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## **Synod of the Trinity Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

**Adopted October 25, 2016**

### **General Purpose Statement**

The Synod of the Trinity seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children, youth, or vulnerable adults participating in events sponsored by the Synod of the Trinity (hereafter know as Synod) from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

### **Definitions**

For purposes of this policy, the terms **child or children** include all persons under the age of twelve (12) years and term **youth** includes all persons twelve (12) to eighteen (18) years of age. **Vulnerable adults** include persons between 18 and 59 years of age who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone, not employed by the Synod, involved in a day care or school, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

### **Selection of Workers**

All persons who desire to work with the children, youth, or vulnerable adults participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with a Presbyterian congregation within the bounds of the Synod for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children/youth must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by Synod. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous

experience with children, youth and vulnerable adults, previous congregation affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the Synod Office.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature, other than personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the Synod Office.

e) **Criminal Background Check**

Since the Synod of the Trinity is a registered not-for-profit corporation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the clearances required by Commonwealth law check are required for all employees (regardless of position) and "volunteers" as defined above. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania law shall serve as the standard for background checks even for those from other states which have congregations included in the boundaries of the Synod of the Trinity.

Before a background check is conducted, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the Synod to conduct the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be determined by the Stated Clerk, or the Synod Executive, on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to the Synod's mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the Synod Office.

### **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children, youth, or vulnerable adults are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some children, youth, or vulnerable adults activities may have only one

adult leader in attendance during the activity session; in these instances, doors to the room in which the activity is taking place should remain open and there should be no fewer than three children, youth, or vulnerable adults with the adult leader. The Synod does not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

### **Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

For purposes of this policy, “abuse” is any action (or lack of action) endangering or harming a child’s, youth’s, or vulnerable adult’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the person is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child, youth, or vulnerable adults and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a person of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Those working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the person under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults at a Synod sponsored event activity becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this shall be reported immediately to the Child Protection Services, Adult Protection Services, Abuse Hotline, or other appropriate civil authorities. Additional reporting shall be made to the person primarily responsible for the.

In the event that a suspected incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse shall be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

5. The Synod Executive shall serve as the spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization shall refrain from speaking to the media, unless explicitly authorized by the Synod Executive.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

### **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside the door. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room, unless a “shelter in place” order has been given.

### **Teenage Workers**

The Synod recognizes there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14 and at least 4 years older than the oldest child being cared for
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

### **Drivers for Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults Activities**

Those providing transportation for children/youth activities, sponsored or co-sponsored by the Synod, shall be at least 21 years of age and have a “clean” driving record for the current year and the previous three years. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be alone with the driver at any time.

### **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

For children below third grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a “child check” for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present the “child check” in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the “child check,” the person primarily responsible for the event will be contacted. The person primarily responsible for the event will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

### **Sick Child Policy**

It is the Synod’s desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children, youth, or vulnerable adults at events or activities of the Synod. Parents/legal guardians are

encouraged to be considerate of other children, youth, or vulnerable adults when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children, youth, or vulnerable adults with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children, youth, or vulnerable adults who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children, youth, or vulnerable adults, and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

### **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of the Synod not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent or guardian at home. Parents/guardians are reminded of our sick child, youth, or vulnerable adult policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted by parents of children, youth, or vulnerable adults with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the person primarily responsible for the event and the person who will be immediately responsible to develop a plan of action.

### **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of the Synod not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents/guardians have suggested or given permission for it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the person primarily responsible for the event if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

### **Restroom Guidelines**

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and 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 they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker

should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

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, or activity.

### **Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

### **Training**

The Synod will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes, or events, on an as necessary basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.