

Safe Church Policy

**Unity Presbyterian Church
Denver, NC**

October 2016

Safe Church Policy

Section I

Introduction

The congregation of Unity Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

The purpose of establishing this Safe Church Policy and the accompanying procedures for Unity Presbyterian church is to demonstrate our commitment to God's call to make our church a safe place. It is a part of God's plan and our response to God's love and grace, that each of God's children be nurtured in faith and love. Children's faith development and knowledge of God's love and grace are limited and distorted, if they are victims of child abuse or are in unsafe situations.

Our goals for this policy are to conduct Children and Youth Ministries and Programs at Unity Presbyterian Church that assures the safety and spiritual growth for all involved. Our Policy:

- Will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of paid staff and volunteers
- Will implement operational procedures in all programs and events involving children and youth.
- Will educate all of our workers and care givers concerning the use of policies and safety methods
- Will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting and responding to a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to state law.

Unity Presbyterian Church affirms the right of children and youth to be protected from sexual, physical, or emotional abuse and neglect; as well as the right of volunteers and staff to be protected from unfounded allegations of abuse or neglect. We believe that parents and workers prefer a church with an established, caring prevention program to a church with no policy in this area of vital concern.

The Safe Church Policy and Procedures will be written and made available to any parent or member of the congregation and distributed to all paid staff and volunteers working with children. These policies and procedures give everyone a common point of reference.

Safe Church Policy

Section II

Procedures for Selection,

Screening and Training Staff and Volunteers

Opportunities to teach and supervise children and youth are a privilege offered by Unity Presbyterian Church. As a church, we believe that nurturing the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of children and youth is vital. These procedures are intended to ensure that all interactions between adults, children, and youth are consistent with the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. All adults entrusted with the care of our children and youth must always strive to be worthy of the example of Christ. Adults must understand the importance of providing a safe and secure environment and avoid any conduct that might have an appearance of being inappropriate, even if no such conduct occurs.

DEFINITIONS

In order to ensure that a nurturing Christian environment for children and youth is maintained within the congregation, to protect children and youth who participate in activities sponsored by the church from sexual, mental and/or physical abuse, and to protect the congregation's members from the false allegations of abuse, this policy uses the following definitions:

- a. "Children" shall mean any child birth-5th grade
- b. "Youth" shall mean any person from 6th-12th grade
- c. "Adult" shall mean any person 18 years of age or older
- d. "Paid staff" shall mean any person receiving compensation from Unity Presbyterian Church for full or part time work with children and youth.
- e. "Approved Adult" shall mean any person over the age of 21 years who has satisfied the training and screening requirements of the Safe Church Policy, including a background check. An approved adult is authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children in accordance with the terms of this policy.
- f. "Volunteer" shall mean anyone who provides short-term supervision of children (e.g., Sunday School teacher, on-campus special event volunteer) under the direction of an approved adult. Ordinarily, volunteers are not authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. However, in extraordinary circumstances, the Children and Youth (C&Y) Team is authorized to provide a short-term waiver of the screening and training requirements for approved adults so that a volunteer who otherwise complies with the approved adult requirements may provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. Any such short term waiver shall be issued in writing by the Chair of the C&Y Team or a designee of the Chair, with the approval of the C&Y Team.
- g. Youth Volunteer- anyone 21 or less years of age who provides short-term supervision of younger children and youth, under the supervision of an approved adult. Ordinarily, youth volunteers are not authorized to provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. However, in extraordinary circumstances, the Children and Youth Team is authorized to provide a short-term waiver of the screening and training requirements for approved adults so that a mature youth volunteer, who otherwise

complies with the approved adult requirements, may provide overnight and off-site supervision of children. The youth volunteer must be at least 5 years older than the children or youth they supervise.

h. Abuse is categorized in five primary forms:

- Physical abuse- abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a youth or child
- Emotional abuse- abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.
- Neglect- abuse in which a person endangers a child/youth’s health, welfare, and safety through negligence
- Sexual Abuse- abuse that occurs when sexual contact between a child or youth and an adult or older youth, occurs. The child or youth victim is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts.
- Ritual Abuse- abuse in which physical, sexual, or emotional violence is inflicted on a youth or child, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple people) with responsibility for the victim’s welfare.

