

Oakland Presbyterian Church

Child Protection Policy & Guidelines

Introduction

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child.... welcomes me” (Matthew 8:15). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones..., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 8:16). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection for the little ones, the children. Children and youth (defined as those under eighteen years of age) must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. In response to this challenge, the Christian Education Committee and Personnel Committee offer this child protection policy to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this child protection policy is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth. At the same time, we are concerned about the safety and reputation of the adults who volunteer to make our ministry to children and youth possible. False accusation is a violation of trust as much as abuse of a physical, sexual, or emotional nature. OPC is also committed to preventing unfounded, mistaken or false claims and minimizing opportunities for false accusations against staff and volunteers.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that enhance the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all who work with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all who work with children and youth regarding the creation and maintenance of a safe environment (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clear procedure for reporting any suspected incident of misconduct, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Guidelines

Recruitment procedures

- All regular volunteers and paid staff shall consent in writing to allow Oakland Presbyterian Church to conduct a thorough investigation into their background using all available methods of investigation, including a criminal background check and check of child abuse/sex offender registries maintained by federal, state and local authorities. Results from such investigations will be reported from the investigating agency to the Pastor. In the absence of a pastor, the Clerk of Session will receive the report. If professional staff knows of reasons why a person would not be suitable for a volunteer position, the name will be removed from consideration. These checks will be re-conducted every 3 years for active volunteers.
- In cases where children, youth, or developmentally disabled adults are to be supervised by volunteers, a Volunteer Application must be filed by the volunteer before final approval is considered.
- No adult who has been convicted of, or pled guilty to, a crime involving child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) will be considered for volunteer status to work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
- Adult volunteers shall attend an annual training and educational event provided by OPC or the Presbytery to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child protection.

Adult supervision

Every church desires to provide a safe, loving classroom where the child feels comfortable and where learning can take place. Therefore, the following ratios shall be the standard for Oakland Presbyterian Church:

- **The Two Adult Rule:** There should be a minimum of two unrelated adults in any room with children, except in the event of an emergency situation. This standard not only helps provide for a safe and loving classroom, but it also gives volunteers more encouragement, creativity, and flexibility.
- When it is necessary for only one adult teacher be in the room with children, the door of that room will remain open or the door must have a window.
- One of the caregivers should be 21 years or older. A youth in high school may be counted as an adult if the other supervising caregiver is at least 21 years old.
- Two related adults (e.g. husband and wife, father and daughter, etc.) are considered one adult under "The Two Adult Rule."

Record keeping and dismissal procedures

The names and contact information of parents and children shall be carefully maintained. An accurate sign-in procedure should be maintained for each preschool child including the child's name, parent's name, and parent location during the function. A line on this form should be provided for the parent to list the special needs of their child. During Sunday School, children ages preschool through fourth grade shall remain in the classroom until picked up by a parent, designated adult, middle or high school sibling. Workers may release a child for non-parental

pick-up only with prior written permission from a parent that identifies both the parent and temporary guardian.

Other activities involving children through fifth grade shall require children to remain in the classroom until picked up by a parent, designated adult, middle or high school sibling. Workers may release a child for non-parental pickup only with prior written permission as described in the preceding paragraph. OPC is responsible for children during scheduled activities. Parents are encouraged to directly supervise their children at other times.

Diaper changing and toddler restroom policy

Only approved volunteers and staff workers may change a child's diaper (other than a child's parent). Diaper changing must take place in the designated diaper changing area in full view of the classroom. Another non-related adult should be in the room. Volunteers or staff workers supervising toddlers and preschoolers should always be in view of another volunteer or staff when helping a child in the restroom.

Restrooms

- This is an area in which church leaders need to be very sensitive to the risks of misconduct or misperception. One adult will not be allowed into a restroom alone with a child or children. A second adult should accompany them or maintain visual contact. One adult may take a child or children to the restroom only if he/she stands in the open doorway.
- Developmental needs are to be considered when deciding between diaper changing/toddler restroom policy vs. restroom policy.

Worker behavior guidelines

Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall not touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with children/youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayers) or physical caretaking (changing diapers, toileting, etc.) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon the child/youth. Care must also be taken that adults do not act in a sexually stimulating way in front of children/youth during church sponsored activities. Workers or staff who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting children/youth must report it as soon as possible to the pastor or staff member in charge. In the absence of a staff member, the clerk of session shall be notified. For the protection of workers, staff members, and children, adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse. They should not hesitate to caution others if they observe activities that are, or might be interpreted by others to be, inappropriate.

First aid and emergencies

Workers are not to give or apply medication (other than routine first aid such as application of band aids and ice packs) without written permission by the child/youth's parent or guardian, including written directions for appropriate administration. First aid boxes will be kept on hand

and all workers are to review the location and contents annually. An accident form should be completed and filed with the Church Office for any accident or injury requiring first aid (beyond band aids and ice packs) or medical attention that occurs during supervised church-sponsored activities.

Overnight trips and retreats

Volunteer teachers, youth advisors, and confirmation mentors are encouraged to involve their children and youth in service projects and other off-campus events and social activities. The following precautions will be taken in planning and implementing these activities. Secure a signed Child Agreement and Liability Release Form from each parent if the church is responsible for transporting children to these activities.

Always have at least two adults present at overnight trips. Two related adults are considered one adult using "The Two Adult Rule." For this reason, a non-related adult must be present. Any overnight trip involving children or youths of both sexes shall be supervised by both male and female adult chaperones.

Transportation

Youth leaders shall provide transportation for youth following the "The Two Adult Rule" or if two adults are not available, then the two youth one adult rule. No youth leader shall provide transportation for one youth alone without written or oral permission from the youth's parent.

Exceptions to guidelines requirements

Oakland's Child Protection Policy and Guidelines expect that the two-adult rule will apply at all times and in all circumstances. However, emergencies and unforeseeable or unavoidable situations may arise where application of the two-adult rule is impossible. If a staff member or volunteer ever supervises a child alone, he or she must provide to the Church Office a written statement detailing the time, date, place, duration and cause of the exception and also identifying both the child and staff member or volunteer. The staff member or volunteer must provide the report to the Church Office within 24 hours of the exception.

Non-church groups: Groups that are not directly sponsored by Oakland Presbyterian Church are not exempt from these guidelines. Groups that use the church and its surrounding property must abide by the guidelines and apply the two-adult rule to activities involving children.

Discipline policy

Disruptive behavior should be corrected first by verbal warning. If behavior continues, age appropriate time out should be implemented. No physical force, threats of physical force, or spanking is permitted. If disruptive behavior is not corrected by verbal warnings and/or time-out, parents will be contacted.

Incident Reporting Process

If any person, adult or child, witnesses first hand or learns of abusive, dangerous, or potentially inappropriate activities involving children, youth, or adults with mental disabilities, they should immediately report it to the Pastor and/or Church Office. They will subsequently be provided with an Incident Report Form, which should be filled out and submitted to the Pastor and/or Church Office. When there is no pastor, the Clerk of Session will be notified. The Personnel Committee will investigate the claims and report to the Session, who will decide on an appropriate course of action, which may include but is not limited to exoneration, verbal reprimand, probationary period, removal from ministry, or criminal prosecution.

If the pastor is involved, the report should be submitted to the Church Office AND the Clerk of Session, who will report to the Session. The Session will decide if it is necessary to contact the Presbytery's Permanent Judiciary Committee.

Statements to the Media

In case of an incident or accident, the Pastor alone will speak on behalf of the Session and congregation, though he or she may consult legal counsel. If there is no pastor, or the pastor is involved, the Clerk of Session will speak to media on behalf of the Session and congregation.