

# Safe Place Policy

**Dorchester Presbyterian Church  
Summerville, SC**

## INTRODUCTION

*“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 10:14-16*

*“Jesus said, ‘You shall love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” ~Matthew 22:37-39*

As Christians, we believe that God creates us to live in community with one another. We understand that life in the church is to be lived according to the rule of love as in Matthew 22:37-39. We are called to create a loving community of faith that seeks the welfare of its staff, members, and visitors.

It is the purpose of the members and staff of Dorchester Presbyterian Church to encourage people to grow in their relationship with God and one another in a safe and secure environment. Abuse, exploitation or harassment in any form, physical, emotional or sexual, will not be tolerated. As part of our congregation’s baptismal vows, we covenant with each other to take responsibility for the nurture of faith. Our commitment to Christian nurture means that we will help care for all of God’s children, regardless of age, by providing them with a safe and nurturing environment and treating them with respect and love, as well as teaching them the gospel and living out the faith as positive role models.

With this formal written policy, Dorchester Presbyterian Church affirms the right of all members and visitors to be protected from sexual, physical, or emotional abuse and neglect, and the right of volunteers and staff to be protected from false allegations of abuse and neglect.

It is not possible for us to have policies and procedures for every situation that may arise. In your interactions with members and visitors of Dorchester Presbyterian Church, please use your best judgment, and act according to the spirit of this Safe Place Policy.

The Good Shepherd School will abide by its own policies as regulated by DSS.

## RATIONALE

It is a real problem in our culture:

- Experts estimate that **1 in 3 girls** and **1 in 6 boys** are sexually abused before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays.
- **Every 10 seconds** a child is reported abused or neglected (**3.3 million a year**)
- **1 in 4 children** are sexually solicited while on the Internet.
- **47% of children** who are sexually abused are abused by family members.
- As many as **81% are abused by people the family trusts**. Abusers often try to form a trusting relationship with parents.
- More than **93% of children who are sexually abused know their abusers**.
- Nearly **50% are abused** by older or larger children.
- **48% of teens** say they have received a sexually suggestive message via text, e-mail, or IM
- **33%** of all internet-initiated sex crimes involved social networking sites

Churches are highly susceptible:

- *Trust*: Churches tend to be trusting and unsuspecting institutions.
- *Need*: Most churches struggle to get adequate help for children and youth programs. Recruiting nursery workers, for example, can be an unending effort. Turnover among volunteers is also high. A willing volunteer worker provides welcome relief.
- *Lack of screening*: Some churches do nothing to screen youth workers. Complete strangers may be accepted to work with children without any investigation.
- *Opportunity*: Churches provide ample opportunities for unsupervised close personal contact between adults and children. The risk increases dramatically for overnight activities.
- *Access*: Child molesters are attracted to an institution in which they have immediate access to potential victims in an atmosphere of complete trust.

Increasing the level of safety within the church will benefit the following areas of congregational life:

- *Children and Youth*: This is the key and over-arching priority of any risk management program. Young people are a precious gift to the church and we have a divine mandate to ensure their safety and nurture. Effective risk management means child protection.
- *Adults*: All of our adult members and visitors should feel safe and secure and be treated with dignity and respect. Therefore, we do not condone any unwanted sexual advance or discrimination based on gender.
- *Families*: Families must be assured that their children remain safe while participating in church programs. The victimization of a child can devastate a family for years.
- *Church Workers*: An effective risk management program protects church workers from personal harm and liability. Both paid employees and volunteers can be at risk. Effective risk management efforts ensure that workers are not open to unfounded accusations or tempted by compromising circumstances that could ruin lives.
- *Church Leaders*: In some abuse cases, church leaders are found personally liable for damages resulting from negligence. Church leaders need the assurance that their reputations and well-being are protected.
- *The Church Community*: The local church suffers intensely after a case of sexual abuse occurs. Often extreme financial, legal, and interpersonal stresses are unleashed. The vitality and effectiveness of a church can be diminished for years as a result. Its mission and reputation in the community will be tarnished.
- *Church Insurance*: Most church insurance companies now require a child protection policy before they will write an insurance policy.