STAFFING GUIDELINES

Unity Presbyterian Church has a goal of staffing by the following ratios of leaders to children and youth. These ratios are goals and will be considered as staffing needs are addressed. The church recognizes that in some circumstances achieving these ratios may not be feasible.

Program	No. of Children or Youth to Leaders
Nursery, Age 0-1	6:2
Toddler, Age 1-2 yrs	8:2
Preschool, Age 3-4yrs	10:2
Children Programs, Grades K-1 st	12:2
Children Programs, Grades 2 nd -5 th	16:2
Youth Programs, Grades 6 th -12 th	18:2

All employees and volunteers shall abide by the policy. An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to abide by this policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation, if the Children and Youth Team determines that the Safe Church Policy and procedures have not been followed. Individuals who fail to follow the procedures listed in this policy place themselves at risk for accusations of child abuse. The possibility of being accused of child or youth abuse, whether true or false, is a risk each employee and volunteer faces when working with the children at UPC. Each person must assume responsibility of his/her own actions in working with children and youth and for attending training offered on child and youth protection.

Screening and Administration

The Children and Youth Team shall ensure the implementation and enforcement of the Safe Church Policy under the direction of the Session. One of these members shall serve as the Child Protection Chair.

The Team will:

1. implement and enforce this Safe Church Policy;
2. review and make recommendations for revising this policy;

3. provide training for all staff and approved adults working with the children/youth regarding child safety, child abuse and the Safe Church Policy;
4. maintain a list of approved adults and disseminate the list within the church community;
5. monitor staff members, approved adults, volunteers, and youth volunteers to ensure that policies are being followed;
6. receive reports of any and all investigations regarding child abuse;
7. review all applications for approved adults;
8. supervise clearances for all approved adults. (All background checks go directly to the Director of Children and Youth; the Director will consult the C&Y Chair regarding any noteworthy background checks.) In addition, the committee may evaluate whether in extraordinary circumstances, short-term waivers of the screening and training requirements applicable to approved adults, may be issued to any volunteers who otherwise meet the approved adult requirements.
9. The Team will review each clearance every five years;
10. receive and process reports of suspected abuse;
11. make available, upon request of an individual, his/her clearance reports;
12. Review the Safe Church Policy annually
13. Provide general education on child safety for the congregation

The Children and Youth Chair and Director of Children and Youth will:

- Ensure that required forms are received for all applicants and proper records are maintained
- Add the Safe Church Policy to the Team agenda as often as necessary, but no less than once each year.

Screening of Employees

1. Personal interviews, personal and professional references, employment records will be required for all employees of UPC. Criminal background checks will be completed on employees who work directly with children or youth, and may be required for other employees at the direction of the C&Y Team.
2. Interviews, reference checks, employment records, criminal background checks on employees are to be documented in writing. These records are confidential church property. They will not be released to any party except with the written approval of the Pastor, Clerk of Session, and Chair of the Personnel Team. The documentation will be made available to the employee, but not a candidate for employment, if a written request is made to the Session.
3. All current and potential employees will be required to sign an Employee and Volunteer Agreement agreeing to follow the policies and procedures of UPC pertaining to child and youth protection. This agreement is a supplement to the personnel application, and is maintained in the employee's personnel file.
4. Any candidate for employment who has a past conviction or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse/neglect/dependency cannot be employed by UPC without the express written approval of the Personnel Team and approved by the Session. The Personnel Team, in consultation with the C&Y Team, will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation to decide about the employment of the individual in question. Notwithstanding the above, a criminal conviction related to any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment with children or youth: pedophilic behavior, rape, incest, assaults, child pornography, and abuse of a minor.

