



**PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**



**September, 2006**

## Providence Presbyterian Church – Child Protection Policy

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## **Chapter 1 - Purpose**

### **Purpose**

Believing that children are our sacred trust from a loving God, we joyfully answer the call to provide a nurturing and dynamic Christian environment that will foster our children's faith, their guiding light. To that end, Providence Presbyterian Church (PPC) and its members are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the programs and activities of the church. In an effort to minimize the possibility that any child or youth (meaning all those 17 years of age or younger) will be subjected to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, PPC has established policies and procedures that seek to balance the security and welfare of the children and the legitimate expectations of privacy of staff and volunteers.

PPC cannot, nor can any institution or organization, absolutely guarantee that no harm will befall a child entrusted to its care. However, Providence can, through adherence to this policy, make every effort to ensure that persons placed in positions of responsibility and trust with respect to the children of the church, are persons deserving of that trust and responsibility.

This policy also directs that supervision of activities involving youth and adults be conducted in a manner that minimizes the risk of abuse, or of false allegations of abuse. It shall be made available to all current members and staff of the church, and provided to new members.

## **Chapter 2 - Definitions**

### **Child**

For the purposes of this policy, a child, or a minor, is any individual under the age of 18.

### **Child Abuse**

Generally speaking, child abuse is injury of a child by an adult or older child that might not be intentional, but is not accidental. It is usually classified as physical abuse, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse. Harm caused by withholding life's necessities - food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education - is called neglect (Boy Scouts of America Child Protection Guidelines).

### **Child Sexual Abuse**

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse or molestation varies from state to state, but in general includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In other words, "any sexual activity with a child" (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992).

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. It includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- Fondling,
- Oral, genital, and anal penetration,
- Intercourse,
- Forcible rape.

Types of abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments,
- Pornographic videos,
- Obscene phone calls,
- Exhibitionism,
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity.

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### Virginia Criminal Code

There are numerous criminal statutes that address "Taking Indecent Liberties with Children" (reference Section 18.2-370 of the Virginia Criminal Code). Violation of any one or more of these criminal prohibitions would form the basis for a civil lawsuit against the perpetrator, and possibly against the church for giving the perpetrator the opportunity to prey on his or her victim.

### Civil Liability of the Church

Courts have increasingly imposed liability on persons who create dangerous situations that result in harm to third parties. The paradigm situation is a church that hires a pedophile and puts him in a position where he has frequent contact with children. This is precisely the situation in J. v. Victory Tabernacle Baptist Church, 372 S.E. 2d 391 (Va 1988).

The church hired an employee who had been convicted of aggravated sexual assault on a young girl. The church apparently took no steps to check his background, and put him in a position with frequent contact with children. This employee repeatedly raped and sexually assaulted a ten-year-old girl with whom he came into contact in the course of working with the church.

The Virginia Supreme Court held that the church was guilty of the tort of negligent hiring.

Most of the lawsuits filed against churches for acts of child molestation have alleged that the church was legally accountable either on the basis of negligent hiring or negligent supervision. The church may exercise sufficient care in the hiring of an individual, but still be legally accountable for acts of molestation on the basis of negligent supervision. Negligent supervision means that a church did not exercise sufficient care in supervising a worker.

The church may need to answer the question:

*"What did you do to prevent this tragedy from occurring--what procedures did you use to check the molester's background and supervise his/her work with children?"*

## Chapter 3            Supervision and Standard Practices

The Children's Ministry Committee, working with the Associate Pastor for Education and the Director of Youth Ministries, shall assume responsibility for the Child Protection Policy. Such responsibility includes supervision and implementation of the policy as well as education and training.

The intention of the Child Protection Policy is to protect. The Policy is not intended to substantially interfere with the nurturing, teaching, and supervising of the children and youth. In order to create the safest possible environment at Providence, the following practices will be observed:

### **Recruitment:**

#### 1.        Screening

A. The Children's Ministry Committee shall require all paid and volunteer child care workers, children's Sunday school teachers, youth workers and teachers to complete an application form, read the church's Child Protection Policy, and sign a form indicating that they have read the policy and agree to abide by it. Such applications should be completed and signed before persons begin to serve or as soon as possible thereafter.

B. The Children's Ministry Committee shall use the "Providence Presbyterian Church Application for Work With Children" form when conducting reference checks, paying particular attention to the questions concerning criminal offense, child neglect, physical/sexual abuse, and misconduct against children. The Children's Ministry Committee shall check at least two references per applicant and determine an individual's suitability to perform the applicable duties.

