Sample Church Child Protection Policy Handbook

Approved on MM DD, YYYY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome! 3

Note to Parents 3

Protecting Children Before They Arrive 4

Commitment to Safety and Abuse Prevention 4 Policy Implementation and Review 4 Volunteer / Staff Screening and Training 5

Protecting Children in Our Care 6

Supervision and Visibility 6 Drop-off and Pick-up 7 Contacting Parents or a Supervisor 8 Bathroom and Diapering Procedures 8 Physical Interactions 8 Discipline 9 Wellness 9 Cleanliness 10 Injury 10 Food and Allergies 10 Evacuation 11

Reporting Suspected Abuse 11

Church Contacts 13

[church name] Children's Staff / Volunteer Expectations & Agreement 14

[church name] Children's Staff / Volunteer References 15

Background Check Acknowledgement & Release 17

[church name] Injury Report 18

Welcome!

What a privilege it is to minister to the children that God has blessed us with at [church name]. We care deeply about the sons and daughters entrusted in our care and desire to help lead them to a love for Jesus and His gospel that is rooted in the Bible and God's grace. We thank our volunteers for supporting our families by acting as covenant parents helping to teach and nurture children within the church community. Our prayer is that they grow into healthy, faith-filled adults who worship and glorify God in all of life.

NOTE TO PARENTS

It is our joy to serve you and your children by providing a nurturing and caring place for them to learn about the God who loves them. In order to promote a welcoming and safe environment for all our families, we have adopted this handbook which describes our policies and procedures regarding children in our care. To help us in doing so, these are a few guidelines we ask parents to follow:

- Engage with other families with grace and love, and seek to extend hospitality.
- Help maintain a healthy environment for all children and caregivers by following our wellness policy herein.
- Have essential items with you at church (such as diapering supplies and a change of clothes for infants and toddlers, a sippy cup if you prefer your child use one from home, and a photo ID in case you lose your parent security tag for pick-up).
- Refrain from letting your child bring "prized items" from home into nursery or classes (as such items often lead to conflicts between children). *Though, please talk to us if bringing a "lovey" or soothing item is essential to a successful transition for your child.*
- Communicate with us regarding specific needs or preferences you have for your child.

Additionally, we ask that each parent or guardian read this handbook carefully so you are aware of all our policies and procedures and are prepared to adhere to them at church.

[church name] is committed to welcoming and including children of all abilities in our children's programming. We recognize that children with disabilities and special needs may require additional support in order to participate in our children's activities. Parents or guardians of children needing additional support should contact the children's ministry director at their location (see Church Contacts section) in order to develop and agree upon an appropriate plan to best facilitate their child's successful inclusion.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Grace and Peace,

The Children's Ministry Leaders at [church name]

Protecting Children Before They Arrive

COMMITMENT TO SAFETY AND ABUSE PREVENTION

[church name] is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children entrusted in our care (where "child" means anyone under the age of eighteen). It is the responsibility of staff and volunteers serving as caregivers or teachers at [church name] to act in the best interest of children at all times. [church name] has a zero tolerance for abuse in its programs and ministry activities. The policies and procedures outlined in this handbook are in place for the protection of both our children and our volunteers and staff.

The state of Massachusetts defines abuse as the non-accidental commission of any act by a caregiver which causes or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury or sexual abuse of a child; or the victimization of a child through sexual exploitation or human trafficking, regardless if the person responsible is a caregiver (where 'caregiver' includes any person entrusted with responsibility for a child's welfare in a child care or other comparable setting).¹

Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following: ¹

- **Physical abuse**: striking, spanking, kicking, shaking, burning, biting, or throwing objects
- Emotional & verbal abuse: degrading, threatening or bullying
- **Sexual abuse:** physical contact with an intimate or sexual part of the body, sexually suggestive language, exposure to sexual content or activity including pornography
- Spiritual abuse: abuse administered under the guise of religion or religious authority
- **Neglect:** failure to provide minimally adequate food, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care

Our hope is that children never encounter these kinds of situations. However, understanding we live in a broken world and seeking to protect children in the church from anyone with intentions to hurt or abuse them, it is important and necessary to define these terms.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

The Children's Ministry Leadership, under the supervision of the Session, shall oversee the implementation and ongoing application of this Child Protection Handbook. They may delegate to other church leaders or coordinators the responsibility for adherence to this handbook within their specific ministry or area (e.g. Women's Ministry, special events).

