



WILLOW PARK CHURCH

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



Children birth to grade 5

Fall 2020

STATEMENT OF POLICY

“Local church leaders have a spiritual, moral and legal obligation to provide a secure environment for children, youth and volunteers who participate in church ministries. Child abuse is a criminal offence as well as a violation of human conscience and dignity. It is a violation of God’s moral law within the trusted context of relationship. The emotional, physical and spiritual trauma to victims, the destructive consequences for abusers and the devastating effects on the credibility of the church ministry and the name of Christ make it essential that the church take all appropriate steps to aid in the prevention of abuse.” (Freeman 2007)

In the church, we recognize that we are a reflection of God’s love to those in our care and we take our responsibility seriously. Micah 6:8 presents this challenge: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (NIV).

“Micah suggests that the Lord requires three things of us:

- **To act justly** – We must work for justice, seeking to promote the truth and to speak out on behalf of the vulnerable.
- **To love mercy** – Compassion needs to be the bedrock of all our work.
- **To walk humbly with our God** – Our personal and professional lives need to be marked by humility and righteousness. We all make mistakes and need to be prepared to admit it. We need to recognize our limitations, but with that to do our best to act with integrity. Above all, we mustn’t be afraid to engage in these difficult areas, trusting in a God who walks with us as encourager, friend and guide.” (Sidebotham 2004)

God’s word outlines our spiritual responsibility to children and youth:

- “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6 NAS)
- People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” (Mark 10:13-16 NIV)
- “Avoid every kind of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:22 NIV)
- But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality.....because these are improper for God’s holy people.” (Ephesians 5:3 NIV)
- “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.....Carry each other’s burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1-2 NIV)

It is the intent of Willow Park Church to do everything possible to ensure that this Church is a safe place. It is our desire to protect all who attend our ministries, with our special attention on children and youth. The following guidelines are intended to reconcile the pastoral responsibilities of Willow Park Church with the legal obligations of all individuals under the laws of the Dominion of Canada and the Province of BC.

DEFINITION OF ABUSE

- “Abuse” is primarily categorized as being physical, sexual, emotional, or involving neglect.
- “Physical abuse” of a child means any deliberate physical force or action which results or could result in injury to a child. It exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline.
- “Sexual abuse” means any sexual touching, invitation to sexual touching or other sexual acts relating to a child committed by an adult or an older child. Coercion (physical, psychological or emotional) is intrinsic to sexual abuse. “Child sexual abuse exploits and harms children by involving them in sexual behavior for which they are unprepared, to which they cannot consent, and from which they are unable to protect themselves.” (Thornburg Melton 1998, 13-4).
 - This definition would exclude normal affectionate behaviour towards children and exclude normal health or hygiene care.
- “Emotional Abuse” is behavior that attacks a child’s emotional development and sense of self-worth. It places expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity and includes constant criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating a child. It also includes failure by a parent or care giver to provide the child with love, emotional support and guidance.
- “Neglect” is the failure to meet a child’s basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education and protection from harm.
- “Child” means a person under the age of 19 years and including a youth and any physically and/or mentally challenged person.
- “Staff” includes pastors, Children’s Ministry workers, Pre-school staff, support staff, unpaid volunteers, and any other person hired or approved by the church.
- “Counseling relationship” means a relationship in which the staff and the person meet in a series of appointments for the purposes of pastoral care.

Reporting Obligations when Children are involved

For the protection of our children and youth, all allegations and/or suspicions of abuse against children and youth will be taken seriously.

- Generally speaking, the reporting obligations of the Province of British Columbia, when children are involved, are governed by the Child, Family and Community Service Act (Section 14 of the Act).
- Generally speaking, a person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is, or may be, in need of protection from abuse, shall forthwith report the belief and the information upon which it is based to the Children’s Pastor or the Children and Youth Ministries Team Leader.
- Generally speaking, the obligation to report child abuse applies not only to abuse committed by a staff, but also to abuse committed by a parent or by any other person.
- If the child is alleged to have been abused by a staff person, the Children’s Pastor should be advised immediately.

