

Grand Point Church Children and Youth PROTECTION POLICY

Grand Point Church (GPC) desires to be a safe place for all children, youth, and adults who attend any activity or ministry. Each year children and youth are victimized by individuals they know and trust. The church is not immune to the potential for such abuse or neglect of children and youth, either by its members or by those in leadership positions. Incidents of child abuse or neglect cut across every racial, social, economic, and religious boundary. This *Children and Youth Protection Policy* reflects GPC's commitment to protect children and youth from harm. The policy applies to all volunteer and compensated workers of GPC.

GPC will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this policy not only reflects your concern about children and youth safety in this society, but also your willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects.

For the safety and protection of our children and workers, all people who participate in church-sponsored activities with children will be required to comply with this policy.

DEFINITIONS

In this policy the following definitions will apply:

1. **Child:** Any person under the age of 18.
2. **Special Needs Person:** Any adult or child requiring direct adult supervision as a result of mental or physical limitations.
3. **Adult:** Any person age 18 and over.
4. **Child abuse and neglect:** Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect of a child by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's welfare.
5. **Physical abuse:** Maltreatment which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.
6. **Emotional abuse:** Maltreatment which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including, but not limited to, belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child's performance, and isolation from normal social activities.
7. **Sexual abuse:** Maltreatment which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including, but not limited to, physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and non-physical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).
8. **Neglect:** Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and supervision.

9. **Compensated workers:** Hourly, salaried, part-time, or full-time employees who work with children at any church-sponsored activity.
10. **Volunteer workers:** Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.
11. **Caregiver:** Any compensated or volunteer worker, seventh grade or older.
12. **Mandated reporter:** Any person that comes in contact with children and has a reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse is a mandated reporter. If a caregiver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report to the Child Abuse Hotline (ChildLine) 1-800-932-0313 or report online at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis.

SCREENING FOR VOLUNTEER AND COMPENSATED WORKERS

The following procedures reflect our commitment to provide protective care for all children and caregivers who participate in church-sponsored activities. These checks are required by law to be updated every three years.

1. Applicants must sign a written acknowledgement (last page of this document) stating they have received and reviewed a copy of the *GPC Children and Youth Protection Policy*.
2. All volunteer and compensated workers shall be screened by State Criminal History, Child Abuse Clearance, and FBI Criminal History checks for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal history or abuse findings. FBI Criminal History checks will be for all compensated workers and any volunteer that has not been a resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 consecutive years.
3. All volunteer and compensated workers shall be given access to Mandated Reporter Training, which will explain in detail; Who is a Mandated Reporter? What are the signs of abuse/neglect? Who does a Mandated Reporter report to and how?
4. 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, shall not provide service in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or special needs persons.

Those who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse can be forgiven for, and cleansed of their sin. However, sin does have consequences and while such persons may serve in certain other areas of ministry at GPC, they will be prohibited from serving in the children's and special needs ministries.

5. This application and the results of any screening shall be kept confidential by authorized church staff.

GENERAL POLICIES

1. Caregivers shall not engage in any form of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.
2. Every effort will be made to have a minimum of two adults working together with children and youth. In a Bible Study or similar teaching environment, it is acceptable to have individual classes/groups with only one adult caregiver provided there are other adults present in the general area. This protects the children and the adults, as well as providing a safer situation in the event of an accident or emergency.
3. The Lead Pastor and/or Children's Pastor, or Youth Pastor must approve any activities that are held off site. Parent or guardian permission shall be obtained and there shall be a minimum of two adult caregivers present.
4. Organized events on or off site (GPC) where parents/guardians are not in attendance shall be staffed with a minimum ratio of 1:10, adult caregiver to child. Overnight events that are attended by children of both genders must be chaperoned by adult caregivers of both genders.
5. GPC will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of anyone. In addition, our organization will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.
 - a. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength.
 - b. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
 - i. Physical bullying – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
 - ii. Verbal bullying – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
 - iii. Nonverbal or relational bullying – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
 - iv. Cyberbullying – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
 - Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
 - Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
 - Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
 - Hazing – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
 - Sexualized bullying – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.
 - c. Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all employees and volunteers.

6. This organization strongly encourages employees and volunteers to refrain from electronic communication and/or social media use with children and youth. *[The terms “electronic communications” and “social media” or “social network” refer to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications, and social interaction through the use of words, images, video or audio tools. Examples include, but are not limited to: social websites, blogs, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing sites, text and voice chat platforms for gaming, live webcasting, and real-time web communities. Additionally, sending text messages between two or more mobile phones or fixed or portable devices over a phone or wireless network is included within these definitions.]* However, if these interactions are part of programming or otherwise unavoidable, this organization offers the following guidelines:
- a. Comments are prohibited that are, or could be construed by any observer to be, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
 - b. Sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities are prohibited.
 - c. Private messages between employees and volunteers and children and youth are prohibited.
 - d. Posting inappropriate pictures or inappropriate comments on pictures is prohibited.
 - e. Requests to discontinue – Parents and guardians may request in writing that a child or youth not be contacted through any form of electronic communication or social media by GPC.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT

As a caregiver, you are a mandated reporter of child abuse or neglect. It is the legal responsibility of a mandated reporter to report all cases of child abuse or neglect they observe, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse or neglect. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the church, the observer, or both. The confidentiality of the pastor/attendee relationship is very important. Reporting probable cause of child abuse or neglect has the potential for helping individuals receive help for a previous problem and may prevent further harm to self and others.

