

# Child Protection Policy



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16*

*"Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful" 1 Corinthians 4:2*

## PURPOSE OF POLICY

This policy is intended to protect children participating in events sponsored by Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church (LMPC). This policy applies to LMPC staff compensated or volunteer, who have the responsibility of supervising the activities of minors age 18 and below. This policy does not constitute a contract between LMPC and its employees/volunteers or any other party. It is merely a statement of policy and general guideline which LMPC will seek to follow. LMPC makes no guarantee to any party that all aspects of this policy will be followed in any given situation. LMPC is not responsible for the individual acts of any employee/volunteer.

## 1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Child abuse** shall be defined as any action (or lack of action, i.e. neglect) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological & emotional or spiritual health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse:** any physical injury to a minor which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, biting.
- **Emotional abuse:** emotional injury occurs when the minor is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, shaming, or persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse:** any sexual activity between a minor and an adult or between minors, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, pornography. Other forms of sexual abuse can include verbal comments, exposure to pornographic materials, obscene phone calls, allowing minors to witness sexual activity.
- **Spiritual abuse:** abuse administered under the guise of religion. Spiritual abuse may include misuse of religion for selfish, secular, or ideological ends. Examples of spiritual abuse include but are not limited to: Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child; compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his or her will; abuse that occurs in a religious context; abuse perpetuated by a religious leader; invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser.

**Employee** shall be defined as any individual who is paid by LMPC on a full or part-time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors.

**Child, children, youth and minor** shall be defined as any individual age 18 and under.

**Screening Committee** shall be defined as those individuals appointed by the executive committee of the Session who will be responsible for approving all employees and volunteers who serve in a LMPC ministry to minors.

**Volunteer** is any individual who is not paid by the church, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors.

## 2. SELECTION AND SCREENING PROCESS

LMPC believes that appropriate personal relationships between adult employees/volunteers and minors of the church foster the community of Christ. LMPC will seek to prevent the abuse of minors when they are participating in church programs. Preventive measures include screening, training and supervision of all employees/volunteers and a commitment to eliminating opportunities for abuse within church programs. This screening includes the following:

- **Six-month observation:** Applicants for volunteer positions involving contact with minors who are not LMPC members will be in an observation period until they have been involved with LMPC for a minimum of six months. Volunteers will not be involved in any one on one ministry during the observation period. This time of interaction between LMPC and the applicant allows for better evaluation of suitability of the applicant for working with minors. At any time during, or at the completion of the 6 month observation period, volunteers can be removed for any reason, including but not limited to, failure to adhere to any point of the LMPC Child Protection Policy.
- **Written application:** All individuals seeking to work with minors must complete a confidential application form; read, be in agreement with, and sign the LMPC Covenant to Teach and Nurture; and give written permission for a criminal records check and have references reviewed. In addition, if the individual is unknown, he or she may be interviewed by a member of the screening committee. Approval to work with minors must be granted by the LMPC Screening Committee and the Executive Committee of the LMPC Session. The application will be maintained in confidence on file at LMPC.
- **Training:** Upon commencement of involvement in ministry to minors, each volunteer/employee will attend training in the LMPC child protection policy and its supporting procedures. Instruction and review of the LMPC child protection policy is expected annually.

## 3. EMPLOYEES/VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE MINORS

Employees/volunteers, who are themselves under age 18, are a valuable resource in the care and nurture of our covenant children. The following guidelines apply to this employee/volunteer.

- Volunteers must be at least 12 years old; employees must be at least 14 years old.
- Minor employees/volunteers will be screened and receive age-appropriate training as specified above with the exception of a required criminal records check.
- Applications submitted by a minor employee/volunteer must be signed by their parent/guardian where indicated.
- Volunteers who are minors will serve in non-primary roles and will have direct supervision by at least one adult volunteer/employee.

## 4. SUPERVISORY REQUIREMENTS

LMPC has a zero tolerance for abuse in its programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every employee/volunteer in children and youth ministries to act in the best interest of all minors in every program. The following requirements shall be applicable to all employees/volunteers who have contact with minors participating in any program at LMPC.

a) **Safety of children:** It is the responsibility of employees/volunteers to promote the emotional and physical safety of minors giving regard to all factors and circumstances known to them. If in their

opinion, an unsafe condition exists, they shall immediately take appropriate precautions to protect all minors.

b) **Two-deep leadership:** A reasonable effort will be made to have two non-related employees/volunteers present in all classrooms with minors during church activities. In the event that an employee/volunteer is alone with a group of children, efforts will be made to increase supervision, such as extra check in by a program supervisor, classroom doors propped open as possible, or the activity moved to more public space in view of others.