Screening of Approved Adults

1. Background checks will be completed on all UPC Approved Adults at the direction of the C&Y Team. These background checks shall be repeated every five (5) years.
2. Information from Approved Adult application forms and background checks will be reviewed by the Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries, and will be held confidentially
3. All Approved Adults involved with children or youth must have been members or consistent visitors of the congregation or the Presbytery for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Any exceptions must be approved by the C&Y Team.
4. All current and potential Approved Adults will be required to sign an Employee and Volunteer Agreement. This agreement is maintained in the notebook (electronically maintained) of volunteer forms.
5. Approved Adults must agree to attend and complete any required training as directed by the C&Y Team or the Session.
6. Any candidate for Approved Adult service who has a past conviction or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse/neglect/dependency cannot fulfill the role of an Approved Adult by UPC without the express written approval of the C&Y Team and approved by the Session. The Session, in consultation with the C&Y Team, will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the volunteer service status of the individual in question. Notwithstanding the above, a criminal conviction related to any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children or youth: pedophilic behavior, rape, incest, assaults, child pornography, and abuse of a minor. Information from background checks will be reviewed by the C&Y Chair and Director of Children and Youth for approval. If the person is denied volunteer service, this information will be reviewed with the applicant by the Chair of the C&Y Team. The applicant may, within 30 days, appeal in writing the decision to the C&Y Team or the Session.

Required Forms for Approved Adults

1. An Information Form, including demographic, emergency contact, and basic health information for emergencies
2. A completed Approved Adult Application
3. A signed Employee and Volunteer Agreement
4. A completed criminal and/or civil background check from an approved agency
5. Letter of acceptance as an Approved Adult

Required Forms for Volunteers in Case of Off-site and Overnight Programs

1. An Information Form, including demographic, emergency contact, and basic health information for emergencies
2. A signed Employee and Volunteer Agreement

Retention and Confidentiality of Records of Staff Members and Approved Adults

The required forms and related material for staff members and approved adults will be locked in a confidential file under the jurisdiction of the C&Y Chair and Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries, (or another designated staff person). The required forms will be maintained by the Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries, (or another designated staff person). In the case of an appeal of a prospective approved adult, these records will only be available to the Pastor(s) of Unity Presbyterian Church (or another designated staff person) and to the Session.

Safe Church Policy
Section III
General Guidelines
For Children and Youth Ministry

Introduction

The following guidelines and procedures apply to all individuals who work with children or youth at Unity Presbyterian Church. The Director of Children and Youth, in cooperation with the Children and Youth (C&Y) Team, is responsible for insuring that proper supervision is in place for its programs and activities. The term “volunteer” in the general guidelines is inclusive of each of the staff and volunteer categories described in the previous section (staff, Approved Adult, adult or youth volunteer), unless specifically noted.

Supervision of Programs and Events:

For all activities, events, and programs that occur as ministries to children or youth, an Approved Adult or adult volunteer must be designated as a leader. In most cases, it will be the paid staff person or Approved Adult who is responsible for the planning, organizing, or directing the event. It is incumbent on that person to establish oversight of the Safe Church Policy that is appropriate to the age, gender, number of participants, and activity planned. Planning for each event is critical to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and youth involved.

For the remainder of Section III of the Policy the term “volunteer” is inclusive of approved adult, and adult volunteers defined in Section I of the Policy.

Two Volunteer Rule

There should always be two volunteers (at least one adult) present when conducting programming with children or youth. In some instances, a designated adult volunteer, Approved Adult, or paid staff will circulate outside the classroom area or be within easy reach to provide assistance as needed. In a mixed group, whenever possible, a male and female volunteer or staff member should be present. Any volunteer should attempt to avoid circumstances that cause them to be alone with a child or youth. All interactions should be interruptible and observable.

Open Door Policy

All events will practice an “Open Door Policy” whenever possible. Doors should remain open and/or windows in doors should remain unobstructed. Parents, workers, and church members have a right to observe any activity, if they are able to do so without disrupting the activity.

Unscheduled Time

No volunteer will be alone with any child other than his/her own parents in any of the Unity Presbyterian Church buildings at unscheduled times without permission from the child’s parent.