Surfacing and Response to an allegation

- Those who work in settings with children should become familiar with the indicators of possible abuse often portrayed by children victims. In so doing, however, one should also remember that those same indicators are sometimes consistent with problems which have nothing to do with abuse.
- When there is suspicion of abuse of a child, the first line of reporting is to the Children's Pastor.
- The Children's Pastor will document all pertinent information.
- The Children's Pastor, in conjunction with church leadership, will determine what steps, if any, shall be taken in the reporting of such situations to Social Services and the Police. If there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protection, Willow Park Church is legally required to immediately report the matter to authorities.
- Church leadership will notify the church's insurance provider and seek legal counsel upon hearing of a suspected child abuse case.
- If the suspected abuse happened in the context of church ministries or was committed by a church member or attendee, the parents of the victim will be notified by the church leadership.
- Willow Park Church will notify and work in conjunction with denominational leadership in any and all allegations or suspicions of abuse that may have happened in the context of church ministry.
- Those who work in settings with children victims should, when the situation calls for it, respond on a human and pastoral level. Thus, when a child makes it clear he wants to be listened to, it is always appropriate to do so. At the same time, common sense should prevail, so that the human or pastoral response called for does not interfere with the police investigation. Staff shall not ask for any information from the child that the child does not voluntarily provide.
- When an allegation surfaces, the staff person, paid or unpaid, should be asked to temporarily step aside from his duties, pending the outcome of the police investigation into the allegation.

Pastoral staff/Paid staff working with Children/Adults

- Any allegation or suspicion of abuse by Pastoral Staff/Paid staff members shall immediately be brought to the attention of the Children and Youth Ministries Team Leader.

Victim Assistance

- Upon reporting the allegation, where necessary, steps should be taken, in concert with the police and/or B.C. Ministry for Children and Families, to find appropriate temporary lodging for the child victim.
- Upon completion of the investigation by the B.C. Ministry of Children and Families, appropriate steps should be taken to assist the child victim, such as counselling. Such steps should only be taken with the consent of the Ministry.
- Appropriate assistance should be provided to those who have been determined to have been falsely accused.

SCREENING & RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

WPC has a moral, legal and spiritual responsibility to appropriately screen all prospective Children's/Youth Staff and volunteers. By ensuring good screening practices, we can create and maintain a safe environment for volunteers, clients, members and the organization. Our recruitment and screening process involves these individuals completing the following:

1. Volunteer Ministry Profile
2. Sign statement of faith.
3. Face to face interview if not known by pastor
4. Reference checks
5. Criminal Record Check
6. Training and awareness of the need and importance of a protection program
7. Signed Code of conduct

Children's/Youth staff and volunteers must complete the steps above prior to being placed in a position of trust. However, should this be impossible, the worker will have limited access to children/youth and all ministry settings will have at least two leaders in place who are fully screened and trained. The process must be completed within 3 months of start of service.

Volunteer Ministry Profile - Prospective Children's/Youth, volunteers or student leaders are to complete form for Youth Working with Children.

- A verifiable witnessed signature is required for the protection of all parties.
- Individuals who transfer from another congregation unknown to the church leadership must include contact information or a reference from a pastoral staff member of their previous church.
- In accordance with PIPEDA regulations, the Forms must include the reason for which the information is being collected.
- Ministry Forms are to be kept confidential and available only to the Ministry Pastor or church leadership and are to be kept in a secure location and on file permanently.

Reference Checks

- Prospective Children's/Youth ministry volunteers are to provide three references (from a broad cross section of individuals who have known the individual for many years and in many settings – personal, educational and professional) and must sign a liability release before reference checks are conducted.
- The appropriate Ministry Pastor/ Children's Staff Member will conduct at least two reference checks on all prospective Children's/Youth volunteers and will date and sign a summary of the referrals' comments which are to be filed permanently.

Interview

- Face-to-face interviews will be conducted by children's staff team member.

Criminal Record Check

- Criminal record checks are to be renewed every three (3) years.
- Criminal record checks are to be conducted on all ministry personnel 16 years and older and are to be kept on file permanently.

Approval – all ministry personnel are to be approved by Children’s Ministry leadership upon completion of recruitment and screening process. This approval must be signed and dated.

