

SVC CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Safeguarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals is one of the most important responsibilities of SVC Ministries.

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

The issue of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is not an easy topic to discuss. However, by being aware of its existence and developing plans for preventing it, we can take an important step toward protecting children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

CHILD ABUSE CAN HAPPEN IN ANY CHURCH

A culture of trust is a characteristic in most churches that too often keeps them from effectively developing and enforcing an abuse prevention program.

Most Christians find it very difficult to talk about child abuse. They think it couldn't happen in their church or be committed by someone they know and trust. This mindset, paired with the presence of many children supervised by few workers or untrained volunteer staff, makes churches targets for sexual predators.

The problem is nationwide. Any church or ministry that works with children and youth is vulnerable to incidents of abuse. Abuse has no regard for the size of the ministry, its denomination, or its location.

Identifying Abuse: Disrupting the Culture

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Generally, abuse occurs in several forms, all of which could be happening at the same time. The definition of criminal abuse in Pennsylvania is defined as when an individual acts or fails to prevent something that causes harm or a high likelihood of harm to a child under the age of 18. This harm can take many forms, such as bodily injury, serious mental injury, or sexual abuse or exploitation.

Emotional abuse conveys a message that the child is worthless and undeserving of love and care. It can take the form of threats, critical words, demeaning terms or names, deprivation of affection, or similar emotional cruelty. It can be spoken or unspoken.

Sexual abuse can be defined by any form of sexual contact between a child and an adult or older youth. This could include showing or talking about sexually explicit material.

Physical abuse is intentional, deliberate behavior that causes bodily harm to a child. It can take several forms, including assault, shaking, kicking, or choking. In general, it includes all non-accidental physical injuries.

Neglect is failing to meet a child's needs, such as nutritional, physical, emotional, educational, and safety. Signs of neglect can include lack of basic needs like weather-appropriate clothing, lack of food that results in a child being extremely underweight for their age, or lack of running water for bathing or cleaning clothes.

WHO ARE THE ABUSERS?

- For child abuse or neglect, about 77 percent of perpetrators are a parent to the victim.
- Family members account for about 30 percent of the perpetrators of sexual abuse.
- Additionally, sixty percent of sexual abuse is committed by someone known to the child but is not a family member, such as a babysitter or other child care provider.
- Only about 10 percent of abusers are strangers.
- While more often than not the perpetrators of sexual abuse are men, 53.7 percent of perpetrators of all child abuse or neglect are women.

HOW DOES CHILD ABUSE HAPPEN?

Churches are viewed as easy targets by sexual predators. Child abusers and molesters exploit the following characteristics found in most religious organizations:

- Churches rely heavily on volunteer help in children and youth ministries.
- Churches often have large numbers of children, weak abuse prevention policies, a shortage of willing workers, and a culture that sees the good in people.
- Ministries tend to have lax screening procedures and policies.

DISCLOSURE AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE

Regardless of where abuse takes place, many times ministry leaders and workers don't readily detect and respond to incidents of child abuse because they are unaware of the behavioral and emotional signals that accompany abuse. Additionally, some estimate that up to 40 percent of sexually abused children don't show any signs.

Victims of abuse often gradually disclose what has happened. Children are especially slow to disclose abuse. They are afraid of negative reactions from adults or of "getting into trouble" with the abuser. Always listen to children if they disclose abuse. And remember, disclosure can take many forms: verbal, non-verbal, behavioral, and emotional.

Preventing Abuse: Policies Set for Safe Boundaries

Clearance Requirements

Screening. Robust screening policies are essential for minimizing the risk of a sexual predator gaining access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Simply put, all volunteers and staff will be interviewed and a comprehensive criminal and child abuse check will be done. SVC pays close attention to who gets the privilege of teaching our children and youth.

In your interview process I would straight up ask people, “Will you be offended if I talk to you about a circumstance that isn’t safe for a child involving you?” Or some version of that - basically it opens the door for you to throw back on that “Hey remember when I asked if you would be offended...well I want to talk to you about something that didn’t have the best appearances...”

Statement of restriction

Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving these groups at Susquehanna Valley Church. We have a commitment to identify potential predators or other unsuitable volunteers and prevent them from accessing ministries involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. In the event of an accusation, we will fully cooperate with any and all authorities, allowing them to conduct and complete their investigation. We will not apologize for making every effort to keep our kids safe.

Supervision

All staff and volunteers at Susquehanna Valley Church should avoid the appearance of impropriety—such as sitting older children on their lap, kissing, being alone with, etc.

GUIDELINES FOR ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTION

Any adult employee or volunteer generally should avoid being alone with a child or youth. If your counseling/ mentoring practices necessitate one-on-one interaction, put into place the following precautions:

- Obtain prior written consent from the youth's parents/guardians.
- Set a limit for the duration and frequency of any continuing one-on-one contact, like three 30-minute sessions.
- Meet only in public locations where the adult and the youth are visible to others.

THE TWO-ADULT RULE

This rule creates accountability that helps prevent and deter misconduct. It also helps reduce the ability for anyone to make a false accusation. The rule requires that two screened and unrelated adults be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

APPLY THE RULE OF THREE.

When the two-adult rule cannot be supported, the rule of three requires at least three individuals to be present, with at least one being an adult employee or volunteer. The age and capacity of the children being supervised should be taken into consideration when using this rule. For the rule of three, it's about accountability.

