

**Village Chapel Presbyterian Church
Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults
for Outside Groups.**

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, youth and vulnerable adults (referred to as children in this policy) in our care, protecting those who are powerless.

Members of VCPC are committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all children participating in the activities and programs while on church property. This includes children at events sponsored by outside groups on VCPC property.

All leaders and members of non-VCPC groups using VCPC facilities are expected to adhere to this policy. The policy is designed to protect children from harm. Should actual or suspected harm to a child occur, the response will follow applicable procedures in the VCPC Disciplinary Policy and other measures to protect children from harm.

Outside groups are responsible for following the procedures in this policy and are ultimately responsible for the welfare of the children in their care.

Acknowledgement of Receipt of this Policy

The outside group leader or representative will be given a copy of this policy. He/she will sign the form found in Appendix A documenting that the policies have been received, read and understood. The signed form will be given to the VCPC secretary. It will be kept in a permanent file in the main VCPC office.

The signed form will be in effect for five (5) years.

If there is a change in leadership of the outside group another form must be signed and filed with the VCPC secretary.

The person signing the form will be responsible for informing members of the outside group of the policies and practices found in this policy.

Definitions

Adult is any person over 18 years old.

Child is anyone under the age of eighteen (18), or a person eighteen or older who is mentally challenged, mentally incapacitated or physically helpless.

Child abuse is the infliction of non-accidental harm to a child. Child abuse may include

- a.) *Emotional/verbal abuse*, occurs when adults responsible for the well-being of a child endanger the mental or emotional health of that child by chronic and persistent acts. This may involve rejection, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting, constant criticism, mean remarks, 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 includes 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 a vulnerable adult cannot give consent to sexual relations (WV Code 61-8B-2-c). Therefore any sexual interaction between an adult and 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 challenged 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.¹

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-(4)).

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).

¹ This is equivalent to the "mentally defective" definition in WV Code 61-8B-1-(3).

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

Physically helpless means a person who is unconscious or for any reason is physically unable to communicate unwillingness to an act (WV Code 61-8B-1-(5)).

Pornography is material that the average person using contemporary adult community standards finds offensive, material that appeals to prurient interests, or is patently offensive.²

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

Youth is a child of middle school or high school age.

General Practices

The following acts are prohibited and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program on VCPC property.

- 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 or pornographic materials at any function of VCPC,
- e.) Possessing, consuming or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Concerns about issues that are not clearly abuse related but impinge on child safety and protection or any circumstances that may affect the ability to comply with the policy may be discussed with the pastor.

Outside groups are expected to use due diligence to determine that persons supervising children on VCPC property will not abuse any child in their care. People supervising children must be carefully vetted.

VCPC will not perform criminal background checks, review references or employment records for people supervising children on VCPC property. However, these safeguards are highly recommended. Use a form provided by the agency used for the background check or the form found in Appendix B.

Outside groups are encouraged to maintain a permanent written and confidential record of the vetting process.

All people supervising children must be 18 years of age or older except that a person supervising children of middle school or high school age must be 21 years of age or older.

A person who is dating a child who is 18 years of age or younger may not supervise that child.

Supervising adults must know the locations of the fire extinguishers, emergency exits and first aid supplies in the areas where they are supervising children.

Persons supervising children must read and sign the form in Appendix A that they have read and understood the policy. The signed form will be sent to the VCPC office where it will be kept in a confidential file. The outside group is encouraged to keep a copy of the signed forms for their records. The signed form will be in effect for 5 years.

Outside groups are encouraged to keep a written log of who were the supervising adults and the children supervised for a particular date.

Supervising adults are responsible to determine that the correct responsible adult leaves with the child.

Supervising adults should receive training regarding this policy before working with children. Representatives of outside groups involving children may, at their request, participate in VCPC-sponsored activities training adults in procedures to protect children.

The following offences or alleged offences will disqualify a person from supervising children.

- 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,
- g.) possession or promotion of child pornography,
- 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, with the exception that the Narcotics Anonymous (NA) organization will not be held to this standard. However, the people supervising children from the NA group will be strictly held to all other standards.

Persons are required to disclose these offences or alleged offences to the leader at any time prior to and during their time supervising children.

