

Child-Youth-Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy
Policies for the Safety of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Northeast Georgia Presbytery

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Section 1: Introduction and Purpose

As people who seek to live the commandment to “let the children come” (Matthew 19:14), the member churches of Northeast Georgia Presbytery (NEGA Pby) take seriously the importance of providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in the activities and programs of Northeast Georgia Presbytery. With the establishment of this Child-Youth-Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy, NEGA Pby is setting an example and taking a stand against the child abuse, abuse of vulnerable adults, neglect and exploitation that breaks the relationships and trust to which our Church is committed.

The Child-Youth Protection Policy is intended to protect the children and vulnerable adults in our Church community, the adult volunteers and employees who work with them, and the Church itself. The Policy establishes standards and procedures for:

- Supervision of and interaction with children and youth
- Interaction with vulnerable adults
- Screening and training volunteers and staff
- Reporting of and responding to suspicious or inappropriate activity

This Policy seeks to be practical and reasonable – relying upon sound judgment and good sense – while at the same time ensuring that necessary safeguards are in place to protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Children and youth are defined as people under the age of 18. Vulnerable adults are defined as adults aged 18 who, for any reason, may be unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Section 2: Scope and Applicability

The Child-Youth-Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy applies to all NEGA Pby staff and any Church member or nonmember volunteer working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Covered activities and programs – both on and off church premises – include but are not limited to: Sunday School classes, Youth fellowship programs, nursery, Vacation Bible School, music camp, children and youth choirs, church-sponsored retreats and mission trips, and confirmation mentoring.

Section 3: Guidelines for Interacting with Children and Youth

Code of Conduct

NEGA Pby expects that all staff and volunteers with children and youth will exemplify Christ’s love of children in all that they do and will offer a healthy and positive Christian role model. Employees and volunteers:

1. Will support and promote spiritual and emotional growth and development in their interactions with children and youth.
2. Will provide proper supervision and exercise sound judgment in maintaining a safe environment at all times.
3. Will observe the Two-Adult Policy as documented in the Child-Youth-Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and will avoid one-on-one situations with a child or youth except in emergency or pre-approved situations.
4. Will respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and will discourage children from touching one another in an inappropriate or unwelcome manner.
5. Will be alert to possible signs of abuse to children participating in church programs and immediately report any suspicions to the staff person responsible for the program.
6. Will not verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse children.
7. Will not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
8. Will use physical restraint only when necessary to protect the child or others from harm and will report circumstances to the child’s parent or guardian or the staff person responsible for the program.
9. Will release children only to adults authorized by the child’s parent or guardian.
10. Will not possess or use illegal drugs or alcohol or smoke/vape or use tobacco during church programs for children and youth.
11. Will not supervise children or youth in the event judgment and ability is impaired by legally prescribed medication.
12. Will not engage in profanity, inappropriate language or jokes, or any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth or parents.
13. Will not share inappropriate details of their personal life or ask children or youth to share inappropriate details through written, verbal or electronic communication.
14. Will not date youth program participants.

15. Will give gifts only on a group basis or for specific occasions (e.g., baptism, confirmation, birthday, graduation). Giving gifts to individual children or youth should be done only with the knowledge and permission of parents.

Two-Adult Policy

At least two adults, as defined below, should supervise all church-sponsored programs and activities involving children and youth whether on or off campus. Adults should make every reasonable effort to remain in sight of one another at all times except in emergency situations and when circumstances demand otherwise.

One adult in any program for children and youth at NEGAPby must be at least 21 years of age and at least five years older than the oldest program participant. The second adult present in these situations may be 18 years old and a high school graduate. In any one-on-one situation outlined in this policy, the adult must be at least 21 years old.

Adults should make every reasonable effort to avoid being in a one-child, one adult situation. When one-on-one interactions between children and youth and employee/volunteers are necessary (e.g. in emergency situations or occasions of pastoral care or mentoring as described under Specific Situations below), care must be taken to conduct the meeting in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult must have knowledge of the employee/volunteer's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.

With youth in Sunday School, two adults should be present whenever possible. However, one adult may teach 6th grade or above as long as there is more than one youth present in the class. If only one youth is present, the class should combine with another group.

Specific Situations

1. Transportation

Adult leaders should make every reasonable effort to avoid being alone in a vehicle with a child or youth. However, it is permissible for one adult driver to transport several children and youth in a vehicle in a convoy of vehicles traveling to or from an event. If it is necessary for a child to get home after an event and circumstances dictate that a volunteer, staff member, or intern take the child home, an effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child. If the parents cannot be reached, another adult should be made aware of the transportation plans and should be contacted once the child is safely home.

