

CHILD, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION POLICY  
Protection Covenant for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults  
Presbyterian Church of Okemos, MI  
revised: August 2024; November 2025  
Approved by Christian Education - Children & Youth November 12, 2025  
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The Presbyterian Church of Okemos (PCO) Mission states “The Church exists to invite everyone to join the lifelong journey of faith ... We desire to build a network of caring relationships between families, friends, and strangers by offering welcome, healing, justice and peace to all in the name of Jesus Christ.”

We have been given the gift of law to guide our lives together to be a loving and just community. The Presbyterian Church of Okemos and the Presbytery of Lake Michigan will not tolerate sexual abuse or any type of maltreatment of our children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This policy and its procedures are intended to apply to, and govern, the conduct of PCO's clergy, employees, volunteers, members, and any person working for PCO in connection with any of our children, youth, or vulnerable adult services and programs.

## **I. Purpose**

1. Promote the well-being of individuals and the PCO community
2. Assist PCO in fulfilling our duty of care to our children, youth, vulnerable adults, and the PCO volunteers and staff who work with them.
3. Provide PCO youth, employees, volunteers, and members with defined standards to clarify our rights, responsibilities and liabilities in providing services and programs

## **II. Definitions**

1. For the purposes of this covenant
  - a) “adult” means any person who is at least 18 years old and is a paid church staff member or church volunteer working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults
  - b) “child”, “children” means any person who is 17 years of age or younger
  - c) “youth” means any person from age 12 to age 17, or 18 years old and in high school or graduated within that calendar year and participating in a PCO Youth event (e.g. Intergenerational Mission Week or Montreat Youth Conference).
  - d) “vulnerable adult” - any person 18 years of age or older who has some form of physical or mental impairment that prevents them from being completely independent
2. Sexual abuse or misconduct as used in this policy is defined as sexual interaction or other sexual conduct in relation to a) child, youth, or vulnerable adult when the conduct involves force, threat, coercion or intimidation, and/or when the conduct involves a misuse of authority, office or position, whether ecclesiastical or otherwise. This behavior

is always considered forced when the interaction is between an adult and a child or youth, or between an adult and a vulnerable adult who is incapable of consenting.

- a) Types of abuse that involve touching include: fondling; oral, genital and anal penetration; intercourse; rape
  - b) Types of abuse that do not involve touching include: verbal comments, pornographic videos, obscene phone calls or text messages, sexually suggestive gestures, allowing children to witness sexual activity
3. Maltreatment is defined, including but not limited to, any non-accidental physical/mental/emotional injury to a minor (abuse), providing of alcohol or drugs or controlled substances of any kind to a minor or vulnerable adult, or failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm (neglect).
  4. Emotional abuse (or psychological abuse), is a pattern of behavior where one person subjects another person to nonphysical acts that harm mental well-being and the overall ability to function. This includes but is not limited to verbal abuse, intimidations and terrorization, humiliation and degradation, exploitation, harassment, rejection and withholding affection, isolation, or excessive control.

### **III. Procedures for Standards of Conduct**

To ensure a safe environment for children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those involved in implementing or overseeing activities for them, the following procedures are required:

1. Adults working with children, youth and vulnerable adults:
  - a. will have been an active member of PCO for at least six months
  - b. non-members will have been active in the life of the church for at least one year
  - c. will be well known to the individual in charge of supervision of programs and/or CECY Committee.
  - d. In order to create an atmosphere of hospitality while upholding safety, exceptions may be made to the length of these waiting periods at the discretion of the Pastoral and/or Program Staff and partnering with an approved adult volunteer
  - e. For the purposes of this policy, related adults are defined as those living in the same household (spouses, parent-child, siblings, grandparent – grandchild etc.) It also includes non-married domestic partners.
2. Adults and volunteer youth working with children in church-related activities will be at least four (4) years older than the oldest child or youth they are serving. In order to create an atmosphere of hospitality while upholding safety, volunteer applicants who are less than four years older will be partnered with an approved adult volunteer/mentor.
3. No one will touch or interact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any way that is intended or could be reasonably construed to be sexually stimulating. Care will also be taken that consenting adults do not act in a sexual way during any church activity. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical caretaking (diapering, medical—band aids on cuts, etc.) are appropriate as long as respect for others' personal wishes about being touched are

honored, not excessive, or imposed upon the another individual. Please see Appendix A for examples.

