

Easley Presbyterian Church

Safe Place Policy

Approved by Session on October 21, 2007

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Safe Place Policy

I. Purpose, Applicability, Scope and Policy Terms

Purpose

This policy is intended:

- To be faithful to our baptismal vows as we seek to welcome children.
- To provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth at EPC.
- To protect children and youth from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse while participating in EPC activities.
- To provide a mechanism to deal with reported concerns and subsequent actions.
- To guide EPC as an institution in the conduct of its employees and volunteers and prevent incidents and allegations of child abuse.
- To protect adult volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

This policy addresses five components of child and youth protection:

1. Screening applicants for employment and volunteer service for a history of behavior potentially detrimental to children and youth.
2. Training both employees and volunteers and children and youth in the child and youth protection policy and in appropriate supervision and chaperoning.
3. Reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues.
4. Responding to allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues.
5. Addressing known offenders as members of EPC.

Applicability

This policy applies to persons including EPC employees and volunteers participating in all children and youth programs of EPC, including, but not limited to:

- Sunday school classes
- Children's church
- Children and youth fellowship programs
- Weekday school
- Children and youth choirs
- Church sponsored retreats, mission trips, etc.
- Vacation Bible school
- Church sponsored athletic teams
- Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts
- Nurseries and child care

Scope

What Does the Policy Require?

1. All employees and volunteers shall abide by the Code of Conduct.
2. Each person must assume responsibility for his/her own actions in working with children and youth and for attending training offered on child and youth protection.
3. An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to observe and abide by this policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation if the Head of Staff, Personnel Committee, or Christian Education Committee determines that the Child and Youth Protection Policy and procedures have not been followed.

Outside Groups Using EPC Facilities

All leaders of non-EPC sponsored groups and events using EPC facilities, which have direct supervision of children and youth, are expected to adhere to these policies. Upon receipt of the policy from EPC, the leaders must review the Child and Youth Protection Policy and sign the Outside Group Leaders Release Form to acknowledge their review of it and to confirm their agreement to follow the policy.

Given the nature of the outside groups that use EPC facilities, EPC will not perform background checks, seek personal and professional references, review employment records, or obtain civil and criminal records for such groups.

Policy Terms (glossary):

Employee – Any person who works for salary or wages at Easley Presbyterian Church (EPC) (e.g. staff, EPC Weekday School employees, custodians.)

Volunteer – Any person, ordinarily an adult member of EPC, who gives of their time and participates in an Easley Presbyterian Church sponsored activity.

Church Sponsored Activity – Includes any and all gatherings that arise from EPC-generated worship, educational, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational events. These events include on-campus and off-campus gatherings.

Child or Youth – Persons under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons.

Head of Staff – The Pastor of Easley Presbyterian Church

Safe Place Committee (The Steering Committee) – A three-person team appointed by

the Christian Education Committee to oversee the policy's implementation, to monitor compliance, to recommend policy changes and clarifications, to provide frontline evaluation of concerns making recommendations to the appropriate decision-making persons/entities, and to provide routine interpretation and training.

Child Abuse – A non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child. Child abuse may include:

Neglect – Occurs when the adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for the child. Neglect may include not giving food, clothing, shelter; failure to keep children clean; lack of supervision and withholding medical care.

Physical Abuse – An injury or pattern of injuries that happen to a child that are not accidental. These injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones or death.

Sexual Abuse – Sexual abuse is the sexual assault or exploitation of children.

Emotional Abuse – Chronic and persistent acts by an adult that endanger the mental health or emotional development of a child.

II. Screening of Employees and Volunteers

1. Personal interviews, application forms, personal and professional references, employment records, background checks (both criminal and civil) are required for all employees. Background checks will be done on EPC volunteers. Information gained by these means will be used to determine eligibility to work with children and youth.
2. Interviews, reference checks, employment records, and criminal and civil background checks, are to be documented in writing, and become confidential church property. These records will not be released to any party except with the written approval of the Head of Staff and the Personnel Committee Chair. These records will be made available to the employee or volunteer, but not a candidate for employment, if a written request is made to the Head of Staff and the Personnel Committee Chair.
3. In addition, all current and potential employees and volunteers will be required to agree to follow the policies and procedures of Easley Presbyterian Church pertaining to child and youth protection. This statement is a supplement to the personal application, and is maintained in the employee's personnel file or in departmental notebooks of volunteer forms. Each fall, all employees of EPC and all volunteers with youth and children will be required to review the current Child and Youth Protection Policy and sign a Recommitment Acknowledgement Form.
4. For Employees: Any candidate for employment who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot be employed by Easley Presbyterian Church without the express written approval of the Personnel Committee, including the Head of Staff. The Personnel Committee, including the Head of Staff, will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the employment of the individual in question. Active substance abuse or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment with children

or youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy or abuse of a minor.