## DEFINITIONS

**Minor** – shall be defined as any individual under the age of 18 or whose mental capacity is that of a minor.

**Child/Children** – individuals from birth through grade 5

**Youth** – any person in grades 6 – 12.

**Caregiver** – includes any person who has been entrusted with responsibility for the care, nurture, well-being and health of any minor.

- **Adult** shall be defined as any person 19 and older. A married couple counts as one adult in the “rule of two” because they are not required to testify against one another in court if the need arises.
- **Teenager** shall be defined as any person between the ages of 12 and 18.
- **Volunteer** shall be defined as any person who participates in any ministry of Dorchester Presbyterian Church without pay or compensation.
- **Staff** shall be defined as pastors and full or part-time employees of the church.

**Parent** – includes grandparents and legal guardians – whomever is responsible for a child while at church-sponsored events

**Appropriate Touch** – non offensive touching in a way that comforts or shows caring within proper boundaries and with the person’s permission. (ex. hugs, squeezing hands, pat on back, or placing arm around one’s shoulder)

**Child Abuse and Neglect** - refers to physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a minor by a parent or caretaker responsible for the child’s welfare.

- **Physical abuse** – is that which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, burns, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.
- **Emotional abuse** – is that which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child’s performance, and isolation from normal social activities.
- **Sexual abuse** – is that which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse), and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, inappropriate verbal comments, and voyeurism). The perpetrator may be another minor.
- **Neglect** – is the failure to use proper care or supervision of children or youth or the abandonment of the children or youth participating in any church sponsored activities.

**Sexual Misconduct** - any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. Sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, teacher, youth advisor, mentor, or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, co-worker, or volunteer. Sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable, and must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue.

## **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. All classroom and office doors must have windows that remain unobstructed at all times.
2. Any one-on-one interactions must be observable and interruptible.
3. In the event that one of the caregivers needs to leave the room, leaving one caregiver alone with minors, another adult in the building must be notified.
4. Parents must notify caregivers of any allergies; caregivers will make accommodations if needed.

## **TECHNOLOGY GUIDELINES**

1. Personal telephone calls, texts, e-mails, and other forms of personal communication should be avoided while supervising minors and should only be used in the case of an emergency. Cell phone use should be kept to a minimum while operating a motor vehicle. Texting is not considered a safe practice while the vehicle is in motion.
2. Church employees, volunteers, and members are to uphold appropriate and faithful communication with minors in all electronic contexts, refraining from the use of explicit language, the exchange of sexual imagery or sexually explicit discussion, and the promotion of illegal activities (ie. drug use, underage drinking). This requirement extends to Phone (voice and text), Social Networking (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc), email, and all other forms of electronic communication. If an adult employee, volunteer, or member feels that they have been inappropriately contacted by a minor, they are to report the incident in writing (email is acceptable) to one of the pastors.
3. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact minors through social media. The “home phone rule” is a basic rule of thumb to use: do not initiate a conversation via text, chat, or e-mail with minors at a time you would not normally call their home phone, i.e. before 8:00 am or after 9:00 pm. If a minor contacts you after hours, and it’s not an emergency, wait until morning to reply.
4. If you choose to accept a “friend” or “follow” request from a minor, review the accessible content on your profile frequently to ensure it is appropriate.
5. Use your best judgment when posting pictures of minors online. It is preferable to only post them to the church’s account or page or to send them to church staff for review and posting.

## **Infant and Toddler Nursery and Children's Church Guidelines**

1. At least two caregivers will be present at all times.
2. At least one caregiver must be an adult; one caregiver may be a teenager.
3. Pre-school children are encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the bathroom door shall remain open while caregiver assists the child.

## **Guidelines Specifically for Infant and Toddler Nursery**

1. All caregivers must wash their hands before interacting with children.
2. All children must be signed in. Parents will receive a numbered pager upon arrival so that they can be reached in case of emergency.
3. Parents must label all of their child's belongings.
4. Children may only leave with a parent or person indicated by the parent on a sign in sheet who has the correctly numbered pager.
5. Paid and volunteer nursery staff will wear nametags at all times.
6. Infants should only receive drinks or snack as provided by their parents. Toddlers may drink water and snacks provided by nursery coordinator, with consideration of possible allergies.
7. Observe hygienic practices (hand washing and diaper disposal) when changing diapers.
8. Paid caregivers must have CPR/First Aid training. A first aid kit is available in the nursery cabinets. In the case of emergency, call 911 - a phone is available in all rooms.

