

POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION AND REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE

1.0 BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND PURPOSE

1.1 To express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness, the Session-Board of Trustees of Knox Presbyterian Church seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and youth and to be in ministry to families where abuse may occur. We share the following Biblical understandings upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand. Jesus teaches us very explicitly that children have both the right and the key to God's kingdom.

"Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." – Mark 10:14-15.

1.2 Our goal in response to the Biblical mandate and societal needs is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where their caregivers, teachers, and leaders, both paid and volunteer, minister appropriately to their needs. As a church, it is our religious, moral, and ethical obligation to take every possible step to prevent and respond to abuse and neglect of children. In addition, as a provider of day care and educational programs at all levels, the Church incurs certain legal obligations under Ohio law with respect to reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of children.

2.0 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Any person subject to the mandatory reporting requirements who knows or reasonably suspects a case of child abuse or neglect must report in person or by writing to:

The Hamilton county Department
Of Human Services
628 Sycamore Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Or by calling 241-KIDS, 24 hours a day.

Reports can also be made with the City Police Department or Hamilton County sheriff. Further, any person suspecting abuse or neglect may make such a report. The agency or officer may request a verbal or written report, which should contain the following information:

Name and address of the child;
Age of the child;
Name and address of the parent or caretaker;
Why you suspect the child is being abused or neglected;
Any other helpful information.

Reporting requirements can be found in the Ohio Revised Code section 2151.421.

3.0 PREVENTION OF ABUSE WITHIN THE CHURCH

3.1 In an effort to create the safest possible environment within our church, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include limited screening of volunteers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision of regular training on child abuse issues to volunteer staff members, use of team teaching and chaperoning, standards for appropriate classroom discipline, and open classrooms. Hiring and performance standards for paid staff will be set by the Session Personnel Committee.

3.2 Volunteer Staff Screening

Knox welcomes and appreciates every person's desire to serve in the life of the Church. In order to better protect the safety and well-being of our children and youth, Knox Church, at its own expense, will conduct, as thoroughly as feasible, prior criminal record background checks for all those who wish to serve as volunteers working with minors. Candidates for those positions will be advised of this policy in advance and must be willing to provide information and assistance as necessary to complete the background checks (including the signing of any appropriate releases). Any person who has been arrested for any offense that could be harmful to children will be disqualified from serving as a volunteer working with minors. Examples of such offenses would be those involving violence, substance abuse, or child abuse, endangerment or neglect.

To protect the privacy of candidates, only the Director of Youth and Young Adults, Director of Christian Education, Pastor (or the Associate Pastor, in the absence or incapacity of the Pastor) will have access to, and will be permitted to review background information.

The Pastor (or the Associate Pastor, in the absence or incapacity of the Pastor) in his or her discretion may recommend any exceptions to the application of this policy, subject to discussion with and the agreement of the Christian Education Director and at least one member of the Personnel Committee.

Prior to beginning active service as a volunteer working with minors (more than two times per 12-month period for non-overnight activities, all chaperons for overnight events involving minors, and all volunteers providing transportation to minors) such individuals (age 14 years old and above) will be screened and selected utilizing the following methods:

- A standard volunteer application (to include items such as: contact information, availability, interest areas, references, Social Security Number, Driver's License Number, self-disclosure information regarding arrests or DUIs, emergency contact information, etc.) completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks (which may include fingerprinting) prior to, and at any time during, active service as a volunteer working with minors. The application also includes acknowledgment that the applicant has received and read these policies.
- Criminal records check in any state where the applicant has resided, and other states, if any, as determined by the church.
- Sexual offender registry check in any state where the applicant has resided.
- Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.

- References from at least two people who are not immediate family of the applicant and who have reason to know about his/her experience with children and youth.

Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children or youth. Although the Session-Board of Trustees recognizes that this policy may exclude someone who could safely work with children, we believe we must err on the side of the children's safety.

