth sponsored activities.

1. Any adult member of the congregation, volunteer, or compensated worker, who has been convicted of a crime against a child, or a violent crime against another adult, will not provide service in any church-sponsored activity or program with youth.
2. All volunteers and compensated workers will complete the following procedures before assuming any participation in a Village Church Youth sponsored activity.
  - a. A standard application for all volunteers and compensated workers is to be completed and reference checks will be reviewed and updated on a periodic basis.
  - b. An initial interview with designated persons will be conducted.
  - c. All persons working with youth will be requested to attend orientation/training activities appropriate to the level of the volunteer or compensated worker involvement.
  - d. Applicants will sign written acknowledgement stating they have received and reviewed a copy of the Village Presbyterian Church Youth Protection Policy.
3. All compensated staff members working with youth undergo background checks for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal history or child abuse findings. Volunteers who have frequent unsupervised access to youth may also be asked to undergo a criminal background check.
4. Although research indicates that the majority of perpetrators of youth/child abuse have themselves been victims, no assumptions will be made that victims of childhood abuse should automatically be precluded from working with children. Adults who were victims of childhood abuse are encouraged to consult with a pastor in order to ensure they have reached an appropriate level of



recovery to work with children.

5. It is intended that this application and results of any screening are to be confidential unless a disclosure is necessary to protect the safety of VPC youth.

## CODE OF CONDUCT AND GENERAL GUIDELINES

This Code of Conduct defines individual responsibilities as ministers, leaders, employees or volunteers to meet the expectations of Village Church with respect to behavior or conduct in the service of the ministries of the church, especially those who serve youth.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Each person subject to this Code shall

1. Act as a team member in fulfilling ministry objectives
2. Treat youth with respect, and fairly without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or religion
3. Practice those behaviors we regard as necessary and positive, as well as to refrain from those behaviors which have been defined as prohibited

### GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

The following behaviors are prohibited at all times:

1. Display affection toward a child in privacy.
2. Use profanity or tell off-color jokes.
3. Discuss their sexual encounters with or around youth or in any way involve youth in their personal problems or issues.
4. Date or become romantically involved with a youth.
5. Use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of youth.
6. Possess sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on Church property.
7. Have secrets with youth.
8. Stare at or comment on a youth body.
9. Engage in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with youth.
10. Work one-on-one with youth in a private setting.
11. Abuse youth in any way including (but not limited to) the following:
  - Physical abuse: hit, spank, shake, slap, unnecessarily restrain
  - Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, curse
  - Sexual abuse: inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented conversations
  - Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, act cruelly
  - Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter
  - Permit youth to engage in the following: Hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, games of Truth or Dare, ridicule or humiliation or sexual activity



12. Manipulate or exploit a youth in any way.

Each Minister, employee, or volunteer worker of Village Presbyterian Church shall conduct themselves in a manner that fosters understanding of safe conduct in the context of serving youth. The standards articulated below serve two purposes:

1. To protect youth from abuse or grooming for abuse elsewhere; and
2. To protect/prevent church staff from engaging in patterns of behavior that may be construed as abusive or predatory. While a single infraction of guidelines may not constitute abuse, a pattern of repeated violations will result in disciplinary action including but not limited to dismissal from ministry.

**1. APPROVAL AND AFFECTION**

In providing approval or affection, the following guidelines apply:

Appropriate Physical Interactions	Inappropriate Physical Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Side hugs</li> <li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder or "temple" hugs</li> <li>• Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>• Handshakes</li> <li>• High-fives and hand slapping</li> <li>• Verbal praise</li> <li>• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li> <li>• Touching hands, shoulders, or arms</li> <li>• Arms around shoulders</li> </ul> <p>Note: These may be inappropriate if unwanted by the child, or the employee or volunteer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-frontal hugs</li> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>• Lap sitting</li> <li>• Wrestling</li> <li>• Piggyback rides</li> <li>• Tickling</li> <li>• Allowing a youth to cling to an employee's or volunteer's leg</li> <li>• Any type of massage given by or to a youth</li> <li>• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the youth, or the employee or volunteer</li> <li>• Compliments related to physique or body development</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> </ul>

**2. VERBAL INTERACTIONS**

The manner of speaking with youth establishes respect. The following guidelines apply:

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Appropriate jokes</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name-calling</li> <li>• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving children in the personal problems or issues of employees and/or volunteers</li> <li>• Secrets</li> <li>• Cursing</li> <li>• Off-color or sexual jokes</li> <li>• Shaming and belittling</li> <li>• Derogatory remarks about the youth or their family</li> <li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate youth</li> </ul>

### 3. OUT-OF-PROGRAM (OFF-SITE) CONTACT

Off-site interaction with youth is part of the very nature of youth ministry. However, there are still guidelines that need to be followed.

