

Westminster Safe Church
Policy and Procedures

Westminster Church
1300 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-442-8939

Adopted by session, May 22, 2018

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to create a safe environment, free of abuse of any kind, in which our youth, along with adults, may learn about and worship God.

Introduction:

In recognition of the spiritual and public trust given to this faith community, Westminster is committed to being a true sanctuary, both nurturing and protecting its members and visitors. Worship of God requires openness, trust, honesty, intimacy, vulnerability and a safe, supportive community. Abuse and harassment are, therefore, violations of the faith and commitment shared by this congregation. Accordingly, the congregation will maintain official policies and procedures that assure prevention of abuse and support appropriate intervention into alleged incidents of abusive behavior. It is the policy of the church that **ABUSE OR HARASSMENT OF A MINOR OR OF AN ADULT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

Practices:

- 1) To protect our children, youth and vulnerable adults from potential victimization, all staff and volunteers will be checked annually using the National Sexual Offender Public Registry (www.nsopr.gov). Staff and applicants for primary volunteer positions with vulnerable populations will also be fingerprinted. All adults who have regular contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must have been a church member for six (6) months or associated with the church for one (1) year.
- 2) Before beginning his or her work with vulnerable populations, the potential volunteer must indicate understanding and compliance with this policy and sign the Personal Safety Covenant and if applicable the Driver Authorization Form. It is recommended that staff, volunteers and clergy also be trained in first aid/CPR. The church may provide a yearly workshop on this or pay the costs for training. Nursery workers and others serving young children will receive training in infant and toddler CPR.
- 3) Two Adults. At least two adults, preferably unrelated, must be present at all times during any church-related or sponsored activity involving children and youth, including but not limited to Sunday School classes. This practice applies to both on- and offsite events.
 - a. Open Door Counseling between a qualified Teaching Elder and a youth is the exception to the above. During such counseling, a second adult will be present in the building, aware that the counseling is happening, and within hearing distance louder than a normal conversation. Doors will be clearly left open.
- 4) Ratios: The adult to child ratio for all child-related events/activities is 2:10. The adult to youth ratio for all youth-related events/activities is 2:17. Only in emergency situations may the ratios be compromised.

- 5) View Windows and Open Doors: When minors and adult workers or volunteers are in a room, if the door is closed, the door must have a view window installed. If no view window is installed in the door, the door must remain open at all times.
- 6) Adult workers/caregivers should respect the privacy of the children to whom they provide care. Responsible use of digital devices and cell phones is required in all situations (ex. Taking age-appropriate photographs and movies, not taking photographs of minors who are not fully clothed). Adults and minors are required at all times to wear appropriate attire.
- 7) Restroom Guidelines
 - a. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child.
 - b. For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class. Should a bathroom emergency occur, staff and/or volunteer should appropriately assist the child and communicate the incident to staff member in charge and the parent.
- 8) "Check-in/Check-out" Procedure for Infant and Preschool Children - Parents/guardians will sign in their children when leaving them in the nursery and sign them out when picking them up. A child will be released only to the person who dropped him/her off, unless otherwise instructed by the person who leaves the child. Permission slips will be available for parents or guardians to sign, authorizing alternate options for the release of the child(ren).
- 9) No Use of Alcohol, Illegal Drugs or smoking around Children. Smoking is not permitted during programs offered to children or teens, in order to avoid the effects of second-hand smoke. Use of illegal drugs or drinking alcohol preceding or during a class or other scheduled interaction with children and teens is not permitted.
- 10) Off-site Activities - Whenever children, youth, or dependent adults will be off campus, and outside the direct supervision of their parents/guardians, a permission form shall be signed by the parents/guardian. The leaders of those off-site activities must have a list of names, emergency contacts and medical conditions with them at all times, so that the leaders have permission to treat a child, youth, or dependent adult if they are injured or become sick during the off-campus event.

11) Transportation - To ensure all minors and vulnerable adults are safely transported to church sponsored activities that require volunteer drivers, Westminster requires that all drivers complete an Authorized Driver Form, and attach proof of insurance and a copy of a valid driver's license. Any church-sponsored event requiring driving will always be within the limits and recommendations of our insurance policy.

a) Drivers must be 25 or older if they are to drive other passengers under the age of 18. When driving youth, one adult volunteer driver is acceptable as long as there are two or more youth in the car. A minor may be alone in a car with a church volunteer or staff as long as the minor's parents have signed the waiver. Of course, children may travel alone with their custodial parents or guardians without any forms.

b) To aid the adult volunteer driver in the event of an emergency, the driver should maintain possession of every passenger's health-history, and medical release form in the car at all times. In the event passengers change cars, it's recommended that the drivers have this information for every youth or child who is attending the event.

c) Authorized driver policy applies to transportation from the church (or designated starting point) to the activity and back. This policy does not apply to transition prior to start of activity or after the conclusion of activity.