4. Staff and volunteers at programs involving children or youth should work in pairs; whenever possible, two unrelated adults should be present with the children or youth at all activities. A teacher may work alone when there is visual access to the classroom (door with window or open door).
  - a. For youth activities held at a time other than during church school or worship hours, two unrelated adults will always be present.
5. For youth activities during the church school/worship schedule—or when numerous other people are present in the building—the following guidelines apply:
  - a. At least two unrelated adults will always be present in a room where the door is closed that does not have a window for outside observation.
6. If a child or youth and adult speak on a one-to-one basis, this interaction will occur in an open space where other people are nearby.
7. PCO's clergy, employees, volunteers, and members will refrain from using alcohol, tobacco, or recreational drugs while participating in activities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
8. This policy does not address nursery staffing. Should a nursery be added to our ministry offerings, an addendum to this policy will be added when nursery staff is hired.

#### **IV. Transportation**

1. Drivers for church-sponsored activities will be at least 25 years old per church insurance policy.
2. An unaccompanied adult will not drive a single child or youth in a Church-sponsored activity
  - a. No fewer than three people of any combination of unrelated adults and children/youth will be together in a vehicle. For example: two unrelated Adults + one or more Youth; a married couple plus one additional Adult + one or more Youth; one Adult + two or more Youth.
  - b. If an unforeseen exception is necessitated for an exception, parental permission will be obtained in writing and the Pastor will be informed. Communication between the driver and parent/guardian will include stops made, anticipated arrival time, and confirmation of drop off.

#### **V. Overnight activities**

1. At least two unrelated Adults should accompany Children/Youth on trips, retreats, and other times that Children/Youth gather at or away from the church property. At least four Adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.
2. It is recommended that there is a minimum of one adult to seven youth.
3. There will be at least one Adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one adult present will be of the same gender as the Children/Youth.

4. The Pastoral or Program Staff member supervising an overnight off-campus activity will ensure that every participant provides a completed and signed permission slip, including permission for emergency medical care and information and phone numbers to contact a parent/legal guardian in case of an emergency. These signed permission slips will be taken on the trip, and a copy will be placed in the church office.

## **VI. Social Media, Video Conferencing, Texting and Email**

1. Adults will not initiate a friend or follow request with children or youth on any social media platform. If a child or youth sends a friend request or requests to follow the adult, the adult will not accept that request without permission from the child or youth's parent or guardian. If permission is obtained, the adult will agree to not post any inappropriate content.
2. On social media pages/accounts (personal or church), adults will not tag or otherwise identify children or youth in photos (other than their own children or youth) posted online of church-related activities without the permission of the child or youth's parent or guardian.
3. Adults will not e-mail, text or message on social media with children or youth about anything beyond objective information related to church activities (time, date, location).
4. Any and all communication between a child or youth and an adult that is not objective information about church activities will include an additional adult: the staff person who works with youth, the youth's parent/guardian, or the Pastor.
5. Parental consent will be obtained if children will be identified in livestreamed worship services and other live streamed or recorded events.
6. When youth are present at a church related video conference gathering (Zoom, etc.), at least two unrelated adults will be present.

