



# Alpharetta Presbyterian Church Child and Youth Safety Policies and Procedures

This manual is the property of  
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## I. Purpose

Alpharetta Presbyterian Church (APC) seeks to provide a safe and caring environment for its children and youth. This policy has been written to help protect children and youth from sexual, physical, verbal and emotional abuse or harassment. This policy also establishes protection standards and expected conduct for Approved Volunteers and staff. Adult sexual misconduct is addressed in APC's Adult Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures document. Additionally, APC Day School, the Boy Scouts and the Cub Scouts have their own specific and unique compliance documents. However, these organizations are held, at a minimum, to the standards defined herein.

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## II. Definitions

**Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children:** The Presbyterian Church USA's (PCUSA's) Book of Order defines sexual abuse as ". . . sexual conduct [with] any person under eighteen years of age or without the mental capacity to consent." (D-10.0401c) This includes the use or coercion of any child to engage in, or to assist in, any sexual conduct (or simulation for the purpose of producing a visual depiction) including (but not limited to) molestation, rape, indecent exposure, the viewing of pornographic materials, and the specific acts listed in Georgia Annotated Code 19-7-5(b).

**Sexual Harassment:** This includes unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favors, or other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature. This includes unwelcome sexual jokes, innuendo, unwelcome or inappropriate touching or display of sexual images that insult, degrade or sexually exploit others.

**Presumed Consent:** This is the assertion that a particular act is between consenting adults. Presumed Consent does not apply in relationships where there is a disparity of power, such as those between a minister and a parishioner or an adult with a minor child.

**Physical Abuse:** This includes (but is not limited to) non-accidental punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand or object) and unnecessarily restraining or neglecting a child. APC considers such contact physical abuse even if the child sustains no injuries, or the adult never intended injury. Corporal punishment is never tolerated at APC; this includes physical discipline such as paddling or spanking.

**Emotional and Verbal Abuse:** This includes (but is not limited to) belittling, insulting, rejecting, teasing, bullying, and unreasonable demands beyond a child's capabilities. Such actions threaten a child's psychological development, and APC considers them emotional abuse even if there is no observable change in the child's behavior, mood, response or cognition.

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### III. Church Staff

1. **Church staff** is defined as all paid employees of APC, including day school staff.
2. All church staff, as a condition of employment, shall read this policy and sign a statement (Appendix I), annually, affirming an understanding of and an agreement to abide by it. A copy will be retained in church files.
3. As a condition of employment, all church staff must consent to a criminal history and identification confirmation (Appendix A). These confidential reports will be kept in a separate and locked file. Rechecks will be performed every 3 years.
4. All new church staff must attend the first available Child and Youth Safety Policy training session after employment. Thereafter, all church staff must attend an in-person training session every three years. This training can be led by the Director of Children’s Ministry, Dayschool Director, one of the pastors, the Office/Finance Manager, or Office Assistant for Children and Youth Ministries.
5. All church clergy must satisfy and abide by the clearance and the educational and professional standards of the PCUSA and the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta.
6. Any person who has been convicted of the sexual, physical or emotional abuse of children cannot work on our church staff. Any person accused of abusing or exploiting children (as defined in this policy) will be placed on paid administrative leave until the allegation is resolved.

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### IV. Selection and Screening of Volunteers

1. All adult volunteers wishing to work with children/youth on a consistent basis must complete a “Child/Youth Approved Volunteer Information Form” (Appendix B), or the online version, annually and consent to a criminal history and identification confirmation previously referred to in Section III. When these are satisfactorily completed, the volunteer’s name will be submitted to Session and, if approved, will become an Approved Volunteer.
2. If you do not consent to a criminal history and identification confirmation, you cannot serve as an Approved Volunteer (see #5 of this section below) at Alpharetta Presbyterian Church.
3. Adults who have been convicted of sexual, physical or emotional abuse cannot serve as a volunteer in church-sponsored programs for children/youth. Any person accused of the sexual, physical or emotional abuse of children cannot volunteer until the accusation is cleared.



