

Policy for Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

Village Chapel Presbyterian Church Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults.

This policy was adopted by vote of the Village Chapel Presbyterian Church (USA) session on November 20, 2024

This policy supersedes the previous version, adopted on March 21, 2018.

Policy Statement

The members of Village Chapel Presbyterian Church (USA) (VCPC) believe that we are called by God to create a safe haven for children and vulnerable adults in our care.

During each baptism of an infant, child or adult into this covenant community of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in Jesus Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual's relationship with the household of God.

Therefore, the members of VCPC are committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all children participating in the activities and programs of this church.

This policy applies to congregants, pastors, officers, employees, and volunteers. All groups using VCPC facilities are expected to adhere to the Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults for Outside Groups which is based upon this policy.

Should harm occur or be alleged, the VCPC Disciplinary Policy and the current Presbyterian Book of Order will guide the response.

Parents/guardians bear the primary responsibility for teaching their children about protection and safety issues. Nonetheless, VCPC may offer age-appropriate educational opportunities for children to provide them with necessary information about child protection issues, including their right to be free from unwelcome and inappropriate touching or remarks, how to report their concerns, and church policies regarding their safety.

Definitions

Adult is any person over 18 years old who interacts with children as a teacher, leader or assistant.

Child is anyone under the age of 18 (eighteen), or a vulnerable adult.

Child abuse is the infliction of non-accidental harm to a child. Child abuse may include
a.) *Emotional/verbal abuse* when adults responsible for the well-being of a child endanger the mental or emotional health of that child by chronic and persistent

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acts. This may involve rejection, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting, constant criticism, mean remarks, name calling, insults, and giving little or no love, guidance or support

- b.) *Neglect* is the unreasonable failure to exercise a minimum degree of care to assure a child's health, safety or welfare
- c.) *Physical abuse* is an injury or pattern of injuries that are not accidental. This may manifest as beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones or death. Physical abuse included unwanted touch, any physical contact intended to coerce or do harm, and hitting or touching in anger.
- d.) *Sexual abuse* is any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. West Virginia law states that a child less than 16 years old or who is a vulnerable adult cannot give consent to sexual relations (WV Code 61-8B-2-c). Therefore any sexual interaction with a child under 16 is always considered child sexual abuse.
- e.) *Spiritual abuse* is using scripture or church authority to coerce, control or shame, using threats about condemnation from God or making threats about God withholding love to control behavior.

Mentally defective means that a person suffers from a mental disease or defect which renders that person incapable of appraising the nature of his or her conduct. (WV Code 61-8B-2).

Mentally incapacitated means that a person is rendered temporarily incapable of appraising or controlling his or her conduct as a result of the influence of a controlled or intoxicating substance administered to that person without his or her consent or as a result of any other act committed upon that person without his or her consent. (WV Code 61-8B-1-(3)).

Misuse of technology is the use of technology to text or email suggestive messages and images to children and includes the viewing and transmission of pornography.

Obscene matter is material that the average person using contemporary adult community standards finds offensive, material that appeals to prurient interests, or is patently offensive. (WV Code 61-8A-1-k).

Pastor refers to the minister or the educator/pastoral assistant of VCPC.

Persons are the congregants, pastors, officers, employees, volunteers of VCPC and other people using VCPC facilities.

Physically helpless means a person who is unconscious or for any reason is physically unable to communicate an unwillingness to an act (WV Code 61-8B-1-(4)).

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Vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 or over who is mentally challenged, mentally incapacitated or physically helpless. Vulnerable adults will be referred to as children in this policy.

General Practices

The following acts towards a child are prohibited and will not be tolerated or accepted during any VCPC activity or program.

- a.) Child abuse as defined by this policy or by WV State Code.
- b.) Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind including such behavior between children.
- c.) Inappropriate comments.
- d.) Possessing obscene materials at any function of VCPC.
- e.) Possessing, consuming or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

A person will be removed from working with children immediately upon receipt of a report of violation of this policy. Such removal does not assume guilt but makes the top priority the protection of those who are vulnerable. Should the investigation show there is no harm to children, likely due to this person working with them, he/she will be reinstated.

