



# Child & Youth Protection Policy for St. John's Lutheran Church Spartanburg, SC

"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."

~Mark 10:14

## General Purpose Statement

As called and baptized children of God, we, the members of St. John's Lutheran Church, commit to the Baptismal promises made to our congregation's children. Among these promises is a dedication to provide a safe environment with caring and effective leaders. In an effort to promote this safe environment, the Church Council is committed to the implementation and enforcement of the *Child & Youth Protection Policy* described in this document.

## Definitions

**Church** - St. John's Lutheran Church, Spartanburg SC

**Child/Children** - any child from birth to 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Youth** - any child from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

**R/L** - rostered leaders (including pastors and deacons) under Call by St. John's Lutheran Church

**Staff** - employees of St. John's Lutheran Church, other than R/L

**Volunteer** - unpaid adult who is active in St. John's Ministries & is working with children and/or youth

**Youth Volunteer** - a volunteer in grades 6 -12

## R/L, Staff, and Volunteer Expectations

1. Follow the *Child & Youth Protection Policy* the church.
2. Not be abusive of prescribed drugs, bring or be under the influence of alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs at any child and/or youth event.
3. Not use tobacco products in the presence of minors, on or off the church property, during any child and/or youth activity, or while transporting children and/or youth for church-related activities.

4. Not use offensive language.
5. Show respect for themselves and other participants as well as ministry staff.
6. Do not spank, hit, shake, or cause intentional harm to anyone.
7. Attend training/orientation.
8. Keep in mind that no matter where they are, R/L, staff, and volunteers are role models and representatives of the church.
9. Protect the safety of our children, youth, staff, and volunteers through a selection process (See section: Selection of Volunteers) as to their acceptability for working with children and youth. R/L, staff, and volunteers will enforce the guidelines set forth in this *Child & Youth Protection Policy*. The Church Council is committed to implementing and following this *Child & Youth Protection Policy*.

## **Selection of Volunteers**

All persons who desire to work with children and/or youth, and who are participating in programs and activities, will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with children and/or youth until she/he has been involved with the church for a minimum of six (6) months and must be a member or have the approval of R/L. They must be 18 years or older with a 3-year age difference from the children and/or youth with whom they are volunteering. These criteria should be upheld, unless supervised by and approved by R/L.

b) **Completion of Safety Training**

Depending on the program used by the church, applicants will be required to review all safety information and complete testing. Some safety training programs include reference checks and a background check which are required to successfully complete training.

c) **Reference Checks (if not included in the safety training)**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children and/or youth, at least two (2) of the applicant's references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children and/or youth in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained by the safety training administrator.

d) **Criminal Background Check (if not included in the safety training)**

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

It is the responsibility of either the Committee Chair for Youth Ministry or the Committee Chair for Christian Education to oversee the completion of the aforementioned selection process. Each respective Committee Chair shall confirm that all applicable training, background, and reference checks are complete prior to participation in events for the church. If a person is

primarily volunteering for youth events, the Youth Ministry Chair is responsible for making sure that person has completed this policy's selection criteria, and likewise if a person is primarily volunteering for children events, the Christian Education Chair is responsible. If a person wishes to participate in both child and youth events and is new, then he/she would fall under whichever Committee he/she is interested in working with first. It is the responsibility of the Committee Chairs to cross reference with one another prior to start of events.

If an individual declines to sign an authorization form to complete reference and background checks, he/she will be unable to work with children or youth.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children and/or youth will be determined by the Christian Education and Youth Committees on a case-by-case basis considering all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or youth 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 and/or youth. Failure to disclose any criminal conviction or previous placement on a Sex Offender Registry will also be a disqualifying event.

Individuals are disqualified if they have a probated sentence, deferred adjudication for any offense outlined above, or have present criminal charges for any offense stated above. Until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, they cannot serve in a volunteer position with children and/or youth.

If an individual declines to participate in any of the above requirements, he/she will be unable to work with children and/or youth.

## **Training**

The church will provide training on this *Child & Youth Protection Policy* to all new R/L, staff, and volunteers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All R/L, staff, and volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events. Copies of this *Child & Youth Protection Policy* are to be made available to all participating families, R/L, staff, and volunteers working in the church ministries and at events involving children and youth.

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is our goal that a minimum of two (2) volunteers will be in attendance at all times when children and youth are being supervised during our programs and activities. Youth Sunday School and LCY meetings should have two people present. 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 and another adult in close proximity within the building. We do not allow children and/or youth to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation with a R/L.

