

GENERAL SYNOD OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

A. Application

This Child Protection Policy and Procedures (“Policy”) applies to the General Synod Childcare Program (“Program”) and all Child Workers/Volunteers, as defined below.

B. Distribution

This Policy shall be made available online to everyone on the General Synod website, and access (via a link or an electronic copy) shall be distributed to each Child Worker/Volunteer for the Program. Parents/guardians shall be provided with a link to the Policy in the registration documents for the Program.

C. Policy Rationale

Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord. Psalm 127:3 CEB

Children deserve to grow up in a world where they feel valued and protected in their homes, in the communities where they live, at their schools, and when participating in programs provided by the church. However children are in fact the most victimized population in our society. Research indicates that a majority of children and youth across the United States will experience at least one type of trauma before adulthood. Some children will experience multiple types of trauma, severely impacting their ability to learn, grow, and develop to their full potential. Although such trauma is never expected, adherence to this policy is an effort to ensure the church has instituted every safeguard available to protect all children and the adults who will care for them during church sponsored activities.

D. Definitions

Child: a person from six months to 12 years of age who is a participant in the Program.

Youth: a person who has completed fifth grade through the summer following completion of high school.

Minor: any person 0-17 years old.

Child Worker/Volunteer: Any person, volunteer, paid staff, or contractor who participates at any level in the Program, including providing care and/or programming.

Minor Abuse: Any act or failure to act that results in physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, or exploitation of a Minor.

Sexual Abuse: Any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to any Minor (whether between two minors or an adult and a minor) or any person without the capacity to consent; or any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of a ministry position. The behavior may or may not involve touching.

Sexual Exploitation: Sexual activity or conduct (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a person takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing that person to engage in sexual behavior.

Misuse of Technology: The use of technology that results in Minor Abuse, harassing of a Minor, or is otherwise harassing or inappropriate towards any person.

Childcare Response Team: A team of at least three people, comprised of two Program leaders and one National Setting staff person with training on the Policy. The Response Team Program leader members shall be selected by the Local Arrangements Hospitality Subcommittee Chair and the National Staff person shall be Tracy Howe. his team will be readily available to be contacted during the General Synod. Child Workers/Volunteers will be notified of the members of the Childcare Response Team at the General Synod.

Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to their wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning or worship environment of another.

Sexual Misconduct: The umbrella term that includes Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Harassment, Misuse of Technology.

E. Prohibited Behavior

It is a violation of this Policy for any Child Worker/Volunteer, or Child, to engage in Sexual Misconduct towards or abuse or harassment of any person during the Program.

It is a violation of this Policy to not comply with any other provisions stated herein.

Violations of the Policy must be reported as provided below.

F. Removal from the General Synod

Any Child Worker/Volunteer or Child who engages in Prohibited Behavior, as determined by a Program leader or the Childcare Response Team, may be prohibited from attending the General Synod.

G. Reporting Abuse

Regardless of any other provision in the Policy, any person suspecting or having knowledge that a Minor has been neglected or abused **must** report the neglect or abuse to the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at **1-800-800-5556**. This is a state law requirement.

Any person suspecting or having knowledge that a Minor has been neglected or abused may also report the neglect or abuse to a Program leader. Any Program leader who receives such a report will report it to the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

Any Child or Youth suspecting or having knowledge of any type of Minor abuse is invited to share the knowledge with any Child Worker/Volunteer, including Program leaders. The abuse will be reported to the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline. Please share information in person for the fastest response. The on-site contact information for Program leaders will be provided at General Synod.

Any person receiving information under this paragraph shall immediately share the information with the Program Response Team.

H. Reporting Policy Violations

Policy violations that involve abuse of a Minor must be reported under the paragraph Reporting Abuse. Policy violations that do not involve abuse of a Minor must be reported to a Program leader, who will determine whether the Childcare Response Team should be notified.

I. Screening, Training, and Background Checks

1. Every Child Worker/Volunteer must adhere to the following standards:

- Criminal background check
- Self-disclosure form

Every Volunteer must adhere to the standards above and the following **additional** standards:

- Complete an application to be a volunteer for the Program, including providing references
- Sign a Code of Conduct
- Have a six-month associational history with the United Church of Christ

The Local Arrangements Committee is responsible for confirming the six-month associational history with the United Church of Christ and checking the references provided on the volunteer applications for Volunteers Local Churches and the Conference.

Screening of background checks will be done by the National Setting of the United Church of Christ Human Resources Department. The National Setting of the United Church of Christ has sole discretion in denying Child Worker/Volunteer status to any applicant for the Program. The results of the background checks shall remain confidential.