At least two approved adults will supervise all VCPC sponsored programs and activities involving children whether on or off VCPC property, except where otherwise noted. Exceptions to this rule may occur for emergencies where the child is in direct harm, where prior permission has been granted by a parent/guardian, or where the interaction takes place in a public place where the interaction can be observed.

The Education Ministry Team Chairperson will complete a list of the adults involved in all routine and non-routine activities using the forms in Appendix C and D. The list will be part of the permanent record of the activity kept in the VCPC offices.

Since spouses cannot be compelled to testify against one another in a court of law, a married couple will count as one adult.

An adult may not date any child involved in VCPC programs who is under 18 years old.

On-site non-routine events, such as Bible School and Arts Camp, present challenges to adhere to the two-adult rule. The two-adult rule may be relaxed for these events. It is preferable to relax the two-adult rule in public areas, like the Fellowship Hall, the Sanctuary, and outside, rather than in classrooms.

An unapproved parent/ guardian of a child may accompany him or her during an activity but will not be counted as a supervisory adult. Adults supervising the group will be instructed that this person is not to be placed in a role of supervision or authority over other children in the group.

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Persons preparing and serving food will not need to be approved as defined by this policy.

All persons participating in offsite or overnight activities must complete the VCPC Consent for Overnight or Offsite Activities (Appendix A) (children only) and VCPC Medical Release Form (Appendix B) (for both children and adults).

Guest presenters will be made aware of the relevant provisions of this policy before the event begins. Guest presenters will not be required to comply with the criminal background check requirement.

Adults are required to report to the pastor or chairperson of the Education Ministry Team any circumstances that affect the ability to comply with this policy.

No event will be held if the chairperson of the Education Ministry Team or the pastoral staff believes that children cannot be adequately protected.

Electronic Communication Code of Conduct

All adults using electronic communication and social media to interact with children shall comply with the following:

Adults are discouraged from establishing direct social media connections with youth or children, although there are situations where this connection is the best platform for communication, as long as there is prior consent from a parent/guardian.

Great care must be taken by adults to avoid inappropriate discussions and adhere to the boundaries set forth in this policy.

Communication through social media will not be comments that are, or could be construed, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.

All inappropriate sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities are prohibited as are posting of inappropriate pictures.

Pastoral messaging may be private, however, if this occurs the pastor shall inform another appropriate adult of these communications.

If a person fails a background check or otherwise violates, or is suspected of violating this policy, they shall immediately disconnect themselves from all social media, email and text connections with children and youth at VCPC.

If a person is no longer formally associated with VCPC they shall disconnect themselves from all social media, email and text connections with children and youth at VCPC; unless, however, they receive permission in writing from the adult/s responsible for the children

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and youth in question that the correspondence may continue. The permission document shall be added to the permanent records of the church regarding child protection.

Requirements for working with children

Adults must have a completed, reviewed, and approved Background Check on file prior to supervising children. The Background check must have been completed within the past 5 years.

The adult must receive training from the Education Ministry Team regarding relevant VCPC policies and recognition of child abuse. The training will occur at least every 24 months (2 years).

An adult must be a member or regular attendee of VCPC for at least 6 months or a member of another church or volunteer organization that is able to provide information about the applicant's character to VCPC.

The adult must be at least 18 years old.

Adults working with middle school or high school youth must be 21 years of age or older.

Adults supervising activities must always remain in sight of one another except as provided in this policy.

Non-adult volunteers may be approved to work with children under the supervision of adults. They must be at least 13 years of age or at least 5 years older than the age of the persons they are supervising. They will receive appropriate training but will not be required to certify their understanding of the VCPC policies nor will they be required to have a Background Check.

Adults shall ensure that all children through 2nd grade are returned to or picked up by a family member or guardian before leaving VCPC property. In cases involving disputed custody of a child, the chairperson of the Education Ministry Team will obtain written instructions from the parent/guardian regarding who will pick up the child.

Background checks

No adult will be allowed to supervise or watch over children unless they have an approved criminal background check within the past 5 years. The Chairperson of the Education Ministry Team may ask for a background check before the 5-year limit if circumstances warrant.