## **Guidelines for all other church-sponsored activities with children**

1. Two adults will be present at any church activity that involves the supervision of minors.
2. Children third grade and above are dismissed after class to find their parents, while younger children will only be dismissed to a parent or person authorized by parent.
3. Parents of children sixth grade and younger should fill out a Student Information Card.
4. If the class leaves the assigned classroom, teachers must put a sign on the door with the new location. If the class is going onto the nature trail, the Pastor, Associate Pastor or Elder of the Month must be notified.

## Presbyterian Youth Connection (PYC) Guidelines

1. Two adults will be present at any church-sponsored PYC activity unless there is one of the following exceptions:
  - a. Contact with prior approval by parents
  - b. Adult leader has background clearance and *Darkness to Light* training
  - c. During retreat or travel events hosted by outside agencies (ex. Montreat, Charleston Atlantic Presbytery) at least one of the same sex adults will be “housed” with a ratio of adult to youth in accordance to event/trip guidelines. For example – staying with youth in cabins at Bethelwoods Camp and Conference Center.
  - d. When staying in a hotel, adults may not sleep in the same room with youth.
2. One-on-one interactions between an adult and youth are discouraged. If a need arises for counseling or mentoring purposes, the meeting must be observable and interruptible. Prior consent by a parent is encouraged.
3. All adults working with youth (including Sunday school teachers, youth advisors, trip chaperones, drivers, and mentors) must be properly trained and screened according to this policy.
4. All youth going offsite with PYC must have a current Medical Release form on file in the church office.
5. A senior high youth (grades 9-12) should not be alone with a junior high youth (grades 6-8).
6. If there are male and female youth on an overnight trip, there must be one male for every six male youth and one female advisor for every six female youth.
7. Adults are encouraged to use the church bus to transport youth to and from events. There should always be two adults on the church bus with youth. The bus driver must have a valid driver’s license on file in the church office and abide by all bus policy guidelines.

Exceptions:

  - a. An adult may drive his/her personal vehicle in a caravan – other vehicles in caravan must be kept in sight. Drivers must abide by all traffic laws.
  - b. If youth are having an event in which they are going in small groups to separate places (ex. scavenger hunt), or if there are too few youth to use the bus, the rule of three must be enforced – at least two adults and one youth or one adult and two youth.

## **DISCIPLINE POLICY FOR CHILDREN**

### **PHILOSOPHY**

We strive to create a positive atmosphere of Christian learning. The ideal environment is one defined by adult expectations of proper behavior and peer pressure to sustain it. To maintain a safe and educational setting for all students there may be times when disciplinary action is necessary.

### **TIPS FOR EXTINGUISHING PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIORS**

1. Ignore – they may be just trying to get attention – if you react to their behavior, they win.
2. Depend on other leaders to help while you are teaching.
3. Make eye contact to let them know you are aware of their behavior without calling attention to it in front of the other children.
4. Physical Proximity – Go and stand next to the child causing the disruption.
5. Touch – Place your hand on their shoulder.
6. Call the child to task by name.
7. Give them a verbal warning.
8. Deal with each problem individually. Take child aside rather than disciplining them in front of the other children. Make sure they understand what the problem behavior is and have them identify strategies to avoid it. Explain the consequences of unacceptable behavior.

### **TIMEOUT**

After verbal warnings to a child have proven ineffective, timeout may be used as follows:

1. The child remains in the same room sitting in a chair along the wall facing the middle of the room.
2. The child should have nothing to read or play with during timeout.
3. Timeout should last approximately one minute for each year of the child's age.

### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Caregivers should notify parents if and when a timeout was given and the reason why it was necessary.

If a child's behavior cannot be effectively controlled through timeout discipline, an extra teacher or adult volunteer should be sent to find the child's parent or guardian and ask them to remove the child from the room.

