



# CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

## For Lemoore Presbyterian Church (LPC)

LPC seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices described below, our goal is to protect the children of LPC and young visitors from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

*This policy satisfies the requirements of the Book of Order G-3.0106 and the California BPC 18975.*

### DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” includes all persons under the age of 18 years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

### SELECTION OF WORKERS

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

**a. Six Month Rule**

No applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with children until she/he has been involved with LPC for a minimum of six months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

**b. Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at LPC.

**c. Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for which the individual is applying.

**d. Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicant's references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at LPC.

**e. Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in our school/preschool/day care center, if any;
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;
- Those counseling children;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children; and,
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization

form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, she/he will be unable to work with children.

### **DISQUALIFYING OFFENSE**

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Session of LPC on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at LPC.

### **TWO ADULT RULE**

California Law (Business & Professions Code 18975) requires a minimum of two unrelated adult workers to be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. To the extent possible, both should be mandated reporters. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom must remain open and there must be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. **We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling (one-on-one) situation.**

### **ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS**

Most abuse occurs when an adult is alone with a youth. Such one-on-one interactions between adults and minors should generally be avoided, but are occasionally beneficial for counseling or other ministry.

#### **One-on-one interactions at LPC must always:**

1. Be pre-approved by the program supervisor/director and a parent or guardian.
2. Happen in a public place in full view of others.
3. Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.
4. Leave doors open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
5. Keep other Clergy, employees, and volunteers informed that you are alone with a youth and encourage those adults to randomly drop in.
6. Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

### **RATIOS**

The adult/child ratio for all child-related activities is 2:10. The adult to youth ratio for all youth-related events/activities is 2:17. Only in emergency situations may the ratios be compromised. Ideally, there shall also be one adult of each gender when there is one or more Minors of each gender in a group.

## TOUCH/CONTACT AND COMMUNICATION

All workers will follow these guidelines for communication and touch/contact with children:

- Touch—**Infants** need to be patted, held, rocked, and hugged. **Toddlers and Preschoolers** also need to be hugged or held from time to time.
- **School-age children and teens** sometimes need a caring, affirming touch from an adult. Care should be taken with this age group to avoid any contact that could be misinterpreted. Always ask permission first (e.g., “Do you need a hug?” “How about a high five?!”).
  - **ALLOWED:** side hugs, high-fives, and pats on the shoulder.
  - **NOT ALLOWED:** lap-sitting, lengthy hugs, massages, or tickling.
- Verbal Interactions shall not include harsh, coercive, or sexual language.
- One-on-one meetings should take place in open spaces and with parental notification.
- Social Media: no private messaging; parents must be informed of communication.
- Gift Giving: only with administrative and parental approval.

## RECOGNIZING POTENTIAL ABUSE

The following physical and behavioral indicators are listed signs of possible child abuse for you to consider (it is not all-inclusive, nor is it always a firm indicator of abuse). The indicators need to be evaluated in the context of the child’s environment. The presence of one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily prove abuse.

PHYSICAL INDICATORS	
Unusual or unexplained burns, bruises or fractures	Irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
Venereal disease	Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress
Substance abuse	Discomfort when sitting

BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS	
Extreme aggression	Fear of a person or intense dislike of being with someone
Withdrawal	Developmental or language delays
Unusually seductive behavior	Regressive behavior (acting much younger than they are)
Being uncomfortable with physical contact or closeness	Recurrent nightmares
Knowledge of sexual matters beyond developmental age	Acting apathetic or depressed
Afraid to go home	Compulsive overeating or extreme loss of appetite

## **REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE**

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. **In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at LPC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, he/she must immediately report it to the pastor and/or Session of LPC for further action,** including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

**In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at LPC or during our sponsored programs or activities, the procedure below shall be followed:**

1. The victim will be heard with compassion and their trustworthiness will not be questioned.
2. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
3. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse of misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
4. Civil authorities will be notified, and LPC will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. LPC will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
5. The company insuring LPC will be notified, and one or more church representatives will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The Clerk of Session will be the spokesperson for LPC to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church must refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. If the pastor is the accused, a Deacon will offer to visit instead.
8. Any person who is found guilty of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## **OPEN DOOR POLICY**

Classroom doors must remain open unless there is a window in the door or a window beside the door that affords a good view of the space. Doors are never to be locked while the room is occupied.

