

CPC Safe Place for Children Policy

Covenant Presbyterian Church (“CPC”) is committed to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities for children. With our entire community working as a team and by implementing the below practices, our goal is to provide a safe place that reduces risks to the children and protects the children from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also providing good guidance to our staff and volunteers (helpers) for their own protection and to help respond to any situations that may occur.

Definitions

“Child”, “youth”, or “children” include all persons under age eighteen (18) years, unless a provision defines a narrower subset range. “Youth” is a child currently enrolled in 6th through 12th grades unless the specific guideline states a higher age.

“Parent” refers to the parents (or person/entity) serving as the legal guardian of a child.

“CPC AR” – a CPC Authorized Representative – paid or volunteer member of the appropriate CPC ministry team that has responsibility for the CPC ministry activity, as well as the persons who supervise or oversee the particular CPC ministry activity.

“Helper” includes all persons (paid and volunteer) who participate in leading or assisting with any CPC activities for children (where the child’s parent is not typically present) and includes CPC ARs who have been approved following the applicable reference and background checks.

Parents Help / Team Approach

Parents should talk with the CPC AR to make sure that both the parents and their child are comfortable with the particular activity prior to participation. If a child has any special needs, the child’s parent should discuss and develop an agreed approach for handling the particular needs with the CPC AR and the designated helper prior to the child’s participation in the activity. Parents should help by making sure to drop off and pick up their own children directly from the activity and the parent doing so should be directly noticed by a CPC AR/helper for the activity. CPC ARs and helpers are instructed that younger children should not wander the facilities unattended.

Approval/Oversight of Helpers

All persons (including all CPC ARs) who desire to help with children participating in our programs and activities will be screened per the current CPC process. This screening includes a background check and the following:

- **Regular Participant / Parent Helper:** Prior to any unsupervised participation with children in CPC activities, a person must be a member or regular participant in CPC activities to allow CPC to have a better familiarity with the potential applicant. This requirement does not apply to helpers involved in activities in which their own children are present. Two CPC ARs shall have the authority to waive this rule where appropriate.
- **Group/Individual Meeting:** An in-person group/individual discussion/meeting with the applicant (and parent if the person is under age 18) and CPC AR(s) may be requested by the CPC AR to discuss the activity(ies) and the applicant’s suitability for the position.

A prospective helper will need to authorize (in writing or by the electronic process) the CPC (or CPC's designated contractor) to run the checks and receive updates. If an individual does not complete the authorization, she/he will be unable to help with children. What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from helping with children will be determined by the CPC ARs on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. A background check should be run at least annually and may be updated more regularly if available from the CPC's current process. The applicant's information and background check results will be maintained in confidence in compliance with CPC policy.

Exceptions to Screening with Background Checks

If a currently approved adult CPC volunteer or CPC staff member is present in close visible proximity at all times during the activity, the standard screening process with a background check will not be required for the following persons:

- Parents and grandparents who are only volunteering in their (grand)child's activity.
- Volunteers who are only participating in one-time events where a CPC AR will be in visual proximity.
- Visitors/Guests/Youth volunteers that will be constantly supervised by a CPC AR.

Two Adult Helper Rule / Open Door Policy

Our goal is to have at least two adult helpers present at all times to supervise children during our programs and activities. Some youth activities may have only one adult helper in attendance during any portion of the activity; in these instances, doors to the activity area should remain open (unless there is a window in the door or a side window with clear sight lines into the room). Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. There should be no fewer than three children with the adult helper or the activity should be combined with another group to allow for two adults to be present and at least three children. CPC does not allow children to be alone with one adult helper unless the child and the adult are both within eyesight and easy hearing of another approved helper while on CPC premises or in any CPC activity.

Communication Policy – Parent Must Approve Direct Communication to Youth.

CPC helpers should send communications for any child/youth to the parent(s) of the child/youth. A CPC helper should not communicate privately to any child (below 9th grade) via email, text, phone call, or through any other method or social media applications. Information and messages posted to the main CPC website for child/youth activities are encouraged. If approved by the parent (via email from the parent that provides the approved electronic address for such messages), a youth (in 9th Grade or a higher) may receive direct electronic messages via the parent-provided address, and the parent does not need to be copied on the messages only if the parent provides such permission in the email. (Attached at the end of this policy) The Guidelines for Direct Communications with Youth should be followed before a CPC helper engages in any form of private electronic communications (either sending or responding) directly to any youth or group of youth without including the parent of each youth.

If any child/youth makes any direct private communication to a CPC helper, the CPC helper should discuss the situation with the CPC ARs when direct private messaging has not been approved by the parent of the child/youth or if any direct message has any content that causes any concern. CPC ARs and helpers should keep a record of any electronic communications to and from any child or youth that is made or received. CPC ARs and helpers should not use any form of electronic communication that is not easily able to be retained (for example, an app such as Snapchat).

