

Child Safety Policy



General Purpose Statement

The Vineyard Church, Chester Springs (VC) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below policies, our goal is to protect the children of VC from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who are responsible for children during public worship services and events. The term “youth” refers generally to children and teens in 5th through 12th grade.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

Six Month Rule

No applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with children until s/he has been involved with VC for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation of the applicant’s suitability for working with children. *Exceptions may be made for those who can supply written recommendation from their former pastor or children’s ministry leader.

Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at VC.

Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview *may* be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two (2) references will be verified. These references should not be family members. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at VC.

Criminal Background Check

Background checks are required for all paid staff and for volunteers responsible for supervising children. Pennsylvania (PA) law requires: PA State Police Criminal Record Check; PA Child Abuse Clearance; FBI Clearance (fingerprinting) unless the applicant can sign the disclosure statement *23 Pa. C.S Section 6344.2* required by Child Protective Service Law.

Policies & Procedures Agreement

All applications and workers will agree to follow the policies & procedures outlined, including responding to medical and natural emergencies, and the prohibition of firearms in the classrooms.

Disqualifying offenses that will prohibit an individual from working with children will be determined by a staff pastor on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances (severity & recency). Offenses involving violence may preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Convictions for an offense involving children and/or sexual molestation will disqualify the applicant from working with children. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at VC.

Two Worker Rule

A minimum of two workers will be in attendance when children are being supervised during our routine, public church services. During the drop off period, one approved adult may supervise if the door is propped open. Youth (5th-12th) classes may have only one adult (non-minor) teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three (3) students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any church sponsored activity unless in a counseling or mentoring situation.

One of the volunteers must always be an approved adult. The second volunteer may be an approved youth (students 5th-12th grade) OR another approved adult. Youth must be at least three (3) school grades ahead of the class in which they serve (e.g., a 5th grader may assist in a classroom where all children are 2nd grade or below”).

Paid Childcare Worker

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for paid babysitters, some who are themselves under age 18, to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. Long term paid babysitters will be screened with an application and reference checks.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

All children being checked into our Kids Wing during our Sunday morning VC worship services will complete the security check-in/check-out procedure. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a sticker for the child similar to a claim check. The parent or guardian must present their matching sticker in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present their sticker, the Children’s Director or Overseeing Pastor will be contacted. The Children’s Director or Overseeing Pastor will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care.

Pennsylvania law dictates that volunteer childcare workers in a church are considered mandatory reporters of child abuse as defined by the following: “an individual paid or unpaid; who, on the basis of the individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.”

Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

All approved childcare workers will participate in a training process for recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at VC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to their overseeing director/pastor for further action. *The approved procedure for reporting incidents is outlined in the VineyardKids Policy & Procedures Manual. A copy of the manual is available in each classroom.*