Record Keeping:

A designated office staff shall be responsible for the following:

- Assuring that fingerprint clearances and driver's license checks are completed and filed in a secure location, annually.
- Annual background checks of all staff and volunteers using the National Sexual Offender Public Registry (www.nsopr.gov).
- Maintain and ensure completion of the records of Personal Safety Covenant and Driver Authorization Form.
- Maintain records of completed training.
- Maintain records of CPR training.

Training Standards:

1) Youth Program Leadership Training:

Westminster Presbyterian Church is grateful to its volunteers for helping our children and teens grow in faith. As such, WPC strives to ensure that volunteers have the tools they need to carry out the programs for which they are volunteering, including the information needed to provide a safe environment. Paid and volunteer workers with regular and frequent contact with children are required to attend an orientation session to review this policy; appropriate steps to take to report an incident of abuse; and a

directory of resources for incidents of sexual misconduct. The breadth and leadership of this training is the responsibility of the Teaching Elder, the Session, and the Christian Education Committee, and is intended to evolve as WPC's youth-centered programs change and grow.

- 2) WPC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers, as well as their policies and procedures and will provide appropriate training on an annual basis.

Social Media—Electronic Communications:

Social Media Communications:

Persons who shall create public pages on behalf of Westminster Presbyterian Church programs are responsible to monitor communications and to assure that employees and volunteers do not have private (and possibly inappropriate) conversations with children and youth.

Persons having Facebook privileges on behalf of WPC shall treat unsolicited communication or "friending" from children or youth under age as an unauthorized text message. No reply may be given except to indicate by a posting that accepting a "friend" invitation by under-age children is a violation of the code of conduct.

If a child or youth reveals abuse or inappropriate interactions with an adult, the person must report this information in the manner of any "suspected abuse."

When using Facebook to communicate with children or youth, the authorized minister shall inform parents/guardians of each child or youth that the latter is communicating with the person via Facebook, providing the parent/guardian the opportunity to disapprove or to participate in a group.

Social Networking Code of Conduct:

Each person who leads using the resources of social media shall apply this Social Networking Code of Conduct:

- Prohibit comments that are, or could be construed by any observer, to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
- Prohibit sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities.
- Prohibit private messages between employees and volunteers and children or youth.
- Prohibit posting inappropriate pictures (for example, sexually suggestive, exploitive, or voyeuristic) or inappropriate comments on pictures.
- Encourage parents to play a role in monitoring their children's and youth interactions with employees and volunteers.
- Continuously remind children and youth how to interact appropriately through social networking sites.
- Deny participation by individuals who repeatedly violate the code of conduct.

- Provide children, youth, and their parents with this Social Networking Code of Conduct.
- At the institution of the use of social media, the authorized minister shall present this Social Networking Code of Conduct to children or youth and parents/guardians.

Mandated Reporting Guidelines:

All WPC clergy, staff and volunteers that have direct contact and supervision of children, or who have responsibility for the care or custody of an elderly or dependent adult are expected to report suspected abuse. Clergy and staff are mandated to report by California law. Reporting laws require that a report be made when the mandated reporter has a reasonable suspicion of abuse. Staff and volunteers are given training concerning the indicators of abuse to aid them in their reporting duties, as well as concerning the reporting protocols required of them.

Congregation Policy Review:

A copy of this policy will be included in the Church's annual report, and attention will be drawn to it during the annual meeting. A public copy of this policy will be displayed on the bulletin board.

Policy Compliance - Church staff will supervise church activities on an ongoing basis and may make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time, to assure policy compliance. Primary volunteers will carefully supervise the secondary volunteers, minors and any other adults involved with the activities for which that primary volunteer is responsible. All church participants should be aware of unsupervised children, risky situations, and other issues that might prevent Westminster from being a safe place to worship and thrive.

Violation of the Policy – Violations of this Policy, will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program, and are to be immediately reported to the designated program staff after the safety of any person involved has been assured. Director of Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry Leader, and/or Head of Staff will determine appropriate response to any policy violations by volunteers or staff. Response may include training, temporary leave from the position, reassignment, suspension or termination.

Response and Reporting Procedure - All participants in Westminster's ministry are encouraged to contact a Teaching or Ruling Elder if they are ever concerned about a safety issue, whether it's a hazardous sidewalk or they witness or hear about risk of harm to a child, youth or vulnerable adult in the church. Any member or guest of Westminster is encouraged to act without hesitation or fear of reprisal if he or she witnesses, experiences, or hears about situations involving abuse, harassment, or exploitation. All concerns and allegations shall be taken seriously and receive some type of action or response immediately, according to church policy.