- Meetings that are regularly scheduled to occur between one employee/volunteer and a group of minors or with a single minor (junior or senior high small groups, etc) shall have written parental consent from each participant on file in the supervising program director's office before the meeting occurs.
- LMPC recognizes that a fundamental goal of the middle and high school philosophy of ministry is to build relationships with students and families and to have regular, intentional contact with students. Meetings that spontaneously occur between one employee/volunteer and a group of minors are to be encouraged rather than thwarted by the scope of this policy. Therefore, employees/volunteers will be responsible to:
  - conduct these meetings in view of other adults and/or minors
  - communicate with parents to receive parental permission before the meeting proceeds
  - file a report of the meeting with their supervisor following the meeting

c) **One-on-One policy:** One-on-one contact between elementary-age minors and employees/volunteers should be avoided. LMPC recognizes that there will be times when an unaccompanied employee/volunteer may be present with a single minor, while on the LMPC premises. In those circumstances, (such as the last child picked up from an event, or a student who can't find their parents) the employee/volunteer should find an additional adult to assist or move to an observable location such as the fellowship hall lobby.

One-on-one meetings are an important and vital aspect of youth ministry. However, these are also the situations where students and leaders are most vulnerable to abuse. To protect both students and leaders we have the following guidelines for conducting one-on-one meetings.

- Meetings must be reported to your supervisor before they take place with the following information: who you are meeting, where the meeting will take place, how long the meeting will last.
- Meetings with a minor must have prior parental permission.
- All meetings will be in a public, supervised place.
- All one on one meetings will be only with an employee/volunteer and a minor of the same gender.
- Spontaneous meetings between an employee/volunteer and one minor can proceed only after the regular one on one guidelines listed above have been completed.

d) **Reporting:** Volunteers and interns will report by email to the director of the department in which they are serving. Directors will save all reports in a specified folder on the LMPC X drive. Directors will report their personal meetings to the Pastor of Youth Ministry, who will also maintain a file copy.

e) **Special Needs Ministry:** In caring for students with special needs, it is often optimal to have one-on-one interaction within the structure of typical ministry activities. LMPC will have a written parental consent form for each participant on file in the supervising program director's office before the meeting occurs. All one-on-one interactions will be observable and interruptible, and in accordance with all the procedures in this policy.

- f) **Ratio of employee/volunteers to minors:** When supervising minors, it is required that an age appropriate ratio of employees/volunteers to minors be maintained at all times. The supervisor overseeing the age group shall be primarily responsible for setting and maintaining a reasonable ratio of employees/volunteers to minors giving due regard to all factors present, including the number and age of the participants, the nature of the activities and the location where the activities are taking place.
- g) **Overnight procedures:** When supervising minors, it is required that an age appropriate ratio of employees/volunteers to minors be maintained at all times. The supervisor overseeing the age group shall be primarily responsible for setting and maintaining a reasonable ratio of employees/volunteers to minors giving due regard to all factors present, including the number and age of the participants, the nature of the activities and the location where the activities are taking place.
- h) **No confidentiality:** Employees/volunteers can never promise confidentiality to a minor. Employees/volunteers must report to the Pastor of Youth Ministries or the Pastor of Discipleship if a minor discusses harming himself or others, committing a crime or being abused.
- i) **Digital privacy:** Inappropriate use of cameras, imaging, or digital devices is prohibited. It is inappropriate to use any device capable of recording or transmitting visual images in areas where privacy is expected by participants. Posting ANY images on the internet is not allowed unless permission has been granted by the parents and approved by your supervisor.
- j) **Hazing and bullying:** Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited. Verbal, physical, and cyber bullying are prohibited.
- k) **Controlled substances:** The use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs and/or mind altering substances with minors is prohibited.
- l) **Gift giving:** Accepting and giving gifts from/to minors is permissible when appropriate (Christmas, birthday, ministry milestones, ministry related materials) but is discouraged as a frequent practice. Report to your supervisor any gifts you receive that seem inappropriately given.
- m) **Close emotional relationships:** Employees/volunteers need to avoid developing close emotional relationships with minors of the opposite sex and exercise extreme caution in dealing with minors of the same sex.
- n) **Grooming:** The process of securing the trust of a minor and his/her parents is commonly called grooming. This process generally takes place over a longer period of time. Trust of the potential offender is gained by providing a variety of services and gifts, including but not limited to attention, affection, kindness, privileges, recognition, alcohol, drugs, money and pornography. This type of trust building is intended to "buy" a victim's trust to hinder them from reporting inappropriate behavior before it leads to abuse. Any behavior that appears to fit this pattern should be brought to the attention of a supervisor, program director or pastor.