Pending Concerns of Misconduct.

Upon becoming aware of any such information, CPC shall prohibit or promptly remove from providing any services any person who has been convicted of, who is under an open investigation, or is accused or otherwise has been formally charged, by CPC or by an authorized governmental entity of having committed: violent, abusive, or otherwise physically harmful misconduct to any person or property or threatening such misconduct; an offense against the person, an offense against the family, or an offense involving public indecency under the Texas Penal Code; an offense under the Texas Controlled Substances Act or federal laws related to the same; financial misconduct; misconduct involving fraud or theft; any offense subject to punishment as a felony; or any similar offense under the laws of any jurisdiction. If and only to the extent the individual person has written approval to do so from CPC's highest leadership committee (and at least two CPC ARs for the activity), the CPC AR may allow a person with such pending concerns to perform services subject to any conditions that may be specified by CPC. CPC may withdraw or modify any such approval at any time.

Reporting Incidents and Allegations

Any individual who observes or becomes aware of any alleged or potential incident of child abuse must, as soon as possible, report the matter to the appropriate governmental authority:

- **911 for emergency or life-threatening situations**
- (for non-emergency) report to the Texas DFPS at 1-800-252-5400 or online through the Texas Abuse Hotline <https://www.txabusehotline.org/>
see also https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Contact_Us/report_abuse.asp

And, then report (only to persons not involved or related to the concern) to the CPC AR or one of the full-time CPC Pastors and the incident form details should be completed as much as possible. Because of the importance of proper reporting, pastors, employees, Session members, and persons highly visible to church members and visitors should understand the terms of the policy and be ready to help direct any such reports or allegations to the appropriate authorities and persons.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

CPC will use the "Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Sexual Misconduct Policy and Its Procedures" [Revised/Approved by COGA, October 2013] as a resource and helpful more-detailed guidelines to address and process any reporting of concerns or allegations of any form or abuse related to this CPC policy and will apply these basis rules:

- **Confidentiality** -- All investigations shall be conducted in as confidential a manner as is possible and compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.
- **Parental Notification** -- The CPC AR should make sure that the parents of any minor involved in any allegation of abuse have been immediately notified of the situation (by the CPC AR or the governmental authority).
- **Potential Responses** -- Upon any report of potential or alleged child abuse by an employee or volunteer of CPC, any individual accused of such conduct should be restricted from any CPC activities involving youth or children (and potentially others as well) pending an appropriate investigation and written approval by CPC.

Explanations of Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action or lack of action that endangers or harms a child’s well-being (physical, psychological or emotional). Child abuse may occur in many ways and includes:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child (under age 17) and an adult or between a child and another child (some very limited exceptions under Texas law if the incident involves a child who is at least 14 and the other person is no more than three years older – see information from Texas DFPS links and also in the Texas Penal Code and Texas Family Code), including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare helpers and CPC ARs may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at CPC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, this should be reported immediately to the CPC AR for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Check-in/Check-out Procedures

For children below Fifth Grade or for older children who CPC is aware of having special needs requiring this approach, a check-in/check-out procedure should be followed as possible for the activity. The child will be dropped off directly at the activity and signed in (electronically is an option) by the child’s parent, and for some activities the parent will receive a “child check” for the child similar to a claim check. The parent must present the “child check” in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent is unable to present the “child check,” the CPC AR for the activity will be contacted and approve of the release to the parent. If someone other than the child’s parent will be dropping off or picking up a child, the child’s parent should notify (electronically via text or email) the CPC AR for the activity in advance of the specific arrangements and person.

Sick Child Policy

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

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

Children who are observed by our helpers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent will be contacted to request that the child be picked up as soon as possible.

Medication Policy

CPC does not administer either prescription or non-prescription medication to the children under our care. Any medications should be administered by the child's parent. Parents should review the sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) or other non-infectious chronic conditions requiring medication. Parents of such children should address their situation with the CPC AR to develop an agreed plan.

Discipline Policy

CPC does not use or allow any form of physical (corporal) punishment. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Helpers should consult with the CPC AR if assistance is needed with any disciplinary issues. Only as a final option where no other reasonable ways are apparent to resolve the situation, reasonable and appropriate physical restraint may be used by a CPC AR or an adult helper only for so long as it appears reasonably necessary to protect the child, other children, or staff from physical harm, and until the parent or other legally authorized individual is able to be present to ensure the safety of the child or until the appropriate governmental authority is able to be contacted and arrive to resolve the situation.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, an adult should try to take a group (for children under 5 and to not leave other children unattended) of children to the hallway bathroom. The adult should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The adult should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the adult should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the helpers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

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

For the protection of all, a helper should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child, nor should more than one child ever be in the same stall or a single person bathroom. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each activity.

