

Vienna Presbyterian Church

Child Protection Policy

*“How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us,
that we be called children of God!
And that is what we are!” 1 John 3:1*

June 2006

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Child Protection Policy

I. PURPOSE, APPLICABILITY, SCOPE AND POLICY TERMS

Purpose

This policy is intended:

- To be faithful to our baptismal vows as we seek to welcome children and provide building blocks to spiritual growth.
- To provide a safe and secure environment for children at Vienna Presbyterian Church (VPC).
- To protect children from sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse while participating at VPC activities.
- To provide a mechanism to deal with reported concerns, allegations and subsequent actions.
- To guide VPC as an institution in the conduct of its employees and volunteers and prevent incidents and allegations of child abuse.
- To help prevent adult volunteers, pastors and employees from being subjected to unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

This policy addresses the five components of child protection:

1. Screening applicants for employment and volunteer service for a history of behavior potentially detrimental to children.
2. Training pastors, employees and volunteers about the Child Protection Policy and appropriate screening and supervision.
3. Reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child protection issues.
4. Responding to concerns and/or allegations regarding child protection issues.
5. Ministering to known offenders who are members or regular attendees of VPC.

Applicability

This policy applies to persons including VPC pastors, employees and volunteers participating in any children's programs of VPC, including but not limited to:

- Sunday school classes
- Children and Student Ministries fellowship programs
- Preschool
- Children and Youth Fellowship Choirs
- Church-sponsored retreats, mission trips, etc.
- Vacation Bible School
- Nurseries and Childcare

Scope

Who is governed by this policy?

This policy supercedes all prior VPC children and youth protection policy statements.

- All pastors and employees of VPC, including the staff of the preschool.
- All independent contractors who work with VPC and have any direct contact with children.
- All volunteers of VPC who have any contact with children in a supervisory role..
- All leaders of non-VPC sponsored groups and events using VPC facilities, which have direct supervision of children.

What does the policy require?

- All pastors, employees and volunteers shall abide by the Code of Conduct.
- Each person must assume responsibility for his/her own actions in working with children.
- Each person will be required to attend training offered on child protection.
- An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to observe and abide by this policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation if the Executive Director, Director of Children's Ministries or Director of Student Ministries determines that the Child Protection Policy and procedures have not been followed or the investigation reveals patterns of behavior that raise concerns.

Policy Terms (glossary)

Child– is a person considered a minor under the law of the Commonwealth of Virginia. As of June 2006 the state of Virginia considers anyone under the age of 18 to be a minor. A person who is legally incompetent is also considered a child by this policy.

Child Abuse – a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child caused by an adult. Child abuse may include but not be limited to:

- **Neglect** – Occurs when adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for the child. Neglect may include not giving food, clothing, shelter; failure to keep children clean, lack of supervision or withholding medical care.
- **Physical Abuse** – An injury or pattern of injuries caused by an adult that happen to a child that are not accidental. These injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones or death.

- **Sexual Abuse** – Sexual abuse is the sexual assault or exploitation of a child by an adult. This includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult or of a third person. Sexual abuse may consist of numerous acts over a long period of time or a single incident. This behavior may or may not involve touching. Types of abuse which do not involve direct touching include: sexual remarks; pornography of any kind; obscene phone calls, emails, text messages or other electronic communications; exhibitionism; and allowing children to witness sexual activity. Types of abuse which do involve touching include touching any part of the body which makes the child feel uncomfortable or where there is sexual intent, real or perceived.
- **Emotional Abuse** – Persistent acts by an adult that endanger the mental health or emotional development of a child including rejecting, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting, constant criticizing, making mean remarks, insulting and withholding love, guidance or support.
- **Spiritual Abuse** – Using religious references to motivate a child into a particular action or behavior through shame.

Church Sponsored Activity – Includes any and all gatherings that arise from VPC – worship, educational, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational events. These events include on-campus and off-campus events.

Criminal Background Investigations – There are 2 levels of background investigations that will be completed through a company approved by our insurance carrier. The first level of background check will consist of a Social Security Number verification, a National Criminal File search and a Regional Criminal File search. The second level of background check will include all of the items listed previously plus County Courthouse searches. This is a much more intensive search and will be used for employees and V3 volunteers.