## 5. PHYSICAL/NON-PHYSICAL CONTACT

### Permissible Contact

- Limited physical contact with minors, such as a pat on the back or on the head, or a handshake, is permissible. Brief hugs are permissible within sight of others. Employees/volunteers must avoid any prolonged hugs and must stop a hug immediately upon request of the minor. Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms, placing an arm around the shoulders, sitting beside minors, holding hands during prayer, high fives and hand slapping are all appropriate.

- Child-driven interactions are acceptable in view of others; for example, if a child approaches an employee/volunteer to give a hug they don't have to turn the child away.
- Employees/volunteers should make every effort that interactions with a child are observable and interruptible.

### **Prohibited Contact**

- **Sexual abuse:** Any physical contact between an employee/volunteer and a minor that would provide, or is intended to provide, any form of sexual gratification.
- **Physical contact:** Any physical contact between an employee/volunteer and a minor that includes giving massages, kissing, prolonged embracing, and so forth
- **Physical abuse:** striking, spanking, shaking, slapping or other violent behaviors towards a minor
- **Pornography:** Showing minors images that are pornographic is prohibited. Accidental viewing of pornography when in the presence of minors should be reported to your supervisor immediately. If employees/volunteers become aware of the existence of child pornography in the hands of a minor, they should immediately report this to their supervisor.
- **Verbal/mental abuse:** Language that is humiliating, degrading, threatening, sexual, personally intimate, related to body development or physique, or crude, regardless of how the communication was conveyed (e.g. text messages, email, phone calls, social networking sites, etc.)
- **Dating:** At no time shall any employee/volunteer pursue a dating relationship with a minor and should be sensitive to minors with "crushes."

### **Reporting**

All employee/volunteers are to be responsible to immediately discuss with their supervisor any signs of possible violations of the above and/or victimization.

## **6. DISCIPLINE PROCEDURES**

No form of punishment that involves pain or physical discomfort may be used. Minors may be restrained if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others. Disruptive minors may be removed from the group to another part of the room.

A basic three step discipline system is in place in all LMPC ministry to minors departments.

- a) Children/students will be given an age appropriate, verbal warning and opportunity to change behavior.
- b) If negative behavior continues, a supervisor or program director will be engaged in further conversation and a challenge to comply.
- c) Failure to comply results in adding a parent to both the conversation and the activities until an agreed upon end date.

## **7. TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES**

- All drivers should be licensed and have proof of insurance with limits that meet or exceed requirements of the state in which the vehicle is licensed.
- Complete transportation procedures are available in X/Youth Specific Forms/Driving Guidelines

## 8. RESTROOM POLICY

### Guidance by restroom type/location:

- When restrooms are single occupant & adjacent to a classroom, children may be dismissed to use the restroom as needed, and assisted as directed in the guidelines below listed by ministry department.
- When restrooms are off a public hallway with multiple stalls near a classroom:
  - Younger children may be walked to the restroom. The volunteer will make sure no one is in the restroom, and then wait for the child in the hall; a child may be assisted as directed in the guidelines below listed by ministry department.
  - Older children may be dismissed from an elementary classroom to the restrooms at the bottom of the narthex stairs as the entrances are in view of the elementary supervisor, and there is a “line of sound” to these areas.

### Guidance by ministry department:

- With NURSERY & MDO AGE children, female paid workers will assist children in the restroom with the door propped open, with a second adult present in the classroom.
- With NURSERY & MDO AGE children, female paid workers will complete diaper changing, with a second adult present in the classroom.
- In the ELEMENTARY DEPARTMENT, children may be allowed to use the restroom alone. If assistance is needed occasionally, such as with pre-K or Kindergarten students, the door will be propped open and the volunteer may assist the child if a second adult is either present in the classroom when the restroom is adjacent to the classroom or a second adult is in the hallway if it is a public restroom.
- In the YOUTH DEPARTMENT, students should not have a phone out or turned on in a restroom.
- In ALL DEPARTMENTS, volunteers or paid workers should never have a phone out or turned on in a restroom.