Children or youth who are accompanying a parent to a meeting, or other non-C&Y event, in the church building will not be allowed to go to other rooms or areas of the church without the direct supervision of a responsible child care provider.

Empty Room Policy

After an activity, one volunteer must check rooms or vehicles to ensure that all participants have vacated the room or vehicles.

Safety Precautions

- Volunteers should conduct a safety count, before and after, when moving children from place to place within the church buildings, outside, or for any special events or activities.
- Children should be well supervised to avoid accidents, if traveling in church hallways.
- If a child needs to leave a classroom to find a parent, that child should be accompanied and delivered to that parent by a volunteer.

Bathroom and Diapering:

In general, children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before and after classes or other activities. In this model, parents can assist as needed.

If a volunteer needs to take a child to the toilet, be aware of your visibility and the child's privacy. (Suggestion: volunteer stands holding public bathroom door open while child enters toilet stall alone.)

Diapering: Two volunteers (one being an adult) must be present when clothes or diapers are being changed. The parent can also be recruited to change clothes or diapers.

A trip to the bathroom or a diapering should be logged in writing on the attendance log for that day; including date, time, child/ youth name, and volunteer name. Additionally, the parent/ guardian should be informed, as they pick-up their child.

Two and Three Year Olds: A volunteer must accompany children to and from the bathroom and inform another volunteer when this takes place. The volunteer will assist the child only when necessary. The classroom bathroom doors must remain open at all times so that children and volunteers assisting are always within view of another volunteer.

Preschool: A volunteer must accompany preschoolers to the bathroom. The volunteer will remain outside the stall. If assistance is required, the volunteer should encourage independence, but can assist with minimal tasks if necessary (belts, snaps, etc.) The classroom bathroom doors must remain open at all times so that children and volunteers assisting are always within view of another volunteer.

Codes of Conduct for Adults and Children/Youth

- Staff and volunteers in teaching/leadership positions should exemplify a lifestyle consistent with the beliefs of the church. They should model biblical principles and values to our children and youth. Their behavior must reflect the highest standards of Christian maturity, foster trust, and be above reproach. Adults engaged in church-related events and activities with children/youth present should never engage in demeaning or derogatory speech, sexually suggestive behavior, or inappropriate touching.

- There will be no drinking of alcohol or use of illegal drugs at any church-related activity or event involving children or youth. Any drinking of alcohol or use of illicit or illegal drugs will lead to immediate suspension and removal from the activity or event.
- Possession of firearms is forbidden at any activity or event involving children/youth
- All volunteers and staff members working with children or youth will abide by all laws and regulations applicable to the location of the event.

Appropriate Physical Contact

True expressions of affection toward children and youth can be a manifestation of Christ's love for all of us. A kind word of encouragement to a child or youth can be a small, but significant act for both the adult and child or youth. Physical contact should be appropriate for the age and temperaments of the child or youth. Touching should be initiated by the child or youth and should never be based on the need of the adult. Touching behavior must always be above reproach and should never be forced upon a reluctant child or youth.

Appropriate touching is as follows:

- Volunteers are encouraged to give children or youth a high five, hand shake, pat on the back, or use gentle touches to shoulder, arms and the upper back.
- Hugs: Children and Youth volunteers will always respond warmly to hugs that are child or youth initiated, but should never ask for hugs or kisses, regardless of age. A brief, casual hug is the only appropriate response to a child-initiated hug.
- Sitting a child on your lap is inappropriate EXCEPT with children under school age.
- Touching between an adult and a child or youth will only occur in the presence of other adults.
- A youth or child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.

Volunteers and staff will not abuse children, including but not limited to:

1. Physical abuse- strike, spank, shake, or slap
2. Verbal abuse- humiliate, degrade, threaten
3. Sexual abuse of any kind, including inappropriate touching or exposure.

Workers are responsible for protecting the children or youth in their care from inappropriate touching by others and all questionable behavior must be promptly addressed and reported to the Director of Children and Youth or the Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries.

