

## **Avondale Presbyterian Church**

### **Children, Youth, Staff and Volunteer Protection Policy**

#### **Overview**

As part of our baptismal vows, we have promised to teach, strengthen and support our children and youth. At Avondale Presbyterian Church (the “Church”), we are committed to a safe, healthy environment for children and youth, as well as those who work with them.

This policy is to be shared with Church employees and volunteers who serve our children and youth. It will also be available to parents of children and youth involved in Church events and activities, and members of the Congregation. It is intended to protect children and youth from inappropriate treatment while participating in Church activities. It also protects volunteers and staff from false allegations of inappropriate treatment. It applies to all Church sponsored events or activities, on or off Church property. The Administrative Ministry Team is responsible for oversight of this policy.

Definitions: Throughout this policy (a) “inappropriate treatment” shall refer collectively to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect. The legal definition according to the N.C. General Statutes is appended; (b) “child” or “children” shall refer to children from birth through graduation from fifth grade; (c) “youth” shall refer to children who have graduated from fifth grade through graduation from 12<sup>th</sup> grade; and (d) “adult” shall refer to persons aged 18 years and older, but shall exclude anyone fitting the definition of “youth” above.

#### **Selection and Screening of Child/Youth Workers and Volunteers**

1. Prospective Church staff members and volunteers must complete a confidential screening form, currently in the form attached to this Policy.
2. A background check, including verification of past employment, reference check and criminal records check, will be conducted prior to making an offer of employment to any candidate for a paid staff position.
3. Volunteers are subject to periodic and/or random background and reference checks. Avondale Presbyterian Church reserves the right to conduct such checks at any time, including but not limited to instances in which there is suspicion of a problem or concern. If an individual refuses to submit to such a background check, he/she will not be able to volunteer in any Church sponsored activity for children or youth.
4. Any person who may pose a threat to children or youth will be prohibited from working with any minors. A conviction or ongoing investigation of inappropriate treatment involving a minor will automatically disqualify an individual from: (a) employment at Avondale; and/or (b) volunteering in ministries or activities with minors.

5. Individuals who have been regularly attending and participating in worship and/or other Church activities for at least six (6) months (the "Attendance Requirement") are eligible to volunteer to work with children and youth. Parents of children who are enrolled in Church programs and others, including non-members, may be cleared for volunteering before meeting the Attendance Requirement by the Ministry Team responsible for the applicable activity; provided that others, including parents, who apply to volunteer before six months of participation shall be placed only in situations in which there are other adults present, e.g. not a Sunday School class in which the volunteer is the only teacher present.
6. Individuals who are already working with children or youth at the Church at the time this policy is enacted may continue without providing references provided that they meet the Attendance Requirement and have worked with Avondale children or youth for at least six (6) months.

### **Training**

Staff and volunteers are required to read and sign a certification by which they agree to follow the Avondale Children, Youth, Staff and Volunteer Protection Policy. This policy will be distributed periodically as part of a training program or as a policy reminder. It will be presented at annual Sunday School Teacher Training programs and to other groups of volunteers working with children and youth, including without limitation those volunteers participating in Summer Camps, Avondale Adventures, and Basketball ministry.

All staff and volunteers shall participate in a training session covering this Policy sponsored by the Church prior to working with children or youth. Once trained, volunteers shall (a) participate in similar training sessions at least once every three (3) years and (b) read and sign a certification annually of their continued understanding of this Policy and compliance with its requirements in order to continue eligibility to work with children and youth at Avondale.

### **General Policy regarding Child and Youth Protection**

1. Staff and volunteers may not subject children and youth to inappropriate treatment. They may not use physical punishment as discipline. Physical restraint shall never be used unless it is necessary to protect the child, youth, other children or youth and/or individuals (including employees and/or volunteers) who may be present. A report shall be made and parents are always contacted if physical restraint is necessary.
2. Staff and volunteers shall never leave a child or youth unsupervised while participating in a program. Staff and volunteers shall be aware of a child's or youth's manner of departing and the person with whom the child or youth is departing. Children and youth shall be released only to their parent, legal guardian or designated adult approved by their parent or guardian.
3. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working with our children or youth is prohibited.

4. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children or youth is prohibited.
5. Profanity, inappropriate jokes or sharing intimate details of one's personal life in the presence of children or youth is prohibited, as is possession of pornographic materials while in the presence of children or youth.
6. Possession of firearms of any kind in the presence of children or youth is prohibited.

### **General Guidelines for Protection**

Open Spaces Guideline: Staff and volunteers are expected to avoid, to the greatest extent possible, any situation in which they would be alone, out of sight of others, with a single child or youth. Accordingly, at no time will staff or volunteers be alone with a single child or youth, where they cannot be observed by others. Each room or space where children or youth are being supervised shall have a window or the door will remain open, such that the space is plainly visible from outside of the space. This is to protect: (a) children and youth from situations in which inappropriate treatment might occur; and (b) volunteers from false accusations of inappropriate treatment.