3.3 Volunteer Staff Training

3.3.1 First year Volunteers working with minors will also be required to attend one training session related to the church's child abuse policy during the course of their first year of service. These training sessions will be offered by the church, conducted by clergy or members of the Christian Education Committee, and held at various times throughout the school year. In addition to the training sessions discussed above, more in-depth educational offerings covering a broad range of child abuse issues will be offered at least biennially for any interested persons. Specialists in the particular area to be addressed will be retained by the Christian Education Committee to conduct these sessions. Attendance at these sessions will be voluntary. Those volunteering at Vacation Bible School at Knox Presbyterian Church will be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form prior to the start of Vacation Bible School. Any volunteer failing to do so will be contacted by the Church Educator. Anyone refusing to read the policy and sign the form after being contacted will not be permitted to teach. When Vacation Bible School is held at other churches, only teachers from the Knox Presbyterian Church congregation will be asked to comply with this policy. Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities will be required to read the policy and sign this acknowledgement form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

3.3.2 The obligation to consent to a background check extends to all volunteers (including both teenagers beginning at age 14 years old, and adults) on the church list who work with minors 2 or more times within a 12 month period, even those with irregular or very limited teaching or care responsibilities such as occasional substitute teachers, summer replacement teachers, and volunteers with Vacation Bible School.

3.4 Team Teaching and Chaperoning

Our goal is to assign volunteers in teams of two or more adults per Sunday school hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers to permit such team teaching. For classrooms where it proves impractical to assign two teachers, the teacher is required to leave the door open unless the children are too young and are impossible to keep in the classroom without closing the door. In any event, the teacher must leave the door window unblocked unless two adults are in the classroom. Further, the Sunday School Superintendent will make rounds involving random visits to classrooms throughout the hour, with a special focus on single teacher classrooms. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should

have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders should be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present, and no fewer than two adults must be present in any room where adults and children are sleeping.

3.5 Classroom discipline

All teachers and workers will utilize the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he or she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building.” If this measure is ineffective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child’s disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child’s parents may be called to pick up the child, or the child may be taken to an empty classroom or office and left under the supervision of a staff member or member of the Christian Education Committee. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, such as ridicule, is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child’s parents or guardian as soon as possible.

3.6 Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, such as members of the Christian Education Committee. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the church Educator during the Sunday School hours.

Background Check Authorization
CONFIDENTIAL – Return directly to Dee Decker Huey or Dave Annett

This form authorizes the church to obtain background information and must be completed by the applicant. The church must keep the signed portion of the form on file for at least five years after requesting a background check. The bottom portion will be destroyed after completing the initial background check.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. In the interest of safety and security I, the undersigned applicant (also known as “consumer”), hereby authorize **Knox Presbyterian Church** and its designated agents and representatives to conduct a comprehensive review of my background causing a consumer report and/or an investigative consumer report to be generated for employment and/or volunteer purposes. I understand that the scope of the consumer report/investigative consumer report may include, but is not limited to the following areas: verification of social security number; current and previous residences; employment history, education background, character references; civil and criminal history records from any criminal justice agency in any or all federal, state, county jurisdictions; driving records, birth records, and other public agency (including the Social Security Administration and law enforcement agencies) to divulge any and all information, verbal or written, pertaining to me, to **Knox Presbyterian Church** or its agents. I further authorize the complete release of any records or data pertaining to me which the individual, company, firm, corporation, or public agency may have, to include information or data received from other sources.

****Knox Presbyterian Church** and its designated agents and representatives shall maintain all information received from this authorization in a confidential manner in order to protect the applicants personal information, including, but not limited to, addresses, social security numbers, and dates of birth.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____
(First) (Middle) (Last)

If applicant is under 18 years old –
Guardian’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Guardian’s Printed Name: _____
(First) (Middle) (Last)

(This portion of the form will be destroyed after completing the initial background check.)

Other Names Used (alias, maiden, nickname, etc.): _____

Current Address Since: _____
(Month/Year) (Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Previous Address From: _____
(Month/Year) (Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Previous Address From: _____
(Month/Year) (Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Social Security Number: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Driver’s License Number/State: _____

Telephone Number: _____