Qualifications of Ministry

- The primary leadership of any Children’s/youth program must be fully committed to the health and life of Willow Park Church and be willing to work alongside the children’s staff department to ensure the safety and well-being of the children attending.
- All prospective ministry personnel will have regularly attended church
 - Exceptions can be made in circumstances where the volunteer has met all other expectations and will be in a supportive role in ministry.
- Volunteers serving in children’s and youth ministry are members or adherents in good standing who support the doctrines, direction and by-laws or constitution of the church.
- Individuals, who have been accused, or convicted, or are under the suspicion of crimes against children and/or youth, or who have been convicted of violent crimes or other relevant crimes will not have any involvement in ministries or programs where children or youth participate.
- Volunteers who serve children and youth must have a personnel file kept with church records. These files are to be kept permanently.

Supervision and Training of Staff

Initially, staff/volunteer’s will be trained regarding child safety, abuse and misconduct prevention as well as post-incident procedures. They will be given some instruction which should lessen the probability of an allegation subsequently being made against them. Such instruction might include some of the following areas:

- The dangers of extended hugging or other inappropriate touching
- The danger of being alone with a child behind closed windowless doors
- Appropriate discipline
- Appropriate adult/child ratios
- Appropriate sign-in procedures
- Appropriate ways of changing diapers and of using washrooms
- Appropriate steps to be taken when children are taken away from church premises
- The potential emotional difficulties experienced during pastoral care

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND STAFF

One of the goals of Children's Ministry is to provide a safe, secure, loving environment for children. In an effort to accomplish this we have several security measures in place to protect our children, their parents and the church.

General Procedures

- Parents of babies and toddlers in the nursery department will be issued a security paging number which is required in order to receive back their child.
- Parents may designate other authorized persons (such as a grandparent) to pick up their child by giving them the parent pick up stub to submit to the childcare worker in the room.
- There must be at least **two** persons at any time.
- The safety of the babies is compromised when older children are playing in the nursery; therefore, unauthorized older children are not allowed in the nursery for any reason at any time.
- The nursery doors (half-doors) should be secured at all times from the inside to prevent anyone from entering unnoticed.
- All Classroom main doors should remain open and windows unblocked
 - Exceptions can be made to protect the safety of a child(ren). Door may then be closed under the condition two leaders are always present in classroom.

Health & Safety Guidelines

- Ministry staff/volunteers are encouraged to become certified and trained in first aid.
- Large toys, ride-on toys and bucket of small toys are cleaned as per instructions posted in the nursery after every service.
- Children, who are ill and could expose others to illness, are not to be received into the classroom. *see sheets pertaining to illness in folder*
- Ministry volunteers are not to give or apply any medications. Parents should be contacted and should administer all medications.
- When necessary emergency medication like EpiPen and puffers are to be kept in the possession of the ministry staff or designated volunteer.
- Where Epi-pens and puffers are needed, written instructions are to be provided by the parent or guardian to the ministry staff. Requests should be written, signed, dated and filed permanently.
- If first aid is needed for cuts, scraps or bumps an incident report form must be completed and Children's Ministry Staff member will contact parent in regards to incident and treatment

Diaper Changing

Diaper changing procedures are clearly posted in the nursery diaper changing area.

- Diaper changing is to be done by the child's parent; if parent is not available, a Kids Church paid staff can change the diaper if necessary.

Teacher/Student Ratio:

- One ministry personnel for every 3 infants (birth – 23 months)
- One ministry personnel for every 5 children age 24-36 months
- One ministry personnel for every 8 preschoolers age 3-4 years
- One ministry personnel for every 10-12 elementary-age children

General Security

- Records will be kept in a safe and secure place of the names and addresses of parents, children and staff. As well, a file containing criminal record checks for all staff will be maintained and kept in a safe and secure place.
- Records for all current staff will be maintained, outlining what periodic training each has participated in, volunteer staff ministry applications and interview records and references will be kept on file.
- In the Early Childhood Department, parents of preschoolers will be issued a security paging number which is required in order to receive back their child.
- Parents may designate other authorized persons (such as grandparents) to pick up their Child by giving them the parent pick up stub to submit to the childcare worker in the room.
- Children are not to be dropped off in a classroom or at the church without ministry personnel present.
- While registered in a program, children are not allowed to wander around the church. Staff or designated volunteers are to take such children to their appropriate classroom or parent
- All children's ministry workers should report people wandering around, or any suspicious activity, to the nearest staff member
- Children in Grades K-5 should remain in their classroom until picked up by a parent or responsible sibling or another adult designated to do so.
- No child may leave the church building without a parent or designated adult unless previously arranged with Children Ministry Staff members

