
Child Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy

Approved by:
NewCity Session

Largely adapted from:
McLean Presbyterian Church's Child Abuse Prevention Policy (CAPP)

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NewCity Church (“NewCity”) is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for every child involved in any program or function conducted by the church. This is essential both to prevent abuse of our children and to ensure that everything we do better enables our children to receive the gospel message and the teachings of God’s Word.

Our church understands that sin is real and that we live in a fallen world where someone may try to infiltrate our congregation with intentions to abuse the same children we are loving and teaching. It is with this sad, but real, understanding that this policy is adopted by the Session for implementation throughout the ministries and activities of the church to include all individuals (members and nonmembers) who have contact with children or youth from birth to 18 years old. NewCity is committed to safeguarding all children, and particularly vulnerable individuals, from abuse of any kind as well as protecting all members, volunteers, and staff from any allegations made against them.

I. CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

A. Screening Requirements

All participants (staff, volunteers [members and nonmembers], and hired helpers) must read and sign an agreement to uphold and comply with the NewCity Church Child Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy. All NewCity staff and Nursery, Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, and Family Advocacy Ministry volunteers and hired helpers are required to complete Nationwide Criminal Databases and Sex Offender Registry Checks.

Background checks shall be updated every 60 months per federal recommendations (or more frequently up to the discretion of ministry directors). All participants are required to immediately self-report any criminal behavior or accusations of criminal misconduct to his/her supervisor or ministry director if it occurs. Any information gained from background checks indicating there may be a problem in allowing an individual to work with children or youth will be referred to the ministry director for further review and determination of the individual's acceptance or rejection as a volunteer. Further, any member of the NewCity pastoral and church staff, or any ruling elder, having personal knowledge of an applicant may recommend the individual's application be rejected if they believe the applicant is not equipped or suitable to work with children or youth.

No one will be allowed to engage in any children or youth volunteering or work at NewCity prior to the satisfactory completion of these screening procedures.

B. Preventive Measures

These measures are adopted (1) to preclude the possibility of child abuse in the ministry settings at NewCity; (2) to avoid situations that could lead to allegations of abuse; and (3) to assist the church in responding to any such allegations.

SIX-MONTH POLICY

All volunteers who work with children or youth must have regularly attended NewCity for at least six months.

Exceptions:

Those involved in administrative or support tasks in the children or youth ministry ministries, where there is no direct contact with children or youth.

Those who have not been attending NewCity for at least six months, but are granted special exception by the ministry director with the justification submitted to the Session. References and background checks are still required.

TWO-ADULT POLICY

At least two adults must be present during all activities.

Exceptions:

One adult may teach or supervise children or youth in activities conducted where others can readily observe; i.e., in rooms in the same hallway where there are either windows in the doors or the doors are left open. There must be line of sight into the rooms from the hallway. When additional supervisory personnel are present, they will perform spot checks of all activities.

One adult may take children to the restroom, but will remain outside in the hallway while the children are in the restroom. If adult assistance is required in the restroom, the door must remain ajar and line of sight must be maintained into the restroom area.

MONITORING OF ACTIVITIES

All activities shall be conducted in areas open to observation. Window blinds must be kept open and classroom doors must remain unlocked. Periodic, unannounced visits will be routinely made by supervisory personnel when activities or classes are held on church property.

Staff members making one-on-one visits away from the church property for children and youth must be conducted in public places and always with written and documented consent (email or texts) of the child's parent or legal guardian. Staff will log such visits, which shall be made available to the Session at request, including the time, location, and purpose of the visit. These records will be maintained indefinitely.

STANDARDS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers and leaders will normally seek to establish personal relationships with those whom they teach and lead. Physical contact is one part of normal communication in such relationships. Thus, for instance, a hug or the placing of a hand on one's arm or shoulder is normally acceptable. However, any touching in intimate areas is never acceptable, nor is unwelcome touching or any touching which makes a child or youth uncomfortable.

Physical contact shall be age-appropriate. We recognize that holding/carrying is basic to the care of infants and small children. The care of infants requires diapering, which means exposing and cleaning private areas. This is acceptable so long as it is done with the intention to clean and not to abuse. Additionally, diaper changes must be performed only in the designated changing area in the Nursery and in the presence of other volunteers; parental verbal consent must be received prior to diaper changes.

Children must sometimes be physically restrained from hurting themselves or others. However, when more than brief restraint is needed, a parent or guardian shall be brought into the situation. Children of any age may not be spanked or struck in any way by a staff member, hired helper, or volunteer.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

This written policy, signs for detecting possible abuse, and responsibilities for reporting abuse will be provided via in-person or virtual training to all individuals at the beginning of their service and at least once per year thereafter. There will be mandatory annual training for all NewCity children and youth staff on child abuse prevention with acknowledgment of completion. This training will be planned and implemented by NewCity Children's Ministry.