This handbook may be revised at any time. Any changes in church policy, authoritative law or experience shall be considered in revising this handbook. All revisions shall be approved by the Session. When revisions are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all employees and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

¹ For MA abuse-related definitions see https://www.mass.gov/info-details/definitions-of-abuse-and-neglect

[church name] may allow exceptions to this handbook that are preapproved (should be rare and communicated to parents in advance) or for emergencies. All exceptions should be documented.

VOLUNTEER / STAFF SCREENING AND TRAINING

SCREENING

At [church name] we take seriously the call in Scripture to nurture and teach our children. We share this responsibility as a church body by asking that members serve as volunteers in our children's ministry, though individuals may decline to do so for any reason. Church leaders also reserve the right to deny an individual or remove a volunteer from serving with children at [church name] at any time and for any reason. Because child safety is a paramount concern, all volunteers and staff (paid full-time and part-time) age 16 or older who work with children at [church name] must meet the following qualifications (and unless met will not count toward room staffing minimums):

- 1. Be a member of [church name] (process as per the *Book of Church Order*²).
- Provide at least two (2) professional/personal references upon application to be conducted prior to any service with the church. The references are to be conducted by an authority within the church (see attached form). The authority should note any information they tried to secure but could not verify or obtain.
- 3. Consent to a background check. This will include both a national and Massachusetts CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) criminal records check at the outset, with the CORI rechecked every three years.
- 4. Read and agree to follow all policies and procedures detailed in this handbook by signing the Children's Staff/Volunteer Expectations at the end of this document.

TRAINING

Volunteers and staff who work with children are initially required to complete child abuse and neglect awareness training (administered either by a qualified organization or individual as identified by the church). They are also encouraged to attend periodic training sessions that review this Child Protection Handbook and allow for questions. Ongoing "training" is also promoted by having key policy and procedures from this handbook available to staff/volunteers to refer to when serving.

EXCEPTIONS

Non-members & paid workers: Individuals who are not members of [church name] may be approved as volunteers or hired as childcare workers provided they meet all other screening/training above and are subject to additional screening including a written application

² http://www.pcaac.org/resources/bco/

and personal interview. Non-member volunteers must also have attended [church name] for at least six months.

Minor volunteers (under age 18): As older kids are valued in the care of our younger children, those in Grade 4 and up are permitted to serve but are considered as helpers (in addition to room staffing minimums). They are approved on an individual basis by ministry leaders and not subject to the screening/training specified above. Upon age 16, minors may count toward room staffing minimums if screened and complete training, except background checks will not be conducted until age 18.

Current volunteers and staff: For those already serving before this policy was adopted, no professional/personal references are required. However, they must review and sign this handbook before continuing to serve. Those subject to only a MA CORI background check must consent to a national records check by their next "recheck" date.

Sexual Offenders: [church name] may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation but they must adhere to specific guidelines.

- 1. A registered sexual offender cannot participate in any of the child or youth programs in any way;
- 2. While participating in church-related activities, a known sexual offender must comply with any requirements set out by the Session which may include the need to report in and be accompanied by another adult.
- 3. [church name] reserves the right to disclose the identity of the sexual offender to the congregation.

Nothing above shall limit the Session from imposing additional requirements on a registered sexual offender nor from imposing similar requirements on a known sexual offender.