Newly hired staff will not be allowed to supervise or watch over children until a background check has been completed and reviewed.

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The Chair of the Education Ministry Team is responsible for tracking who needs to obtain a background check and helping the person obtain one.

Criminal background checks will be obtained through the WV Presbytery or other agency using the forms that they provide.

The Education Ministry Team may, at their discretion, ask for references and employment records as part of the background check. All information received from references and former employers will be documented in writing and will become confidential church property. Information received in this process will not be disclosed to the applicant.

Adults are disqualified for an actual or pending indictment alleging the offense or any conviction for:

- a.) murder,
- b.) aggravated assault, including domestic violence,
- c.) sexual abuse, sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault,
- d.) injury to a child,
- e.) incest,
- f.) indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child,
- g.) possession or promotion of obscene matter,
- h.) the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor,
- i.) employment harmful to children,
- j.) abandonment or endangerment of a child,
- k.) dishonesty, or
- l.) use, sale, and distribution of illegal substances.

Background checks will be returned to and reviewed by the church secretary.

The church secretary will notify the Chairperson of the Education Committee about the accepted background checks and the dates of acceptance.

If the background check raises no issues, the secretary will date and initial the background check and file it in the permanent records for child protection in the church office.

If the background check raises concerns that need to be reviewed, the church secretary will notify the Chairperson of the Education Committee. The Chairperson of the Education Committee, the Chairperson of the Personnel Committee and the Pastor will review the background check to determine if the adult will be allowed to work with children. If the background check involves one of these three persons, that person will not be part of the review and a person from Session will be asked to be the third person on the committee to review the background check. The background check will be initialed, dated, with a note related to the review and determination before being placed in the permanent file in the church office.

Background checks will be held permanently, in a locked location in the main church office. Limited access will be afforded to audit and review on a need-to-know basis.

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Training

All adults will attend an informational meeting outlining the issues related to child protection prior to working with children and at least every 24 months afterward.

Training will include the provisions of this policy and the Disciplinary Policy of VCPC.

Training will include noting the location of all fire extinguishers and first aid supplies.

The Education Ministry Team will provide training. They may be assisted by the Personnel Ministry Team or other suitable trainers.

A list of the adults trained, and the date will be kept as part of the permanent record in the VCPC offices using the format provided in Appendix C and D.

Reporting violations and concerns

Any person over the age of 18, including staff, employees, teachers, parents/guardians, volunteers, and congregation members, who knows of, or suspects, child abuse must report to

- a.) the Centralized Intake for Abuse and Neglect Hotline 1-800-352-6513 and
- b.) the WV State Police Crimes against Children unit 304-293-6400

within 48 hours of becoming aware of the situation.

Failure to report as required can result in heavy penalties under WV law. Consult the VCPC Disciplinary Policy for additional information and procedures.

Any person concerned about violations of this policy or concerns about issues that are not clearly abuse related but impinge on child safety and protection shall discuss them with the pastors, chairperson of the Education Ministry Team, and/or chairperson of the Personnel Ministry Team. The issues shall be raised in a timely manner.

Discipline of children

If a child is behaving inappropriately, the adult will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g. "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."

If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.

If this is not effective, the child may be placed at a table to play or work alone away from the other children.

If the child's disruptive behavior continues, the adult will notify the chairperson of the Education Ministry Team who will talk with the child and work with the children's

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parents/guardians. A child whose behavior might harm others will be removed from the group even if this results in a lapse of the two-adult policy.

Physical punishment or verbal abuse will not be used at any time.

Verbal interactions

Speaking with children appropriately establishes respect. The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive reinforcement• Appropriate jokes• Encouragement• Praise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name-calling• Discussing sexual encounters• Secrets• Cursing• Off-color or sexual jokes• Shaming• Belittling• Derogatory remarks• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children• Compliments relating to physique or body development• Derogatory remarks about the child or his/her family.

Touching

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child. For example, it is generally appropriate for a four-year-old to sit in an adult's lap and give a kiss on the cheek with a hug. It is not appropriate for a teenager and adult to engage in this conduct.

