

New Life in Christ Child Protection Plan

1.0 Purpose

“Behold, children are a gift of the LORD.” - Psalm 127:3

- a. Believing that children are our sacred trust from a just and loving God, New Life in Christ Church (NLICC) is committed to provide a nurturing and vibrant Christian environment that will foster our children’s faith for an entire lifetime of walking with God (Psalm 78:5-8). To that end, NLICC will work for the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the programs and activities of the church. In an effort to reduce the possibility that any child or youth (meaning all those under 18 years of age) will be subjected to physical or sexual abuse, NLICC has established this plan to increase awareness within our ministry to ensure the security and welfare of the children and the volunteers who work with them..

- b. While NLICC will work diligently to apply this plan, due to the nature of ministry it makes no express or implied guarantee that every aspect of the plan will be followed in every situation. As the guidelines in this plan are intended solely to ensure the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the programs and activities of NLICC, it is not intended to and should not be construed to give rise to any independent cause of action or any rights in third parties enforceable at law or in equity. Any concerns about the implementation of the plan should be directed to the session of the church or a member of the Children’s Ministry Team.

- c. This plan also directs that supervision of activities involving children and adults together be conducted in a manner that reduces the risk of abuse as well as false allegations of abuse. It shall be made available to all current members and staff of the church, and a summary of the plan shall be provided to new members.

2.0 Definitions

“Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” - Matthew 19:14

a. Child

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

b. Child Abuse

New Life in Christ Church defines child abuse as acts of mistreatment or neglect against minors. The child abuse covered in this plan falls into the categories of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse.

c. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any non-accidental injury to a minor by an adult or older caregiver. This can include blows, shakings, or assaults that cause injury to the child. Disciplinary spankings by the child’s parent that do not cause physical injury to the child are not considered physical abuse.

d. Neglect

Neglect includes any harm caused by withholding life's necessities (food, clothing, shelter, medical care, protection, and supervision).

e. Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse or molestation 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, sexual abuse is "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. Sexual abuse of a child includes the participation in any sexual activity with a child, including but not limited to: intercourse, sodomy, oral sexual contact, fondling, prostitution, the production of pornography, exhibitionism, verbal comments of a sexual nature, and the deliberate exposure of a minor to pornography or sexual activity.

f. Children’s Ministry Team

The Children’s Ministry Team consists of directors from all children and youth ministries including: Sunday School, VBS, Christian Service Brigade, Pioneer Girls, Youth Group (Junior and Senior High), Arts Ministries, Nursery, Baseball, and any other ministry that specifically focuses on work with children. The Associate Pastor of Congregational Life and the Director of Child Protection are also members of this team.

“Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” - Matthew 18:5-6

3.0 Supervision and Standard Practices

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” - Matthew 10:16

- a. New Life in Christ Church works to ensure it selects people of qualified character to work with children. Recruitment practices for full or part-time church staff are the responsibility of the session of the church. The Director of Child Protection from the Children’s Ministry Team, working with the pastor responsible for children’s education and youth staff, shall assume responsibility for the Child Protection Plan for volunteers. Such responsibility includes selection and supervision of volunteers, implementation of the plan, and education and training.

- b. The intention of the Child Protection Plan is to provide a safe environment for the children to learn. The Plan 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 NLICC, the following practices will be observed:
 - c. **Recruitment:**
 1. All adults 18 years of age and older (both paid and volunteer) who work with children including child care workers, nursery workers, children's Sunday school teachers, youth workers and teachers should complete an online application form (applications are conducted online), pass a criminal background check, view the child safety training provided by the website (and pass a simple quiz), read the church's Child Protection Plan, and indicate that they have read the plan and agree to abide by it. Applications should be completed before persons begin to serve or as soon as possible thereafter. When they deem it appropriate, the Children’s Ministry Team may also conduct oral interviews. Online applications and child safety training will be done through protectmyministry.com through a link that the Director of Child Protection will provide to volunteers.

2. Decisions regarding eligibility of a candidate to serve on a ministry will be decided by the Director of Child Protection together with the Associate Pastor.
3. If for some reason it is determined an individual is unsuitable for ministry to children or youth (e.g., if they have ever committed child abuse, have ever committed sex crimes, or have a recent history of alcohol or drug abuse), every effort will be made to find another area of ministry they can engage in at NLICC. Every effort will be made to do this in a spirit of grace, while maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
4. The online background check company protectmyministry.com is the tool we are using for applications and criminal background checks. All information submitted to the company is held by this company on a secure server. All paperwork produced in the application process shall be stored in a secured safe or destroyed.
5. All volunteers will reapply on a periodic basis of three years using the online format.

d. Training

1. A brief explanation of the Child Protection Plan will be included in training and orientation programs for teachers, childcare volunteers, youth leaders, and Church Officers. All volunteers will go through online child safety training when they submit their online application. The safety training is provided by the online background check company. The plan will be available online and all volunteers and staff will verify through the application process that they have read the document and agree to abide by it.
2. In addition, a summary of the plan shall be available to all parents of children participating in church programs, made available for online access, and printed upon request.

e. Personal Conduct:

1. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support or physical caretaking (diaper-changing, helping small children in the rest-room) can be appropriate expressions of Christian love. Expressions of affection shall not be excessive, or be imposed upon others.
2. 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.
3. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

4. Violations of these conditions of Personal Conduct shall, as appropriate, be handled as set forth in Section 4.0 of this plan.

f. Implementation Guidelines:

1. Supervision

- A. We strive to have teachers and assistants work in teams. Teachers should seek to avoid situations in which the worker and child/youth are alone without another worker present, particularly in the restroom, in disciplinary situations, and when counseling. Whenever possible, a person new to the church will be paired with a longer-term member of the church.
- B. In the event a worker is left alone with children, be sure the door is ajar and windows are not obstructed (open door, or room with a window in the door). Always strive to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.
- C. When workers assist in the restroom, they should alert other workers that they are taking the child to the restroom. The adult worker should secure the restroom by checking each stall. Then the worker should step to the doorway of the restroom, unless there are other adults in the room, though teachers working with very young children may need to provide additional assistance. When assisting with a child's clothing, the worker should assist the child at the doorway of the restroom.
- D. Children at play should be carefully supervised so that no sexual contact and/or misconduct occurs between them while they are playing. The same principle applies to adolescents.
- E. Junior high volunteers, senior high volunteers, and pre-teen (with babysitting certification) volunteers are often asked to provide child care during adult classes, Potluck dinners, and other events outside Sunday morning, at the discretion of the event organizers. Teenagers should be paired with an adult when providing supervision of pre-school children on Sunday mornings.
- F. Always report immediately any abuse concerns, suspicions, or nagging questions to the pastoral staff member who oversees your ministry.
- G. When staff members visit on a one-on-one basis with children for reasons of pastoral care and personal ministry, they should follow the following guidelines: :

- 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.

2. 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. This plan 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 (other than a sibling) on church program trips.

3. Open Classrooms

Church staff, parents, or church workers may visit classrooms and child care rooms at any time without prior notice. Members from the Children's Ministry Team 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. The Nursery Director will periodically observe the nursery during times that childcare is provided. This will be done expressly to guide and encourage teachers and workers in their work, as well as identify potential problems.

4. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will follow these guidelines to maintain order:

- A. 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.
- B. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in an area where he/she will work alone, away from the other students for a brief period of time.

- C. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the appropriate ministry leader or parent.

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

5. Overnight Trips

- A. Whenever NLICC 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, unless the adult is the parent of the child.
- B. Children of the opposite gender must not be permitted to sleep in the same room together, except in special situations such as Mission Trips. 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.

4.0 Reporting Abuse

*"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.
Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." - Proverbs 31:8-9*

"If you see something, say something."

For legal and moral reasons, it is imperative the following reporting procedures should be carefully followed. These procedures apply to all paid or volunteer workers who minister to minors at NLICC. A worker who learns of or suspects any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of a minor at NLICC, shall adhere to the following steps:

Step 1: Maintain appropriate confidentiality. This includes not speaking with fellow workers or the suspected victim's parents about the abuse.

Step 2: Immediately contact the Director of Child Protection from the Children's Ministry Team or a pastor and indicate your observations and concerns regarding the suspected abuse. The pastor or the Director of Child Protection will promptly inform each other of any abuse allegations or suspicions regarding minors in ministry at NLICC.

If the alleged perpetrator is a member of the church staff or a volunteer worker, the accused will be immediately removed from his or her ministry to children or youth. The session will determine if or when the accused can resume ministry to children or youth.

Step 3: If it is determined that there are reasonable grounds to believe a child has been abused, under the direction of the senior pastor and/or the Director of Child Protection, a member of the Children's Ministry Team or session shall immediately report the suspected abuse by telephone to Child Protective Services (CPS) and to the local police department or sheriff's office responsible for the jurisdiction where the incident may have occurred. For the NLICC property, the Spotsylvania County Sheriff's Office has jurisdiction. At that time the senior pastor or Director of Child Protection will notify parents or guardians of the victim, and those accused of allegations, as necessary. The Session of NLICC and (if the accused is an ordained minister) James River Presbytery will also be made aware of the suspected abuse. Within 72 hours the Report Form for Suspected Instances of Sexual/Physical Abuse (see Appendix A) will be submitted to CPS or to the local police department. NLICC will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigations of allegations of child abuse. The time, contents, and recipients of the abuse reports given to CPS or the police department should always be documented and kept in the secured child protection file at NLICC.

Step 4: If it is uncertain whether there are reasonable grounds to believe a minor has been abused an inquiry team will be formed by the session. This inquiry team will be composed of a small group of individuals from the Children's Ministry Team. No one will be chosen to serve on the inquiry team if someone in his or her immediate family is the alleged victim or perpetrator of the abuse. The sole function of the inquiry team is to determine whether there are reasonable grounds to believe a minor has been abused. If and when they determine there are reasonable grounds immediately follow step 3 and notify the proper authorities. Any remaining uncertainty as to the existence of reasonable grounds shall result in following Step 3 and notifying said authorities. If they determine there are not reasonable grounds, the inquiry team submits a written report documenting results of investigation and conclusions to the Children's Ministry Team. All investigation documentation will be treated as strictly confidential and preserved in a secured file.

The person who originally raised the abuse allegations will be advised of the outcome of the investigation. If this person disagrees with the Team's conclusion that there were not reasonable grounds to believe a child had been abused, this person can and should file a report with CPS and the local law enforcement agency. NLICC will fully cooperate with any resulting investigation.

Appendix A – Report Form

Report Form for Suspected Instances of Sexual/Physical Abuse

1. Volunteer/paid staff observing/receiving disclosure of physical/sexual abuse; date/time/place: _____

Brief notes:

2. Victim's Name: _____

Victim's age/date of birth: _____

Victim's Parent or Guardian: _____

Victim's Address: _____

Date/time/place of initial conversation with victim:

Victim's Statements (attach additional sheets if necessary):

Extent of Injuries:

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

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

Notes of conversation (attach additional sheets if necessary):

Suspension date/time: _____

Notes of suspension:
