

# Providence Church Child Protection Policy

## General Purpose Statement

Providence Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Providence Church 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 unpaid persons who work with children.

## Selection of Workers

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

a) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application will also include a signed statement that workers have read and understand The Child Protection Policy and agree to abide by it. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at Providence Church.

b) **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.

c) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least one of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should not include church members and will preferably come from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Providence Church.

d) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and workers as defined above.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check, which may be done electronically. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by church staff on a case-by-case basis, in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check results will be maintained in confidence on file at Providence Church.

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult 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 students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation and there must be another adult present in the building during the session in progress who is aware that the counseling session is occurring. Counseling sessions that require an adult to be alone in a room with a minor must be conducted in a room with a window.

### **Events/Activities Not on Church Grounds**

#### **a) Preschool**

A parent must accompany any preschooler attending a church sponsored activity or event that is not held on church grounds.

#### **b) Children**

A Medical Release form will be required for all church sponsored events or activities that are not held on church grounds. The person in charge will keep these forms until the conclusion of the event or activity; they will then be filed in the church office.

All persons driving children to a church sponsored event or activity away from church grounds must be at least 21 years of age. All 'non-driving' chaperones must be at least 16 years of age. Except in the case of an emergency, there must be at least 2 chaperones in each church vehicle.

For all trips, the ratio of chaperones to children must be no less than 1 to 5.

For overnight trips, there will ideally be 1 female and 1 male adult chaperone if the group is of mixed gender. If 1 female and 1 male adult chaperone are not available, arrangements will be made to accommodate both genders with separate, supervised sleeping arrangements. Parents will be made aware of accommodations prior to departure.

#### **c) Youth**

A Youth Activity and Medical Consent/Release form will be kept on file for all church sponsored events or activities that are not held on church grounds. The person in charge will keep these forms until the conclusion of the school year; they will then be filed in the church office.

All persons chaperoning youth at a church sponsored event or activity away from church grounds must be at least 21 years of age. (This applies to 'driving' and 'non-driving' chaperones.) Ideally, there will be at least 2 chaperones in each church vehicle. In cases where 2 chaperones are not available per vehicle, a signed release will be kept on file by the person in charge.

For all trips, the ratio of chaperones to youth must be no less than 1 to 8.

For overnight trips, there must be at least 1 female and 1 male adult chaperone if the group is of mixed gender.

## 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. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **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.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Providence Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to a paid staff member of the church for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it.

## **Teenage Workers**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for workers (paid or volunteer), who are themselves under age 18, to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 13.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
- Must complete SafeChurch training and pass the SafeChurch certification test.

## **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

For children below second grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian.

## **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Providence Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

## **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of Providence Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) and for minor first aid, such as band aids and antibiotic ointment. Such treatment will only be provided with written permission from a parent or guardian.

## **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of Providence Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Actions such as redirection should be implemented in the case of behavior challenges. Workers should consult with a paid church staff member if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## **Restroom Guidelines**

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort children to the hallway bathroom, while remaining in view of another adult. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, the worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

## **Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

## **Training**

Providence Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.