

Trinity Presbyterian Church (TPC)

CARE Policy (Children and Adults in a Responsible Environment)

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CARE Policy

(Children and Adults in a Responsible Environment)

I. Statement of Intent

The Session, members, and staff of Trinity Presbyterian Church (TPC) are committed to maintaining an environment in which children, youth, and vulnerable adults are protected from emotional, verbal, physical, sexual and mental abuse, and in which approved providers (See Section II, Applicability, below) are protected from potential false allegations of abuse.

To achieve the goals of preventing either incidents of abuse or the unfounded assertion of such conduct, TPC has developed appropriate procedures to be implemented in the following areas:

- The interviewing and selection of providers involved in the supervision or custody of minors or vulnerable adults
- Orientation and training of approved providers
- Supervision of approved providers by trained leadership
- Reporting of, and responding to any incident and/or allegation of the abuse, of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult

TPC's role does not supplant that of the parents / guardians who remain primarily responsible for the nurturing, protection, supervision and care of their child(ren), youth and vulnerable adults in their legal charge. Rather, TPC desires to help such parents / guardians protect their children, youth and vulnerable adults by establishing safeguards and appropriate practices within TPC sponsored programs and activities to reduce the risk of abuse.

II. Applicability

The general policy and procedures apply to all providers as defined in Section III. As situations arise which are not adequately addressed by a specific procedure or policy, this policy may be revised by the Session of TPC.

III. Definitions

The following definitions shall apply in this document:

Abuse includes emotional, mental, physical, sexual and verbal abuse.

Child: A minor under the age of eighteen (18) years old.

Emotional abuse is defined as any act that may diminish the sense of dignity and self-worth of an individual created in God's image.

Mental abuse is defined as a pattern of maltreatment that interferes with a person's ability to develop healthy and stable patterns of relating to others.

Physical abuse is defined as physical maltreatment, which results in non-accidental physical injury or harm.

Provider: A staff person, intern, teacher, or volunteer, church member, or guest involved with the supervision or care of minors and/or vulnerable adults through programs provided at or sponsored by TPC whose participation has been reviewed and approved by the Church Officers of TPC.

Sexual abuse is defined as acts of sexual assault and sexual exploitation of minors or vulnerable adults. Sexual abuse encompasses a broad range of behavior and may include, but is not limited to incest, fondling, rape, sexual proposition or enticement, intercourse, indecent exposure, oral-genital contact, child pornography, or child prostitution.

Verbal abuse is defined as the use of words with the intent to cause harm to the person being spoken to.

Vulnerable Adults: Persons eighteen (18) years or older who cannot reasonably make informed decisions for themselves due to severely impaired physical or mental function and who either reside in licensed facilities or who are in the guardianship or care of others.

IV. Policies

To safeguard our children, youth and vulnerable adults, and to achieve the stated intent of paragraph I above, the following policies are in effect:

1. PROHIBITED CONDUCT

- a) No provider may ever expose children to pornographic or other sexually explicit material of any sort. Providers must not access, display, or possess pornography or other sexually explicit material on TPC property or equipment, at TPC sponsored events, or in any setting where such material may either intentionally or inadvertently be accessed or observed by children.
- b) No provider will use inappropriate corrective measures or behave in a violent manner (such as hitting, slapping, choking, kicking or screaming) towards children in their care.
- c) No provider may make any sexual advances towards, "date," proposition, solicit, or engage in sexual contact with a minor child or vulnerable adult regardless of whether or not such child is above the statutory age of consent, regardless of whether such contact may be welcomed or encouraged by a minor or vulnerable adult, and regardless of whether such contact is prohibited or permitted by statute.

2. TWO PROVIDER RULE

Providers shall observe the "two provider rule," which requires that at least two providers be present at church sponsored activities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Exceptions to the two provider rule include:

- a) In a group situation, a provider who has completed background check(s) and received Session approval may lead approved group activities without a second provider
- b) If a second provider cannot be found for the event, or the second provider is delayed, the activity may be delayed until adequate staffing is available. As an example, one interim measure while waiting for the second provider to arrive is the door to the classroom will be left open and a Church Officer or staff member (Pastor, Ruling Elder or Deacon) will visit the class during the activity. In situations where leaving a door fully open would raise safety concerns (such as with toddlers or very young children), safety gates, half doors, full glass doors and/or visibility by unobstructed windows at eye level may be approved on a case-by-case basis. Attempts will be made to have a second provider join the activity as soon as possible.
- c) In the event of an emergency that requires one of the providers to leave an activity, an attempt will be made to contact one of the Church Officers (Pastor, Ruling Elder or Deacon) or a staff member before leaving the activity. If this is not practicable due to circumstances, the activity may be continued as long as the classroom door remains open. In situations where leaving a door fully open would raise safety concerns (such as with toddlers or very young children), safety gates, half doors, full glass doors and/or visibility by unobstructed windows at eye level may be approved on a case-by-case basis. Attempts will be made to have a second provider join the activity as soon as possible.
- d) Youth events where students participate in activities that meet in the home of a member. Parental permission may be required for these activities.

3. CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

- a) TPC's policy provides that each child, first grade and younger is released only to his/her parent/guardian unless the parent/guardian authorizes an alternate pick-up. The TPC volunteers supporting our children's ministry staff may require signed documentation of such authorization.
- b) Materials used with minors/vulnerable adults must be approved by the Session. This includes, but is not limited to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and mid-week children's programs.

4. YOUTH MINISTRY

- a) One-on-one contact with a youth student is acceptable only in the event that the visit takes place in a public area or if written or verbal parental permission is received. Pastoral visits are exempt from this policy except that pastors shall make reasonable attempts to obtain the consent of a parent / guardian before engaging in any one-on-one session(s). If for some reason parental consent is not possible, the pastor shall notify his Session of the meeting.
- b) Volunteers for overnight church activities involving minors or vulnerable adults shall be approved in advance by the Session or person responsible for that program.

- c) Materials used with minors/vulnerable adults must be approved by the Session. This includes, but is not limited to, Youth Groups, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and mid-week youth programs.
- d) Off-site gatherings sponsored or coordinated by TPC, including those taking place at large public venues (such as a group outing to a park, ski resort or retreat center) are not subject to the two-provider rule if ministry leaders or the Session determine it is not feasible to provide two chaperones for each grouping of participants. However, a minimum of two providers must be present at the venue at all times for the group event and parental permission must be given for such off-site church sponsored or organized events.
- e) In the event that student activities take place off-site, transportation to and from that event should occur in a caravan with multiple vehicles traveling together or with three or more persons in a vehicle. Exceptions to this policy will be made with written or verbal parental permission (or any time a parent of either gender wishes to drive only his/her own children).

5. PROCEDURES FOR SUPERVISION

- a) It shall be the responsibility of the TPC Church Officers accountable for TPC programs that involve minors or vulnerable adults to ensure that all providers and students' helpers have completed the screening protocol. Providers and student helpers are to follow safety, security and other policies specific to that area.
- b) Continuing education programs on abuse issues and program specific practices may be offered periodically by the Church staff or Session.
- c) Compensated church staff or their designees are encouraged to make unannounced visits to scheduled small group classroom situations involving volunteer providers at a frequency of approximately once per hour.

6. PROCEDURES FOR HIRING AND SCREENING

- a) New providers (whether TPC members or not) involved in the care of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults at TPC must go through an application and interview process prior to being involved in any such ministry, under the oversight of TPC Church Officers.
- b) Volunteer providers must be known by the Children or Youth ministry leaders and/or TPC Church Officers. It is preferred that all providers be members of TPC. Exceptions can be made for providers who regularly attend TPC and are seeking to join with the Church or with approval from the session.
- c) Before a provider is allowed to fill a position working within the Children's or Youth Ministry they must be generally observed at church services or functions for 2-3 months by other church members and Church Officers. The Session may make exceptions to this for paid providers who are filling a childcare position (ex: nursery workers), and who have been interviewed by at least one Elder and staff member.
- d) Paid providers shall provide two (2) non-family personal references during the interview process. TPC Church Officers or staff will be responsible for contacting each reference to screen the applicant. The Session may make exceptions to this policy, as necessary.

- e) All providers, whether paid or volunteers, must be background checked prior to serving in children's or youth ministry activities or events. Adults who have been convicted of sexual or physical abuse (including but not limited to sexual assault, molestation, incest, rape or domestic violence, regardless of the age of the victim) are not permitted to provide supervisory services in any church sponsored activity or program for minors, children and vulnerable adults.
- f) Paid providers must sign a statement saying they have read the CARE policy and agree to abide by it. All volunteer providers will be provided with a copy of the CARE policy.

7. DISCIPLINE POLICY

Providers shall review the TPC Discipline of Children policy attached (Attachment #1) hereto and shall use the procedures outlined to address child misbehavior and/or discipline issues.

