

## **Child Protection Policy**

### **The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church**

**1313 New York Avenue, NW**

**Washington, DC 20005-4790**

**202-393-3700**

The members of Washington D.C.'s New York Avenue Presbyterian Church (NYAPC) are committed to the safety, welfare and protection of all children participating in the activities and programs of the NYAPC. This commitment includes the protection of all children from any form of abuse or harassment, whether physical, mental or sexual. During each baptism of an infant, child or adult into this covenant of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in the spirit of Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual's relationship with the household of God. It is in this context and with this spirit that we uphold this policy.

### **Policy Statement and Goals**

- We want to make the NYAPC a safe place for children and youth. To further our intent to provide a nurturing, Christian environment for children and youth at the NYAPC, we have established a policy to protect young people from abuse and/or harassment, whether physical, mental and/or sexual, for all who participate in church activities involving children.
- We seek to reduce the risk of misconduct toward and harm to children and youth. The NYAPC cannot, nor can any institution or organization, absolutely guarantee that no harm will befall a child entrusted to its care. However, the NYAPC can, and through adherence to this policy does, make every effort to ensure that the persons placed in positions of trust and responsibility with respect to children and youth are persons deserving of that trust and responsibility.
- We seek to protect employees and volunteers of the NYAPC from false allegations of abuse. This policy also directs that programs and activities be conducted in a manner that minimizes employee and volunteer vulnerability to unwarranted allegations.
- We recognize that education is a critical component of a successful policy. Initial and ongoing education and training of adults, including employees, volunteers, parents and caregivers, will be conducted to ensure that this policy is thoroughly understood and effectively implemented.
- We seek to balance these goals with all church programs and staffing needs. These procedures have been adopted by the NYAPC Session and will be consistently and equally enforced and administered. This policy is to be distributed to all current members, employees, volunteers, parents and caregivers and the larger community of the NYAPC.

## Definitions

- A **child** is a person 18 years of age or younger. A **youth** is a child in the context of this policy. A **youth** is a person 12 – 18 years of age.
- **Employee** is a term used to cover individuals who work for the NYAPC for salary or wages; it does not include the paid student staff of the Community Club at the NYAPC.
- **Volunteer** is a term used for those individuals who provide services to the NYAPC and/or its mission programs and who receive no monetary remuneration.
- **Child Protection Coordination** is a term used for the responsibilities assumed by the paid NYAPC staff position whose duties include administering this policy and who reports to the Pastor/Head of Staff. This position is currently the Associate Minister of Congregational Life.
- **Supervision** includes direct observation, control or visual monitoring of programs and activities.
- **Programs and Activities** include the NYAPC Christian education program for children and youth, youth activities, mission trips involving youth and adults, and the Community Club program and any other current or future activity or mission of the church that involves children and youth, either on NYAPC property or off site.
- **Abuse and/or harassment**, if manifested in Programs and Activities [as defined above] includes, but is not limited to, the following acts or omissions:
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  - Any sexual activity in the presence of, or in association with, a child.
  - Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse toward a child.
  - Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child.
  - Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
  - Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child.
  - Physical neglect of a child or children, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the programs and activities of the NYAPC.
  - Emotional or psychological mistreatment of a child, including verbal abuse. ☐
  - The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any programs and activities of the NYAPC or on NYAPC property.
  - The presence, possession or being under the influence of any illegal drugs at any programs and activities of the NYAPC or on NYAPC property.
  - The presence, consumption of or being under the undue influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a child or youth programs and activities of the NYAPC or while on NYAPC property.

