

# **Child/Youth Protection Policy of the Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)**

## **General Purpose Statement:**

Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children and youth of Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting those employed as child care workers and volunteers from false accusations.

## **Definitions:**

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

## **Selection Of Workers:**

All employees and all persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

### **a. Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be allowed to work with children until s/he has been a member or regular attendee of Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) for 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.

### **b. Written Application**

All persons, paid or volunteer, seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church 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 Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA).

### **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 as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA).

### **e. Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers who work with children:

- Those who will be involved in our Nursery
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with minors

- Those who represent Montreat Presbyterian Church while working with children in the Community Vacation Bible School and at Children and Friends Enrichment Center.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Children's Ministry Team on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our 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 Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). If the applicant has been a child care worker in the Clubs Program of the Montreat Conference Center within two years of the application, they can sign a release for the Montreat Presbyterian Church to ask the Montreat Conference Center for a copy of their criminal background check.

### **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers (over age 18) will be in attendance when children are being supervised in the Nursery. The Tabernacle, Christian Education time for school age children, may have only one adult teacher in attendance. Tabernacle time is during the sermon and is in a room or stairwell next to the worship space. When our program for children and youth expands, this policy will be updated to define appropriate adult supervision/teaching.

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

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical abuse - any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse - emotional injury when the child 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 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 child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Chair of Christian Education and to the Buncombe County Department of Social Services, as mandated by North Carolina state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at the Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) or 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 alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.
3. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report.
4. We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
5. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children or youth.
7. Our Clerk of Session will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. All other workers should refrain from speaking to the media.
8. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.

### **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

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

For children in the Nursery a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed.

### **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children. Toys and other surfaces are routinely wiped with a diluted bleach solution. Latex gloves are used for diapering. Policies for safety and sanitation are clearly stated and included in training.

### **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy. Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Christian Education Committee's Nursery Coordinator to develop a plan of action.

### **Discipline Policy**

The policy of Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) is not to administer corporal punishment. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Nursery Coordinator or the Chair of Christian Education if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## **Restroom Guidelines**

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.

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.

## **Accidental Injuries to Children**

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

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid 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. (a First Aid Kit with bandaids, etc. is in the Nursery)
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**

Montreat Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers, as well as their Roles and Responsibilities and will strive to provide appropriate training on an annual basis.