V. Reporting Procedures

1. REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS OR POLICY VIOLATIONS

- a) Adult members of TPC who participate in TPC activities (or programs on the property of TPC) should be aware of the potential for abuse of minors, children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, they should not hesitate to raise issues of questionable or inappropriate behavior, including directly questioning or expressing concerns to any person who appears to be engaged in questionable behavior.
- b) When a TPC member or provider observes questionably inappropriate behaviors or policy violations but does not initially have a clear basis for suspecting abuse, the member/provider should endeavor to address the situation directly with the person engaging in questionable behavior in a manner consistent with the principles of Matthew 18.
- c) Policy violations, whether or not any suspicion of abuse is involved, should also be reported to the TPC Church Officers responsible for the specific area of ministry. Initial reports may be made in-person or by phone or by filling out an incident report form.
- d) If, after raising any concerns and/or after further observations, the observer still has concerns or believes that abuse may have occurred, a report should be made to the TPC Church Officers responsible for the specific area of ministry.

2. REPORTING SUSPECTED OR OBSERVED ABUSE

- a) The procedures in this policy for reporting abuse are not designed to discourage reporting to secular authorities. Mandatory reporting laws may require reporting of child abuse. Any person who observes or suspects abuse may independently report such observations or concerns to state or local authorities. Reports to authorities may be made confidentially or anonymously. Maryland provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse who make truthful reports in good faith.
- b) Members, staff and/or providers shall (independently from any other reporting) report any suspected or known abuse of children or vulnerable adults to TPC in the manner outlined in this Policy.
- c) Observations of abuse or suspicions of abuse shall be reported immediately to the TPC Church Officers responsible for the area of ministry where an observation or alleged incident occurred. If suspicions or observations of abuse involve a parent or other third party not in an area of ministry, a report may be made to the Senior Pastor or to an Elder. Reports may initially be made orally but shall be followed in writing (on an Incident Report Form) within 48 hours.

d) Any person observing abusive conduct which appears likely to cause imminent risk of serious physical or emotional harm, death, sexual abuse, or exploitation should immediately intervene to address the situation. A verbal report must be made to the TPC Church Officer responsible for the specific area of ministry immediately. Calls should be placed to 9-1-1 as necessary for emergency response personnel (police and/or ambulance) to address serious physical or sexual assault or abuse. No later than forty-eight (48) hours of such an incident, a call should be placed to Social Services of Anne Arundel County (410-269-4500), Child Protective Services and/or Adult Protective Services.

e) When the TPC Session determines that there is a credible report of abuse involving a risk of serious physical or sexual harm, then in addition to following the procedures herein, and after seeking counsel if appropriate, reports shall be promptly made to any appropriate authority.

f) Mandatory reporting laws will be followed when and as they apply.

g) Notwithstanding any privilege that may exist in law, any TPC Church Officer or Staff Member who, in the course of counseling, confession, or church discipline, learns of conduct which in the opinion of the Pastor or Session seems likely to subject a specific child or vulnerable adult to a serious risk of current, ongoing or future physical harm or sexual abuse, such Church Officer or Staff Member may take action, including reporting to secular authorities as appropriate, to minimize the risk of such harm or abuse.

VI. Procedures for Responding to Reports of Abuse

- 1) The provider should document all events or observations regarding the concerns or alleged incident using the CARE Incident Report Form.
- 2) The TPC Church Officer involved is to assure the safety of the possible victim and then notify the parent/guardian(s). If a parent/guardian is an alleged abuser then the notifying TPC Church Officer shall use his discretion as to the timing and manner of parental notification.
- 3) Parents and/or guardians of the possible victim of abuse should be advised to seek immediate medical attention for the child if physical harm is suspected.
- 4) If, during the course of any review, the TPC Church Officer involved has a credible basis for suspecting abuse subject to mandatory reporting and/or imminent risk of serious physical or emotional harm, death, sexual abuse or exploitation, that Church Officer shall promptly notify appropriate state and/or local authorities.
- 5) At least two Elders (preferably the Pastor and at least one Ruling Elder) are to notify the accused. If the accused is a minor, then the parent/guardian(s) of the accused shall also be notified.
- 6) If the accused is a Pastor, then the Session shall bring such accusation before the local Presbytery consistent with the rules pertaining to the discipline of ministers contained in the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America.

