

Child Protection Policy at Westmont Presbyterian Church (3/24/2025)

Westmont Presbyterian Church believes we are entrusted to care for all the children of God. We must work hard to make our church a safe place for adults and children. It is our goal in this policy to make Westmont Presbyterian Church a safer place by:

1. Safeguarding our children and youth from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior from adults.
2. Protecting church staff and volunteer workers from allegations of misconduct, inappropriate behavior or sexual abuse.
3. Limiting the extent of our legal risk and liability.

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I. Background

A. The Law

Protecting children (persons under the age of 18) from abuse and neglect is a shared responsibility. We are called by God to create a safe haven for all of the children, youth and persons with disabilities in our care. The session and church are committed to doing not only what is required by law but also answer our call as Christ's followers to reduce the risk to people in our care. PA has adopted laws that place specific requirements on church employees and volunteers who work with children. It is reflected in part in the Act entitled Domestic Relations Code 23, HB 431. These laws impact reporting, investigation, assessment, prosecution and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

B. What is child abuse?

Child abuse, as it pertains to this Policy and PA State Law, means intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:

- Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse even if there is no resulting injury or condition. These recent (within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine) acts include any of the following:

- Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
- Forcefully shaking a child.
- Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child.
- Interfering with the breathing of a child.

II. Mandated Reporters, Permissive Reporters, Volunteers

A. Mandated Reporters

At Westmont Presbyterian Church, the following are considered mandated reporters:

a. Pastors

b. Employees who have direct contact with children

c. Volunteers working with children are determined to be mandated reporters. Session will use the following definition of mandated volunteers from the 2015 document of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to make this determination: *An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an **integral** part of a **regularly** scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child. Is considered a mandated reporter.*

B. Permissive Reporters

Permissive reporters are individuals who are **encouraged** to report suspected child abuse, although not required by law. Anyone acting on behalf of Westmont Presbyterian Church who suspects a child is a victim of abuse should make a report to ChildLine. A permissive reporter does not have to know for sure that the child was abused. They can make a report when they suspect a child is a victim of abuse.

C. Volunteers

A volunteer is any person who participates in a Westmont Presbyterian Church-related activity and who is not compensated for participation.

III. Requirements

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

A. Who Needs Clearances

1. Pastors and Employees
2. Volunteers

- Those responsible for the welfare of a child in lieu of or on behalf of the parent.
- Those who have direct contact with children and youth because they provide care, supervision, guidance or control of children and youth or have routine interaction with them.
- Those whose contact is regular and integral to the volunteer responsibilities.

IV. Clearances

The Christian Education Department overseeing children and youth activities is responsible for ensuring all forms and clearances have been obtained for employees and for volunteers working with children and youth. These forms must be on file two weeks in advance of events. All costs for clearances will be absorbed by Westmont Presbyterian Church.

1. Process for Obtaining Clearances

All people required to have clearances will complete and submit the following:

- A.** Those required to have clearances may bring an original clearance, listed above, or obtained from another organization to the church office to be copied by the pastor or the church administrator for filing. It may not be more than 3 years old.
- B.** Those who do not have clearances can follow the process below to obtain them. Please note that if you are not obtaining these forms over the internet and choose to obtain them on your own by submitting forms via

the U.S. Postal service, it could take 6 weeks or more to receive them.

- C. PA State Police Criminal History Record. This clearance form can be worked on at home on the internet or by making arrangements with the Christian Education Department to complete the work in the church office. The record will be kept confidential in the office and copies made available to the signer upon request.

<https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp>

- D. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance. This clearance form can be worked on at home on the internet or by making arrangements with the Christian Education Department to complete the work in the church office. The record will be kept confidential in the office and copies made available to the signer upon request.