Protecting Children in Our Care

SUPERVISION AND VISIBILITY

As a general safety measure, interactions between staff/volunteers and children should be observable and interruptible by others. When children are present at church programs **a minimum of two staff/volunteers** should be in the room at all times. If a staff/volunteer needs to step out of the room (including to use the restroom) and doing so would violate this rule, another staff/volunteer must stand-in for the individual. (Note, a supervisor should be contacted for help if necessary.)

Should a child arrive when only one staff/volunteer is in the room, the parent should be asked to stay until the second staff/volunteer arrives. If the child was unaccompanied, the staff/volunteer should keep doors to the room open and alert the supervisor of the situation.

Staff/volunteers should not remove a child from a room at any time (including taking a crying child out of the room to settle down). However, a staff/volunteer may take an older, school-aged child to the hallway just outside the room for a short period (e.g. to discuss a behavior problem) if it does not violate the two-person room minimum and they remain visible to another staff/volunteer. In instances when an older child needs to take a break from class (e.g. feeling overwhelmed in a noisy room), the child may be allowed to sit just outside the classroom door if a staff/volunteer remains in the doorway (in view of other staff/volunteers in the room) and monitors the child the entire time.

STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

- A reasonable ratio of staff/volunteers to children should be maintained at all times with Massachusetts state childcare ratios as a guideline³.
- It is preferred that when only two staff/volunteers are present with children (especially with young children or during off-site activities) that they are unrelated to each other (not spouses, siblings, parent/child).

EXCEPTIONS

Transferring children between rooms: It is reasonable for one staff/volunteer to escort children between rooms through public areas if predetermined as part of a class/program schedule.

Off-site ministry activities: The two-person staffing rule should also be followed in ministryrelated situations off-site. However, in some instances it is reasonable for a staff/volunteer to be one-on-one with an older child if they remain in public areas at all times (e.g. on walks or visits to restaurants and the other adult leaves to use the restroom). A staff/volunteer may be one-on-one with a child in a private residence (e.g. youth meeting) if they remain in public areas with all doors to the room open and if another adult is in the residence.

DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP

A secure identification system will be implemented for young children dropped off for churchrelated activities and events. The system shall identify persons authorized to pick up children upon departure (e.g. verifying matching parent/child labels, checking IDs against a sign-in sheet). The identification system will not be necessary for children above the grade of kindergarten (though some sites may extend this age).

Picking up older children: Children falling outside the age for secure check-in/out will be released at dismissal time; parents are not required to pick them up. Parents who prefer to pick up older children are responsible for arriving at the dismissal time.

³ Department of Early Education and Care 606 CMR 7.10

Parents entering children's rooms: To maintain a safe, accurate and smooth check-in and check-out process, parents should enter the room at the discretion of the staff and volunteers. Parents may at times need to be present in the room, e.g. to transition a hesitant child, soothe or assist an upset child, or help if the room is abnormally busy.

Special Events: An alternate check-in method (e.g. sign-in sheet) may be used during off-site events involving a more secure, designated group (e.g. church getaway).

Drop-in Activities: Some events may be more "drop-in" in nature, or in public areas like parks where children may already be present and unaccompanied. To participate in these events, children are required to either be accompanied by a parent/guardian, or receive parent/guardian permission to participate, typically by a permission slip or registration form. Parents will be notified of the beginning and ending times of events, and are responsible for the pickup of their children at the appropriate time.

CONTACTING PARENTS OR A SUPERVISOR

Parents will be contacted if needed for their child (e.g. page or text). If a parent does not respond, a staff or volunteer may then try to find that person within the building.

Staff or volunteers in a children's room who need additional assistance for any reason should contact (e.g. page or text) the supervisor on duty.

BATHROOM AND DIAPERING PROCEDURES

[church name] generally has a "no diaper-change" and "no-toileting" policy for those working with children. Parents are responsible for changing diapers and taking children (age 3 and under) to the restroom and will be contacted as needed. Parents are also encouraged to take children to the bathroom prior to drop-off.

Children 4 years and older (who can independently use the toilet) are allowed to take themselves to the bathroom. However, for children ages 4 and 5, a staff/volunteer should stand in the classroom doorway most visible to the restroom to monitor children to and from the restroom. If there is no such visibility of the bathroom, then one or more staff/volunteers may escort children to the bathroom *only if* doing so leaves *at least* two other staff/volunteers in the room with the other children. The staff/volunteers should stand outside the door to the restroom and should NOT enter the bathroom. A staff/volunteer should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed or in a closed bathroom stall. If none of these conditions are met or the child needs additional assistance, please contact the parent to escort the child to the bathroom.

PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS

Healthy relationships with their caregivers and teachers allow children to feel safe and secure. Appropriate touch is part of a positive, nurturing environment. To ensure all interactions with our children are above reproach, these guidelines are to be carefully followed by staff/volunteers:

Appropriate physical interactions (accompanied by good judgment):

- handshakes, high-fives and fist bumps
- a brief, assuring pat on the head, back or shoulder
- walking hand-in-hand with young children
- hand holding during prayer
- side hugs (an arm around the shoulder)
- brief front hugs (within sight of others; best if child initiated)
- infants and toddlers may be held, hugged, rocked and have their backs rubbed

Inappropriate physical interactions (not an exhaustive list):

- corporal punishment or physical abuse
- sexual abuse or any contact for sexual gratification
- tickling or wrestling
- kissing
- rubbing/massaging a child older than toddler (age 4+)
- prolonged or lingering hugs or other close physical contact not allowed above
- lap sitting with a child older than toddler (age 4+)
- carrying a child (including "piggy-back" rides) who is not an infant or toddler (age 4+)

DISCIPLINE

Staff/volunteers should promote a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which children can worship, learn, play, and interact with others by:

- 1. proactively reminding children of and directing them toward acceptable activities,
- 2. verbally encouraging and reinforcing positive behavior,
- 3. and, when necessary, redirecting inappropriate behavior.

If a child is having difficulty following instructions or is being repeatedly disruptive, the child may be asked to take a break in a different area of the room for a set time or until the child is ready to participate appropriately. If none of these measures is effective, or the child exhibits behavior that could be harmful to themselves or others, the child's parent should be contacted and the supervisor notified. If a child has been bitten or injured by another child, the supervisor should be notified, who in turn will notify the parents of both children.

Staff/volunteers are prohibited from swearing or using any form of physical punishment or discipline with children.

WELLNESS

In order to provide a safe, healthy environment for all our children, staff and volunteers, we ask parents to refrain from bringing children to nursery or classes if they exhibit any of the symptoms below. The same applies to teachers, volunteers and staff scheduled to serve with the children. If a child develops any of these symptoms while in our care, a parent will be contacted to pick up the child.

- suspected illness or child is feeling unwell
- fever, vomiting, or diarrhea in the last 24 hours
- runny nose not clear in color (or excessive discharge of any color)
- cough, sore throat (including strep, croup)
- contagious infection or rash ("pink-eye", impetigo, etc.)
- head lice (should be free of nits)
- symptoms of communicable diseases (chicken pox, mumps, measles, etc.)
- use of antibiotics for 24 hours or less

CLEANLINESS

Staff/volunteers are also asked to keep rooms clean and in order by following clean-up procedures posted in the room or communicated by ministry supervisors or leaders. Children should also be encouraged to help as a way of caring for and serving our church.

INJURY

Although we strive to provide a safe environment, the nature of children's activities occasionally leads to accidents, which should be handled as follows:

- 1. Any life-threatening situations should be given immediate medical attention by contacting 911; parents and a supervisor should then be promptly notified.
- 2. Staff/volunteers may attend to minor cuts, scrapes and bumps (e.g. applying a bandage or cold pack). A first aid kit is accessible in the children's areas (contents per the discretion of the Children's Ministry Leaders).
- 3. Any injury or illness should be reported to the supervisor, who will in turn notify a parent (since trivial injuries can turn out to be serious).
- 4. Once a child has received attention, the staff/volunteer or supervisor will complete an incident report (attached) for any injuries beyond minor cuts or scrapes.