4. If a background check comes back with an adverse finding, it will be given directly and confidentially to the Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults for review and decision. Senior Pastor will provide consultation if necessary. The applicant will be notified that their background check results are under review. They will also be given a copy of the background check, the contact information of the background check company, and a copy of the FCRA's "A Summary of your Rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act." They have a right to dispute the information with the agency.
5. Approved Volunteers, working with children/youth, must be *active members* (as defined by the *Book of Order*) for at least six months and be at least 18 years old. If an adult wishes to occasionally be a volunteer on a short-term basis, and has been an active church member for at least six months, that adult may work with children/youth only in tandem with an Approved Volunteer or staff person. Best practices would encourage the presence of two Approved Volunteers working with children/youth, although certain circumstances may dictate the presence of two adults, one of whom is an Approved Volunteer.
6. An adult should never be alone with children/youth.
7. For approved volunteers, criminal histories and identification confirmations are required of, but are not limited to, the following persons:
  - Sunday School Teachers
  - Youth Advisors
  - Whiz Kids Tutors
  - ACT 1 Volunteers
  - Choir/Music Volunteers
  - Nursery, Promise Class and Kinder-Worship Leaders
  - Confirmation Teachers/Leaders
  - Youth and Confirmation Mentors
  - Vacation Bible School Volunteers
  - Summer Camp Volunteers
  - Mission Trip Volunteers

Criminal background checks will be made initially and then every three (3) years thereafter.

8. Youth who lead children on a consistent basis must attend the first available Child and Youth Safety Policy training, review this policy annually, and sign and date the policy. A copy will be retained in church records. Their "Child/Youth Approved Volunteer Information Form" must be co-signed by a parent or guardian.
9. Committees which seek adult volunteers to work with children/youth must recommend them to the Session for approval after all requirements outlined above are satisfactorily completed. If Session approves an Adult Volunteer, that approval is valid for one year from the date of the approval. Renewal of Session approval is required annually to continue as an Approved



Volunteer. This is typically done at the July session meeting before the start of the school year.

10. All volunteers working with and providing guidance to children/youth must exhibit appropriate behavior when working with children including: appropriate language (no profanity, no belittling, and no sexual banter, either explicit or by innuendo), and appropriate physical contact (no pushing, no striking, no wrestling, and no unwelcome touching).
  11. Other prohibited conduct includes using, possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs during church sponsored programs. Any tobacco or vapor device use is also prohibited when working with children and youth. Possession or use of weapons is prohibited when working with or transporting children and youth.
  12. Gifts may be given on a group basis and for special occasions only. Staff and volunteers are not allowed to give gifts to individual children/youth without the knowledge and permission of the parents/guardians. Cash is never to be given.
  13. Persons violating this policy may lose "Approved Volunteer" status. If "Approved Volunteer" status is lost, they will be unable to serve as volunteers with children/youth until the APC Session restores "Approved Volunteer" status.
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## **V. Outside Groups using the Facilities**

Any group using church property must abide by the Child and Youth Safety Policy for Outside Groups (Appendix C). As part of the “Building Use Request” application (Appendix C1), outside group/organization leaders must sign and return a statement, annually, indicating that they have read this summary policy and will abide by it. Failure to do so will result in their facility privilege being revoked. Additionally, outside groups working with youth and children shall submit the names of two adults who will be present at all scheduled events. These two adults must successfully complete a state and national background check. The office assistant shall keep this information in a locked file.

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## **VI. Safety Policies and Procedures**

### **1. General**

- A. Best practice of the church is two Approved Volunteers present when tending children/youth at church programs. When one-on-one contact between an adult and a child/youth is required (such as pastoral counseling) the meeting will be conducted in view of other adults.
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- B. All classrooms and meeting rooms which do not have an unobstructed glass panel must remain open. If a door does not have a glass panel, the top-half of the door must remain open.
- C. Registration Forms (Appendices D & H or online version) for each child/youth participating in church sponsored events must be completed annually by the parent/guardian. These forms will be kept in a locked file in the Children's Ministry office, the Day School office, the Youth Ministries' office, or the Promise Class.
- D. All Approved Volunteers should wear nametags when attending to children/youth.
- E. Any dangerous or broken items in the church or on its property should be reported immediately to the property manager for repair.
- F. Corporal Punishment or physical discipline will not be used by anyone working with children/youth in the church or its programs. Staff and Volunteers must comply with APC's Children and Youth Ministry Discipline Policy (Appendix E)
- G. Any suspicious person(s) on the church property must be reported immediately to a church staff member or event leader.