Director of Children’s Ministries – This Director is responsible for planning, developing and overseeing the Children’s Christian education program at VPC. This Director is responsible for all Sunday School teachers for children in 6th grade and below, all paid and unpaid child caregivers, interns, and volunteers participating in Children’s Ministries at VPC. This Director is also responsible for the Vacation Bible School Program and the volunteers who assist with the program.

Director of Preschool – This Director is responsible for all aspects of the Preschool. This includes, enrollment of students, hiring of teachers, preparing curriculum, etc. While the Preschool is in many ways its own entity, this Director does report to the Director of Children’s Ministries.

Director of Student Ministries – This Director is responsible for planning, developing and overseeing the Student Ministries program at VPC. This Director is responsible for

Sunday School programs and all other activities for children in junior and senior high and all teachers/volunteers involved in those programs. This Director also oversees the Summer Mission Projects and the volunteers who participate in those events.

Employee – is the comprehensive term used to cover persons who are officially offered and agree to perform work on a regular basis in exchange for compensation.

Executive Director/Executive Associate Pastor (referred to as Executive Director throughout policy)- is responsible for overseeing the management of VPC employees and volunteers. The Executive Director is the person who should receive reports alleging any type of violation of this policy.

Pastor – a person ordained to ministry of word and sacrament called to serve in a particular congregation.

Sponsor – a volunteer who is currently active and well known by the Director of the program and/or the ED/EAP and who agrees to provide leadership to a person who wishes to volunteer with a children’s program but does not meet the 6 month attendance requirement.

Volunteer – is the term used for those who provide services for VPC and who receive no benefit or compensation. The different levels of volunteers and screening standards for each level are listed below.

V1 – An adult, 18 years and older, who assists with the care and/or supervision of children in a structured setting. This would include Sunday school teachers and volunteers who help with larger events serving food, helping with crafts, cleaning up, etc.

V2 – An adult, 18 years or older, who assists with the care and/or supervision of children and/or youth in an unstructured setting. This would include volunteers who assist with smaller more intimate settings but would not include overnight events or driving children to and from events.

V3 – An adult, 18 years or older, who assists with the care and/or supervision of children in an unstructured setting which would include overnight events and/or driving responsibilities.

Underage Volunteer – a child under the age of 18 but 12 or older who has been sponsored by a volunteer and approved by the ministry director.

II. SCREENING PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

The screening process for prospective employees will be conducted by Human Resources and for volunteers the process will be completed by the Director of Children’s Ministries and the Director of Student Ministries. Pastors are screened by the Presbytery prior to accepting a Call with any church organization.

Employees: Any candidate who has a past conviction of or a pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot be employed by Vienna Presbyterian Church without express written approval of the Staff Committee and the Executive Director. The Staff Committee and the Executive Director will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the employment of the individual in question. Active substance abuse or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment with children: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy or abuse of a minor.

Volunteers: Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot work with children at Vienna Presbyterian Church. Active substance abuse or a conviction of any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy or abuse of a minor.

Employees will be required to:

- complete an Employment Application
- go through the interview process
- provide at least 3 references
- undergo a criminal background investigation
- review and sign the Child Protection Acknowledgment Form.

All documentation will be held in the Employee’s Confidential Personnel file.

Volunteers will be required to:

- complete the Volunteer Application Form – Appendix 1
- go through the interview process
- provide at least 3 references
- review and sign the Child Protection Acknowledgment Form
- must be regular participant in the life of the church for at least 6 months or be sponsored for 6 months by a volunteer in good standing in the program, to be determined by the Director of that ministry and/or the Executive Director.
- Volunteer levels V2 and V3 will also undergo a criminal background investigation.

All documentation will be held in a confidential volunteer file in the church Human Resources office.

Pastors and Independent Contractors will be required to

- Read the Child Protection Policy and sign the Child Protection Acknowledgment Form

- VPC does not conduct criminal background investigations on pastors. This is done by the Presbytery prior to a call being accepted.