5. For Volunteers: Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot work with children and youth at Easley Presbyterian Church. Active substance abuse or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor. The Christian Education Committee will inform any volunteer applicant denied the opportunity to serve with children and youth the reason(s) for disqualification and how to access information relevant to the decision.

III. Supervision

Two-Adult Policy

Adults are to avoid being in a one-child, one-adult situation. If it is necessary for a child to get home after an event, an effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child. This rule can be eased if other adults are close by and can visually observe activities at all times. For example, it is permissible for one adult driver to transport several children and youth in a single vehicle in a convoy of vehicles traveling to or from an event.

When one-on-one interactions between children and youth and employee/volunteers are necessary (e.g. in emergency situations or occasions of pastoral care), care must be taken to conduct the meeting in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult must have knowledge of the employee/volunteer's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.

Open Door Policy

Doors to rooms in which children and youth are present are to remain open. If noise increases to a level that disturbs other classes, or a safety concern, the door may be shut as long as there is clear glass in the door, nothing impedes vision through the glass, or at least two adults are present. Employees and volunteers are expected to avoid any situation in which they could be alone with children and youth or out of sight of others except in emergency situations. This is to protect:

- a) children against situations in which abuse might occur, and
- b) adults against false accusations of child abuse

Six Month Policy

Any person in a leadership position with children or youth must have been a member of EPC for at least six months. Any exceptions must be approved by the Christian Education Committee for each specific volunteer opportunity. No exceptions will be granted for overnight situations.

Training for Adults

All employees, all church officers, and any volunteers who work with children and youth are required to attend a training session and sign the relevant documents regarding child and youth protection. The church will offer regular training opportunities.

Code of Conduct

1. EPC employees and volunteers will not verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse children.
2. EPC employees and volunteers will not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
3. EPC employees and volunteers may use physical restraint only in situations necessary to protect the child or others from harm.
4. EPC employees and volunteers will provide proper supervision and exercise sound judgment in providing a safe environment at all times.
5. EPC employees and volunteers will avoid situations during EPC programs where they would be alone with a single child and cannot be observed or monitored by others. As adults supervise children, they should space themselves in a way that other adults can see them.
6. EPC employees and volunteers are expected to observe the Two-Adult Policy and Open Door Policy in their interaction with children and youth at all times except in emergency situations.
7. Restroom supervision:
 - a. EPC employees and volunteers will always use proper supervision when children are using public bathrooms to ensure their safety.
 - b. EPC employees and volunteers will call on leaders who may be “floating” from room to room to assist with restroom supervision in order to maintain the two-adult rule.
 - c. EPC employees and volunteers will make sure suspicious or unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom before allowing children to use the facilities.
 - d. Children will be sent in pairs, and whenever possible, with EPC employees and volunteers. EPC employees and volunteers will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom in visual sight of another adult. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the EPC employees and volunteers (i.e. not being alone with a child).
 - e. If EPC employees and volunteers are assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open.
8. EPC employees and volunteers will respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Adults will discourage children from touching others in an inappropriate manner.

9. EPC employees and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children entering the program. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported to the Director of Christian Education or the Associate Pastor for Youth who will report to the Head of Staff.
10. EPC employees and volunteers should release children only to the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian.
11. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs during church working hours or church sponsored programs is prohibited.

IV. Reporting

The law and this EPC policy make the responsibility for reporting Child Abuse and Suspicions of Child Abuse very clear. See Section IV and V of this policy for guidance and direction regarding reporting of and responding to Child Abuse and Suspicions of Child Abuse.

A. Allegations

1. Every employee and volunteer of Easley Presbyterian Church is required to report any situation which presents a suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Such report shall be made to the Director of Christian Education or the Associate Pastor for Youth, who will report to the Head of Staff as soon as possible.
2. Any report of child abuse made by a child about their care by a parent, guardian, youth, adult, or EPC staff employee or volunteer, despite how unlikely such report may seem, must be relayed to the Director of Christian Education or the Associate Pastor for Youth who will report to the Head of Staff as soon as possible.
3. The person with first-hand knowledge of the incident, along with the appropriate staff member, shall, as required by law, report the situation to the Pickens County Department of Social Services or other local authorities for investigation.
4. All concerns and reporting shall be kept confidential.

B. Concerns

From time to time issues arise regarding the conduct of our children, youth and adults at EPC, the Children and Youth Ministry Programs and the adults involved in Children and Youth Ministry that are not clearly abuse related issues but impinge upon child and youth protection and safety, but that may require attention and review. Sometimes patterns and trends of a questionable nature may be noticed. This section provides a means to report such issues other than Child Abuse in a manner that will assure the issues, patterns, or trends are recorded for subsequent review, addressed, and resolved.

