

## **WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY PLAN**

### **Statement of Purpose**

Westminster Presbyterian Church believes that we are called by God to create a safe haven for all the children, youth, and developmentally disabled persons in our care, protecting those who are powerless and empowering them through faith and trust. During each baptism of an infant, child or adult into this covenant community of faith, the members of Westminster pledge to uphold that person in Jesus Christ and to teach, strengthen, and support individuals' relationships with the Body of Christ.

Therefore, the members of Westminster are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children ages birth to 18 and developmentally disabled persons, participating in the activities and programs of this church as well as those adults, whether volunteers or employees of Westminster, involved in the care and nurture of our children and youth.

Westminster recognizes certain people have talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of children and youth and wants to encourage them to use these gifts. At the same time; however, the church places certain criteria on those adults who choose to serve in this capacity.

The Safe Sanctuary Plan addresses the best practices to prevent risk of any form of neglect, abuse, or harassment, whether physical, mental, sexual or verbal, by any of the paid staff, teachers, or volunteers of this church (hereafter "workers") while on church property or while engaged in church-sponsored activities or programs. Additionally, we are called to stand not in judgment, but in compassion for each other. We believe any person who has been accused of committing an act of abuse can expect fair treatment, our prayers, and acceptance as a child of God.

## GENERAL PROCEDURES

In order to provide a safe haven for all at Westminster, we will commit to the following covenant:

1. **TWO WORKER RULE:** At all times, a minimum of **two workers** will be assigned to supervise or lead all group activities involving children and youth.
2. **PERMISSION/INFORMATION FORMS:**
  - a. A Parent/Guardian Permission Form must be completed and signed for all programs and activities **outside** the regular classes and meetings on campus. These would include, but not limited to: overnight lock-ups; off-campus service/field trips; off-campus fellowship activities and out-of-town trips.
  - b. A Parent/Guardian Permission Form must be completed and signed any time a minor and single adult are in a situation where a second adult is not present, such as a tutoring situation or mentoring relationship.
  - c. A Registration/Release/Medical Form must be completed and signed for all children and youth who regularly attend classes and meetings on campus.
3. **WORKER ELIGIBILITY:**
  - a. All workers in the children and youth areas of ministry (to include choir programs, the youth program, church school, and any other position which involves contact with minors) will be required to be either:
    - An active member of Westminster for a **minimum of six months, or**
    - A regular attendee of Westminster for a **minimum of six months, or**
    - Able to provide a prior church or employer reference.
  - b. A person shall be recommended to serve as a worker when the following are completed:
    - **Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Form**
    - **A security background check**
    - **An initial training session**
  - c. In **emergency situations**, it may become necessary to use a worker who has not fulfilled the three eligibility requirements in 3b. This person is not to be alone with a child or youth. The appropriate program director as well as the Plan Administrator should be notified as soon as possible.

#### **4. RECOMMITMENT AND RE-SCREENING**

- a. Each fall, all workers will be required to review the current Safe Sanctuary Plan and sign a Recommitment Acknowledgment Statement.
- b. Following initial screening, active volunteer workers will be re-screened with security background checks on a rotating basis. Volunteer workers are screened every 3-6 years, and paid workers will be screened every two years.

#### **5. PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR**

The following behaviors are prohibited for all individuals working with children or youth. This is not an exhaustive list:

- a. Threatening or inflicting physical injury to a child or youth (other than by accidental means)
- b. Committing any sexual offense against a child or youth or engaging in any sexual conduct with a child or youth
- c. Making any kind of sexual advance, making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in verbal, visual, or physical conduct of sexual nature
- d. The presence or possession of pornographic materials at any function of Westminster Presbyterian Church, on-site or off-site
- e. Being under the influence or in the possession of any illegal or illicit drug or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors sponsored by Westminster

## PROCEDURES FOR WORKERS IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

### General Procedures

1. **AGE OF WORKERS:**
  - a. All workers must be **18 years of age or older** with the exception of nursery workers.
  - b. Teenagers who are at least 16 years of age may work in the nursery under the direct supervision of an approved worker at least 18 years of age or older.
2. **TWO WORKER RULE: Two approved workers** should be present at all times in each room where minors are present. If the two adults are related, a third approved worker should be present.
3. **OPEN DOORS:** Whenever possible, the door to classrooms will be kept open. In rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door will be kept open. The doors to the classrooms may be closed only if there are windows from the classroom into the hallway with an unobstructed view of the classroom.
4. **SUPERVISION:** Only the approved workers and parents/guardians may be in the classroom with the children. Workers will ensure young children do not leave a class or ministry activity unattended.

### Restroom Supervision

1. Workers will make sure unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom before allowing children to use the facilities.
2. Workers will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for children and protection for the workers (i.e. not being alone with a child). Whenever possible, children should be sent in pairs.
3. If workers are assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open.
4. Workers will always use proper supervision when children are using public bathrooms to ensure their safety.
5. Workers may change diapers if done in an open space.

**SIGNING IN:**

Children, left in the care of workers, for classes or other activities are to be checked-in and checked-out by a parent/guardian or other person appropriately designated by the parent/guardian. All guests will be required to be signed in.

