



PROTECTION POLICY AND BEST PRACTICES





Opening

- Theological rationale
- Scriptural mandates and social principals

Prayer

Overview of Your Protection Policy



Your Local Congregation's Policy

Each local congregation's protection policy and guidelines are slightly different. Take a moment and review the main points of your church's policy. Your volunteers should be able to access this policy whenever they are serving in your congregation's ministries.

Key Definitions

CHILD/YOUTH

An individual who is under the age of 18

VULNERABLE ADULT

An individual who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap, requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently

ABUSE

Harm or threatened harm to an individual's health, financial or welfare through physical abuse, bullying, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, maltreatment, and/or sexual harassment.

NEGLECT

Failure to act as a reasonably prudent person would do in the same or similar circumstance. It can include failing to prevent an act of abuse, negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from abuse, placing a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in unreasonable risk.

ELDER ABUSE

Refers to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult. May include physical, sexual, emotional, financial/material, neglect, or abandonment.

Best Practices



Proper Supervision

Eligible Volunteers

- Adults and youth who are at least five years older than the oldest child
- Active in the congregation for at least six months.
- Complete all required paperwork and pass background check with no convictions involving abuse, neglect, or children



Rule of 2 and/or Rule of 3

- Rule of 2 is that there are always two adults or qualified volunteers at all times.
- Rule of 3 is that there are at least three people in a space. This could be two qualified volunteers or one qualified volunteer and two children.



Check-In/Out Policy

Registration

Each child/youth/vulnerable adult should have on file and/or provide the child's name, the emergency contact adult's name and phone number, and any allergies and behavioral concerns, as needed, for each event. This includes events like Sunday School that occur weekly.

Media Release

Ideally, each child should also have a signed media release on file with additional adult contact information including address and email information.

Food Allergies

During the check in process be mindful of sharing with parents and guardians the times you may be engaging in activities (like communion or snack time) when food allergies may be a concern.





Transportation

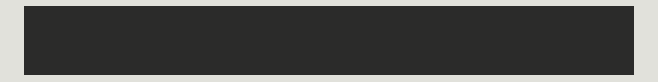
- The same supervision rules apply when transporting children/youth in a vehicle.
- Drivers should be at least 21 years old. Drivers should have a driving background check before being permitted to drive children/youth from one place to another. Drivers should also be able to provide proof of insurance. (Make sure this information is the same as your policy or your churches insurance requirements.)
- Children/youth should have a permission form on file giving permission from a parent/guardian for their child to ride with someone else.

Overnights

- Youth & adults in separate rooms
- Assign roommates based on similar age and maturity
- At least two youth in each room
- Adult rooms scattered between youth rooms (if possible)
- Communicate openly with all youth and their parents/guardians in advance of the travel and accommodation arrangements becoming finalized.
- Whenever possible, consult students on where they would like to room before finalizing overnight accommodations.
- Establish a schedule, curfew, and conduct bed checks with adults visiting the rooms in pairs



Good Touch and Bad Touch



- Touch should always be initiated by the child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- Good (or welcome) touch is meant to affirm, support, care for or help make someone feel good about themselves (hug, handshake, fist bump, high five, etc.)
- Bad (or unwelcome) touch may make one feel uncomfortable, violated, disregarded, or harmed.
- Criteria for touching
 1. Location (head, shoulders, stop! Bathing suit areas are the no go zone)
 2. Duration
 3. Relationship
 4. Who initiates?
 5. Cultural heritage
 6. Age of Child (holding an infant or toddler on a lap to comfort or read is acceptable, allowing an elementary school child or youth to sit on an adult's lap is not acceptable)

Risks and Rewards

- Consider the risks and rewards of activities.
Consider the following factors:
 - Safety
 - Trust in the participants
 - How controlled the environment is
 - Who will ultimately be held responsible if someone is hurt?





Restrooms

- Infant/Toddler in diapers
 - Diapering should be done in the nursery or designated diapering space by a parent/guardian, staff member, or regular volunteer out in the open where others are present.
- Toddler Potty Training
 - Allow child to do as much on own as possible. Assist if needed making sure there is another adult present who knows that volunteer is assisting young child.
 - If an accident happens, try to get the parent/guardian. If not available, regular volunteer or staff can change if there is paperwork on file giving permission for another person to change the child. It is best if you can have another volunteer within hearing distance who is aware of what is happening.
- Children who are potty-trained
 - Same gender volunteer takes student(s) to bathroom
 - Check bathroom before child(ren) enters to be sure it is empty
 - Wait outside bathroom for child(ren)
 - Escorts child(ren) back to classroom

Ministry with Children



Ministry with Children

Behavior is Communication

- Children who are hungry, angry, tired, or lonely may “act out.” Try to figure out what is going on and meet those needs if possible.
 - Please note, many of our children have missed some critical life and behavioral skills during the time of isolation in the 2020/2021 school years. Do not assume that children are being “naughty.” Children are still struggling to catch up to the previous generations in areas of emotional and social development.



Positive Discipline

- Try not to just say “No!” Tell the child what behavior is expected. (Ex. Instead of saying, “Don’t stand in your seat!” respond by saying, “Chairs are for sitting, not standing. Please show me how you can sit in the chair.”)
- Catch kids when they are showing good character (ex. “Thanks for sharing and allowing others to play with your toy.”)
- Focus on building character and skills
- Redirect, redirect, redirect!