2. Pastoral Care and Mentoring

Sound discretion should be exercised by adult staff and volunteers in one-on-one pastoral care or mentoring situations with children or youth. To avoid the appearance of impropriety, such meetings may take place privately but with others nearby and not isolated from view. Examples include meeting in a public place, meeting with an open or cracked door, or meeting in a room or office with a clear glass window in the door. Under no circumstances should a door be locked when one adult and one child or youth are alone.

3. Bathroom Guidelines

Infants and Toddlers

- Diaper changing must always take place in line of sight of another adult.

Kindergarten and Younger

- No child should be sent to the restroom alone.
- When a group of children goes to the restroom together, two adults will escort the children.
- If only one child needs to go to the restroom, one adult caregiver may escort the child to the restroom after informing another adult. The caregiver will wait outside the door and escort the child back to the group. The adult will call the child's name if he or she is taking longer than seems necessary.
- Generally, an adult should not be alone with a child in a restroom. If, however, this is not possible because a child needs assistance, the caregiver should inform another adult of the assistance needed and provided.
- An adult should never go into a stall with a child and shut the door.
- In any circumstances where the bathroom is isolated from the group, when reasonable and practical two adults should escort a child to the restroom.

Elementary School Children

- When a child in this age group needs to use the restroom, an adult should monitor his or her whereabouts.
- If the restroom is isolated from the group, two same sex children may be sent inside together.

4. Overnight Trips

On overnight trips with children or youth, reasonable boundaries must be in place to respect the privacy of each person. Males and females must sleep in separate rooms. An adult may sleep in a room with two or more youth of the same sex. An adult shall not share a bed with a youth or sleep alone in a room with only one youth.

Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany children or youth on an overnight outing. In addition, two adults who are married to each other should not be the only adult chaperones on any overnight trip.

Section 4: Guidelines for Interacting with Vulnerable Adults

Code of Conduct

NEGAPby expects that all staff and volunteers with vulnerable adults will exemplify Christ's love of people in all that they do and will offer a healthy and positive Christian role model. Employees and volunteers:

1. Will support and promote spiritual and emotional growth and development in their interactions with vulnerable adults.
2. Will exercise sound judgment in maintaining a safe environment at all times.
3. Will be mindful of the power dynamic differential between vulnerable adults and others and give the vulnerable adult the same dignity, respect, and opportunity as given to other adults.
4. Will empower vulnerable adults by encouraging them to make their own decisions and providing opportunities for informed consent.
5. Will respect the rights of vulnerable adults not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or are unwelcome.
6. Will be alert to possible signs of abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult participating in Presbytery programs and immediately report any suspicions to the staff person responsible for the program and/or the appropriate government agency.
7. Will not verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse vulnerable adults.
8. Will not possess or use illegal drugs or alcohol or smoke/vape or use tobacco during church programs for vulnerable adults.
9. Will not supervise or interact with vulnerable adults in the event the staff member's or volunteer's judgment and ability is impaired by legally prescribed medication.
10. Will not engage in profanity, inappropriate language or jokes, or any kind of harassment in the presence of vulnerable adults..
11. Will not share inappropriate details of their personal life or ask vulnerable adults to share inappropriate details through written, verbal or electronic communication.
12. Will promote the well-being of vulnerable adults and take their wishes, views, feelings, and beliefs into account.

Section 5: Screening and Education for Volunteers and Staff

Volunteers and staff will be screened and educated as described below. Results of background checks and self-disclosure statements will be kept strictly confidential.

General Volunteers

General Volunteers include individuals volunteering in situations where there will be two or more adults present in the company of children or youth, such as Sunday School Teachers, Vacation Bible School, nursery volunteers and others. All general volunteers:

1. Will have been regularly attending their home church for at least 6 months before volunteering with children and youth. Exceptions will be granted only by the approval of the assigned Presbytery staff person.
2. Will complete an interview with a program staff person or volunteer designated by a staff person. During this interview, the volunteer may be asked to provide background information and references.
3. Will complete a Child Protection training (Recommended: Darkness to Light Stewards of Children) prior to beginning to work with children or youth.
4. Will acknowledge in writing that they have reviewed, understand, and will comply with the Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and will verify that they have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Department of Family and Child Services or convicted of a crime against children/a vulnerable adult or a violent crime. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how disclosed information will affect the person's ability to volunteer.
5. Will be checked to ensure that he/she is not listed on the sex offender registry. This can be verified for a low cost online or through police.