Healthy Discipline

- No form of punishment that involves physical pain or emotional distress or discomfort may be used. Corporal punishment or the threat of corporal punishment is strictly forbidden.
- Children or Youth may only be physically restrained if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others.
- Disruptive children or youth may be removed from the group to another part of the room or into the hallways. The child or youth must remain in full view and the door should remain open if a monitor is not present. If a hall monitor is present to cover the classroom, the door may be closed and the teacher should explain to the child in the hallway that his/her particular behavior is unacceptable.

- If disruptive behavior persists, the parents should be contacted and asked to help. A parent may want to come into the class to observe or assist as long as necessary, until the child or youth can demonstrate self-control. If the behavior continues the parent may be asked to remove the child from the classroom.
- Unity Presbyterian Church is committed to supporting children or youth so that they may fully participate in all offered programming, but not to the detriment of other children in the class.
- Positive reinforcement through frequent, meaningful, direct, specific feedback for appropriate behavior should be used to reduce the need for negative reinforcement of inappropriate behavior. Minimal use of tangible rewards for positive behavior are also acceptable behavior management.

Emergency Situations

In the event of a medical, disciplinary, or other situation that would require a child or youth to leave the classroom or activity, the child or youth will be accompanied to the appropriate destination (e.g., the restroom, church office.) by an adult. Attempts will be made to promptly notify the parent.

Confidentiality

Paid staff and volunteers must follow the highest standards of confidentiality when working with children and youth. Parents must be confident that stories about their children are not going to be repeated inside or outside the church setting. When reporting actions of a child to a parent, the staff person or volunteer should not name another child by name but instead use language such as “another child”, “classmates”, etc.

Counseling

Two adults (Team) counseling one child or youth is preferable whenever possible. When team-counseling sessions are not feasible, another adult must be notified of the location and with whom a meeting is occurring. Counseling should take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance. This should be in a room that has a window in the door. If the door does not have a window, then the door should be left open. Carefully avoid seclusion. If possible, have female adults counsel female youth or children and males counsel males. A male/female team is generally appropriate for counseling either gender. The counseling team would likely include the Director and Pastor, but may include other adult volunteers.

Informal Contact

Informal contact refers to phone calls, letters, emails, texts, other internet communication, or face-to face contact between an adult worker and a youth that is not connected to official church activities. The church recognizes that informal contact between volunteers or staff members and youth frequently occurs. This interaction is usually legitimate and beneficial. However, volunteers and staff members should seek permission of parents before having informal contact with their youth. The youth advisors should clearly let the parent know the nature of the contact. Parents are responsible for monitoring this informal contact.

Permission Slips, Child-Counts, Overnight Activities, Transportation

1. Permission slips: General- children and youth must have permission to participate in activities that may occur when a parent/ guardian is not also present on the church campus. Typically these are activities outside of worship, Sunday School, and church-wide fellowship events. Parents/guardians must fill out and sign a general permission form, which includes pertinent medical information and emergency phone numbers. These forms will be updated every year and filed in the church office. When traveling offsite, copies of these forms will travel with the group.