C. All paid employees dealing with children and youth shall fill out a background check application and sign agreeing to criminal background screening.

D. The associate Pastor for Education will contact applicants regarding any perceived problems that would potentially prohibit their work as child care providers, children's Sunday school teachers, and/or youth workers, either in paid or volunteer capacities.

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### 2. Staff Training

A. Communication and an explanation of the Child Protection Policy will be included annually in all training and orientation programs for teachers, childcare volunteers, youth leaders, and Church Officers. Written information about this policy shall be posted in a central area of the church and included in new member classes. The responsibility for ensuring that this is included in training programs shall rest with the Associate Pastor for Education.

B. First year teachers and workers should attend these training sessions.

C. In addition, the Children's Ministry Committee shall make copies of the policy available to all parents of children participating in Church Programs, and may invite parents to attend a meeting on the Child Protection Policy.

### **Personal Conduct:**

### 3. Personal Conduct

A. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support or physical caretaking (diaper-changing, helping small children in the rest-room) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Expressions of affection shall not be excessive, or be imposed upon others.

B. Employees and volunteers shall not touch or interact with children or youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Any activity of this type is a violation of trust and completely inappropriate.

C. Corporal punishment or verbal abuse is never permitted.

**Implementation:**

4. Two Adult Rule

A. Every effort will be made to have two adults present at all of Providence's activities and classes for children. Whenever possible, a person new to the church will be paired with a longer-term member of the church.

B. If absolutely necessary, a teacher may work alone if there is visual access to the room (open door, or room with a window in the door). However, nursery care-givers must work in pairs.

C. Exceptions may be made to this rule when teenagers are baby-sitting groups of children in the church building during adult classes, Potluck dinners etc., and when a teenager is paired with an adult for supervision of pre-school children on Sunday mornings. However, at least 2 baby-sitters must be present.

D. For reasons of pastoral care and relationship building, staff members may visit with children on a one-on-one basis as long as the following conditions are met:

- 1) Under most circumstances the staff member should seek the parent's permission in advance;
- 2) the meeting shall occur in a public place such as the church offices or a restaurant;
- 3) the staff member shall notify other staff members of these plans in advance.

5. Transportation

A. It is recommended that children be transported in groups rather than alone. A child's parent or guardian may give permission for an unaccompanied adult to drive a single child, or children in a church-sponsored activity. Parental permission should be obtained in writing. This policy is not intended to prohibit staff or adult volunteers from offering a ride home to children in emergency situations. The adult leader shall make a reasonable attempt to contact parents prior to providing the ride.

B. No person under the age of 18 may drive other youth on church program trips.

6. Open Classrooms

Church staff, parents, or church workers may visit classrooms and child care rooms at any time without prior notice. The Director of Children's Ministries and the Sunday School Coordinators will make periodic observation of child care rooms and classrooms during the times when child/youth programs are being conducted.

### 7. Classroom Discipline

A. All teachers and workers will be guided by the Children's Ministries discipline guidelines in order to maintain order:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher/worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable, and state what the expected behavior is, e.g. "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity.
2. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in a area where he/she will work alone, away from the other students for a brief period of time.
3. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Coordinator of Children's Ministry, who will report the incident to the Associate Pastor of Education. If a child must be removed from a classroom or other youth activity, the situation will be discussed with his/her parents.

**In no case are teachers or workers permitted to physically or verbally abuse a child.**

### 8. Overnight Trips

- A. Whenever Providence children or youth are involved in church sponsored overnight trips, leaders must ensure that children are given appropriate privacy in the areas of sleeping, changing, or bathing. Specifically, an adult must never be permitted to sleep together in the same room or tent with a single child (without observing the two-adult rule), unless the adult is the parent of the child.
- B. Children and adults must never be permitted to bathe in the same facility at the same time. Similarly, youth of the opposite gender must not be permitted to change or bathe together.
- C. Children of the opposite gender must not be permitted to sleep in the same room together, except in situations such as the Hunger lock-in, or Mission Trip. In situations such as these, an entire group of children, supervised by at least two adults, may be sleeping in one big room together; however, parents will be informed in advance and asked to give explicit permission for these events.

## Chapter 4 - Reporting Abuse

Anyone who learns of or suspects any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of a minor shall immediately report it to a Pastor, or any member of the church staff, who will in turn, report to the Pastor or National Capital Presbytery as appropriate. A person may learn of abuse by direct observation, by noting signs of abuse as described below, or by being told of abuse by the victim, perpetrator or other person.

If an allegation of abuse is directed against a volunteer or paid staff, that person will be removed from any position involving contact with minors until the allegation is resolved.