Overnight and One-on-One Volunteers

Overnight and One-on-One Volunteers include individuals volunteering in a position that may include the following situations: any overnight activity with children/youth (e.g., chaperoning camping trips, ski trips, conferences or retreats) and any potential one-on-one activities with a child/youth (e.g., counseling, tutoring, mentoring). All overnight and one-on-one volunteers:

Will meet all requirements for General Volunteers plus

1. Will agree to a national criminal records check and any other background checks that are deemed necessary by the Presbytery. Background check information will be reviewed by the direct supervisor and a file maintained by the appropriate

Presbytery staff member. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how disclosed information will affect the person's ability to volunteer.

2. Will provide a copy of a valid driver's license

Staff and Interns

Staff and Interns include all current and prospective employees and interns of the Presbytery. Staff and interns:

1. Will meet all requirements for Overnight and One-on-One Volunteers plus
2. Will complete a written application and provide personal references and will verify that they have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Department of Family and Child Services or convicted of a crime against children or a vulnerable adult or a violent crime.

Will agree to a national criminal records check and any other background checks that are deemed necessary by the Presbytery.

Background check information will be reviewed by the direct supervisor and a file maintained by the appropriate Presbytery staff member. The supervising staff person will use his or her best judgment in determining how results of background checks will affect the applicant's/employee's employment or intern's service.

Section 6: Reporting and Responding

Every employee and volunteer of Northeast Georgia Presbytery must report any situation that presents a suspicion that child abuse, abuse of a vulnerable adult, or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult may have occurred. Such report shall be made within 24 hours to a Minister of Word and Sacrament or the Stated Clerk. The party receiving the report will make sure that policy is followed as outlined in this document.

In the event of an allegation of child abuse or vulnerable adult abuse, the following procedures shall be followed by Northeast Georgia Presbytery:

1. Every allegation of abuse shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.
2. The mandatory reporter who has been notified within 24 hours must report allegations of child or vulnerable adult abuse to the police department that has jurisdiction and to DFACS as required or necessary. If the allegation involves a report of abuse by a Presbytery employee or volunteer or on Presbytery property, the Stated Clerk should make a report to the church's liability insurance provider and may wish to consult with an attorney.
3. If a report of child abuse is made, parents will be notified unless parents are the alleged abuser or it would pose a risk to the child to inform the parent. Staff members will use their best judgment in revealing the identity of the alleged abuser to parents.
4. If a report of vulnerable adult abuse is made, the adult's guardian (if applicable) will be notified unless the guardian is the alleged abuser or it would pose a risk to the vulnerable adult to notify the guardian. Staff members will use their best judgment in revealing the identity of the alleged abuser to the guardian.
5. The Minister or Clerk will report the incident to the Presbytery to activate and make available the resources of the Presbytery Sexual Misconduct Pastoral Response Team (SMPRT.)
6. Written documentation relating to the matter shall be kept in a confidential file. The protection of the child or vulnerable adult is of primary importance. The Pastor or Stated Clerk will use his or her best judgment in terminating or suspending accused staff members and in the separating of alleged victim and alleged abuser.
7. All Presbytery employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the Pastor or Stated Clerk. The Pastor/Stated Clerk, 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.

Section 7: Policy Regarding Known Sex Offenders

In accordance with the Reformed tradition and guided by Holy Scripture, the member churches of Northeast Georgia Presbytery affirm the need of all people to come to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We are committed to being a religious community open to all who present themselves to worship here, especially in times of serious personal troubles. Recognizing the reality of more than 800,000 sex offenders currently registered in the United States, and understanding that the majority of these are currently involved in some form of community supervision that often includes faith-based guidance, we assume that registered sex offenders will attend worship or church functions at some point. While affirming that the church is a place of hospitality, we embrace the gospel's mandate to protect "the least of these," particularly children, youth, and any who are at risk. For this reason, the Presbytery establishes the

following policy regarding known sex offenders and their inclusion into the life of the Presbytery. It is the expectation that a registered sex offender will disclose his/her status to a member of the Presbytery staff or a Presbytery program leader prior to attending the Presbytery function.

Section 8: Acceptance and Affirmation

I have reviewed, understand and will comply with the Child-Youth-Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy of Northeast Georgia Presbytery.
_____ (initial)

I have never been the subject of a formal complaint to governmental authorities such as the police or the Department of Family and Child Services or convicted of a crime against children or a vulnerable adult or a violent crime. _____ (initial)

Printed Name

Signature

Date