<https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>

- E. FBI Background Check and Fingerprinting

This is required for employees (see III.C). The investigation is conducted by Cogent (fingerprinting database). Westmont Presbyterian Church will provide logistical support for individuals to complete this on their own. The site reference is as follows: <http://www.pa.cogentid.com/index.htm>

2. Subsequent Arrest or Convictions

Any worker (paid or unpaid) subject to the above requirements who is arrested for, or convicted of, an offense that would constitute grounds for denying working with children or is named as a perpetrator in the state child abuse database, shall provide written notice to the Pastor(s) and Clerk of Session with 72 hours.

V. Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Under no circumstances may two volunteers who are minors be placed in supervisory role with children and youth. Programs or activities with only one student in attendance must have two adults present or the program/activity will be canceled or rescheduled.

VI. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Westmont Presbyterian Church (Mandated Reporter or Permissive Reporter) becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, the individual must:

1. Make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313.
2. A mandated reporter making an oral report of suspected child abuse shall also make a written report to ChildLine, which may be submitted electronically, within 48 hours.
3. The worker should then report the suspected abuse to the Pastor. If the Pastor is not available or is allegedly involved, a report should be made to the Clerk of Session.

If an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Westmont Presbyterian Church or during any of its sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed in addition to above: 1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.

2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from work with children, pending an investigation, and also instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and Westmont Presbyterian Church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
4. Westmont Presbyterian Church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
5. Our insurance company will be notified. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The pastor(s) and/or the Clerk of Session will notify the Presbytery of Redstone immediately through either the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery or the Executive Presbyter.
7. The Westmont Presbyterian Church pastor(s) or Clerk of Session will be our spokesperson 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 should refrain from speaking to the media.

8. Pastoral visitation and resources for counseling will be arranged for those who desire it.
9. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

VII. Good Practices with Children

- A. **Open Door:** Rooms should remain open, if possible, when children are in them, unless there are windows on the doors.
- B. **Check-in/Check-out Procedure:** Workers should escort the children and youth to agreed-upon places for dismissal to parents or guardians. Under no circumstances are children or youth permitted to leave the Westmont Presbyterian Church properties without clear permission from parents or guardians.
 - **Birth-Preschool:**
 - o Children brought to nursery must be checked in by the parent or guardian and provide any special instructions and care items needed. Parents' name and contact info need given.
 - o At check out, the child must be picked up by an adult family member.
 - **5-18:**
 - o Attendance will be taken once in the Sunday school classrooms
 - o Children will be picked up in the Fellowship Hall after service
- C. **Sick Child:** Parents and Guardians are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to send your child or youth to a church function. Generally, children with the following symptoms should not be dropped off for events or activities:
 - Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
 - Green or yellow runny nose
 - Eye or skin infections
 - Other infectious diseases
- D. **Medication:** It is the policy of Westmont Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy (Section C above). 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 pastor(s) and youth leader to develop a plan of action.
- E. **Discipline:** Westmont Presbyterian Church will never administer corporal punishment. There will be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. There may be times when children or youth must be separated from other children. When a child misbehaves, an adult may use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If misbehavior continues, the child's parent or guardian is to be notified at pick-up of the misbehavior.
- F. **Transportation:** The Two Adult Rule applies here as children are transported in private vehicles. Every effort will be made to comply with this, and parents will be notified if this is impossible. All drivers must be licensed and insured.
- G. **Off-site & Overnight Activities:** Most off-site or overnight activities will require a consent form and medical release form to be filled out by parents. The form will include emergency call numbers, medications, medical issues, and insurance information.
- H. **Restroom Guideline:** Normally workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child into the bathroom alone.
- I. **Injuries to Children:** For minor injuries to children or youth while under Westmont Presbyterian Church's care, we will provide Band-Aids, ice, etc. Parents will be notified immediately if the injury is more serious and may require further medical attention. Once the child or youth has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report form will be completed and turned into the insurance company.
- J. **Photo Consent:** Westmont Presbyterian Church will work diligently to not publish (in the bulletin or newsletter or through social media), pictures of children or youth whose parents have not signed a photo release form. We will make every effort to contact parents in the event a form is not on file.