The Pastor will maintain a confidential written record of each such report, and will use appropriate judgment in designating a person or a team to carry out an investigation. During the investigation, the Pastor will notify parents or guardians of victims, and those accused of allegations, as necessary, and will make proper reports to government and law enforcement authorities. It is Providence's policy to forward reports of child abuse to the appropriate governmental authority, as required by state and church law, using the National Capital Presbytery's reporting format. Providence will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigations of allegations of child abuse.

Following are some common signs of child sexual abuse that should be reported:

- **Physical Signs:**

- Unusual lacerations and bruises,
- Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area,
- Difficulty with urination,
- Discomfort when sitting,
- Torn or bloody underclothing,
- Venereal disease.

- **Behavioral Signs:**

- A sudden change in behavior, Nervous or hostile behavior toward adults, Sexual self-consciousness, "Acting out" of sexual behavior.

- **Verbal Signs:**

- "\_\_\_\_\_ does things to me when we're alone",
- "I don't like to be alone with \_\_\_\_\_"
- "\_\_\_\_\_ fooled around with me".

All persons involved in reporting or investigating any alleged incident of abuse should hold information received in strict confidence, subject to such disclosures as are required under church procedures or by law.

**Appendix A – Application for Work with Children Form**

**Providence Presbyterian Church  
Application for Work with Children**

THIS APPLICATION IS A CONFIDENTIAL, MANDATORY PART OF A PROCESS TO HELP THE CHURCH PROVIDE A SAFE, NURTURING ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH. PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUPERVISION AND CARE OF OUR CHILDREN ARE IN A SPECIAL POSITION OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE.

THEREFORE, ALL PERSONS WHO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE MUST COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION.  
PERSONAL INFORMATION (Please attach photo identification, e.g. copy of driver's license)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SOC.SEC # \_\_\_\_\_ DRIVER'S LICENSE # \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE # (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

**CHURCH OR YOUTH WORK EXPERIENCE:**

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF CHURCHES ATTENDED ON A REGULAR BASIS DURING THE LAST FIVE YEARS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

LIST ALL PREVIOUS CHURCH AND NON-CHURCH WORK INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE (Name, Address, Type of Work Performed, Dates)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

LIST ANY TALENTS, TRAINING, EDUCATION, ETC. THAT HAVE PREPARED YOU TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Providence Presbyterian Church  
Application for Work with Children**

**PERSONAL REFERENCES:**

PLEASE FURNISH PERSONAL REFERENCES INCLUDING PAST CHURCHES WHERE VOLUNTEER SERVICE HAS BEEN PERFORMED.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

ARE YOU 18 YEARS OR OLDER? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF ANY CRIMINAL OFFENSE? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

HAVE YOU PLEAD GUILTY OR δNO CONTESTδ TO ANY CRIMINAL OFFENSE? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CHARGED WITH OR CONVICTED OF CHILD NEGLECT YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

OR PHYSICAL/SEXUAL ABUSE INVOLVING CHILDREN OR ADULTS? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

HAVE YOU PLEAD GUILTY OR δNO CONTESTδ TO ANY NEGLECT OR ABUSE OFFENSE? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

HAVE ANY COMPLAINTS OR ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT INVOLVING CHILDREN EVER BEEN MADE AGAINST YOU? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

IF ANSWER IS YES FOR ANY OF THE ABOVE, PLEASE EXPLAIN:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I UNDERSTAND THAT PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MAY CONTACT THE CHURCHES AND REFERENCES I HAVE PROVIDED AS PART OF PPC'S CONSIDERATION OF THIS APPLICATION. I HEREBY RELEASE FROM ANY LIABILITY ANY PERSON OR ORGANIZATION THAT PROVIDES INFORMATION.

I CERTIFY THAT THE INFORMATION I HAVE PROVIDED IS TRUE AND CORRECT. IF IT IS FOUND THAT THE ANSWERS GIVEN ARE UNTRUE, I UNDERSTAND IT MAY BE CAUSE FOR DISMISSAL.

APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix B – Reference Check Form**

**Reference Information Form  
CONFIDENTIAL**

APPLICANT NAME \_\_\_\_\_

REFERENCE CONTACTED \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF PERSON CONTACTING THIS REFERENCE \_\_\_\_\_

METHOD OF CONTACT \_\_\_\_\_  
(TELEPHONE, LETTER, PERSONAL CONVERSATION)

This person (applicant name) has applied to work with children at Providence Presbyterian Church, and has listed you as a reference, and given us written permission to contact you. Would you please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. This should only take a few minutes and is very important to our Church programs. Thank you.