## **2. Trips**

- A. Parents/guardians of children/youth must sign and return Child and Youth Overnight Trip Consent Form (Appendix F) before their child(ren) may attend church-sponsored off-site events.
- B. All drivers for church events involving youth/children must be at least 25 years old, submit photocopies of a valid driver's license and a valid insurance card, and successfully complete a 3 year background check on their driving record. (Appendix A) No DUI, reckless driving convictions in the last three years will be acceptable.
- C. Best practice for vehicle use with youth/children is two adults per vehicle. Never one-on-one youth/child and adult.
- D. Drivers cannot use cell phone while operating the vehicle.
- E. Seat belts must be worn at all times. Children under 12 may not sit in the front seats. Child safety seats must be used as required by law.
- F. First aid kits must be taken on all trips (i.e., activities or events which are held off church property). A portable defibrillator is available.



### 3. Care for Children/Youth

- A. Any APC member of this church engaged in ordered ministry who suspects that a child has been abused at home or elsewhere shall notify civil legal authorities - typically the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS) - immediately. (Abuse Hotline: 1.855.GACHILD (422.4453) (Book of Order G-4.0302)
- B. If a child/youth arrives with a fever, intestinal upset or contagious condition worse than a mild cough or runny nose, the volunteer, teacher or leader may ask the parent to remove the child from the program until he/she is well. The child must be symptom-free for 24hours before returning to the program. All children's and youth programs will adhere to the COVID-19 safety gathering guidelines approved by Session.
- C. In order to ensure the safety of all children, children may be redirected or moved to a situation where the child is removed from other children per the Child Discipline Policy (Appendix E). When absolutely necessary, appropriate restraint will be used in order to save the life of a child, to protect a child or an adult from physical harm and/or to prevent someone in the room from causing harm. In such situations, parents will be contacted to provide further support.
- D. Parents or caregivers of younger children must keep those children within their care and/or eyesight at all times while on the property. In no case should a child be left unattended in a vehicle or on the playground.
- E. Fifth graders and younger should be escorted to and from their classroom/meeting place by a parent/ authorized guardian or an Approved Volunteer. Children will be released only to those authorized on their registration or sign-in form or as specified by the parent or guardian. Siblings under the age of 18 cannot pick up a younger sibling.
- F. Youth should arrive only shortly before the scheduled program start time. Adults bringing youth to church activities are responsible for confirming that the activity is occurring as scheduled and that the minimum required adult supervision is present before leaving their child or children.
- G. APC is not responsible for the transportation arrangements of children/youth coming to, or departing from, sponsored activities. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to inform their children and the approved adult volunteers of any restrictions on their children's transportation to and from activities. The approved adult volunteers will supervise throughout the activity and remain until all children/youth have departed.
- H. Youth participants are requested to sign-in for all activities other than Sunday school. If emergency contact information is not already on file, it should be provided at the time of sign-in.



- I. If a child/youth needs adult assistance in a restroom, the door must remain ajar and another volunteer must be present.
- J. If a younger child cannot be comforted, nursery attendants will make every effort to locate parents/guardians before the child becomes too distraught. Parents will be contacted on their cell phones to facilitate this practice.
- K. Diaper bags, sippy cups, bottles and other personal possessions brought into the nursery should bear the child's name or be tagged with the appropriate number entered on the sign in sheet.
- L. Nursery toys will be cleaned and sanitized after use.
- M. While on the playground, volunteers will monitor all areas of the playground, being especially mindful of high areas, gates and swings.

#### **4. First Aid and Fire Safety**

- A. All approved volunteers will be given instructions for fire, tornado, or other emergencies. This includes inclement weather and evacuation plans.
- B. The Property Committee will ensure that all fire extinguishers, alarms, and emergency lighting are functional and that evacuation routes are posted in every classroom. Property committee will test and restock defibrillator parts annually.
- C. First aid kits are located in the church kitchen (inside Fellowship Hall room 102), the Dayschool front desk (located between rooms 118 & 120), and the youth lounge (room 204). Children's Ministry Committee will restock the contents of the first aid kits annually. Defibrillators (with attachments for use with children) are located on the walls outside the church office and the youth lounge. A portable defibrillator is kept in the upper sink cabinet in the church workroom.
- D. Refer to the "APC Safety and Security Guidelines" (Appendix J) for further information.