## Responding to Allegations of Child or Youth Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child or youth abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child and/or youth's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child or youth abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child and/or youth that is not accidental, such as but not limited to beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child and/or youth is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as but not limited to an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and/or youth and an adult or between a child and/or youth and another child and/or youth at least three (3) years older than the victim, including activities such as but not limited to fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child and/or youth of his or her essential needs, such as but not limited to adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children and/or youth under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children and/or youth at the church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child and/or youth under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the R/L or staff member who is working with the ministry, and Christian Education and Youth Leaders for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state and federal law.

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

1. The R/L or staff member who is working with the ministry will be notified of the allegation or suspicion.
2. The parent or guardian of the child and/or youth will be notified by the R/L or staff member.
3. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be removed from the event, instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation, and no longer be permitted to work with children and youth until the allegation is resolved and/or permission granted by R/L. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
4. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.

5. The insurance company will be notified, and the church will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The church 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 church should refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A R/L visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing R/L support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children and youth at the church.

## **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it, or if only one (1) adult is present.

## **Youth Volunteers**

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

- Must be at least in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Screening must adhere to the above standards as closely as possible.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

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

For children below 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, a parent/guardian or other written-authorized individual must be present to check-in/check-out the child from Sunday School and events. For larger events, a sign-in and sign-out procedure will be followed. For children in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above, they do not have to be accompanied by an adult for checking in or out, except for events. In any case in which the parent or guardian is unable to be present for sign-in/sign-out, the R/L, leader of the event, or Director of Children's Sunday School will be contacted and 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.

For youth who are licensed drivers, there are no restrictions regarding check-in/check-out procedures for events held on the church campus.

## **Sick Child & Youth Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children and/or youth at the church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children and/or youth when

deciding whether to place a child and/or youth under our care. In general, children and/or youth with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children and/or youth who are observed by our volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and/or youth and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child and/or youth be picked-up.

## **Medication Policy**

Neither prescription or non-prescription medications will be administered to the children and/or youth under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child and/or youth policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children and/or youth with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions or other conditions not specified). Parents of such children and/or youth should address their situation with the Christian Education and/or Youth Leader to develop a plan of action.

## **Discipline Policy**

Corporal punishment will not be administered, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children and/or youth. Volunteers should consult with R/L or the event supervisor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. Parents will be notified of the child and/or youth's behavior and if disciplinary action was required.

## **Restroom Guidelines**

Children five (5) years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, R/L, staff, or volunteers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The R/L, staff or volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the child inside. The R/L, staff, or volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the R/L, staff or volunteer should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the R/L, staff or volunteer should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five (5), at least one (1) adult male should take boys to the restroom, if possible, and at least one (1) adult female should take girls. The R/L, staff or volunteers should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The R/L, staff or volunteers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, R/L, staff and volunteers should *never* be alone with a child and/or youth in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child

and/or youth. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

## **Diaper Changing/Nursery**

All diapering for children participating in church programs will be carried out by adult volunteers (unless they are a parent/caregiver of the child) in a sanitary, safe manner to prevent the spread of germs and diseases that can occur during the diaper changing process. The procedure for "Safe and Healthy Diapering" from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will be posted in the church nursery.

## **Accidental Injuries to Children and Youth**

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

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, R/L, staff or volunteers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and the R/L, staff or a volunteer will notify the child and/or youth's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child and/or youth is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be contacted in addition to the event supervisor. If necessary, ambulance services will be contacted as well.
3. Once the child and/or youth has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

## **Off-Campus & Overnight Rules**

For off-campus and overnight activities, this *Child & Youth Protection Policy* will be adhered to in addition to whatever additional rules are set for that particular event/activity. Expectations will be discussed and covered prior to any off-campus or overnight event that will include but are not exclusive to: supervision, staff-to-youth ratios, transportation, parental consent and permission forms, overnight specifics, physical boundaries, sleeping arrangements, etc.

## **Transportation**

At a minimum there must be one (1) authorized driver and one (1) adult volunteer (2 adult volunteers preferred) when using a church-approved bus or van. For privately owned vehicles, there should be two (2) youth and one (1) adult unless the adult is a parent or authorized guardian/driver for a single youth. Documentation is required of any unusual occurrences in an incident report. Drivers and volunteers will keep appropriate documentation at all times: roster and emergency contacts.

In addition to volunteer application screening, all drivers will meet the following requirements to qualify for transporting youth:

1. Be age 21 or over
2. Have a valid driver's license
3. Have in-force liability and personal injury insurance for the vehicle to be used

4. Good driving record
5. Vehicle in good operating condition
6. Working seatbelts to be worn by all vehicle occupants
7. Car seats and booster seats for use as required by law

These transportation policies are in effect for drivers from the time they arrive at the event to the time they return to the point of origin. Drivers will carry emergency contact information for all youth passengers in their vehicle.