Appropriate Outside Contact	Inappropriate Outside Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking groups of youth on an outing</li><li>• Attending sporting activities with groups of youth</li><li>• Attending functions at a youth's home, with parents present</li><li>• Having a coffee or meal with youth, with parent's permission, or the notification of another adult on staff in the Youth Ministry department</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking one youth on an outing without the parents' written permission or expressed verbal consent</li><li>• Visiting one youth in the child's home, without a parent present</li><li>• Entertaining one youth in the home of a church employee or volunteer</li><li>• A lone youth spending the night with a church employee or volunteer</li></ul>

In addition, when outside contact is unavoidable, the following steps are to be taken:

- A supervisor shall identify for employee and volunteers what types of outside contact are appropriate and inappropriate (above).
- A supervisor shall assure that the employee or volunteer has the parents' permission to engage in outside contact with the youth. When time permits, parents shall execute a permission form with a waiver of liability (if permitted by state law).

### 4. ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS

While one-to-one interactions are not a staple in youth ministry, there are times when private conversations need to take place. It is appropriate for paid staff and volunteers to abide by the following guidelines:

- When meeting one-on-one with a youth, always do so in a public place in full view of others. If youth requests meeting alone, the staff must notify other staff and/or parents.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other employees and volunteers that you are alone with a youth and ask them to randomly drop in (ask to be supervised).
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

To the extent any of these guidelines may appear to be in conflict, the spirit of them is that one shall seek to be under the supervision of others while meeting privately with a youth.

### 5. SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

**General Social Media Policy.** No Minister, employee, volunteer or member of Village Presbyterian Church shall create or use a media site (web, Facebook, YouTube, or similar) in the name of or purporting to represent the church without the explicit written permission of the Session. When clergy or staff, acting in their capacity as a representative of the church, lead or coordinate a group activity using social media, each may use only official church sites/channels when they have been made available by the church. These may include web

pages, Facebook, e-mail, and similar means.

**Communication with Youth** (*Option 1 – Restricted Communication*). Due to the attendant risk of electronic communications with youth, especially the inability to supervise, the following standards shall apply:

- Any e-mail communications with youth must include the youth's parents/guardians and/or BCC (blind carbon copy) another member of the Youth Ministries team, where appropriate. E-mail communications shall be limited to logistical matters, e.g., meeting dates, times and places.

**Social Media Communications** (*Option 2 – Official Church Sites – Preferred over Option 3*). In order to extend the life of the congregation, enhance communication, and develop participation of young people in the life of the church and its ministry, Village Church will authorize certain Ministers to manage the church's official website and organization Facebook page. Use by Ministers of private pages and private profiles are prohibited.

Ministers who shall create public pages on behalf of church programs are responsible to monitor communications and to assure that employees and volunteers do not have private (and possibly inappropriate) conversations with youth.

Ministers having Facebook privileges on behalf of the church and shall treat unsolicited communication or "friending" from children under age 13 as an unauthorized text message. No reply may be given except to indicate by a posting that accepting a "friend" invitation by under-age children is a violation of the Social Networking Code of Conduct.

If a youth reveals abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult, the Minister must report this information in the manner of any "suspected abuse."

When using Facebook to communicate with youth, the authorized Minister shall inform parents/guardians of each youth that the latter is communicating with the Minister via Facebook, providing the parent/guardian the opportunity to disapprove or to participate in a Group.