#### **5. Social Networking/Media**

APC recognizes the wide use and supports the ministry potential of social media. Because information and exchanges disclosed on social media and computer are not private, all staff and approved adult leaders for youth and children are expected to refrain from online and IT communications or activities related to APC that are inappropriate to the mission of APC or inconsistent with the spirit of this Child and Youth Safety Policy. What a person shares with others through social media should be considered public and permanent. Therefore, APC staff and approved youth/child leaders are expected to be thoughtful, professional and appropriate in the ways they present themselves in all electronic communications and social networks.





Staff members or approved child/youth leaders who use the computer or social media, within an APC church function/activity, in inappropriate ways (for example: pornography, vulgarity, illegal activity, bullying, graphic violence, etc.) will be subjected to disciplinary action up to, and including, termination (for staff) and removal from leadership (for volunteers).

## VII. Reporting and Inquiry Procedures

The **Crisis Inquiry Committee, (CIC)**, reviews all incidents that allegedly violate the Child and Youth Safety Policies observed within our buildings, on our property, or at an event sponsored by APC. The CIC shall ensure an objective, effective, expeditious and caring response to alleged misconduct. The CIC will report and make recommendations to the Session on each incident.

### 1. CIC Composition and Term

The CIC will be composed of three members of APC, selected by the Nominating Committee and approved by the Session. The CIC will be preferably comprised of a legal professional, a professional educator, and a licensed counselor. Members will serve a three year term, which may be renewable. An elder currently serving on Session shall not serve on this committee. The Senior Minister of Alpharetta Presbyterian Church shall serve as the staff resource.

### 2. Duty to Report

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of privileged communication as defined in Book of Order G-4.0302, or (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) he or she reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

*Source: PCUSA Book of Order G-4.0302*

### 3. Reporting and Notification Procedures

If anyone witnesses or suspects physical or sexual abuse (as defined in **Section II**), he or she must notify civil authorities - typically the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS) – immediately after securing the safety of the victim and before providing a written notification (see **Appendix G “Incident Report Form”**) to a pastor or Clerk of Session. The pastor or Clerk of Session will confirm that the civil authorities have notified the parent or guardian of the child (unless the parent or guardian is the alleged abuser) of the alleged abuse and the CIC.

Anyone who suspects or who has witnessed an incident of emotional or verbal abuse or harassment (as defined in **Section II**) on church property or at a church-sponsored event must,



after securing the safety of the victim, report that incident immediately and provide a written notification to a church staff member or Clerk of Session. The recipient of this report will immediately notify the parent/guardian of the child involved unless the parent or guardian is the alleged abuser. The recipient of this report will then notify the CIC.

On behalf of the Session, the clerk will, in confidence, provide written and verbal notification to the alleged abuser of his/her removal from all children/ youth activities pending inquiry. If the alleged abuser is a staff person, that person will be placed on administrative leave with pay, pending inquiry. If the incident is reported to the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS), DFCS, not APC, will notify the alleged abuser.

If applicable, the Clerk of Session will also notify our liability insurance, legal counsel and the congregational consultant or stated clerk of the presbytery.

#### **4. CIC Inquiry Procedure**

The CIC shall proceed with the inquiry in the following manner:

- Receive the written claim of abuse from the Clerk of Session.
- Advise the Clerk of Session and confirm immediately that a report has been made to law enforcement in cases of child physical and sexual abuse.
- When an investigation begins, the CIC will ask the clerk to immediately notify the Session with the following statement:
  - “The Crisis Inquiry Committee is investigating a recently reported incident. The individuals involved and the incident itself must remain completely confidential. We ask that you keep the committee and those involved in your prayers. Please allow this committee the leeway to perform the task you have charged it to do. If asked, please mention that an inquiry is ongoing, that you do not know the details, and that the CIC is handling it. We will provide an update at the next Session meeting. Thank you.”