## **VII. Procedures for Screening and Training**

1. Adults will undergo training on this policy and on sexual harassment annually.
2. Adults will be background checked before working with children and every 3 years through Protect My Ministry. The records will be kept in a secure location in the Pastor's office.
3. Known Criminal Sexual Offenders will not be permitted to work/volunteer with youth programs.
4. All employees and volunteers who work with youth programs will receive and sign a copy of this policy to be kept in a church file for this purpose. Employees and volunteers are encouraged to retain a personal copy of this policy for reference.
5. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

## **XVIII. Procedures for Responding to an Allegation or Disclosure Including Reporting**

The Presbyterian Church of Okemos understands that we will report any abuse or neglect to the appropriate state agencies. If there is reasonable cause to suspect that child abuse or neglect has occurred, the church will take all allegations seriously and will follow the requirements of the Michigan Child Protection Act, Public Act 238 of 1975, as amended (MCL 722.621 et seq.)

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=mcl-Act-238-of-1975>)

Should an allegation of sexual abuse or maltreatment occur; every effort will be made to assure fair treatment of all persons affected, including the accused. Where possible, the privacy of the persons and the confidentiality of communications will be respected.

The following process will be followed by the church:

1. Anyone believing they are the victim of, or have witnessed, abuse (physical, sexual, neglect, verbal or emotional) of a child or vulnerable adult will report it to the Pastor. In Michigan, clergy are mandatory reporters (See Appendix B). If the allegation or suspicion is about the Pastor, the adult will report their suspicion to the Clerk of Session. The allegation will be well-documented by the Pastor or, if applicable, the Clerk of Session.
  - a. The Pastor or Clerk of Session and at least one other adult will meet with the one making the allegation in a pastoral manner. This will include calm, attentive and non-judgmental listening. Leading questions should be avoided.
  - b. Assuring to the child, youth or vulnerable adult that it is not their fault is appropriate and that they have done the right thing by reporting it.
  - c. If allegations do not involve the parents/caregivers they will be informed of the situation and counseling options will be discussed.
2. The pastor, or if applicable, the Clerk of Session will refer the allegation to law enforcement officials.
3. Any person(s) against whom allegations are made will be treated with dignity, confidentiality and support. They will be informed that an allegation has been made and the process moving forward. Purely as a precautionary measure and without judging the validity or invalidity of any allegations, the Pastor or if applicable, the Clerk of Session, will immediately remove the person(s) against whom such allegations are made from further responsibilities involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the investigation is completed.
4. The Pastor or if applicable, the Clerk of Session will immediately contact the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and the church's insurance company, and consult with legal counsel familiar with child protection laws for legal advice.
5. The church will cooperate with all agencies involved in the investigation, will try to assure the child or youth's safety and maintain the confidentiality of the reporter of accusations to the extent it is permitted by law.
6. The Pastor will minister, as is possible under the circumstances, to individuals who in good faith make reports of actual or reasonably suspected cases of abuse or maltreatment of children/youth/vulnerable adults, to those who are alleged to have been abused and their families and to those identified in the allegation.

If the allegation involves sexual abuse or maltreatment outside the church setting and in a child's home environment, the Pastor, or his/her designee, will immediately:

- a. document the allegation
- b. refer the allegation to the Protective Services in the Department of Human Services (DHS) in the county where the disclosure occurred and complete a DHS form 3200.

## Appendix A. Examples of Appropriate, Inappropriate and Harmful Physical Contact

Source: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training from LeaderWise; <https://www.leaderwise.org/workshops-programs>

APPROPRIATE WITH CONSENT	INAPPROPRIATE	HARMFUL
High Fives	Tickling, wrestling	Grabbing, shaking
Handshakes	Roughhousing	Slapping, spanking
Fist Bumps	Piggyback rides	Pinching, pushing
Side Hugs	Back rubs/massages	Kicking
Pats on back or shoulder	Seating a child on one's lap	Touching chest or genital area
Holding hands for safety	Patting or slapping buttocks	Intimate, romantic, or sexual conduct
Verbal praise	Unwanted affection	Belittling, embarrassing, shaming
Positive reinforcement	Photography without permission	Referencing physical development or appearance
Tending to an injury	Giving/receiving gifts	Showing pornography
	Contact without permission	Asking for/sending sexual photos



## MDHHS

### Mandated Reporters Are Required by Law to Report

Michigan Child Protection Law requires certain professionals to report their suspicions of child abuse or neglect to Centralized Intake (CI) at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). These people are mandated reporters and have established relationships with children based on their profession.