2. Clear verbal communication or written documentation will be provided to the lead paid staff or adult volunteer for an event, when a child or youth picked up from the event by a parent/ guardian or designee. Neither children nor youth are permitted to exit an event (leave church or other property) without clear communication with the lead paid staff or adult volunteer. A sign in/ out process is recommended.
3. Overnight activities involving children/youth will be chaperoned by at least two approved adults. Boys and girls will sleep in separate areas with at least two approved adults of the same gender directly supervising each group. However, in extraordinary circumstances, the C & Y Team is authorized to provide a short term waiver of the two approved adults for each gender requirement. When sleeping space or adult: youth ratio for one gender is such that an approved adult of the opposite gender can provide additional coverage for the youth who has one approved adult of the same gender supervising them, a waiver may be deemed appropriate by the Team. For example, if male and female youth are sleeping in the same room (separate areas), then one male and one female approved adult could provide adequate coverage. In any case, as stated above, two or more adults would always be in the presence of the whole or divided groups of children or youth.
4. For all off-site and overnight events for children, all medicines belonging to a child will be given to the designated first aid leader or the “in-charge” leader (volunteer or staff member). It will then be distributed, as designated, and an on-going log of medications dispensed and treatments administered will be kept. For youth, this practice would be at the discretion of the designated first aid leader or the “in-charge” leader (volunteer or staff member). For children or youth who require medications or medical attention out of the realm of expertise of the paid staff or volunteer leaders, parents may need to accompany their child for off-site or overnight events.
5. For overnight events, boys and girls will be separated into different rooms for sleeping and have separate access to bathroom facilities. The exceptions would be a result of shortage of chaperones or the nature of the space.
6. Adults should respect the privacy of children or youth when changing clothing or showering, to the extent safety allows. Adults will not be nude in front of children/youth.
7. Transportation: Vehicles used for transportation during events with children/youth shall meet all legal requirements and safety inspections. Leaders will make sure that children have proper equipment and follow safe practices (i.e. car seats, safety belts, etc.). There shall be two adults in each vehicle transporting passengers who are children or youth, the exception would be with parental approval only. These guidelines apply to both church and personal vehicles. Drivers should not use cell phones for calls or texting while the vehicle is moving.
8. A parent/ guardian or designee of the parent/ guardian is responsible for transporting a child or youth home from a church sponsored event.
9. Leaders should conduct a safety count, before leaving and after stopping on all trips off-site.

Workers Not Following Guidelines

Workers must avoid even the appearance of misconduct. This is critical to maintain parent confidence, avoid mistaken allegations and to reflect Unity Presbyterian Church’s commitment to the safety of children and youth. Workers who do not comply, disobey, or violate these guidelines may be reassigned or relieved of their duties at the discretion of the Pastor, appropriate staff members, or the C&Y Team.

Reported Suspected Abuse

Any violations of the Safe Church Policy should be reported to the Director of Children and Youth. Any volunteer or staff member that has reason to be concerned about the safety or welfare of a child must bring his/her concerns to the Director. The Pastor and/or appropriate staff members will review any incidents or violations to determine if the volunteer and/or staff member should be removed from continued service in Children's and Youth Ministry. Additionally, see Section IV of this Policy for additional guidelines.

Children and Youth

Christian education on healthy physical, emotional, and sexual boundaries, including sexual abuse prevention, will be offered in age appropriate ways. The purpose is to provide our children and teens with the opportunity to receive age-appropriate information in a faith-based context to help them recognize inappropriate conduct on the part of an adult or older child. This should also empower them to say "no", and tell a "safe adult" at church, home, or school. These topics are appropriate for faith formation and Christian education, as they are relevant to the church's commitment to securing a safe space for children and youth and inform a child or youth's understanding of loving relationships with other people as manifest of God's love.

Parents and other Congregants

Child Abuse Awareness education will be offered periodically for parents and congregants. This shall include information about the spiritual, as well as psychological and physical impact of abuse.

Safe Church Policy

Section IV

Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Incidents of Abuse

The following actions are to be followed in the event of an incident or allegation of abuse. Remember that discretion is paramount. The confidentiality of all persons involved must be safeguarded.

Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that a “juvenile” is abused, neglected, or has died as a result of maltreatment shall report such suspected abuse or neglect to the Director of the Department of Social services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found. The report may be made orally, by telephone, or in writing.

Child Protective Services, Lincoln County Social Services, 115 W. Main St., Lincolnton, NC 28092. Telephone (704) 732-0738. Or call Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, 1-800-CHILDREN. They can put you in touch with someone who can offer support and help. Or contact your Family Physician or Pediatrician, Mental Health Center, Health Department or 1-800-4-A-CHILD a National Child Abuse Hotline.

Internal Guidelines for Reporting Suspected Abuse

Anyone who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child/youth under their care, guidance or supervision, or a child/youth not directly under their care, guidance or supervision but involved in any church program or activity, has been abused by anyone (including but not limited to the child/youth’s family or guardians) shall immediately inform the Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries; Director of Children and Youth; or the C&Y Chair and document the suspected abuse by completing a Suspected Child Abuse Incident Report.