The CIC will undertake its work expeditiously and meet in-person with all parties within 15 days. The primary goal of this step is to confirm whether a violation of this policy did or did not occur. The CIC will endeavor to complete and submit a written report to session, including any recommendation, within 30-days of notification of said incident.

As the CIC undertakes its work, it should consider the following:

- Recommend that all parties seek professional psychological or certified pastoral counseling.
- Recommend immediate pastoral care for the reporter, the alleged victim, the alleged offender, their families, congregations and governing bodies.



- Recommend remedial actions within the Session, congregation and/or activity area directly affected.
- Treat the alleged offender with Christian kindness and respect.
- Advise the reporter or the alleged victim that he or she may file a written statement of the alleged offense with the Clerk of Session pursuant to the "Rules of Discipline" of The Book of Church Order if there has been no admission of misconduct and the allegation is to be pursued.

### **The CIC shall not:**

- Advocate for any party
- Act as legal counsel for any party
- Act as counselors to any party
- Replace the authority of the Session
- Enforce a specific remedy or disciplinary action
- Breach confidentiality

If the incident is reported to legal authorities, the CIC will cooperate with those authorities and will support and guide the church family, as needed.

If an inquiry is made by the press, public, or congregation, the following statement may be issued by the clerk of session:

“An incident report of abuse has been forwarded to the proper authorities. APC will safeguard the privacy of all involved and treat them with dignity, respect, and support. ”

### **CIC Findings, Recommendations and Final Report**

Within 60 days of the initial report, the CIC and the clerk of session will produce and deliver to Session a written report of the church's response. The report should be brief and contain only relevant factual information which shall include:

- Names and addresses of all parties
- A summary of the allegation(s)
- A summary of the facts as stated by all parties



- A summary of the CIC's investigative actions
- The remedy, if any, sought by the alleged victim
- The CIC's findings, and whether the abuse is substantiated
- The CIC's recommendations
- A list and signatures of the CIC members

The report should be written in ink or typed to prevent tampering. The report must be signed, dated, witnessed, and kept in a locked file in the church office. If an allegation is unsubstantiated, the CIC may recommend to the Session whether the staff member or volunteer should be allowed to return to work at the church. It will consider the individual's likely effectiveness in working with minors following an allegation and investigation of child abuse, sexual harassment, or other prohibited conduct. Even if unsubstantiated, most allegations require follow up. Therefore, the moderator of Session, in consultation with the pastoral staff, will respond with Christian care and concern to the reporter and/or alleged victim, the vindicated person's family, and the congregation if appropriate.

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## **VIII. Policy Implementation and Revision**

The Church staff that oversees children and youth programs is responsible for the following:

- Sponsor a minimum of two Child and Youth Safety Policy training sessions each year.
- Educate parents, church members and friends of the church about this policy, and make it available for review in the church office and on the church's website.
- Ensure the church and its ministries are in compliance with this policy.
- Recommend, in consultation with the CIC, to the Session any needed changes in the policy.
- The Session will review this policy and approve any necessary revisions and conduct an audit annually to ensure compliance.



## **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Background Check and Consent Form (referenced in Section III, 3 and Section VI, 2, B)**

**Appendix B – Child/Youth Approved Volunteer Information Form (Section IV, 1)**

**Appendix C – Child and Youth Safety Policy for Outside Groups (Section V)**

**Appendix D – Child Registration Form (Section VI, C)**

**Appendix E – Discipline Policy (Section VI, 1, F and Section VI, 3, B)**

**Appendix F – Child and Youth Overnight Trip Consent Form (Section VI, 2, A)**

**Appendix G – Incident Report Form (Section VII, 3)**

**Appendix H – Youth Registration Form (Section VI, 1, C)**

**Appendix I – Staff Agreement Form (Section III, 2)**

**Appendix J - APC Safety and Security Guidelines (Section VI, 4, D)**

**Appendix K – Childcare Request Form**

**Appendix L – APC Children’s Ministry Covenant**

**Appendix M – APC Youth Ministry Advisers Covenant**

**Appendix N – APC Adult Medical Release Form**

**Appendix O – Virtual Ministry Guidelines**