**Social Media Communications (i.e. Facebook)** (*Option 3 – Private Sites*). In order to extend the life of the congregation, enhance communication, and develop participation of young people in the life of the church and its ministry, Village Church will authorize only certain Ministers to communicate through personal Facebook pages under the following conditions and settings:

- Each authorized Minister shall maintain a Facebook profile setting at "public" to permit supervisory viewing of communications with youth.
- Only "Open" Groups may be used on a personal Facebook page for communications with youth.
- "Membership Approval" shall be set to require Admin approval of new members.
- Contact via Facebook from a child known to be under age 13 shall be reported in the same manner as an unauthorized texting contact.

Ministers having Facebook privileges on behalf of the church shall treat unsolicited communication or "friending" from children under age 13 as an unauthorized text message. No reply may be given except to indicate by a posting that accepting "friend" invitations by under-age children is a violation of the Social Networking Code of Conduct.

**Social Networking Code of Conduct** (*Applies to both Option 2 and 3, above*). Each Minister who leads using the resources of social media shall apply this Social Networking Code of Conduct:

- Prohibit comments that are, or could be construed by any observer, to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
- Prohibit sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities.
- Prohibit private messages between employees and volunteers and youth.

- Prohibit posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive or voyeuristic) or inappropriate comments on pictures.
- Encourage parents to play a role in monitoring their youth's interactions with employees and volunteers.
- Continuously remind youth how to interact appropriately through social networking sites.
- Deny participation by individuals who repeatedly violate the Code of Conduct.

## REPORTING OF ABUSE

### RESPONSIBILITY OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Each employee or volunteer is obligated to fulfill the Code of Conduct by living the standard and helping others to do the same. Each is obligated to guide and gently correct others as they would in a circumstance of high personal risk. When another person, regardless of status, rank, or power, repeats a violation of the Code of Conduct, the employee/volunteer observer must report the violation to their own immediate supervisor, or the next level of authority if necessary.

Reporting responsibility includes incidents of youth-on-youth and or employee-on-youth sexual activity, dangerous behaviors, employee-on-employee sexual harassment, bullying of any kind, exploitation of a youth or circumstances which rise to the level of abuse requiring action by a mandatory reporter.

### RESPONSIBILITY OF AUTHORIZED CLERGY, LAY LEADERS, AND SUPERVISORY EMPLOYEES (LEADERS)

Village Church expects that Ministers and Leaders especially, will relate to each other in a cordial and professional manner and in matters of safe conduct will support, encourage and mentor each other.

Each person in a ministry leadership capacity is required to fulfill the standards of the Code of Conduct. Church Leaders shall foster Safe Conduct by example and by correcting, mentoring and counseling followed by progressive discipline. Whether upon direct observation or as a result of reports from others, each church Leader shall take affirmative steps to correct behavior or enforce policies.

At such time as verbal warnings are found to be ineffective and a written notice is required in order to correct behavior, each Leader shall do so with the advice and approval of their supervisor. A Leader may proceed to a higher level of supervision if they feel there is a conflict of interest created by another relationship such as family ties.

At such time as warnings, verbal and written, are deemed unsuccessful, and termination from ministry, employment, or volunteer status is required, a termination letter shall be issued only with the authority and over the signature of the Personnel Committee. If the alleged individual is a member of the clergy, he or she shall be subject to disciplinary procedures of the presbytery in accordance to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

A Leader may be expected to recuse themselves from the reporting and disciplinary process in situations where there appears to be a conflict as a result of family ties or outside-of-church relationships, but may not do so when they are a mandatory reporter as prescribed by Kansas law.

### RESPONSIBILITY OF MANDATORY REPORTERS

Regardless of procedures outlined herein, each person who is considered a mandatory reporter under the statutes of Kansas shall in good faith report abuse as defined by the State of Kansas (<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/GuidetoReportingAbuseandNeglect.pdf>).

Village Church prefers that a mandatory reporter first report circumstances requiring reporting to authorities to the Executive or Senior Pastor. Without delay, the highest-level leader who is considered to be a mandatory reporter shall make the initial report to police or child welfare authorities on behalf of Village Presbyterian Church.

Nothing in this policy shall be considered a restraint of an individual's statutory obligation to report to authorities. Furthermore, no person shall be restrained from reporting an incident on the basis that they are not a mandatory reporter.

If a youth reveals abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult, the Minister must report this information in the manner of any suspected abuse.