QUESTIONS:

- A. HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THE APPLICANT?
  
- B. IN WHAT CAPACITY?
  
- C. BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE APPLICANT WOULD WORK WELL WITH CHILDREN ? (WHY, OR WHY NOT)  
  
GRADES K THRU 6:  
  
JUNIOR HIGH:  
  
SENIOR HIGH:
  
- D. ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?
  
- E. ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY PROBLEMS THAT WOULD AFFECT THEIR WORK WITH CHILDREN?
  
- F. WOULD YOU ENTRUST YOUR CHILD TO THIS PERSON?
  
- G. ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

**Appendix C – Child Protection Policy Acceptance Form**

**Providence Presbyterian Church  
Child Protection Policy Acceptance**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), accept the responsibility to nurture the Christian faith and well-being of the children and youth of Providence Presbyterian Church, and to care for them as Christ cares for me.

"I... will tend the flock of God that is in my charge, exercising the oversight ... willingly, as God would have me do it...., (I Peter 5:2).

I have read the Providence Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy and accept it. I hereby affirm that I have not resigned from, or been terminated from a position for reasons relating to sexual abuse or misconduct, as defined in the Policy statement. I further affirm that I am not a registered sex offender.

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(Signature and date)

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### Appendix D - Congregational Letter

Dear Friends,

Providence Presbyterian Church, like other voluntary, religious, educational, and social service organizations, is being called upon to deal with difficult and sensitive issues relating to personal ethics and sexual misconduct. Churches are by nature trusting and unsuspecting institutions, and have traditionally accepted the services of anyone expressing an interest in working as a volunteer with children or youth. Asking sensitive questions of potential teachers or leaders can be seen as distasteful and offensive.

These qualities can make a church extremely susceptible to incidents of child molestation. As scouting organizations and other churches institute programs to reduce these risks, child molesters may be attracted to those organizations which have not done so. A single incident of molestation can devastate the individuals involved, and also an entire church. The viability of the church's youth programs are jeopardized and church members collectively face blame, guilt, and possibly legal liability for negligence in allowing the incident to happen.

However, programs of relatively simple, yet effective steps have been developed by the National Capital Presbytery and other organizations that will reduce the likelihood of abuse in the church. It is time for Providence Presbyterian Church to join thousands of other churches that are taking positive actions to make their churches safer places for children, youth, and all members.

To that end, our Child Protection Policy has recently been developed by a representative committee, and adopted by our Session. All volunteer and staff child care workers will be contacted and asked to read the policy, and to sign a card acknowledging they have done so.

I encourage you to speak with me or Mary Rodgers if you have questions or comments about the policy. We pray that our life together as a caring and responsible community of faith will continue to deepen in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely yours,

The Rev. Dr. Michael P. Burns  
Pastor

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### Appendix E - Implementation Plan

The following steps were undertaken in initially implementing the Child Protection Policy at Providence Presbyterian Church.

1. Dec,1996- Letter from the Pastor, Child Protection Policy Brochure mailed to entire congregation (see Appendix D).
2. Jan, 1997 - Policy presented at the Annual Meeting.
3. Jan,1997- Applications mailed to all current teachers and youth leaders.
4. Jan, 1997 - Teachers meeting January 26, 1997 (film is shown, followed by discussion, application forms and acceptance forms completed).
5. Feb, 1997 - Two elders, plus 3 additional committee members chosen, as Child Protection Sub-committee of the Children's Ministry Committee, to carry out screening (calling references), and are trained by the Director of Educational Ministries (DEM). The responsibility for seeing that this is done is added to the job description for the DEM.
6. Mar, 1997- Jun, 1997 Locking file cabinet is purchased, Screening is completed for all current workers, forms are filed in locking cabinet.
7. June, 1997 - Sept. 1997 All new teachers and youth leaders fill out application forms and acceptance forms.
8. The Session of Providence amended the policy at its regular monthly meeting in October 1999.

*The Session of Providence is scheduled to approve an amended policy in September, 2006.*

**Appendix F – Report Form**

**Report Form for Suspected Instances of Sexual/Physical Abuse**

1) Volunteer/paid staff observing/receiving disclosure of sexual abuse; date/time/place: \_\_\_\_\_

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Brief notes:

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2. Victim's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Victim's age/date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/time/place of initial conversation with victim:

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Victim's Statements:

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3. Name of accused (paid staff, volunteer, or other) of abuse:

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If accused is staff or volunteer, date/time/place of initial conversation:

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Notes of conversation:

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Suspension date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes of suspension:

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