

Holston Presbytery Child Protection Policy

Purpose

As people called to convey God's love to young people and develop trusting nurturing relationships with them, Holston Presbytery recognizes the great responsibility we have to be accountable before God, the church, and the community for the safety and well-being of children and youth. Holston Presbytery also recognizes that by establishing guidelines and maintaining standards for interaction with young people will improve our ministry. Thus, failure to adhere to these guidelines and standards by any employee or volunteer working with young people may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from their position of employment or volunteer service. However, nothing in this policy or in any other document or statement shall limit the Presbytery's right to terminate any employee or volunteer at will.

The intention of this policy is:

- To provide safe and secure environments for children and youth (defined as those less than 18 years of age).
- To protect children and youth from any incident or conduct that might cause physical, emotional, spiritual or sexual harm while participating in activities and events of Holston Presbytery. (Such prohibited behavior includes, but is not limited to: sexual abuse or exploitation of children or adults, rape or sexual assault, sexual harassment, verbal, emotional and/or spiritual abuse, abuse of authority and power, breaching Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship to gain advantage over another for personal gratification. The forms of prohibited behavior may include physical contact, gestures, spoken words, and/or written contact.)
- To guide Holston Presbytery in the required conduct of its employees and volunteers in children's and youth programs with the goal of preventing incidents and allegations of abuse.
- To protect adult employees and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.
- To provide a mechanism to deal with reported concerns and take appropriate subsequent actions.

Components of the Policy

This policy addresses four components of child and youth protection:

1. Screening and selection of applicants for employment and volunteer service to rule out any record of prior abusive behavior.
2. Training and supervising of employees and volunteers.
3. Reporting allegations and concerns regarding child and youth protection issues.
4. Responding to allegations and concerns that have been reported.

Screening and selection of workers

All paid staff and all scheduled volunteers of Holston Presbytery who work with children or youth shall be screened. Each paid position shall have a job description that defines the responsibilities of the position and provides information on supervision and evaluation. Scheduled volunteers are those who supervise or have custody of minors on a scheduled or recurring basis.

1. Paid Employees: Before hiring any paid employees for a position which includes supervision or custody of minors, Holston Presbytery shall:
 - Personally interview the applicant.
 - Contact the applicant's references.
 - Explain this Child Protection Policy and have the applicant authorize a background screening prior to employment.
 - Conduct a background screening that shall include the following components: a verification of Social Security number; a criminal records screening in jurisdictions where the applicant has previously lived; a driving records screening (if the position duties involve driving others); and a credit records screening.
 - Obtain a negative (or negative dilute) result on a pre-employment drug screen, if a drug screen is thought to be advisable.

Individuals in paid employment may also be subject to reasonable suspicion, post-accident, and random drug and alcohol testing if indicated during their employment.

2. Scheduled Volunteers: Before assigning a volunteer which includes the supervision or custody of minors, Holston Presbytery shall:
 - Interview the volunteer.
 - Explain this Child Protection Policy and have the applicant authorize a background screening prior to employment.
 - Conduct a background screening that shall include the following components: a verification of Social Security number; a criminal records screening in jurisdictions where the applicant has previously lived; and a driving records screening (if the position duties involve driving others).
 - Obtain a negative (or negative dilute) result on a pre-employment drug screen, if a drug screen is thought to be advisable.

Occasionally volunteers may be needed in an emergency to temporarily fill in for a regularly scheduled volunteer or employee who works with children and/or youth. In this case, Holston Presbytery will make every effort to select volunteers from among those who have been previously screened.

All background screening authorizations and results shall be maintained and kept by the Financial Manager/Treasurer of Holston Presbytery. Adverse actions reported through the background screening

shall be conveyed by the Financial Manager/Treasurer of Holston Presbytery to the entity(s) responsible for the position.

It is the responsibility of each employee and volunteer covered by this policy to report to their supervisor, as soon as possible, any subsequent arrest, conviction, treatment or proceeding that would have been disclosed in the background screening process. An employee's or volunteer's failure to report any such subsequent development will be considered a violation of this policy.

Information disclosed, or which is discovered before or after employment or volunteer service, begins does not automatically require adverse action against an applicant, employee or volunteer. Rather, a variety of factors such as the nature of the position, the nature of the information disclosed or learned, and the age of the applicant, employee or volunteer when the incident or conduct occurred.

Training and Supervising Workers

These practices shall be followed in an effort to prevent any physical, emotional, spiritual or sexual harm to children or youth from occurring:

- Conduct training: Children and youth workers and volunteers shall regularly review this policy and be encouraged to attend additional training regarding children and youth safety.
- Maintain the "two adult" rule: Ordinarily, two adults shall be present during all activities involving one or more minors. Every effort should be made for both adults to remain present during all activities. Any meeting where two adults cannot be present requires parental and/or supervisor notification.

Private conversations between an adult and a child or youth, should take place within sight of others (i.e. in the presence of others or in a public place). Counseling sessions with a minor should be held in a place where they are in view of others (i.e. with an open door or a door with a glass window). Parental consent or notification of the program supervisor is advised in any situation where an adult worker will be alone with a minor.

- Schedule adequate supervision: In addition to following the two-adult rule, adult supervision shall be maintained before and after events until all children and youth are in the custody of their parents or another person authorized by their parents. In instances where youth may drive or carpool to the activity, adult leaders shall remain at the program event until the last youth leaves.
- Approve overnight chaperones: All chaperones for overnight activities must be approved in advance by the responsible staff person and be in compliance with this policy.
- Report suspicious behavior: Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between adult workers and children and/or youth shall be reported immediately in accordance with the reporting procedures outlined below.

Reporting Obligations

Pursuant to this policy, any staff member, worker (paid or volunteer), teacher, aid, or other adult participant in a Holston Presbytery sponsored program or event involving children or youth shall report

any incident, activity, behavior or evidence noticed that reasonably appears to indicate that child abuse has occurred or may occur. Persons making reports shall not be identified, without their permission, except as necessary in connection with any potential or pending legal action or criminal investigation.

Reports should be made to event coordinator, the program supervisor or the Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk.

Response to Allegations

The following guiding principles shall apply:

- All allegations shall be taken seriously.
- All allegations shall be handled forthrightly with due respect for privacy and confidentiality.
- The victim will be cared for and not held responsible in any way.
- Full cooperation will be given to church and civil authorities under the guidance of legal counsel and in accordance with the PCUSA Book of Order.

Both the victim and the accused shall be treated fairly and with dignity. The care and safety of minors is of foremost priority. The accused should not be confronted until the child's safety has been ensured. As soon as a report is made, the accused should be temporarily removed from his or her duties pending resolution of the matter. Paid workers may be suspended with or without pay.

This policy is intended to assure families and those working with children and youth within Holston Presbytery programs and events that abuse shall not be tolerated in any form—physical, emotional, spiritual, or sexual. Effective prevention will reduce the risk of harm to our children and youth, and the threat of legal liability for our church and its leaders. The aim of these guidelines is to assure a safe, loving, and welcoming experience for all children and youth, and will reflect the spirit of the ministry of Jesus Christ.