

The Wesleyan Church of North America & Life Stone Wesleyan Church

GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN AND OTHER VULNERABLE PERSONS

I. Purpose - Life Stone Church (hereinafter, the "Church") has a sacred desire to keep our children, youth and other vulnerable persons safe from harm. The purpose of these Guidelines for Protecting Our Children and Other Vulnerable Persons (the "Guidelines") is to raise awareness, provide information and set out procedures designed to protect vulnerable individuals, particularly our children and youth, from abuse while at Church events.

Although the Church is concerned when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, the specific focus of these Guidelines is to make effort to ensure that abuse does not occur within the framework of this Church, its programs or ministry activities. These Guidelines are intended to help make the Church in all of its settings a truly safe and caring place.

II. Standards of Conduct -The Church endeavors to provide a safe environment for all children entrusted into its care during worship gathering's, during involvement in any church ministry and any Church sponsored event and all encounters between children and church workers. These same principles of protection will be adapted and applied to any adult known to be vulnerable due to age, developmental disabilities or other factors.

A. Prohibited Conduct: Conduct that is prohibited includes:

- **Abuse** - any physical, mental, or emotional abuse of a child or children involving harm or the threat of harm to a child by an adult who is responsible for the child's health and welfare.
- **Neglect** - any act of neglect that results in an unreasonable risk being posed to a child's health or welfare by an adult who is responsible for the child's health and welfare - also, the failure to act in a manner that would prevent or eliminate that risk by a responsible adult who has (or should have) knowledge of that risk.
- **Sexual abuse and exploitation** - any behavior by an adult that uses a child for sexual stimulation, whether it involves actual touching or not, and regardless of consent or apparent consent as well as any behavior that is sexual in nature or creates a sexually charged environment.

B. Desired Conduct: As a preventative measure, all church workers are required to follow the following procedures adopted by the Church.

1. Two-Adult Rule: In ministry with minors, especially involving infants and pre-school aged children, there should always be a minimum of two adults in the immediate area. Groups larger than 10 young children should have additional supervision, depending upon the age of the children and the activity. **A general rule of thumb would be one (1) adult for every five (5) children.** However, for children who are older, but still under the age of 18, the following exception for Sunday school classes is acceptable:

- a. **Exception:** Sunday school classes for fifth grade through high school students may have the presence of only one approved teacher if the following measures have been taken:
 - i. The door is left open or there is a window in the door that allows unobstructed visibility into the classroom; and
 - ii. The classrooms are periodically monitored by another approved adult worker.

**Under no circumstances will it ever be acceptable
for a teen helper to be alone with a class of children.**

2. One-on-One Meetings: The nature of such ministry, especially youth ministry, is that it often takes place spontaneously. Nonetheless, to the extent possible, one-on-one meetings between an adult church worker and an individual minor should be conducted in an area that provides visibility to other adults and at a time when other adults are normally present in that vicinity.

III. Preventative Measures and Hiring/Volunteering Requirements

A. Initial Requirements: All those who wish to work with minors in any capacity in the Church must meet the following requirements before they will be permitted to work in any ministry or Church activity involving children:

- Complete an application and receive a positive recommendation after personal interview(s) by representatives of the ministry team and the Local Board of Administration;
- Obtain a favorable criminal background check;
- Participate in required child protection training;
- Be knowledgeable about these Guidelines; and.
- Attend church consistently for a minimum of 6 months prior to any assignment.

B. Criminal Background Check: A criminal background check must be completed and a favorable report received prior to any individual beginning work/ ministry in any capacity with minors in the Church. This check shall include both a State and National criminal background check. It is the policy of the Church not to accept the record of a background check obtained from any other source nor any report that is more than 2 years old.

In addition to those who work with any children's ministry, all ministers, members of the Local Board of Administration, and employees of the Church should be screened and participate in training.

C. Mandatory Training - All workers with children, paid or volunteer, all ministers, members of the Local Board of Administration, and employees of the Church are required to complete training designed to instruct them about the:

- Church's guidelines for the prevention of child abuse.
- The Church's established procedures to be used in all ministries with children.
- Signs and indicators of possible child abuse.
- Required steps to report an alleged or actual incident of child abuse.
- State law regarding child abuse

At the completion of the training, the participants will be asked to sign a form acknowledging they have completed the required training, are knowledgeable about the Church's policies and procedures for the prevention of child abuse, and understand when and how to report suspected child abuse.

D. Ongoing Requirements for All Who Work with Children: All workers with children, paid or volunteer, all local church employees and leadership are subject to the following continuing obligations:

- Participate in all required training sessions on child protection;
- Be aware & vigilant when working with children;
- Report ALL suspected child abuse immediately pursuant to these Guidelines;
- Follow up on any reporting by timely completing required reports;
- Cooperate with authorities and church leaders;

- Cooperate as required to obtain updated background re-checks every 2 years;
- Refrain from sharing information with others about any suspected violation of these Guidelines, except as provided in the reporting procedures or required by law, so as to protect the identity and reputations of the alleged victim and alleged abuser. Gossip not only hurts the alleged abuser and alleged victim but negatively impacts their families and the church community as a whole. Reporting is critical; gossip is unnecessary.