VEHICLES

Adult employees and volunteers should avoid traveling in a vehicle one-on-one with a minor. If it is necessary, parent permission must be obtained in advance. A communication strategy to notify parents/guardians or supervisors when leaving for and arriving at an event must be in place.

NO-GO ZONE

All areas that are difficult to properly supervise, unused rooms, and closets are to be kept locked with limited key access.

General Volunteer Policies

- ***Illness Policy:*** Persons who are ill (with a fever, or a communicable disease that can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity.
 - A suitable worker—one who has been previously approved through our ministry screening process—must be used to take the place of a worker who is ill.
 - Participants should be returned to their parents or guardian as soon as the illness is discovered. If immediate return is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that allows an adult worker to monitor the participant until he/she can be returned to a parent or guardian.
 - Take reasonable steps to avoid contact with blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids.
- ***Inconsolable Children:*** Volunteers should make every effort to engage unhappy children in the Nursery and Preschool areas in play or rock children. However, if a child is inconsolable (10 minutes of non-stop crying), the parents are to be notified immediately. Under no circumstance should a child be left to “cry it out”. This policy will help to fortify the trust between our parents and our volunteers.
- ***Emergency Procedures:***
 - All Emergency Procedures and plans of action are posted in each room.
 - Ministry Leads who become aware of an injury to a worker or participant will take steps to ensure that proper medical attention is given to the injured person and provide for continued monitoring of the remaining activity participants.
 - Persons who have received an injury that is obviously minor should be given first aid as needed at the time of injury. The individual's parents or guardians should be notified of the injury when they pick up the injured person.
 - Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The First Aid Kit is located in each room by the door.
 - The Parents will be notified immediately of any accident that occurs. An [online report](#) of the incident should be completed by a volunteer and submitted online. If warranted by the injury, emergency medical personnel should be called.
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BATHROOM PROCEDURES

- No diapers should be changed by nursery or preschool volunteers. If a child requires a diaper change please notify the parents via the iPad located in the Nursery and Preschool Rooms.
- All children will use the single bathroom in the Next Gen Room.
- In cases where the main bathrooms are used, children age 6 or older, using the main bathrooms at SVC at least one adult should take children to the restroom. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe and then wait outside the restroom for the children. If assistance is required, the presence of a second adult escort is also recommended.
- Children age 5 or younger (boys and girls) should be assisted as needed in the restroom by an adult female. Leave the bathroom door ajar with a second screened worker nearby for additional accountability.
- Never touch the private areas of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult .
- No Adult should be in a closed bathroom with a child for any reason.

Discipline of children.

SVC policies clearly indicate what, if any, discipline is appropriate in each classroom Job Description. Under no circumstances should volunteers spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Physical restraint should only be used in a situation where it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming himself or another individual. If a child is unmanageable after efforts

have been made to correct the situation, it is appropriate to then contact either the Ministry Leader or the parent/guardian.

RECORD KEEPING

All ministry functions involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults should maintain an attendance list for every function using Planning Center Check-Ins. Record the date of the function, along with the names of all participants, ministry coordinators, and supervisors.

Ministry workers should complete the [Health and Safety Report](#) whenever an injury occurs during a ministry function.

Abuse notification and Report Procedures

It's imperative that SVC volunteers and Leaders pay special attention to accusations of child abuse. Always take the accusation seriously to determine if a report to the authorities is required and/or warranted.

It might be tempting to assume children often report false allegations of abuse. Current research does not support this. You may be required to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse, not just hard evidence.

All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers subject to mandatory reporting guidelines are expected to fully comply and report any reasonable suspicion of abuse or signs of neglect to local authorities.

When a child confides in you:

- Listen seriously to the child; do not criticize.
- Let the child use his or her own words.
- Remain calm; reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling.
- Be a good listener and don't make promises to "fix this."
- Don't make suggestions or attempt to alter the child's story.
- As soon as possible, write down the exact things the child said and give it to the ministry leader in charge of the activity.
- We may ask you to fill out an incident report form. If so, please do so promptly.

MANDATORY REPORTING

You only need to have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of abuse. Once a report is received, specially trained child welfare professionals will determine whether the child is a victim of abuse and what action is necessary to ensure a child's safety and well-being.

A reporter is not required to provide the identity of an alleged perpetrator, if it is unknown to the reporter.

3 Main components

1. A Child - anyone under 18
2. An Act - is something that is done to harm or cause potential harm to a child
A Failure to Act - is something that is not done to prevent harm or potential harm to a child
3. A Perpetrator - A parent of the child, A spouse or former spouse of the child's parent, A paramour or former paramour of the child's parent, A person 14 years of age or older who does not reside in the same house

Document what you were told and immediately by filling out the [Health and Safety Report](#) and [reporting to Childline](#)

VIOLATION OF POLICY OR PROCEDURES

- Ministry volunteers must promptly notify their ministry leader when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.
- Ministry leaders who become aware of a violation of the procedures set by this policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with them. In the process of ensuring compliance with this policy, it may become necessary to remove workers from their positions.

INTERNAL INVESTIGATION

- Susquehanna Valley Church considers any allegation of abuse or molestation a serious matter. Each situation will be fully investigated first through civil authorities, then by ministry leaders with the assistance of legal counsel. The ministry will not interfere with a pending law enforcement investigation.
- Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
- This ministry will permanently remove any employees or volunteers from their ministerial duties within the organization if they are found guilty of abuse or molestation.