What is probable cause? Probable cause means that the available facts when viewed in the light of the surrounding circumstances would cause a reasonable person to believe a child was abused or neglected. A report based on probable cause does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

The following guidelines will be used for reporting suspected abuse/neglect:

1. Report the abuse or neglect directly to the Child Abuse Hotline (ChildLine) 1-800-932-0313 or report online at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis.
2. Report to the Children’s Pastor, or Youth Pastor that a report was made. To preserve confidentiality, it is important to discuss the incident initially only with one of these two individuals.
 - a. The Executive Pastor and Church Administrator will be made aware of the report and, depending on the specifics, the church insurance company and possibly an attorney will be notified.
3. Child Abuse Hotline (ChildLine) determines the next steps.
4. Children’s Pastor, or Youth Pastor will notify the parents or guardians depending on the specifics.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS

GPC's primary function in responding to allegations of sexual abuse or neglect is to attempt to provide pastoral care to all who are affected, to attempt to ensure the safety and protection of persons who have been or may be harmed, to seek healing by providing pastoral care and other needed assistance to all who are affected, and, to the extent possible, to respect the privacy and rights of the parties involved and the confidentiality of communications.

If GPC receives an allegation of child abuse or neglect, the pastors will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, GPC will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that GPC takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

If an alleged abuser contacts the church officials about a complaint, GPC personnel may confirm that they have received such a complaint only if they are certain the alleged abuser already knows this. They should avoid discussing the allegations or making any further comments until the proper authorities have an opportunity to conduct their investigation. They should not identify the alleged victim or complaint to outside parties during an investigation.

If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the Lead Pastor or Executive Pastor. Only the Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor, or their designee shall make comments about the allegation.

GPC Children and Youth Protection Policy

Commonly Asked Questions

Is a criminal background check really necessary?

Sadly, the culture in which we live dictates that we must take drastic preventive measures to protect the children and youth whose care we've been entrusted with. Furthermore, there are litigation issues: A church that hasn't performed background checks faces the risk of catastrophic financial penalties in the event that an allegation of abuse within the church leads to a conviction or out-of-court settlement.

Who needs to submit a signed *GPC Children and Youth Protection Policy* and a *Permission to Obtain a Background Check* form?

Any church employee or volunteer who will have direct contact with any child or youth (less than 18 years of age), either on or off the church campus, during any church-related ministries must complete both of these forms.

Once I complete and sign these forms, to whom do I give them?

Give your completed forms to the Children's Pastor, Youth Pastor, or their Administrative Assistants.

I'm concerned about confidentiality and privacy issues. Who will see my application and more importantly, who will see the results of my background check?

Only those listed above, along with our church's administrative support staff will see your application and/or the results of your criminal background check. All information will be kept in our secure online database, FellowshipOne.

I am not presently involved in any church volunteer work that involves young people. Should I submit an application and give permission for a background check?

As our church continues to grow, so do our children and youth discipleship ministries. Because the addition of programs to minister to these young people is ongoing, the demand for volunteers is always on the increase. Even though you may not be currently involved in such a ministry, it's a good idea to go ahead and submit your forms now. In the event that you do volunteer work at some point in the future, we'll already have your forms and background check on file.

Why do I have to list my Social Security Number (SSN)?

A couple of reasons. The first is that your SSN is the primary key for all databases affiliated with a background check. The second reason is that your SSN is used to verify the following crucial information:

- whether the SSN is validly issued
- to whom SSN belongs
- in which year and state the SSN was issued
- the current and other known or previous addresses to that SSN.

Why do I have to list things like my hair color, height, and weight on the *Permission to Obtain a Background Check* form?

For any volunteer that has not resided in Pennsylvania for the past 10 consecutive years, and any compensated employees, an FBI Criminal History check is required. The registration for that check requires those answers along with other questions that more precisely identifies the person filling out the form.

What criteria from the background check will determine whether or not someone is approved for volunteer work? Who makes that decision?

The background check will cite felony and misdemeanor convictions. At the end of this document is a list of crimes that would disqualify someone from serving with children and youth. The most obvious reason that someone is denied the opportunity to do volunteer work in our church is any prior conviction pertaining to an offense against a child. Misdemeanor convictions, would have little or no negative impact in determining a person's worthiness as a church volunteer.

In the event a conviction turns up on the report from the list at the end of this document, the person would not be permitted to work with children and youth. Other crimes listed would be reviewed by the Elders of the church and the Pastoral staff to decide whether or not to approve the volunteer for work with children and youth.

Some final thoughts...

Please know that the intent of the background check is to protect the young people in our church... period. Its purpose is *not* to cause you personal embarrassment by dredging up past mistakes or wrong choices. Regrettably, it's impossible to implement a viable screening plan without a bit of scrutiny into some personal background information.

Throughout the entire process of developing the *GPC Children and Youth Protection Policy* for our church, a tremendous amount of concern and sensitivity has been shown in regard to matters of confidentiality. Much effort has been put into implementing screening procedures that limit the number of people who have visible access to private information.

By signing below, I indicate that I have received, read, and agree to abide by the
GPC Children and Youth Protection Policy.

I also swear that I am not disqualified from serving based on the conditions listed below;

- 1) By being named in the Statewide database [pursuant to a Child Abuse History Clearance] as the perpetrator of a founded report committed within the last five years;
- 2) By my PA State Police Criminal Background check or FBI check revealing a conviction for any of the following at any time in the past:
 - a. Criminal homicide; aggravated assault; stalking; kidnapping; unlawful restraint; rape; statutory sexual assault; involuntary deviate sexual intercourse; sexual assault; aggravated indecent assault; indecent assault; indecent exposure; incest; concealing death of a child; endangering welfare of children; dealing in infant children; prostitution and related offenses; obscene and other sexual materials and performances; corruption of minors; sexual abuse of children; or the attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the above offenses;
- 3) By my PA State Police Criminal Background check or FBI check revealing a conviction for a drug or drug-related felony in the past five years.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date _____