Staff Identification

- All adults and youth helpers in Children's Ministry are required to wear a nametag as a means of identifying them as an adult (or youth) authorized to be in the classroom.
- Other adults (such as a parent or grandparent) should receive a visitor tag to wear in the classroom as a means of identification.

Washroom Procedures

- All children from birth to age 4 will be accompanied to the washroom by their own parents or an adult *female* staff person if it is an urgent need.
- A quick safety check of washroom should be done by volunteer/staff member before children enter to ensure no other adults are in washroom with child. Adults will be directed to different bathroom when children are present.
- For the safety of the child, no volunteers will ever be alone in an unsupervised washroom with a child. A volunteer can take a child to the washroom and stand/ supervise in the hallway or near open doorway.
- Children should have as much privacy as possible. Ministry personnel will enter a bathroom stall only when absolutely necessary to assist the child, keeping the door open at all times
- Children in grades K-5 may be sent to the washroom without supervision of an adult. A teacher will monitor this situation closely from hallway.
- Male ministry personnel **are not** to accompany female children to the washroom.

Classroom Procedures

- Physical contact with children should be minimal and only in the presence of other adults. Appropriate touching should be limited to handshakes, "high fives", brief side hugs or a brief touch on the shoulder.
- At least two workers should be present whenever possible as no child should be alone with a worker. If a child arrives before other members of your teaching team arrive, ensure the classroom door is wide open.
- Where there are windows, window blinds are to be kept open at all times unless it is necessary to darken the room for proper showing of videos or projected audio-visual equipment.
- Staff may not have children sit on their lap while the room is darkened or when other staff persons are not present
- Staff/volunteers are not to carry, piggyback children unless the child is injured and unable to walk
- Cell phone numbers provided by parents for the use of contact during children's program **cannot** be used for any other purpose by staff/volunteers

Field Trip/Off Site Procedures

- Bus Drivers must carry Class 1 or 2 drivers license and provide a clear driver abstract Copies of these will be kept on file
- Emergency contact forms or program registration forms must be on bus with children in the care of staff member or designated volunteer
- Transportation of children and volunteers attending WPC Children's ministry program will only occur via bus transport not personal vehicles. Exceptions can be made in advance and parent/guardians need to consent to personal vehicle use.
- Any necessary personnel like lifeguards will accompany the trip and copies of certification will be kept on file
- First aid kit and person with current first aid certification must be present for the duration of the outing

Approved Activities

- Activities or outings outside of regularly scheduled classes or childcare must be pre-approved by the Pastor of Children's Ministries.
- There must be a signed parent permission and medical release form received by a Children's Ministry staff person before children are taken from the church property.
- All ministry personnel drivers transporting children during church activities must be pre-approved by the Ministry Pastor, provide a copy of their valid driver's license and current insurance in accordance with the church insurance policy, and have completed the of graduated license program through ICBC.
- Children will not be left unattended in a vehicle.
- All overnight activities must have a minimum ratio of two ministry personnel for every ten children.
- All trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved, unrelated adult ministry personnel for every ten children.

Social Media/ Photographs

- Posting of pictures on social media platforms taken during WPC Events is prohibited
- Video and Photographs of children will only be done by a designated WPC photographer and or Videographer
- All photos of children can only be used on social media platforms with the consent from legal parent/ guardian of the child
- Special care will be given for those children who we are not able to take photos of eg. Addition of a “no photo” sticker will be added to name tag

These guidelines are designed to create a safer environment for children, so as to do what is humanly possible to prevent abuse and sexual misconduct. The prevalence of abuse and sexual misconduct in society at large demands a sober and serious response from all members of society. The gospel requires no less of a response on the part of Willow Park Church in dealing with its own institutions and personnel.

