

ST. ELMO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

I. Purpose of Policy

Believing that children are our sacred trust from a loving God, we should joyfully answer the call to provide a nurturing Christian environment that will encourage our children's faith. To that end, St. Elmo Presbyterian Church (SEPC) and its members are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children, youth, and volunteers participating in the programs and activities of the church.

SEPC has established this policy and its procedures to provide the security and welfare of the children and volunteers and to outline expectations of staff and volunteers. This policy is also intended to be a source of information for parents as to what the church policies are so that parents can freely choose to participate in various programs. Despite our best efforts, we cannot guarantee that no harm will befall a child; however, it is our sincere hope that adherence to this policy will minimize the risk of any type of abuse.

II. Definition of Terms

- A. Child abuse is the intentional wrongful treatment of a child which results in injury to the child. Some examples of evidence of physical injury may include scars, bruises, wounds, etc.
- B. Child sexual abuse involves the intentional touching of, penetration of, or intrusion upon a minor's genitals or other intimate parts; the exposure of the perpetrator's genitals, or other sexual acts for the purpose of sexual gratification of the adult; the sexual exploitation of a minor.
- C. SEPC refers to St. Elmo Presbyterian Church.
- D. "Minor" is a child under 18 years of age.
- E. "Staff" for this policy will be paid workers who serve in SEPC ministry to minors.
- F. "Volunteers" are people who serve in an area of ministry on an occasional/unpaid basis.

III. Procedure

SEPC will seek to prevent the abuse of children when they are participating in church programs. Preventive measures include **screening, training and supervision** of all workers.

- A. **Screening.**
 - 1. Staff: All staff must undergo a primary screening, which will consist of a background check, and the completion of a confidential written application, including questions regarding child abuse. The written application will be submitted to the head pastor who will check references and follow up as appropriate, or delegate that task.
 - 2. Volunteers: Volunteer screening will be required of volunteer workers, consisting of a brief volunteer application and follow up by staff if necessary.
- B. **Training.** All members and regular attenders who work with children will be required to attend one training session with a Christian Education staff member prior to working with children. They will be asked to read this policy and sign it when applying for service. Some specific training guidelines can be found in Appendix A.

C. **Supervision**

1. It is our desire that activities with children will include at least two (2) workers who have been screened. If parents have concerns about a specific situation, then that concern should be brought up to the appropriate staff member.
2. Activities away from the church property will require a signed permission statement from parents or guardians of the children participating.
3. All classrooms should be visibly accessible from outside the classroom.
4. Each of the paid staff will make periodic observations of childcare rooms and classrooms during the times when programs are being conducted.

IV. Reporting Child Abuse and/or Child Sexual Abuse

Tennessee law requires that any person report all known or suspected incidents of abuse to the Department of Child Services (DCS) within 24 hours. If there is suspicion of child abuse, the individual with suspicion must immediately report it to the pastor, ruling elder, or appropriate staff member as soon as possible after the incident. The pastor, ruling elder, or staff member must in turn report the incident to the Session for action and contact of DCS at 1-877-754-ABUSE. Workers and all others involved should be reminded that such information, especially the names of persons involved, will be held in strict confidence. Tennessee laws protect persons who report abuse or neglect.

This policy has been approved by the head pastor and session and will be implemented through his leadership and delegation to the paid staff and, or Christian Ed. Ministry Group.

Appendix A

Training Guidelines and Policies

1. Two adult rule- A minimum of two adult employees/volunteers shall be present with minors during church activities. Do not put yourself in a situation where you are alone in any room with any child.
2. Open Door Policy- Classroom windows will be unobstructed at all times, and parents are welcome to observe any activity with their children. Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.
3. Transportation- Being alone in a car with a child should be avoided whenever possible. You must receive parental consent before transporting children for church events and activities.
4. Restroom Policy- Parents are encouraged to have their children use the restroom prior to class/nursery. Children should ask permission to use the restroom and children under 7 years old should be accompanied by an adult. Adults should always go in a group, if possible, never taking a child alone to the bathroom. The adult should check to be sure the restroom is empty and then wait outside the stall and assist as needed. If a child requires assistance, the worker should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. For the protection of all, workers should never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Wash your hands regularly to avoid the spread of germs.
5. Discipline- Employees and Volunteers are not permitted to use corporal punishment with any child, even if parents have suggested or granted permission of it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the appropriate staff member if assistance is needed with specific disciplinary issues.
6. No Confidentiality- Employees/volunteers can never promise confidentiality to a minor. Employees/volunteers must report to the pastor, an elder or appropriate staff member if a child discusses harming him/herself or others, committing a crime or being abused.
7. Permissible Contact- Common expression of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back) support or physical caretaking (diaper changing/helping small children in the restroom) are appropriate in a caring community and with others present; however, expressions of affection should not be excessive or imposed upon others. Make sure all your speech is appropriate for ministry. Be careful not to use sexual language, personal intimacies, or crude language. Make sure games and programs are safe and appropriate.

*A First Aid kit can be located in the downstairs kitchenette, nursery and pre-k room.

VOLUNTEER SCREENING FORM

This screening form is a confidential, mandatory part of a process to help the church provide a safe, nurturing environment for our children and youth. Persons responsible for the supervision and care of our children are in a special position of trust and confidence.

Screening Questions

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a felony or misdemeanor? If yes, please explain

Have you ever committed or been convicted of sexual or physical abuse on a child? If yes, please explain.

Is there anything in your history that would affect your ability to appropriately work with children?

Have you ever been accused or convicted of child abuse, or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? If yes, please explain. _____

If you prefer, you may choose not to answer the questions above and discuss your answers in confidence with the head pastor or appropriate Christian Education staff member.

Child Protection Policy Acceptance and Release Statement

I have read the St. Elmo Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy and accept it.

The information contained in this form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize the release of any information which pertains to any records of convictions contained in any police department or law enforcement files maintained on me. I hereby release all such law enforcement agencies from any and all liability resulting from such disclosure.

I agree to be bound by the policies of SEPC on behalf of the church. I acknowledge that these policies do not constitute a contract between the church and myself, and that SEPC is not responsible for the individual acts of any worker.

I, _____ (print name), accept the responsibility to nurture the Christian faith and well-being of the children and youth of SEPC, and to care for them as Christ cares for me.

Signature

Date

Please return this form to the appropriate Christian Education staff member or the head pastor.

Appendix C (2 pages)

For Staff

**ST. ELMO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
APPLICATION FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN**

This Application is a confidential, mandatory part of a process to help the church provide a safe, nurturing environment for our children and youth. Persons responsible for the supervision and care of our children are in a special position of trust and confidence.

Personal Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone # (H): _____ (W): _____

Church or Youth Work Experience

Names and addresses of churches attended on a regular basis during the last five years:

All previous church and non-church work involving young people (name, address, type of work performed, dates):

Any talents, training, education, etc. that have prepared you to work with young people:

Personal References

Please furnish personal references including previous churches where you have served.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Screening Questions

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a felony or misdemeanor? If yes, please explain

Have you ever committed or been convicted of sexual or physical abuse on a child? If yes, please explain.

Is there anything in your history that would affect your ability to appropriately work with children?

Have you ever been accused or convicted of child abuse, or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor? If yes, please explain. _____

Have any complaints or allegations of misconduct involving children ever been made against you? If yes, please explain. _____

I understand that St. Elmo Presbyterian Church may contact the churches and references I have provided as part of SEPC's consideration of this application. I hereby release from liability any person or organization that provides information.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct. If it is found that the answers given are untrue, I understand that it may be cause for dismissal.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____