Should an emergency or other unforeseeable event occur in which one child or youth must be alone with an adult, the adult shall report the circumstances to the Senior Minister, the chairperson of the Administrative Ministry Team or other person designated by the Session (each, a "Designated Church Contact") as soon after the situation as possible.

Two- Adult Guideline: No fewer than two adult volunteers or staff will be present during on-site, off-campus, out-of-town or overnight children/youth activities. Whenever possible the adults will be unrelated.

Two adults need not be present for regular Sunday school, worship readiness or worship childcare or similar programs, provided that doors are open or have windows, and/or there is periodic observation by an assigned adult as described in the following sentence. During such programs or activities, at least one monitor or "roamer" (who shall be an adult volunteer specifically designated for such purpose) will be available periodically to roam the premises and monitor classrooms, hallways, restroom and other areas.

Ministerial counseling and mentoring of youth may be an exception to the two-adult rule set forth in this policy, with the written consent of the youth's parent or guardian. However, any such counseling or mentoring sessions will take place in a public setting with other adults close by and in compliance with the open space rule set forth in paragraph 1 above.

Restroom Protocol: Staff and volunteers should check the restroom to ensure it is not occupied by suspicious or unknown individuals before allowing children to use the facilities. Always send children in pairs, and whenever possible, with staff. Staff or volunteers will stand in or near the doorway while children are using the restroom. This procedure allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff or volunteers. If staff or a volunteer is assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open. Staff and volunteers will respect children's rights to say no to any assistance.

Gift Giving: Except as approved by the Senior Minister and the Administrative Ministry Team, gift-giving by staff and volunteers should be on a group basis and for special occasions only. Parents must be aware of gifts that are given. For purposes of this paragraph, “gifts” shall not include food or other items provided during activities, or de minimis items generally made available to all or a substantial portion of children and/or youth.

Adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the possibilities of inappropriate treatment of minors and to avoid any appearance of such by abiding by these guidelines. They should not hesitate to caution others if they observe activities or behavior which are, or might appear to be, inappropriate or to seek guidance from the Designated Church Contact about what is appropriate under this policy.

If You See Something, Say Something: Adults who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior of any kind affecting children or youth must report it to the Designated Church Contact.

### **Social Media Guidelines**

1. Inappropriate use of smart phones, cameras, imaging or digital devices is prohibited. It is easy to unintentionally invade the privacy of others with these devices. Do not take photos of individuals who object. Never use these or similar devices in or near shower houses, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected.
2. Staff and volunteers will be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children and youth.
3. The *Open Spaces* rule also applies to the use of social media. Social media channels used in connection with children and youth ministries must be public. No private channels or private communication allowed – i.e. private Facebook groups, invite-only YouTube channels, etc.
4. The *Two Adult* rule also applies to use of social media. There should be no private messages and no one-on-one direct contact through email, Facebook messages, Twitter direct messaging, chats, instant messaging, or other similar messaging features provided through social media sites. All communication between youth and adults should take place in a public forum (i.e. the Facebook wall), or should include another adult. In the case of ministerial or youth leader counseling, written permission by the parent is required for private communication. For example, if a youth reaches out via text or email to youth minister or youth leader seeking advice, the youth minister or youth leader should email or text the parent asking to engage with the youth on a one-on-one basis at the youth’s request.

Parents will have an opportunity to give permission for youth leaders to text or respond one-on-one to texts or emails about youth group logistics (dates and times of activities, supplies needed, etc.).

5. Do not claim to speak for Avondale on social media unless you are authorized to do so.
6. Remember that social media sites and content live forever. If you create a social media channel for a ministry or event, consider transitioning the administration rights and duties when the initial administrators end their involvement in ministries for children and youth.

### **Supervision and Monitoring**

Any Ministry Team or other group or individual within the Church that plans and implements a program or event involving children or youth is responsible for establishing oversight according to this Policy.

Parents shall be permitted and encouraged to participate in Church activities with their children. Parents will be encouraged to train their children and youth in safety procedures and be alert to the physical and emotional state of their children and youth.

Church staff and/or parents have the right to visit and observe any Church-related program or activity at any time, unannounced.