No medications are allowed in children's rooms except inhalers, EpiPens or other required emergency medication, which may be administered by those trained. However, [church name] will not be responsible for any "Good Samaritan" assistance offered by any of its congregants.

FOOD AND ALLERGIES

Food and snacks may be served to certain age-groups of children under our care. To be welcoming of those with food allergies and dietary restrictions, nutritional and ingredient information for regularly served food will be made available if needed. Occasionally other food may be served (e.g. as part of a lesson or special celebration) and such will be communicated to parents (e.g. an announcement in the service prior to children's dismissal or posting an "Allergy Alert" at the check-in station or classroom door).

If a child is allergic to church-provided snacks or needs any special accommodations during snack time (e.g. refraining from snack or alternate food), parents must speak with a Children's Ministry leader or supervisor BEFORE leaving their children.

EVACUATION

In the event of an emergency, staff/volunteers are responsible for leading the children in their room safely out of the building. Ministry supervisors and church officers should assist with this process. The general evacuation plan for all sites is as follows:

- 1. Have the children in your room form a line. Younger children should pair-up and hold hands or be given something to grab onto (e.g. a rope with hand-holds). Infant and non-walkers should be carried or pushed in strollers.
- 2. Verify against a child roster or check-in records that all children are accounted for in your room. Take the roster/record with you when you leave.
- 3. With one staff/volunteer at the beginning of the line and another at the end, lead the children out of the building.
- 5. Once outside, lead the children a safe distance from the building or to any location agreed upon for your site.
- 6. Recheck attendance to make sure that everyone is accounted for and await further instructions.

Note: Parents should evacuate the building utilizing the nearest exit, then find their children once outside. Parents flooding the children's areas would cause congestion and prevent the children from being safely evacuated from the building.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

Per <u>Massachusetts General Laws</u>, chapter 119, section 51A, staff and volunteers working with children should immediate report if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering physical or emotional injury, including:

- abuse inflicted upon him/her which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare, including sexual abuse
- neglect, including malnutrition
- being a sexually exploited child
- being a human trafficking victim

The reporting process is as follows:

- 1. IMMEDIATELY report the situation to one of the pastors or children's ministry leaders.
- 2. This pastor or children's ministry leader is then responsible for notifying the state as a designated Mandated Reporter* and:
 - a) Must IMMEDIATELY make an ORAL report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).
 - b) Must file a WRITTEN report ("51A report") with DCF within 48 hours of the oral report.
 - c) In addition, the Mandated Reporter may contact local law enforcement of any suspected abuse and/or neglect.
 - d) Must report a death as a result of abuse and/or neglect to the local District Attorney and to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

NOTE: Specific details for how to report may also be found in the <u>A Mandated</u> <u>Reporter Guide</u> available from DCF at <u>www.mass.gov/dcf</u>.

- 3. Cooperate fully with the church leadership, law enforcement and DCF⁴ as necessary.
- 4. Maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved, to the extent possible, while upholding reporting protocols.

If a staff or volunteer is unable to confirm, or has any doubt, that an incident has been reported within the prescribed time, he or she should report the matter directly to DCF.

 *Designated Mandatory Reporters at each church site should have completed the Massachusetts DCF training video on <u>reporting child abuse or neglect</u> available at <u>www.mass.gov/dcf</u>.

⁴ Any person defined by law as a mandated reporter is required to assist DCF in its response (M.G.L. ch. 119, § 51B) even if they are not the filer of the 51A report.