- 7) Persons against whom sexual or physical abuse allegations have been lodged through this Policy will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with minors or vulnerable adults and shall not resume responsibilities unless and until the review is completed and allegations are cleared or otherwise unsubstantiated.
- 8) If TPC becomes aware that a provider has been criminally indicted with charges of any felony sexual or physical abuse, regardless of whether or not an incident has been reported under this policy, then during the pendency of proceedings she/he will be removed from all responsibilities involving direct contact with minors or vulnerable adults and the Session will consult with the accused regarding future responsibilities.
- 9) If any accused is criminally convicted of felony physical or sexual abuse then that person shall be permanently removed from responsibilities supervising minors or vulnerable adults.
- 10) All parties involved in any incident, concern, or reasonably suspected incident or concern, including the accuser, the accused, and any possible or actual victim, will be treated with dignity, support, and love.
- 11) The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded by maintaining all written documentation in the church's confidential files and by prohibiting any discussion outside of the parties involved in the incident, any parent/guardian(s) of such parties and any personnel involved with reporting or response procedures.
- 12) Pastoral or shepherding response to any allegation will be handled by the Session according to Biblical principles and the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America.
- 13) The Pastor, or an assigned Session Elder, will be the spokespersons for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned

Attachment #1: Discipline of Children Policy

"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves as a father the son he delights in." Prov.3:11-12

Discipline of children in any ministry activity of the church should be handled within the same parameters that all church discipline is administered which include:

- **For the glory of God** - in obedience to God's Word, we administer discipline to restore the child to a Godly path
- **For the purity of the church** - behavior that is inconsistent with Biblical standards is not to be tolerated.
- **To restore the fallen person in error-** our actions must be consistent with the awareness that these children are God's loved ones and our goal is to point them to Christ.

RECOMMENDED STEPS IN THE DISCIPLINE PROCESS:

Communication with the Child - for occasional disruptive behavior:

- Pray for God's wisdom.
- Redirect the child by taking him or her from the situation.
- Speak to the child quietly, lovingly, and privately.
- Explain to the child the erroneous behavior and how it displeases God.
- Pray with the child for recognition of wrong behavior, for repentance and for a changed heart.

Communication with Parents - for ongoing disruptive behavior or for extreme situations as in biting, hitting, acting with total disregard to authority figure:

- Inform parent of child's behavior and ask for strategies that they find effective at home. (Note: They may not have any suggestions.)
- Call parents at home to further discuss child's behavior and to develop a plan of action.
- Agree to pray along with the parents on a regular basis regarding child's behavior.
- Maintain contact with the parents to encourage them as progress is made.
- Inform parent that the child may need to be removed from the classroom environment or ministry activity if wrong behavior persists.

Communication with Church Officers/Staff Members - in the event of an emergency situation where the child is totally out of control, disrupting the ministry activity, or efforts to work with the parents have been unsuccessful:

- A responsible person should seek assistance from an available Church Officer or Staff Member who will either remove the child from the class or group setting, or will assist with the class/group while the child is removed.
- Locate parents, if possible, to allow them to assume responsibility for the child.
- Pray with the parents and child regarding the particular incident.

- Use physical restraint, such as holding in a bear hug, only as a last resort when harm may come to the child, others or physical property as a result of the child's actions. Additional support and involvement of the parents should be sought as soon as practicable. (Note: Paddling is a responsibility that belongs solely to the parents.)
- NEVER LEAVE CHILD UNATTENDED!

In summation, this policy calls for prayer, wisdom and restraint in dealing with disruptive children.

GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:

- Establish rules and procedures
- Provide positive reinforcement
- Wait for compliance before starting the lesson or an activity
- Use child's name in context to get their attention and to redirect attention
- Move to area of room where disruption is while teaching
- Conduct private conference as needed
- Respond to misbehavior with clarity and firmness
- Remove a privilege
- Isolate child within the classroom
- Talk with parents

Attachment 2: CARE Incident Report Form

Person filling out the incident report: _____

Date of the incident: _____

Location of the incident: _____

Person suspected of violating the CARE policy: _____

Name of the person subject to the violation: _____

Is this person under 18 years of age? Y/N

If yes, has a parent been contacted? Y/N

Who contacted the parent? _____

Date of contact: _____

Have law enforcement officials been contacted about the incident? (If applicable) Y/N

If so, by whom? _____

Are there any witnesses to the alleged incident? Y/N

If so, list their names below:

Has the Pastor and/or Session been made aware of the incident? Y/N

If so, when were they notified?

Staff member or Elder responsible for communication with the accused: _____

Staff member or Elder responsible for communication with the person subject to the violation:

On reverse of this page please give, in detail, the alleged event as you witnessed or understand to have taken place.