**No other form of correction or discipline is deemed appropriate.**

## INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

The following characteristics may be indicators of abuse, although **they are not necessarily proof**. Individually, any one of the indicators may be a sign of a number of other more or less serious problems. When these indicators are observed in a child, they can be considered as a warning and lead you to look into the situation further.

### Possible Signs of Physical Abuse:

1. hostile and aggressive behavior towards others
2. fearfulness of parents and/or other adults
3. destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property
4. inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child's developmental stage
5. burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises

### Possible Signs of Emotional Abuse:

1. exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal
2. exhibits severe lack of self-esteem
3. failure to thrive
4. threatens or attempts suicide
5. speech and/or eating disorders
6. goes to extremes to seek adult approval
7. extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns

### Possible Signs of Neglect:

1. failure to thrive
2. pattern of inappropriate dress
3. begs or steals food; chronic hunger
4. depression
5. untreated medical conditions
6. poor hygiene

### Possible Signs of Sexual Abuse:

1. unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age
2. depression- cries often for no apparent reason
3. promiscuous behavior
4. runs away from home and refuses to return
5. difficulty walking or sitting
6. bruised bleeding in vaginal or anal areas
7. exhibits frequent headaches, stomachaches, and extreme fatigue
8. sexually transmitted diseases

## RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Refer the *Definitions* section of the Safe Place Policy for descriptions of abuse. “Sexual misconduct” occurs at any age, and is defined as any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual misconduct includes, but is not limited to, discrimination on the basis of gender.

Every allegation of abuse or misconduct will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared. In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at a Dorchester Presbyterian Church program or event, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The victim will be cared for and counseled as needed. (moved from #3 to #1)
2. Person reporting the incident should complete the Safe Place *Incident Report Form* and notify the Pastor or Associate Pastor. If the alleged perpetrator is the Pastor or Associate Pastor, then the Chair of the Charleston Atlantic Committee on Ministry should be immediately notified and the matter placed in their hands.
3. In the event of suspected child abuse, the parents or guardians of the minor will be notified of the allegation and the steps taken.
4. The accused perpetrator shall be notified immediately and treated with dignity, support, and pastoral care. That person will be immediately relieved of further church related responsibilities until the investigation is completed and allegations are cleared or substantiated.
5. The church’s insurance company will be notified and will complete an incident report.
6. The church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
7. The church will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, an Incident Response Team appointed by the session may be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with the church’s insurance company and/or an attorney.
8. The Pastor, or other person designated by the session, shall be the sole spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved, then the Executive Presbyter shall be the spokesperson. All others should refrain from speaking to the media.
9. Pastoral visits will be arranged for those who desire it.
10. The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

**INCIDENT REPORT FORM**

Reason for report \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of incident \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person reporting \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Report \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of people involved \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the incident of suspected abuse, sexual misconduct, or any violation of the Safe Place Policy:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What action did you take? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Has the incident been resolved? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Were there any witnesses? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no Names: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signatures of witnesses (if possible): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person making report: \_\_\_\_\_

**For office use:**

Date and Time Received: \_\_\_\_\_ Received by: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Recipient: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date and Time that Pastor is notified

\_\_\_\_\_ Date and Time that Authorities are notified

\_\_\_\_\_ Date and Time that the Incident Response Team is notified, if needed

## SCREENING

As an organization committed to developing strategies for the prevention of child abuse in the church, the session of Dorchester Presbyterian Church is determined that any and all adults and teenagers who serve on our behalf with any minor will be properly selected, screened, trained, and supervised to minimize the risk of abuse at Dorchester Presbyterian Church by volunteers or employees.

### Staff

Application with references  
Reference check authorization  
Background check authorization  
National Criminal Background Check\*  
*Safe Place Covenant*  
Personal interview

### Volunteers

Appropriate *Volunteer Application Form* and *Safe Place Covenant*  
Background check authorization  
National Criminal Background Check for volunteers 18 and older\*  
A Basic Background Check will be conducted for all volunteers in children's ministry. A level C Background Check will be conducted for all staff and volunteers in youth ministry.