#### Mandated Reporters Include:

Physicians	Licensed emergency medical care providers.
Licensed master social workers.	School counselors.
Dentists.	Audiologists.
Licensed bachelor's social	Teachers.
Physician's assistants.	Psychologists.
Registered social service technicians.	Law enforcement officers.
Registered dental hygienists.	Marriage and family therapists.
Social service technicians.	Members of the clergy.
Medical examiners.	Licensed professional counselors.
Persons employed in a providers. professional capacity in any office of the Friend of the Court.	Regulated child care
Nurses.	Social workers.
School administrators.	Employees of an organization or entity that, as a result of federal funding statutes, regulations, or contracts, would be prohibited from reporting in the absence of a state mandate or court order (example: domestic violence provider).

Physical therapist assistants.      Physical therapists.

Athletic trainers.      Occupational therapists.

The following MDHHS employees also have a legal mandate to report suspected child abuse or neglect:

- Eligibility specialists.
- Family independence manager or specialists. -
- Social services specialists.
- Social work specialists.
- Social work specialist managers.
- Welfare services specialists.

### **Making a Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect**

Mandated reporters shall make an immediate report to CI by telephone or through the online reporting system, of suspected child abuse or child neglect. Within 72 hours after making an oral report by telephone, the reporting person shall file a written report (DHS-3200). If the immediate report has been made using the online reporting system, no additional written report is required.

Reporting the suspected allegations of child abuse and/or neglect to the head of the organization does not fulfill the requirement to report directly to DHHS.

The verbal report can be completed by calling 855-444-3911. or via [ISD Partnership Landing \(michigan.gov\)](https://www.michigan.gov/isd-partnership-landing).

The individual who had contact with the child must make the report and provide as much detail as possible about the following information:

- The child's primary caretaker, including name and address.
- Names and birth dates for all members of the household.
- Name and birth date of the alleged perpetrator(s).
- Whether the alleged perpetrator lives with the child.
- Address where the alleged abuse or neglect occurred.
- What makes the mandated reporter suspect the child is being abused or neglected.

The Child Protection Law requires that the written report include the following information:

- Name of child.
- Description of abuse or neglect.
- Names and addresses of child's parents/guardians.
- The persons with whom the child resides.
- Child's age.
- Other information available to the reporting person that might establish the cause of the abuse or neglect, and the manner in which the abuse or neglect occurred.

MDHHS encourages the use of the [Report of Actual or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect \(DHS-3200\)](#) form when filing the written report, which includes all the information required under the law. If more than one

mandated reporter suspects child abuse or neglect based upon the same incident, they may submit just one DHS-3200 form.

### **Confidentiality of a Mandated Reporters' Identity**

The identity of a reporting person is confidential under the Child Protection Law. The identity of a reporting person is subject to disclosure only with the consent of that person, by judicial process or to those listed under Section 5 of the Child Protection Law (MCL 722.625).

### **Civil and Criminal Liability**

Mandated reporters, who fail to file a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, will be subject to both civil and criminal liability. In a civil action, the mandated reporter may be held liable for all damages that any person suffers due to the mandated reporters' failure to file a report. In a criminal action, the mandated reporter may be found guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for up to 93 days and a fine of \$500.

A person making a good faith report is protected from civil and criminal prosecution and cannot be penalized for making the report or cooperating with a CPS investigation.

### **Mandated Reporter Hotline**

If a mandated reporter is dissatisfied with the response by MDHHS, the mandated reporter may contact the Mandated Reporter Hotline at 877-277-2585. Prior to doing so, the mandated reporter must first attempt to talk with our local MDHHS office director about his or her concerns.

View the [Guide to Detailed Reporting \(Downloadable\)](#) to understand what information should be included when reporting.



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