2. Each Child Worker/Volunteer must be at least 18 years old.

3. Each Child Worker/Volunteer must participate in training provided by the National Setting of the United Church of Christ or its designated contractor, which covers the Policy, abuse prevention, and reporting.

J. Childcare Response Team

The Childcare Response Team must be trained and available throughout the duration of the event. The General Counsel will be available for consultation to the Response Team. The Team is intended to be activated under the following circumstances: allegations of abuse of a Minor; or serious misconduct that does not rise to the level of abuse.

The Response Team has the following duties:

1. Immediately provide for the safety of the victim(s) involved.
2. If the report alleges abuse or harassment of Minor, the Response Team will:
 - a. Immediately ensure the allegation is reported according to state law.
 - b. Immediately notify the parents or guardian of the Minor.
 - c. Notify the appropriate insurance company of the allegation and that no investigation has yet occurred.
3. Make immediate decisions concerning the removal of the individual accused from the event until a resolution of the allegations has occurred.
4. Notify the General Counsel, who may further investigate the matter by: [Note: Crimes should be investigated by the police. Violations of policy may be investigated by the organization.]
 - a. Gathering statements from those making the report and any party to the abuse;
 - b. Making written determinations and recommendations of actions appropriate to resolve the matter, including, but not limited to, recommendations for prevention as well as response.
5. Have resources readily available for victims of abuse.
6. If the report is against authorized clergy, send a written statement to the appropriate Committee on Ministry.
7. If the report is against a staff member of a Local Church, Conference, National Setting, or other setting of the United Church of Christ, notify the person responsible for the supervision of the employee.
8. Provide for pastoral counseling for the principal parties involved.

9. Provide a written summary to the General Counsel of any proceedings as the result of any report under this Policy.

K. Rules for Working with Minors

1. Child Workers/Volunteers shall:

- a. respond to Children with respect and consideration and treat all of them equally, regardless of race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, disability status, or religious affiliation;
- b. act as positive role model for Children by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity;
- c. maintain appropriate boundaries when in positions of power with Children;
- d. not give money or gifts to Children.

2. Two adult rule: two non-related adults must always be present in groups of Children, in both in-person and online gatherings. Under no circumstances should a Child Worker/Volunteer be alone with a Child (unless that Child Worker/Volunteer is also a parent of the Youth) or with a group of Children.

3. Ratio: the Child Worker/Volunteer ratio for Children is one adult for every four children under the age of four and one adult for every seven children age four and older. The Two-Adult Rule, however, still applies regardless of the number of children.

4. View Windows and Open Doors: When Child Workers/Volunteers and Children are in a room, if the door is closed, the door must have a view window that is unobstructed. Otherwise, the door must remain open at all times.

5. Responsible use of digital devices and mobile phones is required by Children and Child Workers/Volunteers at all times. Child Workers/Volunteers may not photograph Children with their digital devices during the Program.

6. Age-appropriate training to Children should be provided regarding behavior that should be reported to Program leaders.

7. A Child Worker/Volunteer must not engage in one-on-one texting, direct messaging, or telephone, or other private communications with a Minor. If a Minor texts a Child Worker/Volunteer, the Child Worker/Volunteer shall add another Child Worker/Volunteer to the communication prior to responding.

8. Child Workers/Volunteers who accompany a Child to the bathroom should remain outside the bathroom or stall while the Child is inside. If a Child needs assistance, two Child

Workers/Volunteers should be present. Diapering of infants and toddlers is subject to the two-adult rule.

9. Visitors to the Program area who are not Child Workers/Volunteers are not permitted; an exception is that parents/guardians with a Child in the Program may briefly visit their Child. No person, including friends/relatives of Child Workers/Volunteers, may “hang out” in the Program areas.

10. Discipline: Child Workers/Volunteers are encouraged to listen to the Child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs, or give alternative choices. If a Child continues to be disruptive, a parent should be contacted and brought to the Program area to pick up their Child.

11. Injuries/Illnesses/Emergencies: a first-aid kit shall be available to treat minor injuries like scrapes, papercuts, or minor bumps/bruises. Parents/guardians shall be called if a Child if a more severe injury occurs or if the Child becomes ill. Call 911 and parents/guardians if there is a medical emergency.

L. Arrival, Pick-Up, and Snacks

Rooms will be open 30 minutes prior to scheduled sessions and close 30 minutes after. Parents or guardians are expected to bring and pick up their children within these times. A sign in and sign out sheet will be required. Children will only be released to the person who brought the child. Each adult will be required to show photo ID.

We will have designated times for snacks. Parents or guardians need to pick up children prior to meals. No meals are provided.

M. Parent Availability

Parents/guardians must not leave the Convention Center while their Child is attending the Program and must be reachable at all times by mobile phone.