The church is not responsible for investigating or determining whether or not abuse has occurred. The standard under the law for reporting is that ‘a reasonable person has cause to believe the child has been abused.’ It may be necessary to question the child or person alleging the abuse has occurred; this would be to clarify solely in order to determine if there is cause to believe abuse may have occurred.

Detailed interviews and extensive questioning with the child and/or the alleged abuser should be conducted by legal authorities, not the church.

If a child is injured or in pain, call 911 for an ambulance.

If an adult has reason to suspect child abuse, that person must call the local County Department of Social Services and report the abuse. (Lincoln County DSS number is (704) 732-0738).

After child protective authorities have been contacted, continue with follow-up, investigation, documentation within the church:

1. Following placement of the call to report the suspected abuse to County Department of Social Services, the Pastor, responsible for children and youth ministries, will inform the parent (provided that neither of the custodial parents is suspected of abuse). If a custodial parent is the alleged abuser, his or her first

contact about the allegation should come from either the Department of Social Services, or the police - not the church.

2. The church should not enter into discussion about the details of the complaint with the alleged abuser after a report has been filed and during the course of legal investigation. The alleged abuser will be removed from any position in which he or she has supervisory authority over children pending the completion of the investigation.
3. The insurance company and Presbytery should be contacted after the report is filed as a matter of routine practice if they alleged abuse involves a staff person. The alleged abuser will have their ministry restricted to exclude contact with children immediately; and may be placed on paid or unpaid leave for a designated period of time during the investigation.
4. If an incident is reported that does not rise to the level of making a mandated report, the Pastor will inform the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) of the concern and document.

Information

1. The extent to which information will be shared with the congregation will be determined by the Moderator and Session and others as appropriate. The input of the General Presbyter may be sought and, if pastoral staff is involved, the WNC Presbytery Committee on Ministry may be consulted in making this decision.
2. All necessary parties will cooperate with the investigations made by the police.
3. The Session will authorize the Pastor or Session designee to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only the authorized person or persons may speak for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys, or others.

Violations of Safe Church Policy

Persons who admit to or plead guilty to or are convicted in a court of law of any form of physical or sexual abuse of a child/youth will be immediately, permanently, and completely disqualified by the Children and Youth Team from working with children/youth in the congregation. Person who admit to a Pastor or any member of the C&Y Team any type of physical or sexual abuse of a child/youth but who have not appeared in a court of law will be disqualified from working with children/youth in the congregation. Allegations of sexual or physical abuse shall disqualify any person from working with children/youth until the investigation is completed. The C&Y Team may temporarily or permanently disqualify any person(s) from working with children/youth, as the committee deems appropriate, subject to review by the Session.

Alleged violations of the policy, other than abuse, shall be immediately reported to the C&Y Chair who will report it to the Pastor and the Session, if deemed appropriate. The Children and Youth Team will investigate the alleged violations of the policy. If a person(s) is found to be in violation of the policy, the C&Y Team will recommend disqualification or disciplinary action to the Session, if any is necessary.

Training and Supervision

In order to be an Approved Adult, one must participate in an initial training, provided by the Director of Children and Youth or the Presbytery of Western North Carolina (based on the training materials of the Presbytery). Refresher training will be required at least every five years. Teachers for this training will have education and training in issues of child abuse.

Training for staff member and adult or youth volunteers working with children and youth will make use of professional training materials on recognizing and responding to child abuse. Included will be:

- Specific materials about child sexual abuse
- Behavior signs exhibited by abused children
- The grooming process that sexual offenders often use to engage children
- How to respond to a disclosure
- The training for all volunteers and staff working with children and youth would also include familiarity with the Safe Church Policy of Unity Presbyterian church, including supervisory expectations, appropriate interactions, reporting guidelines, and required documentation.

Pastoral Care of Individuals and Families

1. Pastoral support will be offered to all parties involved in a child abuse complaint. This includes those who have made the complaint, the alleged abuser, the families of both, other persons directly affected, and the congregation. Decisions about how this support will be given will be made by pastoral staff and the Session.
2. If the allegations involve Pastoral staff, the ministry of the church will need to be maintained while the issue is being addressed. Decisions regarding how this will be accomplished will be made by the Session with assistance from the Presbytery.