Touching should be initiated by the child. It should be a response to the child's need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based on the adults' emotional need.

A child's preference to not be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child.

Examples of appropriate and inappropriate physical interactions are listed below. The examples are to be applied to most children. However, as noted above certain physical interactions are appropriate for young children. In addition, the Chairperson of the Education Ministry Team, in consultation with the parent/guardian of a mentally challenged person may agree that certain physical interactions are appropriate for that

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person that would not be age appropriate for another person of that age. In these cases, the appropriate physical interactions will be in writing.

Appropriate physical interactions	Inappropriate physical interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Side hugs• Shoulder-to-shoulder or “temple” hugs• Pats on the shoulder or back• Handshakes• High-fives and hand slapping• Pats on the head (when culturally appropriate)• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms• Arms around shoulders• Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-frontal hugs• Kisses• Showing affection in an isolated area• Lap sitting• Wrestling• Piggyback rides• Tickling• Allowing a child to cling to an adult’s leg• Any type of massage given by or to a child of any age• Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or adult• Touching bottom, chest or genital areas

Diapering and Restroom supervision

The presence of two adults is particularly important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or using the restroom.

Children will always be supervised when using restrooms to ensure their safety.

Children will be sent to the restroom in pairs, if possible, with at least one adult.

An adult will stand in the doorway while older children are using the restroom.

An adult assisting younger children will keep the door to the restroom, the fire door, and the door to the classroom open while the restroom is in use to be within hearing distance of the other adult.

Injury and medications

Medications will be administered by a parent/guardian, if possible and practicable, except in potentially life-threatening conditions when an adult may administer medication. Parents/guardians may provide signed written instructions supervising adults regarding medical issues that may occur.

Adults may provide first aid for minor injuries, scrapes and bruises as appropriate. Adults will summon medical professionals and the parent/guardian of the child for injuries

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requiring treatment beyond simple first aid. If warranted by circumstances, they may call an ambulance. The adult will notify the child's parent/guardian of the treatment.

Emergency situations may result in a lapse in the two-adult rule supervising children.

The event organizers or other person in charge will document the incident. The Injury Incident Reports will be placed in a confidential file in the VCPC office.

All Injury Incident Reports will be reviewed by the Education Ministry Team to determine if changes in procedures need to be implemented to avoid further injuries. Their review and conclusions will also be placed in a confidential file in the VCPC office.

Water activities

If an event involves water activities all prudent safety precautions will be taken, such as the presence of a certified lifeguard when swimming and the use of adequate life jackets if on a vessel on the water.

Overnight events

If an overnight event is planned, and the children are of mixed gender, the overseeing adults must include at least two males and two females.

There must be access to a phone, or cell phone, or pager when a group is away from the church facility. This number must be available to church staff and parents/guardians before the group's departure from the church.

All children participating in VCPC-sponsored out-of-town and overnight events must have signed written consent and medical release forms found in Appendix A and B, or similar forms that obtain the information in these forms.

All medical release forms will be reviewed by the adults supervising the overnight events before the event occurs. Plans for dealing with potential medical issues and other concerns will be developed with the supervising adults and the parent /guardian before leaving church property.

Adults supervising overnight events will complete the medical release form found in Appendix B or other format giving relevant information.

Female adults will supervise female children in their sleeping quarters and male adults will supervise the male children. Adults and children will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag except for a child and his or her parent/guardian.

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Transportation

It is preferable to have two adults in a car with children. It is permissible for one adult driver to transport several children in a single vehicle in a convoy of vehicles traveling to or from an event. Parents/guardians may waive the two-adult rule for transportation by signing the waiver form included on the Written Consent found in Appendix A.

Parents/guardians may provide transportation for their children without signing a transportation waiver or having a completed criminal background check.

All drivers must be at least 25 years old with a valid driver's license. Drivers are expected to obey state and federal laws. The chairperson of the Education Ministry Team may ask to see the adult's driver's license.

Drivers of personal cars must have liability insurance. The driver's liability insurance will be the primary insurance in case of accident.

All occupants must always wear seat belts while the vehicle is in motion.

Smoking is prohibited in vehicles.