Accidental Injuries to Children

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

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, helpers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent will immediately be summoned in addition to the helper's CPC AR. If reasonable under the circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

CPC will provide (in-person and electronically) training on this child protection policy to all new staff and helpers and will work to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All helpers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events. At least annually as well as on the date of any revisions that are approved by CPC, all CPC ARs, helpers, and staff should be provided (electronically is encouraged) with a copy of this policy and any documents referenced by this policy to read and understand. Parents of any children and youth in CPC activities should also be electronically provided a copy of this policy or the electronic link to this policy on the CPC website.

Additional guidelines may be developed as appropriate and necessary for designated activities by the CPC ARs for unique circumstances and should be proposed to and reviewed and approved by the CPC ARs and the CPC Children/Youth Ministry committee prior to implementation. Those additional guidelines should be as consistent as possible with this Policy.

Unique, Urgent Circumstances

If any situation/concern arises that does not fall within a specific process or area, that concern will be reviewed, discussed, and managed at the next occurring CPC committee meeting. For any such situation, as much information as possible should be gathered as confidentially as possible, prior to the review and response to the matter.

For any urgent matters that are necessary of evaluation and/or response prior to the next occurring meeting of the CPC committee, that matter will be reviewed and evaluated by the applicable highest CPC AR(s) available using their good judgment and discretion as appropriate and necessary under the urgent circumstances. That matter will still be reviewed and evaluated at the next occurring meeting.

For any urgent or emergency matter, any adult or CPC AR may also request and seek a meeting as soon as possible to address such matter and all available CPC ARs should make good efforts to attend or participate in person or via electronic means.

Non-CPC Groups Using the CPC Campus for Activities for Children

All non-CPC groups and events that use the CPC premises for children and youth activities are expected to comply with this policy. The leader of any such group will be asked to review and abide by this policy and confirm in writing receipt and understanding of this policy and provide a copy of the policy to the group's leaders/helpers who will be on the CPC Campus. The leaders of such groups will be invited to attend/review the CPC training sessions and such groups are expected to conduct their own good faith due diligence for the safety and care of children in the activities on the CPC campus.

Guidelines for Participation by Youth Helpers Age 11 (6th Grade) to Age 17 (including Youth still in 12th grade)

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for youth/sitters (paid or volunteer) who are at least age 11 (and in 6th Grade) to assist in caring for children during programs or CPC activities for children below age 12 (such as Vacation Bible School). The parent(s) of a youth who wishes to be a helper should be a regular member/participant of the church. Before any participation in a CPC activity, each youth helper must:

- receive specific training related to the volunteer activity and be reminded of which adult ARs to seek help from at any time while participating in the activity
- Be at least age 14 to fulfill an “adult” helper role under this policy, and fulfill all other requirements in this policy, although the screening process may be waived if approved by two CPC ARs;
- have a signed CPC volunteer form from the parent understanding the responsibility of the parent and the child volunteer
- be approved (documented via email is okay) by at least two CPC ARs for the particular CPC activity.
- be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Guidelines for Direct Communications with Youth

A CPC AR/helper should not engage in any form of private electronic communications (either sending or responding) directly to any youth or group of youth except following the below guidelines:

- the parent provides prior written permission to the CPC AR from the parent's own electronic address and the parent provides the youth's electronic address for the specific CPC helper to make such communications,
- the parent is included in each communication to the youth unless the parent in an electronic message to the CPC AR elects to not be included on any messages,
- at least two CPC ARs must be made aware of any such direct private communication authorization that the parent has authorized when the parent has elected to not be copied on the messages,
- any direct communications are to be used only for authorized purposes of the activity,
- any approved direct communication method is only effective for the specific activity and for a maximum of one year unless the parent specifies a shorter time,
- the parent may at any time withdraw or modify the prior authorization by electronic communication to the CPC AR.

If any child/youth makes any direct private communication to a CPC helper, the CPC helper should discuss the situation with the CPC ARs when direct private messaging has not been approved by the parent of the child/youth or if any direct message has any content that causes any concern. CPC ARs and helpers should keep a record of any electronic communications to and from any child or youth that is made or received. CPC ARs and helpers should not use any form of electronic communication that is not easily able to be retained (for example, an app such as Snapchat).

For additional information and helpful resources, please visit:

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services:

<https://www.dfps.state.tx.us>

and

<https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/recognizing.asp>



ChildAbuseNeglect
TexasDFPSReporting

Prevent Child Abuse America at www.preventchildabuse.org



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