

# **PALMYRA CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM Adopted June 16, 2015**

## **Purpose and Definitions**

### **Declaration**

God embraces children/youth with love, placing their nurture and care in our hands. We believe that children/youth should be safe from all forms of abuse and neglect. We, the church, will be advocates for children/youth and establish clearly defined safeguards, procedures and guidelines for their protection. We acknowledge that abuse of any kind, including physical, sexual and emotional, is a serious matter and is not tolerated. This type of mistreatment violates the very image of God. It causes serious damage to the soul, body and spirit of the one abused. It also causes harm to the soul and spirit of the abuser. When abuse occurs, we will seek and support healing for both the abused and the abuser.

Adapted from *Brethren Handbook*

### **Introduction**

To help protect children and youth, the Palmyra Church of the Brethren has adopted this Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program. It is important that all Palmyra Church of the Brethren staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent abuse against children and youth. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of Protection and Prevention, a Response to Abuse procedure, and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children and youth.

### **Purpose**

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of child and youth abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and staff.
2. Assist Palmyra Church of the Brethren in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and staff.

## Definitions

The following terms used herein are defined as follows:

1. *Staff*: Anyone who is employed by or receives regular compensation from the church who provides care, supervision, guidance or control of children; or has regular, ongoing contact with children as integral to their job responsibilities.
2. *Volunteer*: Any unpaid adult who provides care, supervision, guidance or control of children; or has regular, ongoing contact with children as integral to their volunteer responsibilities.
3. *Child/Youth/Minor*: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
4. *Adult*: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or age of majority as defined by state law.
5. *Child/Youth/Minor Abuse*: According to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law:  
Child abuse means intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:  
Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.  
Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.  
Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.  
Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.  
Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.  
Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act. Causing serious physical neglect of a child.  
Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.  
Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:  
Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.  
Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.  
Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.  
Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age. Interfering with the breathing of a child.  
Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.  
Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.

"Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine. Sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect and deaths have no time limit.

6. *Mandated Reporter:* According to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law:

The following adults are considered mandated reporters and are required to report suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse:

A person licensed or certified to practice in any health-related field under the jurisdiction of the Department of State.

A medical examiner, coroner or funeral director.

An employee of a health care facility or provider licensed by the Department of Health, who is engaged in the admission, examination, care or treatment of individuals.

A school employee.

An employee of a child-care service who has direct contact with children in the course of employment. A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization.

An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.

An employee of a social services agency who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.

A peace officer or law enforcement official.

An emergency medical services provider certified by the Department of Health.

An employee of a public library who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.

An individual supervised or managed by a person listed above, who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.

An independent contractor who has direct contact with children.

An attorney affiliated with an agency, institution, organization or other entity, including a school or regularly established religious organization that is responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or control of children.

A foster parent.

## **Protection and Prevention**

### **Volunteer and Staff Screening Procedures**

The following screening procedures are to be used with all volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors and with all staff.

1. All volunteers who work with a minor, and all staff, must complete the appropriate application forms.
2. All information provided on the application must be reviewed. All references may be contacted, and qualified applicants must be interviewed in person.

If concerning information is uncovered but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is ultimately hired or accepted as a volunteer, document the reasons for overriding the prior information.

Whenever possible, the interview will be conducted by a team of at least two persons responsible for that particular program/ministry of the Palmyra Church of the Brethren.

3. *Background Checks:* According to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law:

All staff who provide care, supervision, guidance or control of children; or have regular, ongoing contact with children as integral to their job responsibilities must submit a new:

Pennsylvania Child Abuse Clearance

Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check

FBI Criminal Background Check

All adult volunteers who provide care, supervision, guidance or control of children; or have regular, ongoing contact with children as integral to their volunteer responsibilities must submit:

Pennsylvania Child Abuse Clearance

Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check

FBI Criminal Background Check if they have not been a Pennsylvania resident continuously for the past 10 years

Any person who has obtained their clearances within the previous 36 months may serve in a volunteer capacity for any program, activity or service. All staff and volunteers must produce the original documents upon application, with a copy remaining on file with the church. All background checks must be updated every 36 months. All staff and adult volunteers must sign the appropriate Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law Disclosure Statement.

Required background checks will be paid for by the church, if desired.

4. *Six-Month Rule:* Volunteers are required to have been active in the ministries of the Palmyra Church of the Brethren for six months and to have reviewed and signed the Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program Acknowledgement.

## **Confidentiality**

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and background checks will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted. These materials will be archived.

## **Disqualification**

Anyone who has been convicted, or has a probated sentence, or has received deferred adjudication, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense against minors will not be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors and will not directly oversee and exert control or oversight over minors.

## **Supervision Procedures**

Unless an extenuating situation exists, the Palmyra Church of the Brethren:

1. Will keep records of the minors we are serving, including the minor's name and age, how to contact/locate parent(s) or guardian(s), special needs of the minor and who may pick up the minor. Will utilize sign-in and sign-out sheets for minors as appropriate.
2. To the extent possible, will have at least two staff or volunteers present when minors are present. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity. To the extent possible, co-educational events will have both male and female chaperones.