If it is necessary for a child to get home after an event, without a parent/guardian providing transportation, an effort should be made to contact the family about the situation before transporting the child without others in the car.

Gifts

Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only.

No adult will give gifts to an individual child without the prior knowledge of the parents/guardians or pastor.

Gifts must be modest and appropriate for the occasion.

Individual counseling

Counseling should take place in a place where the conversation is private but still be in plain view of others. If the counseling takes place in a separate room, the door should remain open.

When possible, another adult will have knowledge of the counseling session and the persons involved.

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Children receiving counseling will be told that they are free to discuss the aspects of the counseling session with their parents/guardians or other adult of their choosing, especially if they are uncomfortable with anything that occurs during the counseling session.

Records

Because there is no statute of limitations for bringing allegations of sexual abuse, all records related to this issue must be kept permanently. The permanent file will be held in a locked file in the main church office.

Persons accessing the records will be noted with the date and reason for the review.

The file will contain:

- Background checks
- References (when requested)
- Training
- Adults teaching children (Appendix C)
- Adults involved in non-routine events (Appendix D)
- Consent for overnight or offsite activities (Appendix A)
- Medical release forms (Appendix B)
- Injury reports
- Copy of each version of the VCPC Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults
- Other documentation related to child protection at VCPC

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APPENDIX A

VCPC CONSENT FOR OVERNIGHT OR OFFSITE ACTIVITIES

I give permission for my child _____ to participate at

Event name _____ Event Date(s) _____

To be held at _____

The adults supervising the event are:

The contact number for this event is _____

The VCPC Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults policy requires two adults to be present at all activities involving children. There may be circumstances providing transportation to and from the event in which only one adult is present in a vehicle. You may waive the two-adult portion of the policy by signing this portion of the permission form.

I hereby give my permission for my child, _____, to be alone with _____ (name one or more of the adults involved in the event) in appropriate ways and settings for transportation purposes.

Signature of adult or guardian:

Printed name and date : _____

Address of the parent/guardian:

Email address of the parent/guardian:

I give permission for the adult(s) on this form to supervise my child at an offsite event for ____ (initial) today only or for ____ (initial) for 12 months from this date. This permission may be revoked at any time at my request.

Signature and today's date: _____

This form must be accompanied by a Medical Release Form for your child.

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APPENDIX B

VCPC MEDICAL RELEASE FORM

Today's date: _____

This information about _____ is given to VCPC church so that in case of emergency he/she can be properly treated. VCPC church may share this information with other people in order to protect him/her from harm and to treat any illness or injury until I can be notified.

By initialing here _____ I give permission for this form to be in effect for 12 months or until I otherwise revise or revoke it.

In the event of emergency, I give my permission to VCPC volunteers for medical treatment. I can be reached at one of the following phone numbers. Home _____ Cell _____

In the event I cannot be reached in an emergency, contact _____, who is _____ (relationship to named person) at the following phone numbers.
Day _____ Night _____.

Please circle if this person has a history with any of these medical problems:

Hay fever	Convulsions	Lung problems
Bee Sting allergy	Fainting	Diabetes
Food allergies (elaborate under Special Dietary Needs)	Asthma	Kidney problems
Poison ivy/oak allergies	Heart Disease	Other medical issues that the leaders should know about?
Sulfa Drug allergy	Penicillin drug allergy	

Current medications:

Special dietary needs

You may use the back of this form to provide more information

Sign and print name _____

Circle if you are a parent/guardian for a person under the age of 18)

Address: _____

Phone numbers: _____ Cell _____ Home _____

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APPENDIX C

ADULTS TEACHING CHILDREN AT VCPC FOR THE YEAR _____

NAME	DATE OF APPROVED BACKGROUND CHECK	DATE OF TRAINING

Person making the report (name and date) _____

This report will be maintained in the Permanent File in the VCPC Main office

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APPENDIX D

ADULTS INVOLVED AT NON-ROUTINE EVENTS

EVENT _____ DATE _____

NAME	DATE OF APPROVED BACKGROUND CHECK	DATE OF TRAINING

Person making the report (name and date) _____

This report will be maintained in the Permanent File in the VCPC Main office