## Standards of Conduct

- When working with children and youth, employees and volunteers who undertake this special responsibility at the NYAPC shall not violate the trust of that responsibility by engaging in acts of abuse and/or harassment.
- **Two-Adult Rule.** All adult employees and volunteers must work in pairs, even where an adolescent helper is in attendance, when working directly with children or youth at any programs and activities of the NYAPC or on NYAPC property. The only exceptions to this two-adult rule are: 1) pastoral counseling by staff pastors or affiliated pastors of the church; in those circumstances, the meeting must be conducted in view of others (e.g., either a window in the door, or a door left open), 2) one-on-one mentoring or tutoring in groups of tutors and students in public spaces, as has historically taken place in the Community Club program, 3) meetings between a Community Club tutor and student or students that are expressly permitted in writing by a parent or guardian of each student, and 4) transportation of children as provided in the Transportation of Children paragraph below.
- **Restroom Guidelines.** Whenever possible, children in third grade and younger will be sent in pairs to the restroom and with a NYAPC employee or volunteer. The employee or volunteer who accompanies children to the restroom should ensure that suspicious or unknown individuals are not occupying the restroom prior to allowing children to use the facilities. For single-stall restrooms, the employee or volunteer stands outside the door; the door shall remain ajar for children under age five. The door may be closed at the request of the child, but at all times the employee or volunteer must stand outside of the door and assist the child as needed.
- **Transportation of Children.** Children involved in an NYAPC-sponsored program or activity should be transported in groups rather than alone. While transporting children, an employer or volunteer must travel with at least one additional adult in the vehicle. A single adult, except under emergency circumstances, should only drive a single child with the written permission of the child's parent or guardian.
- **Parental Permission.** Parent/guardian permissions forms will be required for all off-site programs and activities. A parent/guardian may expressly, in writing, give permission for more than one occasion at a time.
- **Expressions of Affection.** Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayers), or physical care taking (changing diapers, toileting, etc.) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon a child.
- **Social Media.** To ensure the safety of our children and youth in social media, parents/guardians must provide written permission for their child's photo to be used on social media before any photo can be so used; no photo should be used on the NYAPC or Community Club websites or Facebook pages unless written consent is given by the parent/guardian and use of the photo is cleared by the person charged with child protection coordination. Names or other identifying information about a child will not be posted with pictures put online or in social media.

- **Alcohol Consumption in the Presence of Children and Youth.** For programs and activities where alcohol will be present in the presence of children and youth, committees and planning teams must first contact the Session for guidance and approval. As a standard rule, the parent/guardian of every child in attendance must also be present whenever alcohol is served at a church event. Alcohol consumption is never permitted during the following events: confirmation and youth retreats and Community Club study hall or Community Club programs and activities where students are present.

## **Supervision and Accountability**

- The **Session** is responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of this policy. The Christian Learning Cluster will be the committee that assists and advises the Session and congregation in the day to day administration and implementation of the policy.

- The NYAPC staff member assigned the duties of Child Protection Coordination will be responsible for ensuring that the NYAPC abides by these elements of the policy:

- **Six-Month Rule.** As a general rule, no person will be accepted as a volunteer working directly with children until he or she has been a member or has been actively engaged in the activities of the NYAPC for at least six months. Volunteer tutors for the Community Club program may begin work with students in public spaces for this purpose once tutors have completed the application and orientation process and their references have been checked and found to be satisfactory. However, Community Club tutors may meet one-on-one, off-site, with their students with the express written permission of the child's parent or guardian.

- **Employee/Volunteer Acknowledgement and Annual Training.** All NYAPC employees and volunteers shall submit a signed and dated application that acknowledges that they have read this policy and agree to abide by it before embarking on their duties. The Community Club has developed application protocols that are comparable to and substitute for the NYAPC application form and process. Communication and explanation of this policy and the context for it will be included in training conducted no less frequently than annually for all employees and volunteers. Parents and caregivers will be invited to attend these training sessions.