E. Ongoing Responsibilities of Church Leadership:

- Ensure all who work with children in the Church have obtained favorable background checks;
- Ensure all who work with children in the Church have received child protection training required by the Church;
- Ensure all who work with children in the church are knowledgeable about the Church's Guidelines;
- Conduct periodic review of these Guidelines & update as needed;
- Require periodic update background re-checks. Every 2-3 years is advised.
- Reporting incidents that may lead to claims to Church's insurer.
- Ensure all background check reports are maintained in a secure, locked manner and are only accessible by those on a need-to-know basis.

IV. Procedures for Reporting Child Abuse:

1. What Must Be Reported? To protect the children who have been entrusted to our care, anyone who has formed a reasonable suspicion that a violation of these guidelines has occurred based on their own observations or on a plausible report from a reliable source should promptly report inappropriate, abusive or neglectful conduct toward a child.

2. Report to Whom? Report internally to one of the Church's pastors or one of the members of the Local Board of Administration (the "Responsible Person") and the local civil authority, usually police or child welfare agency, per local laws.

3. When to Report? Make your report immediately or as soon as possible after learning of an alleged incident or you develop a suspicion that abuse and/or neglect has occurred.

4. How to Report? Notify a Responsible Person verbally, in person or by phone. This should be done in a manner which protects the confidentiality of the conversation. Contact information for the police and child protective service agencies are included in Appendix E.

V. Response and Investigation by the Police or Child Protective Service? The Child Protective Services Act of 1973 encourages the prompt reporting of suspected child abuse and maltreatment. The law established a Child Protective Service in each county in New York. Each Child Protective Service is required to investigate child abuse and maltreatment reports, to protect children (under 18 years old) from further abuse or maltreatment, and to provide rehabilitative services to children, parents, and other family members involved. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services maintains a Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) for reports made pursuant to the Social Services Law. The Statewide Central Register, also known as the "Hotline," receives telephone calls alleging child abuse or maltreatment within New York State. The Statewide Central Register relays information from the calls to the local Child Protective Service for investigation, monitors their

VI. What Steps Should the Responsible Person Consider After A Report Is Made?

Suspected child abuse or neglect is a serious matter that can arise in any number of circumstances and may evoke strong emotions. There are many important factors to consider in developing an appropriate response to a report of suspected abuse. To insure a timely and effective response, it is wise to seek the assistance and guidance of one of the pastors and one or more members of the Local Board of Administration (provided that none of them are alleged to have been involved in the alleged abuse or neglect). The combined reflection and analysis of a small group of trustworthy Church leaders can insure that important details are not overlooked and that a timely and effective initial response is formulated. Before taking any action beyond what is required by law, consult with the Church's attorney. There are often privacy, employment, health care, liability and other legal issues which may be unknowingly negatively impacted. A responsive plan should be tailored to address the particular circumstances and should include consideration of all of the following measures:

1. Ensuring the alleged child victim and all other children under the Church's responsibility are safe.
2. Temporarily removing the alleged abuser from all contact with children while treating the alleged abuser respectfully knowing that the allegations remain under investigation.
3. Communicating in an appropriate manner with the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the alleged victim to share information on the alleged incident and to ensure that any necessary medical or supportive attention is obtained for the child.
4. Verifying that the church worker (reporter) made the required initial report and any written follow up report to the police or to Child Protective Service.
5. Reporting the alleged incident to appropriate local church leaders, such as the local board of administration;
6. Reporting the alleged incident to the District Superintendent;
7. Reporting alleged incident to Church's attorney;
8. Reporting the alleged incident to the Church's insurance provider;
9. With the advice of the Church's attorney, cooperating with civil authorities and the Church's insurer.
10. Keeping accurate records of all steps taken by the Church in response to the allegations. Retain copies of all reports, correspondence and statements - including email and other electronic communication and documents that are related to this matter together.

b. The following principles should guide the formation of an effective response to a report of suspected abuse or neglect:

- i. It is the Church's policy to treat the accused abuser with dignity and confidentiality to the extent possible as the allegations may be unfounded.
- ii. When child abuse occurs and even if allegations are later proven untrue, many others in addition to the alleged victim are often harmed. These may include: peers of the child, family members of the child, peers of the child's parents, other workers with children in the Church, the entire congregation and family members of the accused abuser. Though sensitive to this reality, it is the Church's policy to first protect the child and all other children and to cooperate with the authorities, and then to promote healing of all who are adversely affected by abuse or allegations of abuse.