The group leader is responsible for removing a person from working with children immediately upon receipt of a report of violation of this policy. The group leader may

consult with the pastor regarding procedures should this occur. Such removal does not assume guilt but makes child protection the top priority.

Two adult rule

When children are out of sight of the group activities, at least two approved adults will supervise the children's activities.

Since spouses cannot be compelled to testify against one another in a court of law, two people married to each other do not qualify as two adults.

A parent/guardian may accompany their child/children to the bathroom and perform necessary diapering activities without qualifying as a supervising adult.

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 person leading the group who will talk with the child and work with the children's 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.

Verbal interactions

Verbal abuse will not be used at any time.

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• Involving children in the personal problems or issues of adults• Secrets• Cursing• Off-color or sexual jokes• Shaming• Belittling• Derogatory remarks,• Derogatory remarks about the child or his/her family• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children• Compliments relating to physique or body development.

Touching

Physical punishment will not be used at any time.

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 an 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 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 touching 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 leader of the group, in consultation with the parent/guardian of a mentally challenged person may agree that certain physical interactions are appropriate for that person that would not be age appropriate for another person of that age. In these cases, the appropriate physical interactions will be placed in

writing. The notice will be signed by all parties involved in the decision. Copies will be kept by both parties as a permanent record.

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 • 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. A parent/guardian may accompany their child to the restroom.. Otherwise, children will be sent to the restroom in pairs, if possible, with at least one approved adult.

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

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 to the supervising adults for other medical issues that may occur.

Adults may provide first aid for minor injuries, scrapes and bruises as appropriate. The adult will notify the child’s parent/guardian of the treatment.

Adults will summon medical professionals and the parent/guardian of the child for injuries requiring treatment beyond simple first aid. If warranted by circumstances, adults may call an ambulance.

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

Supervising adult(s) will document all emergency situations in writing. The volunteer will give the report to the group leader.

Reporting and documentation of child abuse

Any person 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. This is state law.

Failure to report as required can result in heavy penalties under WV law.

Any person who knows of, or suspects child abuse occurring on VCPC property will notify the governmental authorities as outlined above and notify the VCPC pastor verbally as soon as possible for advice about procedures to follow.

Only professionals trained in child abuse investigations should question a child about suspected or actual child abuse.

The outside group will provide a written report to the pastor as soon as possible.

Consult the VCPC Disciplinary Policy for additional information and procedures.

APPENDIX A

Acknowledgement of Receipt

Village Chapel Presbyterian Church Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults for Outside Groups

I hereby acknowledge that I _____
(printed name)

representing _____, have received a
(name of group)

copy of the "Village Chapel Presbyterian Church Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults for Outside Groups" adopted on November 20, 2024

I certify that I have read and understand this policy.

_____ (Signature) _____ (Date)

A copy of this acknowledgement will be given to the VCPC secretary. It will be kept on file in the VCPC offices. It will remain in effect for 5 years or until a change in group leadership occurs.

APPENDIX B
BACKGROUND CHECK CONSENT FORM

The information requested is for identification purposes only and is in no manner used as a qualification for service as a supervising adult.

Applicant's full name (printed): _____

Other names used: _____

Social Security Number: _____ Date of birth: _____

Addresses for the past 10 years (use back of sheet if needed for additional addresses)

Address	City	County	State	Zip	How long at this address?

Other than the above listing what states and counties you have lived in since turning eighteen years old? _____

Name as it appears on your driver's license or state ID card:

Driver's license number: _____ State issuing license: _____

I, _____, authorize _____ to make an investigation of my background, reference, character, past employment, education, credit history, adult criminal or police records, and motor vehicle records. These records include those maintained by both public and private organizations for the purpose of confirming the information contained on this Background Consent Form and/or obtaining other information which may be material to my qualifications for service now and, if applicable, during the tenure of my employment or service with _____.

I release _____ and any person or entity which provided information related to this consent form from any and all liabilities, claims, or lawsuits in regards to the information obtained from any and all of the above referenced sources used.

This consent form will be in effect for 5 years from today's date. I give permission to _____ to obtain a background check based on this information at any time within the 5 year period should he/she determine it is needed.

The name and all information provided on this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of applicant: _____

Date: _____