## **TEENAGE WORKERS**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14;
- Must be screened as specified previously;
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

## **CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT PROCEDURE**

For children below Third grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a “child check” for the child (similar to a claim check). The parent or guardian must present the “child check” in order to sign the child out from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the “child check,” a staff member responsible for this ministry will be contacted. The staff member will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

## **SICK CHILD POLICY**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all the children at LPC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted and requested to pick up the child for the day.

## **MEDICATIONS POLICY**

It is the policy of LPC NOT to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the childcare worker and his/her supervisor to develop a plan of action.

## **DISCIPLINE POLICY**

It is the policy of LPC **NOT** to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with their supervisor, the Pastor, or an Elder on Session if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## **RESTROOM GUIDELINES**

Children aged five years and younger should use a classroom restroom if one is available. If a classroom restroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway restroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the restroom alone.

The workers should check the restroom first to make sure that it is unoccupied, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the restroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, a worker should open the restroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, workers should prop open the restroom door and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over age five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the restroom first to make sure that it is unoccupied; then, allow the children inside. The worker should remain outside the restroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a restroom with the door closed and never be in a closed restroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the restroom prior to each class.

## **ACCIDENTAL INJURIES TO CHILDREN**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under the church's care, the steps below will be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

## **TRAINING**

LPC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers or anyone who comes into contact with children and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

## DEFINITIONS

The following is a comprehensive list of definitions of terms and their intended use in this particular Policy. For the purpose of this Policy:

**Child:** A child is defined as a person between the ages of 0–11.

**Youth:** A youth is defined as a person between the ages of 12–17.

**Minor:** A minor is defined as any child or youth 0–17 years-old.

**Child/Youth Worker:** Any person, volunteer or paid staff or contractor, who participates at any level at church sponsored events or activities involving children and/or youth. This includes chaperones who accompany minors to and during meetings, events, and activities covered by this Policy.

**Vulnerable Adult:** Any person eighteen-years-old or older without the developmental or cognitive capacity to consent.

**Vulnerable Adult Abuse:** Any act or failure to act that results in physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult.

**Child/Youth Abuse:** Any act or failure to act that results in physical abuse, neglect, and or sexual molestation or abuse, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, or exploitation of a child or youth.

**Sexual Abuse:** In the Book of Order, sexual abuse is defined as, “Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position” (Book of Order, D-10.0401c).

**Misuse of Technology:** The use of technology that results in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages and images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography on church property. When pornography includes a person under the age of eighteen, it is considered child abuse. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by a church or church entity or within the context of ministry.

**Sexual Misconduct:** Sexual misconduct is the comprehensive term used in this policy to include:

**Child Sexual Abuse:** 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 person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the sexual abuse definition of a child is anyone under age eighteen.

**Sexual Abuse:** as defined in the Book of Order: “Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position” (Book of Order, D-10.0401c).

**Sexual Harassment:** unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an

- individual's employment, or their continued status in an institution;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such an individual;
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment; or
- An individual is subjected to unwelcome sexual jokes, unwelcome or inappropriate touching, or display of sexual visuals that insult, degrade, and/or sexually exploit men, women, or children.

**Rape** or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation.

**Sexual Conduct** is offensive, obsessive, or suggestive language or behavior, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome touching or fondling that is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another.

**Sexual Malfeasance** is defined by the broken trust resulting from sexual activities within a professional ministerial relationship that results in misuse of office or position arising from the professional ministerial relationship.

**Misuse of Technology.** No clergy, employee, officer, or volunteer shall misuse technology in the following ways:

- Using technology to send suggestive messages and/or images to a minor.
- Having contacts by misuse of technology to contact a minor or vulnerable adult that is not pre-approved by the minor's or vulnerable adult's legal guardian with a signed waiver, unless the contact is on an open public medium, such as a church website or church or social media program.
- To view pornography or sites (ex. dating websites) that include pornography or naked bodies on church property or property where children or youth ministry events, gatherings or activities are being held.