The above records will be made available to the employee or volunteer if a written request is made to the Executive Director. They will not be released to any party except with written approval of the Executive Director.

Leaders of non-VPC-sponsored groups and events using VPC facilities, upon receipt of the policy from VPC, must review the Child Protection Policy and sign the Outside Group Leaders Form. This form acknowledges their review of the policy and confirms their agreement to follow it and also gathers contact information to be used by the person scheduling all events for VPC . This includes but is not limited to groups such as: AA, ALANON, Birthday Parties, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc. (Given the nature of the outside groups that use VPC facilities, VPC will not perform background checks, seek personal and professional references, or review employment records. Leaders of outside groups are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.)

III. CODE OF CONDUCT

VPC pastors, employees and volunteers:

1. will endeavor to provide emotional, physical and spiritual support to children through common expression of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), and support (prayer). These expressions are appropriate in our caring Christian community, however, care must be taken that any physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed upon another individual.
2. will not verbally, emotionally, physically, spiritually or sexually abuse children.
3. will not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
4. may use physical restraint only in situations necessary to protect the child or others from harm.
5. will provide proper supervision and exercise sound judgment in providing safe environments at all times for children.
6. will observe the Two-Adult policy in their interaction with children as defined on page 10.
7. will respect the rights of children not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Adults will discourage children from touching others in an inappropriate manner.
8. should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children entering VPC programs. (Significant changes could be an indicator of abuse that is taking place.)

9. will not use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or be impaired by legally prescribed drugs during church working hours or church sponsored programs.
10. will not smoke except in designated areas. VPC is a smoke-free facility. Smoking or use of tobacco during church programs is prohibited.
11. will not use profanity, inappropriate language or jokes, or engage in any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents.
12. will not share inappropriate details of their personal lives or ask children to share inappropriate details through any form of communication: written, verbal or electronic.
13. will not socialize with or provide mentoring to program participants without the knowledge and permission of the child's parents and program director.
14. will not give gifts to individual children without knowledge and permission of the child's parents and the VPC Children's Ministries or Student Ministries Director.

IV. TRAINING

All VPC pastors, employees and volunteers who have contact with children will be required to attend the annual training and review the current Child Protection Policy and sign a Recommitment Acknowledgment Form.

Training for Pastors, Employees, Church Officers and Volunteers

All pastors, employees and volunteers who have any contact with children are required to attend one foundational training session prior to working with children and annually thereafter and to sign the relevant documents regarding child protection. This foundational training will include the following:

- The need for the Child Protection Policy
- Definition of child abuse
- Preconditions for sexual abuse to occur
- Definitions of inappropriate conduct
- Church policies governing working with children
- Procedures for reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child protection issues
- Procedures for responding to allegations and/or concerns regarding child protection issues

Training sessions will be held semi-annually, however, individuals are expected to attend only one training per year. There will also be a video tape training program available for individuals who want to join the volunteer staff at other times of the year or for those who are unable to attend the formal training sessions. VPC Church Officers will be exposed to a foundational training presentation during a regularly scheduled meeting of the Session.

Training for Children

Parents bear the primary responsibility for teaching their children about child protection and safety issues. Nonetheless, from time to time, VPC will offer age-appropriate educational opportunities for children. These sessions may include their right to be free from unwelcome and inappropriate touching or remarks, how to report their concerns, and understanding church policies regarding their safety. Parents will be advised prior to any such educational sessions.

V. GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN

The following guidelines are for the purpose of protecting both the children from situations where abuse may occur and the adults from the possibility of false accusations.

For legal and safety purposes, the following are the recommended minimum adult: child ratios:

Birth – 4 years	1:4
5 years – 8 years	1:6
9 years – 14 years	1:8
15 years – 18 years	1:10

Two-Adult Policy

At least two adults will supervise all church-sponsored programs and activities involving children, whether on or off campus.

Adults in leadership roles are to avoid situations, on campus or off, where they are alone with children by having at least two adults for all activities.

When one-on-one interactions between children and employee/volunteers are necessary (e.g. in emergency situations or occasions of pastoral care), care must be taken to conduct the meeting in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult must have the knowledge of the employee/volunteer's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.