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until s/he has been involved in Dorchester Presbyterian Church for at least six months. This time allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant to work with children/youth.

**All information will be held in strictest confidence. Only the Pastor and Associate Pastor will have access to this information. Applications and information gathered through background and reference checks will be kept in a locked file in the Dorchester Presbyterian Church office.**

\*Background checks will be conducted on all caregivers when their application is first completed. After the initial checks, the church will run follow-up background checks on five randomly selected caregivers each year.

## **SCREENING**

### **DISQUALIFYING OFFENSES TO SERVE IN MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH**

Disqualifying offenses to drive children to and from church sponsored activities:

- Any DUI arrest in the past year or two DUI convictions in the last three years
- More than two convictions (moving violations) during the last three years
- More than two moving accidents within the last three years
- Any accident in the past three years caused by the driver, resulting in loss of life

Disqualifying offenses to serve in ministry with children or youth:

- Any conviction of assault, kidnapping, abuse, neglect, possession or promotion of child pornography, indecency with a child, or any other kind of sexual offense
- Any felony convictions
- Any misdemeanor involving moral turpitude (sexual, lying, etc.)
- Conviction of any misdemeanor involving use of alcohol or drugs within the past year or two convictions in the last three years

### **PROCEDURE WHEN CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK ON VOLUNTEER INDICATES DISCREPANCIES**

Convictions: If a conviction is discovered, the Pastor and Associate Pastor will decide upon a course of action depending on the nature of the offense and the position to be held. Procedure to follow shall include:

- Meet confidentially with the volunteer to inform him/her of discrepancies found in criminal background check, documenting the conversation
- Ask for an explanation
- Focus on the area that pertains to the volunteer service and determine whether there are any disqualifying offenses or whether a solution can be found
- Notify the volunteer of the decision
- Keep all proceedings confidential

Arrests: If an arrest for a serious offense is discovered, the Pastor and Associate Pastor will decide upon a course of action, which could include:

- Meet confidentially with the volunteer to inform him/her of discrepancies found in criminal background check
- Ask for an explanation, affording them an opportunity to correct the record
- Determine if there are any disqualifying offenses or if a solution can be found
- Notify the volunteer of the decision
- Keep all proceedings confidential

Be mindful that as a community of faith, our response to the volunteer shall be to offer support through counseling (referring to agencies as appropriate), pray, and guidance as to an alternative area of service to the church.

## TRAINING

All staff and volunteers are responsible for attending a training session led by the Associate Pastor or other properly trained individual and sign the relevant documents during their orientation period regarding children and youth protection. This training will include the following:

1. The need for Safe Place policy regarding child/youth protection.  
Handout – Rationale for a Safe Place Policy
2. Reducing the Risk, Segment one, “Overview of Problem of Child Sexual Abuse in Church”.
3. Review Dorchester Presbyterian Church’s Safe Place Policies and Procedures.  
Handout – Safe Place Policy
4. Procedures for reporting allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct.  
Handout – Recognizing Signs of Abuse  
Reporting Procedures and Incident Report Form
5. Complete appropriate applications and authorizations.  
Handout – Applications

Training will be offered as needed to ensure that all new volunteers and staff are trained, no less than two times a year.

## CONCLUSION

Dorchester Presbyterian Church desires to provide a safe and secure environment for each individual of our church family and our guests. The implementation of the above policies and procedures will enable us to be the “Safe Place” we are called to be.

The Safe Place Policy Task Force is indebted to the research and work that went into the policies and procedures of Charleston Atlantic Presbytery, Mt. Pleasant Presbyterian Church of Mt. Pleasant SC, Grace Presbyterian Church of Fort Mill SC, Trinity Presbyterian Church of Atlanta GA, Forest Lake Presbyterian Church of Columbia, SC and the Providence III Youth Ministry Network.

This policy should be reviewed by the Safe Place Task Force and approved by Session at least every three years. If there are any changes to this policy, all staff and volunteers will be notified.

Adopted by Session on August 19, 2008  
Revised and Reapproved by Session on May 21, 2013