Ministry with Children

Take Wiggle Breaks

- Keep in mind that children have shorter attention spans and tolerances to certain activities. You are not a failure if students are struggling to listen, but it may mean that they need a break.



Adjust When Needed

- Discuss with your team or pastor what the expectations are for your ministry setting. While it is ideal to get through the lesson, if your vision is to connect children to God, it may be more in keeping with your church's vision to adjust and play a game instead of finishing the lesson.



Ministry with Children

Expectations

Clearly establish your expectations for the classroom. Keep any rules simple and easy to follow. Tell the students what you want them to do, rather than what they should not do. (ex. “Don’t hit your neighbor” versus “We keep our hands and feet to ourselves.”)

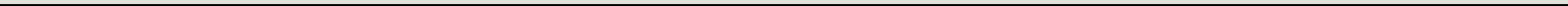


Healthy Boundaries

Setting healthy boundaries (rules) with kids is helpful in the ministry setting. Encourage older kids to help create the expectations. Keep them simple. Learn about the expectations for the local elementary school and use them in your ministry setting. For example: Be responsible, respectful, kind and safe.



Ministry with Youth



Ministry with Youth

One on One

One on one conversations with youth may need to happen. Find a quiet and public space. This is especially true in mentoring situations



Confidentiality

You may need to walk the line with youth between confidentiality and keeping minors safe. Do not make promises of confidentiality, because you may not be able to keep those promises. Instead, assure youth that you will not disclose their information unless you are required to do so.



Ministry with Youth

Communication

Work on creating healthy boundaries and guidelines in regard to communicating with youth via texting, email or social media. Direct communication between a youth and adult should not occur. Group texts, email groups and public means of communication should be used. Should no other options exist, you should always include or copy another leader in any direct contact with youth.

Cultural Changes

Be aware of the current trends and influences on youth in today's culture such as, cyber-bullying, sexting, social media, bullying, and hazing. If you have a covenant of conduct for youth events, be sure it includes internet and communication safety guidelines.



Ministry with Students and Adults with Special Needs



Ministry with Special Needs

Communication

Have open communication with parents and individuals about how to care well and nurture their faith



Consistency and Routine

Consistency and routine are important. If the routine needs to change communicate that as early as possible and reinforce this communication with a classroom or event schedule created with their cognitive skills in mind.

Ministry with Special Needs

Coordination with Parents

Parents are great resources and advocates for learning more about their student or adult child. Do not hesitate to ask appropriate questions regarding safety, behavioral concerns, and the best forms of communication.



Coordination with Specialists

Reach out to professionals in your area (for example, a school social worker) to lead a training about working with children with special needs if that may be helpful.



Ministry with the Elderly



Ministry with the Elderly

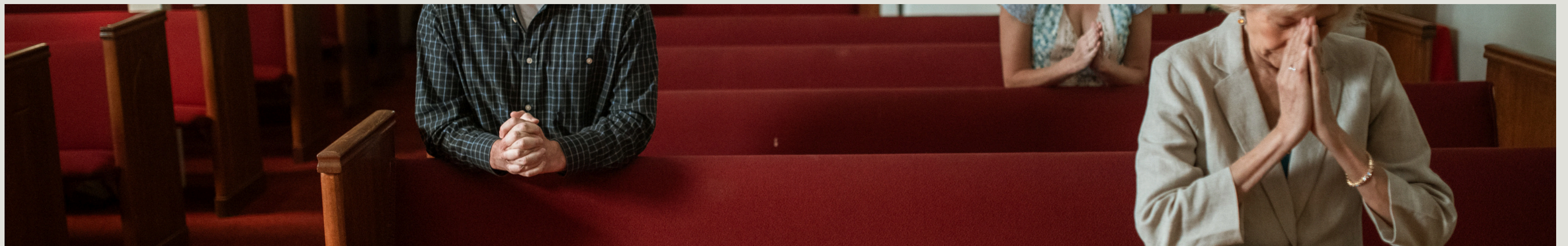
Two Person Rule

Maintain the two-person rule (This is especially true if you are going to be doing a home visit with a single elderly adult. If a caregiver will be present, that meets the requirement.)

Maintain Boundaries

Maintain boundaries, awareness of their cognitive needs, and their comfort level with any touching.

- A person in cognitive decline may not consistently maintain the same level of awareness of their surroundings. When you reach out to touch their arm, they may panic thinking someone is trying to hold them down.
- Adjust your ministry practices in keeping to what maintains their comfort level in each moment. Just because it was fine during your last visit does not mean that it will be same each time.



Small Church/Rural Church

- Due to lack of willing volunteers or financial restraints, it may be challenging to comply with all the best practices/guidelines. It is important to have proactive conversations with your church's governing board about how to "open up" ministry areas so that these spaces can always be visible. For example, it may mean creating modified half-doors in the nursery or children's room(s) or installing a window in doors for visual access.
- It is also important to have conversations about who will be floating if you are using the rule of 3 (with one approved adult in the room with at least 2 children) and who will be in the room at the end of worship to ensure the volunteer is not left with one child.



Reporting



- Child or Youth – contact DHS (oral & written report or on-line report; 855.444.3911 or <https://newmibridges.michigan.gov/>)
- Adult or Elder – contact Adult Protective Services (855-444-3911)

CLOSING PRAYER