1. All adults, youth and children are encouraged to report any issues as soon as possible to the responsible adult leadership at the time the issue is observed. It is important to bring issues of safety to the attention of responsible adults as soon as possible. Such notification may be oral or an incident report form may be filled out.
2. When it is appropriate or more comfortable, anyone who wishes to have a concern addressed is encouraged to bring the issue to the attention of the Director of Christian Education or the Associate Pastor for Youth or the chairs of the appropriate age group Ministry Committees either verbally or in writing. All disciples are encouraged to be responsible in identifying issues, and it is desirable that such concerns bear the name of the originator.

V. Responding

A. Allegations

In the event of an allegation of child abuse, the following procedures shall be followed at Easley Presbyterian Church:

1. Every allegation shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.
2. The Head of Staff will immediately contact the EPC attorney and liability insurance carrier.
3. In consultation with the EPC attorney the following may be appropriate:
 - a. The Head of Staff/Personnel Committee may notify the parent(s) or legal guardian of the alleged victim.
 - b. The Head of Staff may notify the accused individual.
4. Written documentation, relating to the matter, shall be kept in a confidential file.
 - a. The Head of Staff or the Personnel Committee may complete an internal investigation in addition to that which will be carried out by the authorities, following the required notifications.
 - b. An individual accused of child abuse may be placed on leave from his/her responsibilities at the discretion of the Head of Staff or Personnel Committee. For employees, this may be with or without pay.
 - c. To protect the child or youth from further possible abuse or harassment, EPC will prohibit the accused individual access to the alleged victim and other children and youth in ministries sponsored by EPC.
 - d. In the event of an unsubstantiated allegation, the Head of Staff will make a determination as to whether the individual will be allowed to return to work as an employee or volunteer at the Church. They will

consider the individual's likely effectiveness in working with children/youth following an allegation and investigation of child abuse. An employee has the right to appeal the decision to the Personnel Committee. A volunteer has the right to appeal the decision to the Clerk of Session who will address the situation with the Session in the appropriate time and manner.

5. EPC employees and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully with the investigation authorities, such as the Child Protective Services Unit of the Department of Social Services, with guidance from the EPC attorney.
6. All EPC employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the Head of Staff. The Head of Staff, or Clerk of Session, shall be the only person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information, such as to a protective services investigator or a police officer.
7. All EPC employees and volunteers are expected to avoid denial, minimization, or blame during the period of investigation of the allegation.

B. Concerns

1. Every report of a concern regarding the children or youth of EPC shall be evaluated to determine if it represents a report or a suspicion of Child Abuse. Such concerns will be processed as described by this policy.
2. The Safe Place Committee shall evaluate any concern related to child and youth protection and safety to assure proper follow up on the issue.
3. All concerns reported shall be documented and maintained for long term review of notable trends or patterns of unacceptable activity by the Safe Place Committee. If a conflict of interest is noted during the review, other church staff will perform the review.

VI. Addressing Known Offenders Who Are Members or Who are Visiting Easley Presbyterian Church

At Easley Presbyterian Church, we seek to live in covenant with God and with one another and to be a redemptive community to all who are members. We also acknowledge that redemptive action and responsible action can, at times, be in tension or even in seeming opposition. We embrace this fact as a natural part of seeking to be the church in the world. We adopt these procedures for ministering to those among us who are known offenders of children and youth while maintaining our focus on protecting the children and youth of our church.

1. Known offenders are required to make their status and any terms of probation known to the Head of Staff.
2. The Head of Staff, in conjunction with the Safe Place Team, will establish appropriate boundaries, in writing, governing the life of the offender within the church. This group will also assign covenant partners to the offender. No decisions made by this group will conflict with any provisions of the EPC Safe

Place Policy. All Boundary Covenants must also be approved by the Session of Easley Presbyterian Church.

3. The known offender will give written acknowledgement and acceptance of EPC's Safe Place Policy and of the boundaries imposed.
4. At no time is a known offender to be assigned to ministries with children and youth.
5. At no time is a known offender to congregate with children and youth without proper supervision.
6. At no time is a known offender allowed in areas of the church or grounds dedicated to children and youth or in use primarily by children and youth without proper supervision.
7. As circumstances warrant, the Head of Staff may identify a known offender to church employees and volunteers whose ministries should be informed of this fact.
8. Known offenders will receive the normal pastoral care afforded any member.
9. Should a known offender violate their boundary covenant; they will be denied access to all future church functions and the church property.

- END OF POLICY

Amended by the Session of Easley Presbyterian Church, November 20, 2011.