3. Will leave doors fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present. For occasions such as Sunday School, where two adults are not always able to be present in the room, the door must remain open and the adult Sunday School attendance taker will act as a roamer.
4. Will provide changing stations in nursery and preschool areas that require the staff or volunteer to face others while changing a child's diaper.
5. Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the staff or volunteer will wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible the escort will be the same sex as the child. If the child needs assistance using the restroom, the escort will notify the other staff or volunteer that they will be assisting the child. The staff or volunteer will inform the person who picks up the child that they assisted and how they assisted the child in using the restroom.
6. We will utilize sign-in and sign-out sheets for all minors.
7. Will obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, prior to taking minors on trips.
8. Will ensure more than one minors or more than one adults are in a vehicle when transporting minors to avoid a one minor to one adult situation. Any driver transporting minors must be at least 21 years of age. All occupants must wear seat belts or use a car seat as required by law.

## **Behavioral Guidelines**

All volunteers and staff will observe the following guidelines:

1. Avoid any behavior that could jeopardize the emotional, physical, or psychological well being of a child/youth. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor.
2. Avoid all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched. A hug around the shoulders is not sexual abuse, but a full body to body hug, stroking, massaging or sitting a child/youth in the center of your lap should be avoided.
3. In the event a minor initiates inappropriate touching, it is necessary to inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
4. Any overt display of affection or one on one conversation with a minor should be made in a public place where others are present.

## **Sexual Offenders within the Congregation**

The Palmyra Church of the Brethren may allow a known sexual offender (a person who is required to register with the Pennsylvania State Police as a sexual offender) to participate in the ministries of the congregation but they must adhere to specific guidelines.

1. A known sexual offender must adhere to any probation/parole/legal restrictions regarding attending services or other functions where children are present. Any restrictions must be provided in written form from the appropriate legal authorities and will be available to staff, leaders and all participants in the ministries of the congregation for review.
2. A known sexual offender cannot participate in any of the child/youth programs in any way.
3. A known sexual offender can only participate in preapproved activities each week.
4. A known sexual offender must report in and be assigned to an escort who will accompany him or her at all times.
5. The identity of the sexual offender will be disclosed to the congregation.

## **Reporting and Responding to Abuse**

The Palmyra Church of the Brethren will take seriously and respond promptly to any abuse or allegation of abuse.

1. According to the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law:  
A mandated reporter must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine, either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313, if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:  

The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.

The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.

A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.

An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.
2. Anyone who observes the abuse of a minor or an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and an adult must take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Any concerns or inappropriate conduct must be promptly reported to one of the pastoral staff.

3. Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of abuse of a minor or of an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and an adult must report it promptly to one of the pastoral staff.
4. The pastoral staff will interview the person making the report, documenting the information on the appropriate reporter form. If the information warrants a report to ChildLine, and a call has not been made, that call will be made immediately in the presence of the initial reporter. If the information does not warrant a report to ChildLine the initial reporter will be advised of that determination and asked if he or she will be making a report to ChildLine.
5. The pastoral staff will then immediately alert the Executive Committee of the situation. The Executive Committee may appoint a task team to oversee the congregation's response to the alleged allegation. The pastoral staff, Executive Committee or task team will:
  - a) immediately direct the alleged perpetrator to cease any contact with any minors and their families in connection with the church. Their ministry responsibilities will cease (with pay for staff) until the allegations have been investigated and determinations have been completed.
  - b) cooperate with and monitor any investigation conducted by legal authorities.
  - c) report suspected abuse to the appropriate district and denominational authorities, and the congregation's insurance provider.
  - d) assess the findings of any legal investigation to determine if any further investigation is warranted. If no investigation is conducted by legal authorities, an internal review will include:
    - 1) meet with the reported victim and his/her parents or legal guardians
    - 2) meet with any witnesses
    - 3) meet with the alleged perpetrator
    - 4) report to the congregational Board of Administration, district and denominational authorities, and the congregation's insurance provider on the determinations of the review and any recommendations for action.
  - e) maintain contact with the reported victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, and the alleged or founded perpetrator to inform them of actions being taken and assist them in their process of healing.
  - f) communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged or founded perpetrator.
  - g) hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of legal counsel.
  - h) keep written documentation of the report/accusation, investigation, recommendations and resolutions and keep these records in a confidential file in the church office.

## **Confidentiality**

Both the alleged victim and the alleged violator have strong interest in maintaining the confidentiality of the allegations and related information. The privacy of the minor, the accused, and the witnesses will be respected as much as possible, consistent with legal obligations to investigate, to take appropriate action and any discovery or disclosure obligation.

## **Support**

We will strive to be aware of all those who may be in need of healing including the victim, members of that victim's family, peers of the victim, the perpetrator and his or her family, and involved members of the congregation. Counseling will be made available to all those in need.

## **Access and Education**

1. A copy of this policy is posted on our website at [www.palmyracob.org](http://www.palmyracob.org). Printed copies are available through the church office and will be placed in each teacher's manual.
2. All members/friends of the Palmyra Church of the Brethren will have the opportunity to hear about this Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program, who it involves, and what it entails.
3. All volunteers and paid staff who work with children/youth will be required to attend training sessions set up by the Education Team. Workshops will be held annually so any new volunteers can be trained and/or additional training can be obtained. Topics will include: Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program, Common Signs of Child Abuse, Reporting Procedures, Staffing Requirements and Room Closure Guidelines, etc...

## **Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program Acknowledgment**

The Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program for the Palmyra Church of the Brethren has been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The program establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. The Palmyra Church of the Brethren reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined within the program are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with the Palmyra Church of the Brethren or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received a copy of the Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program for the Palmyra Church of the Brethren. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained therein. I understand that its policies are the property of the Palmyra Church of the Brethren.

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Print Name

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Signature

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Date