**LOCATION:**

Parents and guardians are expected to remain on the church campus while their children are in the care of the church. Exceptions are made for activities and events on and off campus: such as Vacation Bible School, Music Camp, One Great Day of Service, and Choir Practice. If parents or guardians do leave campus, they are required to sign in children upon arrival indicating the parent's location and contact information.

**Overnight Trip Rule**

1. **PERMISSION FORMS:** Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two worker rule must be followed throughout the trip with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.
2. **ROOMING ARRANGEMENTS:**
  - a. Rooming arrangements should provide for children (ages 9-12) of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together.
  - b. Ordinarily, adults would not share rooms with children. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by parent or guardian (in such cases as Intergenerational Mission Trips).
3. **MEDICAL**
  - a. Each child, worker, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.
  - b. Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-campus events. These forms will be kept on site for the duration of the event.
  - c. First aid supplies will be available on the event site.

- d. All workers will be informed of the location of first aid equipment and specific medical conditions and concerns of participating child.
- e. A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency, or injury.

### **Driving Rules/Travel**

1. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two worker rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicle in sight at regular intervals is an acceptable substitution for the two worker rule.
2. Travel arrangements for off-campus events will be coordinated through the church.
3. All adult drivers will be screened through the Division of Motor Vehicles in their state of residence. A valid driver's license will be required.
4. All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting children and buying supplies.

## PROCEDURES FOR WORKERS IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

### General Procedures

1. **AGE OF WORKERS:**
  - a. All adult workers must be **22 or older**.
  - b. Workers in the youth program who are under age 22 will be supervised by an adult during events.
2. **TWO WORKER RULE:** Two approved workers should be present at all times in each room where youth are present. If the two workers are related, a third approved worker should be present.
3. **OPEN DOOR:** Whenever possible the door to classrooms shall be kept open. If an adult is unexpectedly alone with a youth, they should make certain they are in a location where they can be seen. The door should remain open and physical contact must be avoided.
4. **SUPERVISION:** The youth will not be allowed to leave a ministry activity unattended without the permission from the Director of Youth Ministries or designated adult worker.
5. **Conduct:** Youth, workers, and staff will be expected to observe all policies, procedures and covenants of all youth activities and events. This includes host facility's rules and regulations.

### One-on-One Meeting between Workers and Youth

1. One-on-one office meetings involving a youth must be conducted with the door open.
2. A Pastor may have a closed door meeting if:
  - The door has a window with an unobstructed view
  - A parent and/or a member of staff has been notified
3. Any one-on-one lunches or meetings must be held in public places and may only occur if:
  - Approval has been given by the parent or guardian
  - The director of youth ministries or program staff member has been notified

## Driving Rules/Travel

1. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two worker rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicle in sight at regular intervals is an acceptable situation for the two worker rule.
2. Travel arrangements for off-campus events will be coordinated by the church. Youth driving themselves must ride alone unless permission is given by a parent or guardian to the Youth Director or worker.
3. All adult drivers will be screened through the Division of Motor Vehicles in their state of residence. A valid driver's license will be required.
4. Youth may not leave the site of the youth activity without explicit permission from the Director of Youth Ministries or designated adult worker.
5. All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting youth and buying supplies.

## Overnight Trip Rule

1. **PERMISSION FORMS:** Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two worker rule must be followed throughout the trip with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.
2. **ROOMING ARRANGEMENTS**
  - a. Rooming arrangements should provide for youth (ages 11-18) of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together.
  - b. Ordinarily, adults would not share rooms with youth. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by parent or guardian (in such cases as Intergenerational Mission Trips).
  - c. Where possible, middle school youth and senior high youth will be housed separately.
  - d. Youth are to be housed with adults rooming in close proximity to provide adequate supervision.

### 3. MEDICAL

- a. Each youth, worker, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.
- b. Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-campus events. These forms will be kept on site for the duration of the event.
- c. First aid supplies will be available on the event site.
- d. All workers will be informed of the location of first aid equipment and specific medical conditions and concerns of participating youth.
- e. A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency, or injury.

## REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR SAFE SANCTUARY PLAN

### Safeguards Committee

1. The Safeguards Committee is a committee consisting of two elders currently on Session and two lay members, all of whom should be appointed by Session. The Safeguards Committee works with the appropriate people to assure compliance of this Safe Sanctuary Plan, including appropriate record keeping.
2. Members of the Safeguards Committee will be asked to serve three-year "staggered" terms. A chairperson of the Committee shall be elected by its members. Committee members shall serve a maximum of two consecutive terms. After two consecutive terms, a member shall be eligible to serve again following two years of inactivity. No person who is a regular and/or recurring volunteer in Children's or Youth Ministry or who serves on the Children's Ministry Committee or Youth Ministry Committee may serve on the Safeguards Committee.