Our congregation acknowledges that there are many victims who may be affected by an incident or a suspicion of child abuse or neglect. We are mindful that the following persons, in addition to the victim, will require the proper response, care, counseling and support following any such event:

- Family members of the harmed child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- Peers of child, youth, or vulnerable adult
- Peers of the child's or youth's or vulnerable adult's parents
- Remaining workers of children, youth, or vulnerable adult programs
- Congregation as a community of faith
- Family of the accused abuser

We believe that failure to address the issues of suffering, anger, fear, and grief that can occur within the church after abuse can have extended and unnecessary consequences for everyone. We will not hide or shrink away from our responsibility to promptly and appropriately address any incident of abuse. As a congregation, we are committed to the prevention of and termination of behaviors which contribute to the cycle of abuse. The following represents the steps we will take to assure that the congregation and those affected may be restored to a feeling of well-being and justice.

- Truth telling is the most important component in post-loss recovery. Our communications will be honest, measured, and respectful of all parties involved. Written communication will be factual and will work to dispel rumor and innuendo. We will assure the congregation of the steps taken to secure the safety of the victim and to resume the functions of the ministries and programs.
- Senior clergy will host a planned congregational meeting so that members can attend to learn about the church's response to the allegation of abuse. The meeting will be led by appropriate senior clergy, lay leaders and Presbytery representatives. A non-member counselor will be available to address attendee questions and feelings.
- A task force will be established to determine how our congregation will adapt its ongoing ministries to appropriately acknowledge and recover from the incident. Educational programs in various forums

(adult, youth, and children’s Sunday school programs, choir, standing committees, staff) will be implemented to promote healing, justice, education and restored worship.

- The C&Y Team will work closely with the task force and clergy to modify any procedures and policies based upon incident outcomes and to diligently engage in every effort to prevent further incidents of abuse and neglect.

Response Procedures

A response team selected by the Pastors and Session shall provide pastoral care, including but not limited to the making of referrals, seeking of aid and care if needed, and providing comfort. Nonexclusive examples of such pastoral care include contacting the Session to request funds to pay for counseling; providing transportation; and giving lists of appropriate professionals whose assistance might be available.

Whenever confidentiality is required under these rules and procedures, it is expressly understood that members of the response team are subject to any requirements of the secular law. This particularly includes any requirements that sexual or physical abuse of children or incapacitated adults will be reported to appropriate authorities.

Care for the Congregation

In our congregation we take every precaution we possibly can to protect our children; however, we have to recognize that incidents may occur. These situations can have a tremendous impact on the individuals, as well as the entire congregation. To help the community of faith deal with this betrayal of trust, there are four main components necessary for the healing process:

1. Truth telling. For healing to begin, the silence must be broken by acknowledging what has happened. Ignoring the issue could only make things worse.
2. Sharing and validation of feelings. There are many emotions that surround the betrayal of trust: shock, anger, disbelief, and fear. In order to help the community of faith acknowledge and validate these feelings as well as find some resolution, we encourage group mediation with a trained sexual abuse pastoral counselor.
3. Education. Commitment to the safety and well-being of children and youth is our number one priority. We have to communicate that commitment to the congregation in order for trust to be re-established. We also must re-educate members on how collectively we can protect our children.
4. Spiritual Reflection. In a community of faith, we turn to God for guidance and direction especially during difficult times. We turn to Scripture, like the words Paul gave to the Colossians during crisis, or the comforting words of Psalm 23. We pray that the “peace of Christ will rule in our hearts.” We turn to God in prayer and emphasize the grace of Jesus Christ that will lift us up and love us forever.

Pastoral care will help the congregation to answer questions, such as, “What else do we have to do in order to be able to heal?” “As a congregation and as the body of Christ, where do we go from here?” “What do we need to do to mend ourselves so that we can go about the mission of the church—which is to glorify and serve God?”