- **References and Background Checks.** Any employee or volunteer of the NYAPC will be required to state whether he or she has ever been convicted of or pleaded no contest to a crime. Completed checks with at least three references conducted by NYAPC are mandatory prior to employment and volunteering for a program or activity involving children and youth at the NYAPC. Further, all NYAPC employees must have a criminal records background check with the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia or with the police department of the employee's current or former places of residence, and volunteers providing pastoral counseling to children or attending overnight youth activities must have a national sex offender background check. All these background checks will be conducted anew for each new employee/volunteer. Background checks will be renewed every three years. Those entering employment at NYAPC through internships and special work programs must undergo the same checks, conducted by NYAPC, as all other employees.

- **Record Confidentiality.** All records, including applications and results of reference and background checks, will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by church procedures and

civil law in locked and secured files, accessible only to the Pastors, the staff member responsible for Child Protection Coordination, the Clerk of Session, the Chair of the Personnel Committee, the President of the Board of Trustees and the church's legal counsel. Any person should be able to review the church's file on himself/herself.

- **Convicted.** An applicant who has engaged in or been convicted of sexual misconduct, child abuse or other behavior determined solely within the discretion of the NYAPC to be inconsistent with a supervisory role for children will not be permitted to work with children and youth at the NYAPC and shall be informed in writing of this decision.

### **Procedures for Allegations of Misconduct**

1. It is the policy of the NYAPC that all allegations of abuse/misconduct under this policy shall be reported immediately, to an NYAPC Pastor or the staff member responsible for Child Protection Coordination. If an allegation of abuse and/or harassment involves a Pastor, the information shall be provided to the staff member responsible for Child Protection Coordination and the Clerk of the Session. In all cases of allegations of abuse/misconduct by any pastor, the General Presbyter and the Stated Clerk of the National Capital Presbytery also will be notified by the Clerk of Session. The Clerk or person responsible for Child Protection Coordination shall also notify the General Presbyter and Stated Clerk if allegations have been raised against a member or non-ordained staff person.
2. The staff member responsible for Child Protection Coordination, the Senior Pastor, or his or her designee, legal counsel, or the Chair of the Personnel Committee, after obtaining such professional advice as deemed necessary, will meet with the possible victim to listen to his or her concerns, document them in writing and explain the next steps in reporting and investigating an allegation of misconduct. A meeting also will be held with the individual accused of misconduct so that person knows a complaint has been made and what the NYAPC process and policy are in such a circumstance. The information shall be received in strict confidence subject to such disclosures as are required under church procedures or required by law.
3. It is NYAPC policy for the person responsible for Child Protection Coordination immediately to report to the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) allegations of abuse and/or harassment of children that are reportable under CFSA regulations. Reports are made by calling CFSA's child abuse and neglect hotline, 202-671-SAFE (7233). CFSA, in turn, notifies the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia (MPD). NYAPC ordained clergy are expressly mandated by National Capital Presbytery and the PCUSA *Book of Order* to report allegations of abuse that occur either on or off church property.
4. The NYAPC will cooperate fully with government authorities, who, in turn, will lead investigations of allegations of child abuse and/or harassment.
5. A Pastor or the staff member responsible for Child Protection Coordination shall inform the Session that an allegation has been made and reported. Those persons involved in the investigation or report should hold relevant information in strict confidence, subject to disclosures as required by NYAPC procedures or by law.

## **NYAPC Member and Community Awareness**

- A copy of the Child Protection Policy and the application and reference forms will be made available on the NYAPC web site ([www.nyapc.org](http://www.nyapc.org)), in the church's annual report, and in a brochure available in the church office and at the front desk.
- The Child Protection Policy and application and reference forms will be given to all participants in new member classes and to all Community Club tutors in the new tutor orientation sessions.
- Training will be provided at least annually to ensure adults, including employees, volunteers, NYAPC parents and caregivers are aware of what constitutes abuse and to explain the intent and elements of the Child Protection Policy.
- The Session will review the Child Protection Policy annually. The Christian Learning Cluster will conduct the annual review and report its findings to the Session. Experience gained with the review will be used to refine the policy and its associated application and reporting procedures.

Approved by the NYAPC Session on June 10, 2014