### Reporting Policy Violations

1. In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all minors, the paid staff, teachers, parents, and workers of Westminster must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstances, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Covenant.
2. Anyone personally witnessing any occurrence of or encountering a situation which presents suspicion of the occurrence of abuse as stated in this Safe Sanctuary Plan is required to report the situation to a member of the Pastoral Staff immediately after the occurrence. The reporting individual will be asked to complete a suspected abuse incident report.
3. Any report of child abuse made by a minor about their care by a parent, guardian, youth, adult, or Westminster employee or volunteer, despite how unlikely such report may seem, must be relayed to the Pastoral Staff immediately after the occurrence. The reporting individual will be asked to complete a Suspected Abuse Incident Report noting the words originally spoken by the minor and the minor's conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.
4. In the case of suspected physical and sexual abuse (including, but not limited to, physical injury, indecent liberties, exposure to pornography, and exploitation) of a minor, the following steps should be taken to ensure the security of the minor involved and to protect against physical, emotional, or psychological injury to all persons involved:
  - Personally secure the safety of the minor(s)
  - Report the incident immediately to the Pastoral Staff or Plan Administrator

- Do not leave the minor(s) unsupervised while reporting the incident
- Under no circumstance should the accused be given access to the alleged victim
- Do not personally confront the individual suspected of abusing the minor
- Allow the Pastoral Staff, Plan Administrator or designated person from the Response Team to provide you with instructions for reporting of the incident to the parents or guardian of the minor(s)
- The Pastoral Staff will be solely responsible for all communications on behalf of the church.
- Allow the Pastoral Staff, Plan Administrator or Response Team Designee to which the suspected abuse has been reported provide instruction with regard to reporting the abuse or neglect to the Guilford County Department of Social Services or the police department. Any report to DSS shall be made in the presence of a member of the pastoral staff or Plan Administrator.

### **Response Team**

In the discretion of the Pastoral Staff, a Response Team may be created to respond to allegations of physical or sexual abuse. The team will be comprised of qualified individuals who understand the issues of confidentiality. The team may include the following members:

- The Senior Pastor/Pastoral Staff
- The Directors for Children's or Youth Ministries
- The Clerk of Session
- An attorney for the church
- Counselors for both the alleged victim and the accused person

### **Consequences of Violations**

1. When a person is accused of committing child or sexual abuse, the Senior Pastor shall notify the accused individual. This notification shall not take place until the safety of the alleged victim is secured.
2. The accused should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until determination of the allegation has been made by the church, law enforcement, or child protection agency.
3. If an act of abuse has occurred, a person shall be prohibited from future participation in all church sponsored activities and programs with minors. If a person is a paid staff member such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

4. In the event of an unsubstantiated allegation, the Pastoral Staff will work with the individual to determine a course of action with the best interest of all parties involved.

#### **Failure to Timely Report a Prohibited Act**

Failure to timely report a Prohibited Act to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of Safe Sanctuary Plan and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a paid staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all Children's and Youth activities and programs of Westminster by any person.

#### **Changes to the Safe Sanctuary Plan**

Any changes to the Safe Sanctuary Plan shall be approved by the Session of Westminster.

## WORKER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURES:

1. **PAID STAFF/VOLUNTEER INFORMATION FORM:** All workers will be required to complete a Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Form. In addition to providing information necessary for security background checks, this participation covenant states that the worker has received a copy of Westminster's Safe Sanctuary Plan, has read and understand it, and will comply with the procedures set forth in it.
  
2. **SECURITY BACKGROUND CHECKS :**
  - a. Security background checks for all workers will be conducted by the Plan Administrator.
  - b. The Plan Administrator will maintain a locked storage cabinet in the church for all Paid Staff/Volunteer Information Forms and the results of the background checks. The results of the security background checks will be destroyed periodically if required by the guidelines mandated by the appropriate local or state agency.
  - c. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by the results of the security background check, the following terms will automatically disqualify an individual from participating in the leadership or sponsorship or any church activity or program for youth or children:  
**Any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to a child; abandonment or endangerment of a child; misdemeanor sexual battery or any crime involving moral turpitude.**
  - d. All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Pastoral Staff and/or the Plan Administrator to determine eligibility for that person's service in ministry areas involving children and youth.
  - e. If it is determined, based on his or her background check, that a worker is unfit to have responsibility for the safety and well-being of children or youth, the worker shall be notified by the Senior Pastor or Plan Administrator and shall have the opportunity to complete, discuss or challenge the accuracy of the information obtained through the background check.
  - f. Guest speakers approved by session and/or staff are exempt from the security background check and training requirements. It is expected that a guest speaker would not be with minors without an approved worker present.

## Training for Adults

All employees and workers are required to attend an initial training session or view a video of a training session. This training will include the following:

- The need for the Safe Sanctuary Plan
- Definition of child abuse
- Preconditions for child sexual abuse to occur
- Definition of inappropriate conduct
- Westminster's policies governing working with minors
- Procedures for responding to allegations of abuse from a child
- Civil and criminal consequences of misconduct
- Procedures for reporting observed or suspected misconduct
- NC statutes regarding Child Protective Services
- Procedures for reporting concerns
- Westminster's procedures for responding to accusations
- First Aid and CPR instruction (Mandatory for Nursery and Staff only )
- Accident Reporting

Following successful completion of the above training and approval of their application, workers may be deemed eligible to work with children and youth at Westminster. This eligibility must be renewed every two years for staff and at a minimum of every three years for volunteers.