**LMPC IS NOT RESPONSIBLE for children in the restroom while they are not under the specific care of an LMPC Ministry to Minors Activity (i.e. allowed to use the restroom unattended during worship service, fellowship dinner, etc.)**

**Adults should avoid being alone in a restroom with a child who is not under their care. If an unattended child enters the restroom, an adult should exit as soon as possible.**

## 9. CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION OF CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Any employee/volunteer accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by LMPC to be harmful to a minor, may be immediately suspended from participation in any LMPC ministry for minors. Any employee/volunteer found in violation of the LMPC Child Protection Policy may be prohibited from future participation as an employee/volunteer in all LMPC ministries for minors. If the person is an employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from LMPC.

## 10. DOCUMENTING A CONCERN

Violations of any of these policies and procedures which do not constitute abuse should be reported to a direct supervisor to be noted in the employee's/volunteer's file. Cumulative concerns may result in suspension from LMPC ministry to minors. As with reporting abuse, specific details or proof are not

necessary, any person feeling uncomfortable or uneasy about actions or attitudes of any volunteer/employee with minors should bring it to the attention of the appropriate supervisor.

## 11. REPORTING ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE

### Reporting obligation:

- Tennessee state law mandates that anyone who has knowledge of or suspects abuse or neglect of a child must report it. The law makes no distinction between professional and non-professionals on the issue of reporting. Employees/volunteers involved in LMPC ministries to minors must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any good faith suspicion or belief that a minor is or has been physically or sexually abused, physically or emotionally neglected, exposed to any form of violence or threat, exposed to any form of sexual exploitation including the possession, manufacture, or distribution of child pornography, online solicitation, enticement or showing of obscene material. Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for an employee's termination of employment. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act witnessed or suspected by them may be restricted from participation in any activity involving minors. Minors, whether employees or volunteers, are exempt from this reporting requirement, but are encouraged to report concerns or violations to a supervisor.

### To whom to report and how:

- An employee/volunteer should first report suspicions of abuse directly to one of the following departments.
  - The TN Department of Children's Services (DCS).
    - The main page for Reporting Abuse is found at <https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/child-safety/reporting/child-abuse.html> There is helpful information here to help you begin the reporting process.
    - The TN DCS Hotline number is 1-877-237-0004. Someone is available 24/7.
    - You may make a report using the online form available at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat/>
  - The Hamilton county job and family services department. 423-241-KIDS
  - The sheriff in Hamilton County or the chief law enforcement officer in Hamilton County. 423-209-7000
- An employee/volunteer is also required to report an incident to an immediate supervisor, the Pastor of Youth Ministries, the Pastor of Discipleship or the Director of Operations and Finance as soon as possible after the incident. The reporter will be asked to fill out a *LMPC Report of Child Abuse* form which is available from your supervisor and attached to this policy.
- If not initially reported to the Director of Operations and Finance, the immediate supervisor will immediately report to the Director of Operations and Finance, who will coordinate the investigation and communication process.

## 12. RESPONSE PLAN

In the event that an incident of child abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred on the premises of LMPC or during a sponsored program or activity, the following procedure shall be implemented by the Pastor of Youth Ministries, the Pastor of Discipleship or the Director of Operations and Finance, unless he is alleged to be involved.

- The parent or guardian of the minor will be notified, unless the parent or guardian is the alleged perpetrator.

- The employee/volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with minors pending an investigation.
- LMPC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
- LMPC's attorney and insurance company will be notified.
- If the alleged abuse involves an ordained pastor at LMPC, the Tennessee Valley Presbytery will be notified and the Stated Clerk's office made aware of the situation.
- LMPC will cooperate fully with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities.
- In conjunction with the Communication's Manager, one person will be selected to act as the official spokesperson for LMPC, who will be available to the media to answer questions and to interpret the child protection policy. The use of a prepared statement with the advice of legal counsel shall be the means by which the child protection policy will be described to the public.
- LMPC's goal is to protect the dignity of those involved in an incident while facilitating necessary and appropriate discussion for the safe resolution for all concerned. All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in appropriate confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with an official investigation. Breach of this confidentiality by a LMPC employee/volunteer may be cause for immediate dismissal. The pastor, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation, may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other minors from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified. But in no case shall the identity of the victim or the accused person be disclosed except as required by law. Any person who is found guilty of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with minors.