

Children and Youth Protection Policy

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY

General Purpose Statement

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY 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 Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY 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” and “children” and “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. “Children” are generally birth through grade 6, and “youth” are grades 7 through 12. The term “worker” includes both paid staff and unpaid volunteers who work with children or youth. “Ordained Officers” means Teaching Elders (pastors), Ruling Elders, and Deacons, whether currently serving or not. “Church sponsored programs” are activities run directly by Westminster Presbyterian Church. Organizations using the church as its site for their own child/youth programs will be asked to provide their own child safety policies or provisions for the church’s review.

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 person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY 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 the church. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence in a locked cabinet in the church office. The cabinet will be accessible by only the pastor, Clerk of Session, CE Moderator, and church administrative assistant.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

An applicant must provide at least two references, who should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY

Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and workers as defined above. 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 be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the pastor, Christian Education Committee moderator, and/or Clerk of Session on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. 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 disqualifying. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence in a locked file in the church office.

Preventive Measures and Expectations

- A “two-adult” rule shall be in effect meaning that no staff member or volunteer is to be left alone with any child without a justifiable reason pertaining to the child’s well-being. If alone, every effort shall be made to meet in an open room with a window and another person in close proximity.
- Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from disciplining children through use of physical punishment or verbal abuse.
- Staff members and volunteers shall respect the rights of the children not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Staff members and volunteers shall not transport children in private vehicles without authorization (verbal or written) from a parent or guardian. No one child shall be transported in a vehicle by only one adult.
- Staff members and volunteers will respond to children with respect, consideration, and fairness.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs 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.

In the event that **an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY** or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The incident will be reported immediately to the state authorities (including the **police at 9-1-1 or at 253-3231**, and the **Department of Children and Family Services at 1-800-342-3720**), to the church’s insurance company, and to the pastor and church session. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation by civil authorities.

2. The child will be immediately removed from the situation and the parents notified. We will not confront the accused until the safety of the child has been secured.

3. When the child is safe, the worker/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the child abuse will be removed from working with children pending the investigation. The individual will be handled with dignity and respect. He/she will be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.

4. The role of the church is to provide pastoral care, spiritual care, and comfort for all parties, including the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and their families. The church staff will not act as detective or investigator. Staff members should not prejudge the situation and should show care and support to all parties.

5. In the event the report does not result in further investigation by civil authorities or charges by law enforcement, the Session will form a team to review the circumstances of the incident and make recommendations to Session about further internal action.

6. The church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to have reasonable cause to suspect **abuse or neglect of the children which has happened while the child was not under our care**. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Westminster Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child which may have occurred off-site by others, this should be reported to the New York Statewide Register of Child Abuse and Neglect (the SCR), whose public for reporting suspected abuse or neglect is 1-800-342-3720. The suspected abuse should also be reported immediately to the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church and/or Christian Ed moderator and/or Clerk of Session.

Ordained Officers are Mandated Reporters by the Book of Order

The PC(USA) Book of Order identifies ordained officers as mandated reporters:

G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

Teenage Helpers

Teenagers under the age of 18 will be expected to follow the same procedures as adults when acting in a volunteer capacity with children. At the same time, it is recognized that all youth under the age of 18 are also afforded the protection of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures of this church. Teenage helpers must be under the supervision of two adults.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of Westminster Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent or guardian.

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, ice pack, 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. 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

Training and Transparency

Westminster 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. This policy shall be available in the church office, and shall be posted in a public place in the Education Building.

Social Media Policy

Westminster Church has adopted a Social Media Policy regarding digital communications between adults and children/youth.

Approved and adopted by Session, December 19, 2016

Recommended Basic Procedures for Working with Children and Youth at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY

The “Six Months Involvement Rule”

Ordinarily, all volunteers who work with children and youth will be actively involved with the church for at least six months before they will be considered for volunteer positions involving contact with minors.

The “Two Adult Rule”

Ordinarily, two adults will be present during a church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth.

Windows in All Classroom Doors

Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or half door. Any classroom doors without windows should remain open at all times.

The “Five Years Older Rule”

Supervising leaders of youth ministry should be a minimum of five years older than the oldest youth. Teenagers under the age of 18 will be expected to follow the same procedures as adults when acting in a volunteer capacity with children. At the same time, it is recognized that all youth under the age of 18 are also afforded the protection of the Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Procedures of this church.

Open-Door Counseling

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the doors on the room used should remain open for the entire session, ideally when others are nearby even though not in listening distance. Open door counseling protects both the child from abuse, and the counselor from false allegations of abuse. In cases of need for confidentiality, the door can be closed as long as it has a window.

Advance Notice to Parents

A basic rule with children and youth ministry is to give parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate. Before an off-site or special event, parents should give written permission for their child to participate. Advance information gives a guideline to parents about scheduling and allows parent and child to decide if the event and its content is suitable for their participation, allows for emergency contact information and enhances communications among the church and parents. It also demonstrates that the church has planned thoroughly to provide the safest experience possible for everyone.

Transportation

Adults should avoid being in isolation with a child. No one (unrelated) child should be driven in a vehicle by one adult alone.