Church Contacts

[Pastor Name], Pastor [email address]

[Director's Name], Children's Ministry Director [email address]

[Coordinator's Name], Nursery Coordinator [email address]

Church Volunteer Hotline [phone number]

Children's Staff / Volunteer Expectations & Agreement

We are excited and grateful to have you partner with the church as we nurture and teach the youngest in our community. This handbook is intended to help you serve joyfully and confidently by knowing what to expect during your time together with the children, providing clear policies and procedures to follow. Therefore, we ask that you read this handbook carefully and apply these things as you care for the children within the church.

We also ask those who serve with our children to commit to:

- Arrive on-time for service and communicate any last-minute emergencies to the [church name] Volunteer Hotline.
- Care for the children in a way that models God's love for them
- Be quick to encourage children and affirm positive behavior and never using any form of physical punishment.
- Spend your time with the children engaging them in meaningful ways (e.g. playing with young children, reading Bible stories with enthusiasm, share about living out your faith with older kids).
- When applicable, be a prepared teacher, reading and meditating on the lesson or Scripture in advance, for God's work in our hearts and lives overflows to our students.
- Be responsive to volunteer emails and follow protocols when scheduling conflicts arise
- Avoid the possession or use of weapons/dangerous items in the presence of children.
- Avoid the possession, use or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco and vaping products, and heavy pain medication in the presence of children; using and possessing illegal drugs is prohibited.
- Refrain from cell phone and other device usage in children's rooms except as allowed in this handbook (e.g. contacting parents, calling 911). Phones should be on vibrate/silent.
- Make an effort to attend training sessions for those working with children when offered.

I have received a copy of the [church name] Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy. I acknowledge that I have read and become familiar with the information contained herein.

Print Name	Parent Name (co-signing on behalf of minor)
Signature	Parent Signature (co-signing on behalf of minor)
Date	Date

[church name] Children's Staff / Volunteer References

Name:	Date:		
Address:			
City:	State: Zip:		
Primary/Cell Phone:	Email:		
Please list two individuals who may be co	ntacted for a personal and/or professional reference.		
REFERENCE 1	REFERENCE 2		
Name:	Name:		
Address:	Address:		
City:	City:		
State: Zip:	State: Zip:		
Phone:	Phone:		
Years known:	Years known:		
The information provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.			
Signature	Date		
Printed Name:			
Section below For office use only.			
-	mum, the following information will be requested for deal deal deal deal deal deal deal deal		

- 1. How long have you known the individual and in what context?
- 2. Do you think the individual is suitable to work with children?
- 3. Is there any information you would like to share that you feel would affect this individual's ability to care well for the children of our church?

CONT'D - section For office use only.	
REFERENCE 1	
Name & position of individual conducting reference:	
Date Contacted:	Contact via: phone call / text / email
Question 1 notes:	
Question 2 notes:	
Question 3 notes:	
Note any information you tried to secure but could not v	verify or obtain:
REFERENCE 2	
Name & position of individual conducting reference:	
Date Contacted:	
Question 1 notes:	
Question 2 notes:	
Question 3 notes:	
Note any information you tried to secure but could not v	verify or obtain:

[church name] Child Protection Policy

Background Check Acknowledgement & Release

- 1. MA CORI Acknowledgement Form & [church name] CORI Policy
- 2. National Check (consent given electronically through link sent via email)

[church name] Injury Report

Your Name:	Phone:	
Address:		
City: State:		
Injured Person's Name:	Age:	
Date of Injury: Approx	. Time: AM PM	
Where did the injury occur?		
What church-related event/activity was the injured		
Describe the Injury sustained:		
Describe any first-aid / treatment administered on		
If medical treatment sought:		
Where was injured taken? (hospital / doctor):		
Does the injured party have medical insurance?	YES NO DO NOT KNOW	
Insurance Co. Name & Phone:		
List individuals who witnessed the injury:		
Witness Name:	Phone:	
Witness Name:	Phone:	
Signature	Date of Report	