C. ADJUNCT MINISTRY AREAS

FAMILY GROUPS & CHURCH WIDE EVENTS

Due to the diverse nature of how and when each Family Group meets and operates with the addition of parents being present, this policy shall not apply to the Family Group ministry. Child supervision during Family Group meetings will be the responsibility of parents; any childcare arrangement during Family Group meetings will be up to the discretion of the Family Group leaders.

It is still recommended by this policy that children requiring supervision during Family Group meetings have at least two adults present at all times; children under the age of 12 should not be unsupervised nor left under the care of older children. It is also recommended that Family Groups should operate under all child abuse preventive measures as outlined in Section I-B, including clear lines of sight, restroom policies, and standards for relationships.

This policy will also not apply to church wide events, informal gatherings, meetings in homes, and other fellowship opportunities that fall outside of the scope of official Children's or Student Ministry events.

FAMILY ADVOCACY MINISTRY

All volunteers for the Family Advocacy Ministry must be screened as outlined in Section I-A and should operate under all child abuse preventive measures as outlined in Section I-B, including clear lines of sight, restroom policies, and standards for relationships.

D. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

MANDATORY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

As required by Virginia law (Section § 63.2-1509) whenever any NewCity staff member, hired helper, or volunteer has “reason to suspect” that a child has been abused or neglected, he or she shall immediately report such abuse or neglect to the Child Protective Services Department of the county or city where the child’s family resides, or to the Virginia Child Protective Services. Individuals are to report any suspicions or concerns promptly.

Virginia Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline: (800) 552-7096

Fairfax County Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline: (703) 324-7400

Montgomery County Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: (240) 777-3500

ADDITIONAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Whenever any NewCity staff, member, hired helper, or volunteer has reason to suspect child abuse or neglect, in addition to the report described above, he or she shall also report the suspected abuse or neglect immediately to a pastor or ministry director, specifically:

- Reports heard from others, including children or youth, that a child may have been abused
- Any incident involving children under his or her care when it is possible that a child or youth may reasonably believe they were abused by a staff person, hired helper, or volunteer, for whatever reason (i.e., accidental improper touching, injuries received in the course of games or other group activities)
- Any other facts that in the view of the staff member, hired helper, or volunteer, might indicate possible child abuse or neglect.

Whenever a pastor or ministry director receives a report, it shall be escalated to the Session who will investigate the situation and prepare a written report, which shall be retained indefinitely.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS

When an allegation has been made against any NewCity staff, member, hired helper, or volunteer, it shall be promptly escalated to the Session who will investigate the situation following the outlined process:

1. The Session shall gather evidence interviewing relevant parties and prepare a written report, which shall be retained indefinitely. Detailed records must be maintained in a secure and confidential manner and must include the date, time, and nature of the allegation.
 2. The Session shall ensure that individuals who report abuse allegations will be protected from retaliation or victimization. Any form of retaliation against reporters shall not be tolerated.
 3. The Session shall involve appropriate authorities such as law enforcement and child protection agencies. Reporting abuse allegations to these authorities shall supersede internal reporting protocols.
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4. The Session shall maintain transparency throughout the process, keeping the congregation informed of any developments, while maintaining confidentiality and respecting the privacy of those involved, including the identity of the reporter.
 5. The Session shall hold individuals accountable for their actions and ensure that appropriate disciplinary measures are taken if abuse is substantiated.
 6. The pastoral staff shall provide support to both the victim and the accused, recognizing the sensitive nature of the situation and the potential impact on all involved parties. The pastoral staff shall also provide access to counseling services and support networks.
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II. FOOD SAFETY

A. Food Allergies

Every effort will be made to protect the health of children with food allergies. All snacks and refreshments offered to children during class times and children's events shall be tree-nut and peanut free. While NewCity is not a nut-free facility we will do our reasonable best to adhere to nut-free products during churchwide events. Children are welcome to bring their own food during eating or refreshment times; families with severe food allergies will be encouraged to do so. Food shall not be shared between children.

This portion of the policy regarding other major allergens will be reviewed and updated as needed and annually at minimum.

B. Toddler Choking Hazards

Food choking hazards such as hard fruits or vegetables, popcorn, or pretzels will not be allowed in the Nursery. The Nursery shall only serve toddler-safe snacks such as toddler puffs, Goldfish, or Cheerios. Families with toddlers are encouraged to bring their own snacks, which will be served with the verbal consent of a parent or guardian. Food shall not be shared between children.

C. Food Handling and Preparation

All staff members or volunteers must wash their hands with soap and water prior to handling or preparing food for children. All work surfaces, equipment, plates, and serving utensils must be clean prior to use. Perishables shall not be out at room temperature for more than two hours or more than one hour if the temperature is above 90° F. Reasonable effort shall be made to reduce the touching of foods prior to serving. While gloves are strongly recommended when serving food, they are not required if the server has properly performed handwashing.

III. TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

NewCity shall not provide routine transportation traveling to and from NewCity Church. However, NewCity recognizes that special circumstances arise where children and youth may need to be transported to and from NewCity worship services and/or other NewCity activities and events. NewCity *may* provide temporary transportation for outings and field trips or for students who fall under special categories.

A. Outings and Field Trips

NewCity staff and volunteers who have undergone formal background checks may provide ground transportation by personal vehicle for outings, field trips, and extracurricular events with a distance of 20 miles or greater. Travel and gas expenses shall not be paid by the transporter; fees should be absorbed by ministry operating budgets.

All children and youth requiring transportation by a staff member or volunteer must have parent/guardian written consent indicated on the Annual Registration Form. Standards for Relationships outlined in Section 1-B shall still apply and, if and when possible, two adults shall be present in the vehicle.

B. Special Circumstances

NewCity staff and volunteers may also provide temporary transportation to and from NewCity Church for the following reasons:

- The student's parent or guardian is not a member or attendee of NewCity and the student has no other reasonable means of transportation. Additionally, the student is under driving age, ineligible for a driver's license, and/or has no other reasonable access to a vehicle or mode of transportation.
- The student's parent or guardian has a prior existing relationship or history of friendship with the NewCity personnel providing transportation, outside of NewCity Church, that would serve as a reasonable request for transportation.

These circumstances shall be temporary and every effort must be made to propose a permanent transportation solution. Additionally, all children and youth requiring transportation by a staff member or volunteer must still have parent/guardian written consent indicated on the Annual Registration Form. Standards for Relationships outlined in Section 1-B shall still apply and if and when possible two adults shall be present in the vehicle.

C. Transportation Safety Standards

GENERAL STANDARDS

Only NewCity personnel with a valid driver's license may operate a private vehicle for transporting students. Drivers should not provide transportation in adverse weather and road conditions. Drivers should practice defensive driving by anticipating and observing the actions of other drivers and controlling the vehicle in a manner so as to avoid accidents. Eating food, operating an electronic device, or being under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or other substances are strictly prohibited while operating a state vehicle. Drivers must observe all Virginia motor vehicle laws.

PRIVATE VEHICLES

Seatbelts must be used by all occupants in accordance with state law. Occupants are not allowed to ride in any part of the vehicle not specifically intended for passenger use and/or any seat that does not include a working seatbelt. Any vehicle that has a capacity of 8 or fewer passengers used to transport students must have any child under the age of 7 use an appropriate child safety seat or booster seat. Child safety seats and booster seats must:

- Meet the specifications outlined by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).
- Be secured to the seat using a seatbelt or anchorage that meets NHTSA standards.
- Not be under a recall.
- Have all parts intact and in working order.

While there are no height/weight requirements in the state of Virginia, it is recommended that students should be properly restrained in the backseat if and when possible, regardless of age or the presence of an airbag.

PASSENGER VANS AND OTHER NON-PRIVATE VEHICLES

Passenger vans and other non-private vehicles such as a school bus, shuttle bus, or coach bus are currently not in use for NewCity activities and events. However, passenger vans and other non-private vehicles may be used for ground transportation for groups of 15 passengers or more should the need arise. Proper vehicle specific restraints must be used for all passengers and, specifically, child safety restraint systems must be used for children under 7.

IV. POLICY ENFORCEMENT

The nursery, children, and youth directors will be responsible for administering and enforcing this policy. All ministry areas that have volunteers working with children and youth must provide NewCity with an ongoing current list of all workers.

The nursery, children and youth directors will file all reports for the Session each year. These reports will provide the names of those who have received training under this policy, suggested revisions to the policy, and a description of all incidents and actions taken relating to this policy. Incidents and actions taken regarding hired helpers or volunteers will be reported to the Session. The Session will also be made aware of any concerns that have arisen in applying the policy.

All child abuse prevention records and documents for volunteers, hired helpers, and staff will be maintained in NewCity's Google Suite drive by the respective ministry director.

The Session will conduct an annual evaluation of compliance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy.

CHILD AND YOUTH WORKER STATEMENT

I, _____, have read the NewCity Child Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy and understand the duties and responsibilities that it requires of me. I will abide by its provisions, and will conduct myself in a way that is pleasing to God and helpful to those under my care at all times.

In addition, I will report any suspected child abuse or neglect which I observe or which is brought to my attention to the appropriate authorities and to NewCity's leadership as required by the NewCity Child Abuse Prevention and Safety Policy. And I will immediately self-report to a ministry director or pastor any criminal misconduct (child abuse or other), allegations of suspected child-abuse or criminal charges brought against me from this date forward until the end of my service at NewCity.

In all cases, I will do my best to love, guard, and protect those children entrusted to my care and to provide an atmosphere of love and protection so as to nurture them in the manner that Christ admonishes us to in the Scripture.

Signature of Worker

Signature of Ministry Director/Witness

Date

Date

Printed Name

Printed Name