Social Media Guidelines for staff, volunteers, and youth Westminster Presbyterian Church, Auburn, NY

Engaging with youth using social media* can be a healthy way to cultivate positive relationships and maintain communications using the tools that youth are using. Digital communication technologies allow extending the care and welcome of the church beyond the physical walls. Yet social media is a rapidly changing communication tool, and the risk of inappropriate sharing or the blurring of appropriate boundaries between youth and adults is ever-present. Westminster takes care to protect the safety and privacy of youth in digital communication by recommending the following guidelines:

1. Use good sense in all communications. Think twice before saying or sharing anything via social media or digital communications. Could this comment be misconstrued? Would you be comfortable if it were shared or read by others?
2. Online communications with youth should be mutually agreed to. Online communications with children should be with the approval of parents/guardians.
- 3.. Avoid platforms that automatically delete content (like SnapChat).
- 4.. If you accept a social media connection from one youth, you should accept all requests on that platform from other youth.
- 5.. A youth might openly share thoughts and feelings on line, but take great care when responding. Be a good listener, but be careful in expressing your own feelings via digital communication. A good rule of thumb is to limit what you share to *information*.
- 6.. Follow the church's policy regarding sharing photos or images. Permission to post photos of children and youth is assumed unless the parent/guardian opts out in writing. Care is taken not to identify children by name, although parents and youth sometimes share, tag, or post identifying information themselves.

We recognize that social media is a rapidly shifting technology, and we resolve to pay close attention to its development and advise volunteers and staff on its use accordingly.

*Social media refers to any digital communication, including email, texting, digital messaging, and connections through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, ShapChat, and any other online or mobile application-based platform.

Approved and adopted by Session December 21, 2016

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

17 William Street, Auburn, NY 13021, 315-253-3331, office@westminsterauburn.org

APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES TO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

It is the goal of this church to create a safe and secure environment for all children and workers who are involved in church activities. To do this, it is necessary to gather pertinent information from those who desire employment or offer volunteer services with our children and youth. This information will be used for the sole purpose of helping the church provide a safe and secure environment for children and workers.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime phone: _____ Evening phone: _____

Cell phone: _____ Email: _____

Type of position in which you are interested in working:

Can you make a one-year commitment to this volunteer/staff role? _____

Do you have your own transportation? _____

Do you have a valid driver's license? _____

Do you have automobile liability insurance? (List policy limits and name of carrier) ____

Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, other crimes of violence, theft, or motor vehicle violations), family court proceedings involving abuse or neglect, or do you have any charges pending against you? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, please explain fully: _____

Why would you like to work with children or youth?

What qualities do you have that would help you work with youth?

Is there any reason why you should not work with or around children and youth?

Would you be available for periodic volunteer training sessions? _____ No _____ Yes

Current or most recent **employer information:**

Company _____ Position _____
Address _____
Supervisor _____ Tel. # _____
Dates employed _____

Educational Background	School	Year(s)	Course of Study
High School	_____	_____	_____
College	_____	_____	_____
Other (please specify)	_____	_____	_____

Special interests, hobbies, and skills: _____

List **churches/religious organizations** you have attended regularly in the last 5 years:

Church & Address	Type of volunteer work	Dates
_____	_____	_____

List all **other volunteer work and employment involving youth**

Organization	Address	Type of work	Dates
_____	_____	_____	_____

Two References (not relatives)

1. Name:

2. Name:

Address:

Daytime phone:

Evening phone:

Relationship to reference:

Address:

Daytime phone:

Evening phone:

Relationship to reference:

The information contained in this screening form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any persons, organizations or references named in this application to give you any information, including opinions, which they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with minors.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Revised 10/2016

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION CONSENT

I, _____ (applicant complete name), hereby authorize the Westminster Presbyterian Church (the "Church") and/or its agents to make an independent investigation of my background, references, character, past employment, education, criminal, or police records, including those maintained by both public and private organizations and all public records for the purpose of confirming the information contained on my Application and/or obtaining other information, which may be material to my qualifications as a volunteer or for employment now, and if applicable, during the tenure of my volunteering or employment with the Church. I release the Church and/or its agents, and any person or entity which provides information pursuant to this authorization, from any and all liabilities, claims, or lawsuits in regards to the information obtained from any and all of the above referenced sources used.

Full legal name (printed)

Maiden name or other names used

Phone Number(s)

Present street address

How long?

City/State Zip

Former street address

How long?

City/State/Zip

Date of birth

Social security #

Driver's license #

State of license

Race: (please indicate)

W
White

B
Black

I
American Indian

A
Asian/Pacific Islander

H
Hispanic

O
Other

Signature

Date

Eff August 1, 2005, updated Dec 21, 2016

Incident Report Form

Westminster Presbyterian Church, 17 William St, Auburn, NY 13021

Date of Incident _____ Time of Incident _____

Name of child/youth involved _____

If more than one child/youth is involved, separate forms should be filled out to maintain confidentiality.

Address of child/youth _____

Phone number of child/youth _____

Name of parent/guardian _____

Location of incident _____

Describe incident as seen, heard, or reported:

Name of person(s) who witnessed incident:

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Any additional relevant information

Signature of person completing this form

Date

*This form may be used for observation of or reasonable suspicion of abuse, as well as for accidents.
This form should be given to the pastor or CE Moderator (or in their absence, an appropriate church leader—clerk or assistant clerk of session).*

Effective August 15, 2005, Updated Oct 2016