## Physical Contact

The church promotes a positive, nurturing environment while protecting children and youth, R/L, staff, and volunteers. The church encourages appropriate physical contact with youth and prohibits inappropriate displays of physical contact. Any inappropriate physical contact by R/L, staff, and volunteers towards children or youth in the church programs will result in disciplinary action, as approved by Church Council.

***Physical touch should be appropriate for the age of the child and/or youth and adult.*** For example, while it is often appropriate to hold a toddler on your lap, it is inappropriate for a teenager to sit on the lap of an adult. For older youth, opt for a side hug, touching their hand, or other forms of affection that do not involve excessive body contact for extended periods of time. At no time should a child and/or youth, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals, or buttocks (except when changing a diaper per CDC guidelines).

Avoid all inappropriate touching with children and/or youth. In the event a child and/or youth initiates inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the child and/or youth and his/her parent or legal guardian that such touching is inappropriate.

Anyone who recognizes an inappropriate relationship developing between a child and/or youth and adult, should maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the matter to the R/L or a member of the Executive Committee.

Physical touch and gestures of affection must be within parameters appropriate to the situation and to the age of the child and/or youth. R/L, staff, and/or volunteers will be especially vigilant in light of the two-adult rule and avoid physical contact if in a temporary transition period of adult supervision.

Anyone observing inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a minor should immediately begin the process for reporting suspected abuse or neglect (See section: Responding to Allegations of Child or Youth Abuse).

## Communication Between Children and/or Youth & Adults

### Verbal Interactions

R/L, staff, and volunteers are prohibited from speaking to children and/or youth in a way that is, or could be construed by any observer, as harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. R/L, staff, and volunteers must not initiate or engage in private or explicit sexual conversations with children and/or youth. If a counseling session is deemed appropriate, this will be done one on one with a R/L.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions:

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Appropriate jokes</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Praise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name-calling</li> <li>• Discussing sexual encounters or in any way involving children and/or youth in the personal problems or issues of R/L, staff &amp; volunteers</li> <li>• Secrets</li> <li>• Cursing</li> <li>• Off-color or sexual jokes</li> <li>• Shaming</li> <li>• Belittling</li> <li>• Derogatory remarks</li> <li>• Harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate children and/or youth</li> <li>• Derogatory remarks about the child and/or youth or his/her family</li> </ul>

**Electronic Communication**

Communication between children and/or youth and trusted leaders is essential to our mission at the church. In order to protect the health, safety, and spiritual and emotional well-being of our young people, as well as to protect the safety, reputation, and effectiveness in their calling by our volunteers, staff and rostered leaders, any private electronic communication or social media interaction between youth and/or children and R/L, staff, and/or volunteers is permitted only with parental consent. All communication must be transparent, documented on an approved forum, and in keeping with the relationship existing within the context of ministry for transparency purposes. In addition, the information below should be provided to the child and/or youth’s parents, so they know what is appropriate and inappropriate from R/L, staff, and volunteers.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication:

Appropriate Electronic Communication	Inappropriate Electronic Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sending and replying to emails/social media chats/text messages from children and/or youth only after a parental consent has been signed.</li> <li>• Group communicating through “organization group pages” on Facebook or other approved public forums.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating comments</li> <li>• Sexually oriented conversations</li> <li>• Private messages between R/L, staff, and/or volunteers with children and/or youth without parental consent</li> <li>• Posting pictures of church participants on social media, unless on church private group</li> </ul>

	<p>pages with consent of parent/guardian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults may not initiate “friend requests” with children and/or youth on social media, but may accept requests from children and/or youth with parent/guardian consent</li> </ul>
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**Cell Phone Use**

While assigned to work with children and/or youth, R/L, staff, and/or volunteers are not permitted to use electronic communication devices except during approved breaks and in emergency situations. If cell phones are needed for personal reasons, their use should be done in such a way that it does not distract from any supervisory duties.

**Gift Giving**

Gifts can be given to groups of children and/or youth. Gifts should not be given to individual children and/or youth without the parent’s consent.

**Photography**

In general, it is acceptable to use a photo or video footage from an organizational event as long as the people photographed are not individually identified. However, if you will be identifying the people by name, it is best to have participants sign a consent.

Children and/or youth in foster care and children and/or youth awaiting adoption require special consideration. No photographs or video should be taken or displayed of these children and/or youth.