## **RESPONSE OF THE VILLAGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Village Church is committed to prompt, professional, and measured response to all circumstances, which may range from violations of these policies and procedures to suspicions or allegations of abuse. We are committed to (1) seriously consider the concerns of victims; (2) undertake a fair investigation of policy violations; (3) protect the confidentiality of parties involved in investigation; (4) report to as required and cooperate fully with public authorities; and (5) communicate fully with the congregation within the bounds of individual rights to confidentiality.

Fulfillment of this commitment requires every Minister to assume responsibility as part of their respective duties, whether "authorized clergy", employee or volunteer.

## **OTHER REPORTABLE ABUSE**

While the State has defined abuse for the purpose of youth protection statutes and mandatory reporting, other kinds of abuse occur which are outside the bounds of safe conduct and to which Village Church requires a response. The following circumstances constitute reportable abuse, which requires response to include counseling, correction, progressive discipline and termination.

1. Dangerous behaviors (hazing, truth or dare, drinking, etc.);
2. Bullying, whether youth-on-youth or adult-on-youth.

All such activity shall be reported by Employees/Volunteers or Leaders in the same manner as any violation of the Code of Conduct. In the event of out-of-program circumstances where there is not an identifiable direct Minister supervisor, reports shall be made to the Executive or Senior Pastor.

## **OTHER DISCIPLINARY PROCESSES**

Other behaviors not necessarily involving children or which may not be considered strictly illegal, are subject to other disciplinary practices as may be set out in governing documents of the congregation or of the denomination. Behaviors subject to other adjudication may include but are not limited to:

1. Sexual harassment, whether among employees or volunteers;
2. Clergy professional boundary violations;
3. Sexual exploitation;
4. Sexual relationships between a Minister OR Leader and a minor/youth.

Employees/Volunteers or Leaders shall report all such activity in the same manner as any violation of the Code of Conduct. In the event of out-of-program circumstances where there is not an identifiable direct Minister supervisor, reports shall be made to the Executive or Senior Pastor.



## **COOPERATION WITH INVESTIGATIONS**

Village Church expects and requires the cooperation of all Ministers and other employees in the investigation of violations of the Code of Conduct or other misconduct, including a complainant, witness, and the accused offender. We may interview these individuals privately and take oral and/or written statements from them. Any person who fails to cooperate with such an investigation or to provide complete and truthful information may be subject to disciplinary action.

## **NOTIFICATION OF PARENTS**

A minor may be party to an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a minor is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a youth-on-youth incident. A violation of policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

Therefore, a Minister or employee having knowledge of an incident which warrants communication to a parent shall first advise their immediate supervisor, who shall consult with their department head or the Senior Pastor. While communicating with a parent, and being mindful of the importance of timely communication, care shall be given to assessing:

1. The specific facts;
2. Whether a disciplinary or termination process is required;
3. Whether a youth should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians);
4. Whether mandatory reporting is a factor;
5. Who shall communicate, and in what manner, with the parents/guardian;
6. Whether the Minister should be involved in the communication;
7. Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident.

Notification of parents shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required.

## **VICTIM NEEDS**

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of Village Church is to be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, Village Church will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

An incident of alleged abuse that requires the person shall report medical or psychological care for a victim or family to the Insurance Board specifically designated by the Session to represent the church. The latter shall discuss with the Insurance Board Claims Department whether the circumstances warrant initiation of Crisis Management services which may include psychological counseling. Upon approval, counseling services may be offered to a perceived victim(s), which may include family members.

## **RESPONDING TO MEDIA**

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals, the congregation, and Village Church. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Session to represent the church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the church. Unless designated differently by the Session in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the church shall be the Senior Pastor.

Prior to speaking to media, the Senior Pastor shall contact and consult with Heartland Presbytery, to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the

situation.

The Senior Pastor shall give immediate consideration to securing Insurance Board media relations and crisis management resources. Considering the speed of news cycles, a prompt determination is required, erring on the side of seeking help.

## VOLUNTEER/EMPLOYEE ACCEPTANCE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF VILLAGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

I acknowledge that I have received and read through a copy of the Village Presbyterian Church Youth Protection Policy and agree to its terms. Further, I agree to adhere to its limits, restrictions, and guidelines.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print name \_\_\_\_\_