### **Reporting and Responding to an Incident or Allegation of Abuse**

1. Remove the child or youth from the situation, if applicable. The safety and security of the child or youth must be assured before further steps are taken.
2. Discretion is important. Though confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, any allegation must be handled with the utmost of discretion.
3. Report immediately to the Designated Church Contact any situation which presents any suspicion that inappropriate treatment may have occurred. The person who suspects or witnesses the incident should document, in writing, and provide to the Designated Church Contact all known facts and circumstances, including such details as time, date, place, persons involved, witnesses and a description of the incident or allegation.
4. A person's wish to remain anonymous will be respected. The written report may be unsigned, and report may be made to the Department of Social Services (704 – 336 – 2273), in the presence of a third person who will be able to verify that an oral report was made.
5. The Designated Church Contact will document all steps taken in handling the reported incident.
6. Ensure that the Department of Social Services has been notified. The Designated Church Contact must report all allegations to the director of the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services within 24 hours (704 – 336 – 2273), unless the report has been made previously. See #3 above.
7. The Church will be supportive of any individual who makes a report in good faith regarding actual or suspected cases of inappropriate treatment. All reports will be taken seriously, but will not be prematurely judged.

8. The Designated Church Contact will notify the parent or guardian of the alleged incident, without making a judgment as to the accuracy of the report.
9. The Designated Church Contact will make an appropriate report to the liability insurer for the Church and the Administrative Ministry Team chairperson.
10. Remove the person accused from further contact with children and youth, but do so without judgment. Anyone accused of inappropriate treatment will be treated with dignity and support. The individual accused will be relieved of further responsibilities with children and youth until the investigation is complete and allegations resolved. All parties should remember to remain impartial until a thorough investigation has been completed.
11. The Designated Church Contact is the sole spokesperson for the Church in making announcements or responding to the media.
12. The civil authorities, not the Church staff, will conduct the investigation. Staff and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully with an investigation of inappropriate treatment.
13. If inappropriate treatment occurred on Church property or if Church personnel (staff, elders, volunteers, etc.) are involved, the Presbytery must be notified (704-535 - 9999). The Presbytery's designee shall be responsible for following the procedures set forth in this section and all practices established by the Presbytery. Notification of the Presbytery Sexual Misconduct Response Coordination Team may be required.
14. Organizations that use the Church facilities shall be made aware of this policy and shall be required via contract to notify the Designated Church Contact as soon as possible (and at least within 24 hours) of any incident of inappropriate treatment involving any person that is using Church facilities as a result of his/her affiliation with the previously mentioned organization. The organization will follow that organization's reporting practices or, if it has no established reporting procedures, that organization shall follow the procedures set forth in this section.

## Definition of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of North Carolina Law

Information obtained from Child Welfare Information Gateway online at  
[www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/define.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/define.cfm)

### **Physical Abuse 7B-101**

*Abused juvenile* means any juvenile less than 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker:

- Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the juvenile a serious physical injury by other than accidental means
- Creates or allows to be created a substantial risk of serious physical injury to the juvenile by other than accidental means
- Uses or allows to be used upon the juvenile cruel or grossly inappropriate procedures or cruel or grossly inappropriate devices to modify behavior

### **Neglect 7B-101**

*Neglected juvenile* means a juvenile:

- Who does not receive proper care, supervision, or discipline from the juvenile's parent, guardian, custodian or caretaker
- Who is not provided necessary medical or remedial care
- Who lives in an environment injurious to the juvenile's welfare
- Who has been placed for care or adoption in violation of law

### **Sexual Abuse 7B-101**

*Abused juvenile* means any juvenile less than 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker commits, permits, or encourages the commission of a violation of the following laws regarding sexual offenses by, with or upon the juvenile:

- First and second degree rape or sexual offense
- Sexual act by a custodian
- Crime against nature or incest
- Preparation of obscene photographs, slides or motion pictures of the juvenile
- Employing or permitting the juvenile to assist in a violation of the obscenity laws
- Dissemination of obscene material to the juvenile
- Displaying or disseminating material harmful to the juvenile
- First and second degree sexual exploitation of the juvenile
- Promoting the prostitution of the juvenile
- Taking indecent liberties with the juvenile, regardless of the age of the parties

### **Emotional Abuse 7B-101**

*Abused juvenile* means any juvenile less than 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker creates or allows to be created serious emotional damage to the juvenile. Serious emotional damage is evidenced by a juvenile's severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior toward himself or others.

### **Abandonment 7B-101**

*Neglected juvenile* includes a juvenile who has been abandoned.

### **Standards for Reporting 7B-101**

- Inflicts or allows to be inflicted injury by nonaccidental means
- Creates or allows to be created risk of injury
- Commits or permits

### **Persons Responsible for the Child 7B-101**

*A person responsible for a juvenile's health and welfare* means:

- A parent, guardian, or custodian
- A stepparent, foster parent, or an adult member of the juvenile's household
- An adult relative entrusted with the juvenile's care
- Any person such as a house parent or cottage parent who has primary responsibility for supervising a juvenile's health and welfare in a residential childcare facility
- Any employee or volunteer of a division, institution, or school operated by the department

### **Exceptions**

None noted in statute