Restroom supervision for children under 9:

- VPC employees and volunteers will assure that suspicious or unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom before allowing children to use the facilities.
- Children will be sent in pairs, and whenever possible, with VPC employees and volunteers. VPC employees and volunteers will stand in the restroom doorway while children are using the restroom and in visual sight of another adult.
- VPC employees and volunteers will call on the Children's Ministries staff, who may be floating from room to room, to assist with restroom supervision in order to maintain the Two-Adult rule.
- VPC employees and volunteers will always use proper supervision when children are using public bathrooms off campus to ensure their safety.

- If VPC employees and volunteers are assisting children younger than 5, doors to the facility must remain open.

Classroom Management for children under 9:

- VPC employees and volunteers should release children to only the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized in writing by the parent or guardian.
- VPC employees and volunteers should take periodic headcounts of the children they are supervising to ensure everyone is accounted for at all times.

Publishing Personal Information:

VPC shall not publish children's personal information in any public forum (web site, newsletter, etc.) without parental permission.

VI. REPORTING

Reporting child abuse and suspicions of child abuse are required by this policy, the VPC Sexual Misconduct Policy and by Fairfax County law.

A. Allegations of Child Abuse

1. Every VPC Pastor, employee or volunteer is required to report any situation which presents a suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Such a report shall be made to the Director of Children's Ministries or Director of Student Ministries, within 24 hours after such occurrence, who will report to the Executive Director or Senior Pastor.
2. Any report of child abuse made by a child accusing a parent, guardian, youth, adult, or VPC pastor, employee or volunteer, despite how unlikely such a report may seem, must be relayed to the Director of Children's Ministries or Director of Student Ministries who will report it to the Executive Director or Senior Pastor.
3. The Executive Director, as required by law, shall report the situation to Child Protective Services of Fairfax County or other local authorities for investigation.
4. All concerns and reporting shall be kept confidential.
5. The identities of the people involved in a report will be protected.

B. Other Concerns

From time to time, issues may arise regarding the conduct of our children and adults at VPC that do not appear to be abuse-related issues but impinge upon child protection and safety, and may require attention and review. Examples of issues reported might include:

- Child safety such as: water-based activities, transportation issues, behavior issues, etc., during children's activities
- Adult's behavior during VPC sponsored activities such as inappropriate language, dress, conduct, safety, leadership, discipline, substance abuse, etc.
- Children's behavior during VPC sponsored activities such as inappropriate language, dress, conduct, safety, leadership, discipline, substance abuse, etc.
- Lack of adherence to the Child Protection Policy

- Potentially inadequate, inappropriate or unwise leadership of Children’s Ministries and Student Ministries activities.
 1. All adults and children are encouraged to report any issues as soon as possible to the responsible adult leader at the time the issue is observed. It is important to bring issues of safety to the attention of the responsible adult(s) as soon as possible. Such notification may be oral.
 2. When it is appropriate or more comfortable, anyone who wishes to have a concern addressed is encouraged to bring the issue to the attention of the Executive Director, Director of Children’s Ministry, Director of Student Ministry or Volunteer Staff either verbally or in writing. All individuals are encouraged to be responsible in identifying issues and it is desirable that such concerns bear the name of the originator.
 3. Any concern shared should be documented and filed in the appropriate confidential file (employee, volunteer, ministry) to make sure any patterns or trends are not overlooked. These files are maintained by Human Resources.
 4. VPC maintains a box for suggestions and concerns outside the church office where any adult or youth can anonymously report any concern or issue. You may also send concerns to cpconcerns@viennapres.org realizing that email messages are not necessarily anonymous. Both mailboxes will be monitored by the Human Resources.

C. Other Circumstances

VPC pastors, employees and volunteers are required to report to the Executive Director any circumstances that under this policy affect their ability to work with children.

VII. RESPONDING

A. Allegations

In the event of an allegation of child abuse, the following procedures will be followed at Vienna Presbyterian Church:

1. Allegations of abuse shall be brought to the Executive Director, Senior Pastor or Presbytery, as appropriate. The Executive Director and Senior Pastor will consult with each other and then meet with the accused to discuss the allegations.
2. Every allegation shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.
3. The Executive Director will immediately contact the VPC attorney, Fairfax County authorities, VPC’s liability insurance carrier and the Staff Committee.
4. Following a consultation with the VPC attorney; the Executive Director may update the accused individual about the status of the concern or allegation.

5. Written documentation relating to the matter shall be kept in a confidential file.
6. The Executive Director and Staff Committee will conduct an internal investigation in addition to that which will be carried out by the authorities, following the required notifications.
7. Progress on the investigation will be documented on the Allegation Investigation Form.
8. A Pastor or employee accused of child abuse may be placed on administrative leave and asked to cease participation in Children's activities at the discretion of the Executive Director and Staff Committee. A volunteer will be asked to stop participating in children's activities until the allegations are investigated. This action would be to provide protection to the accuser during the investigative process.
9. In the event of an unsubstantiated allegation, the Executive Director will make a determination as to whether the individual will be allowed to return to work as an employee or volunteer at VPC. The individual's likely effectiveness in working with children following an allegation and investigation of abuse will be considered. An employee or volunteer has the right to appeal the decision to the Staff Committee in the appropriate time and manner. Should further resolution be needed, consult the rules of discipline per the Book of Order.
10. VPC pastors, employees and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully with the authorities, such as Vienna or Fairfax County Police and Fairfax County Child Protective Services.
11. All VPC pastors, employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the Executive Director. The Executive Director or his/her designee, shall be the only person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information, such as to a protective services investigator or a police officer.
12. All VPC pastors, employees and volunteers are expected to avoid denial, minimization or blame related to the allegation and investigation.

B. Other Concerns

1. Every report of a concern regarding the children of VPC shall be evaluated by the Executive Director or Ministry Director to determine if the report in fact represents a concern or suspicion of Child Abuse. Such concerns will be processed as described by this policy.
2. The Executive Director along with the Director of Children's or Student Ministries shall evaluate any report of a concern related to child protection and safety, even if it does not fall under the legal definition of abuse or its suspicion, to assure proper follow-up on the issue.
3. All concerns reported shall be documented and maintained for long term review of trends or patterns of unacceptable activity. If a trend or pattern develops, Human Resources will inform the Executive Director. The

appropriate program director will be consulted and a plan developed for how to address the noted behavior pattern.

VIII. MAINTAINING A RESPONSIBLE & REDEPTIVE ENVIRONMENT

“ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us.” 1 John 1.8-10

At VPC we seek to live in covenant with God and with one another, and to be a redemptive community to all who participate. We also acknowledge that redemptive action and responsible action can at times, be in tension or even seeming opposition. We embrace this fact as a natural part of seeking to be the church in the world. We adopt these procedures for ministering to those among us who are known offenders of children while maintaining our focus on protecting the children of our church community.

1. Known offenders, who wish to become part of the VPC community, are expected to make their status and any terms of probation or parole known to the Executive Director.
2. The Executive Director will appoint a group of 3-5 disciples (one member to be from Staff Committee) to establish boundaries, in writing, governing the life of the offender within the church, including areas on campus where he/she may go unaccompanied. Group members will receive training in the protection of children and in dealing with any provisions of the VPC Child Protection Policy.
3. The known offender will give written acknowledgement and acceptance of VPC's Child Protection Policy and of the boundaries imposed.
4. At no time is a known offender to be assigned to activities with children.
5. At no time is a known offender to congregare with children.
6. At no time is a known offender allowed in areas of the church or grounds dedicated to children or in use primarily by children.
7. As circumstances warrant, the Executive Director may identify a known offender to church employees and volunteers whose ministries should be informed of this fact.
8. Known offenders will receive the normal pastoral care afforded to any disciple.
9. Should a known offender disregard the terms established in this policy, or should a known offender disregard any boundaries or conditions set by the Executive Director and his/her appointed group, the violation will be handled through the Rules of Discipline in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA).
10. Those struggling with sexual issues involving children are encourage to seek support through the Executive Director or Senior Pastor, who will confidentially assist individuals in establishing boundaries.