

**Child Protection Guidelines**  
**Louisa Christian Church, Louisa, VA**

As of January 2, 2007 Louisa Christian Church, Louisa, VA is committed to providing a safe and secure environment to promote the religious and social development of children and youth, and will strive to prevent the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of minors. In our quest to provide a healthy environment where children and youth are safe, and believing that the key to conducting safe programs lies in the quality of adult leadership, the following guidelines for volunteer/paid staff working with children or youth have been established.

**Purpose**

- To promote a safe and secure environment for the children and youth of our faith community
- To train and support volunteer/paid staff to achieve that goal
- To ensure compliance by the church and its volunteer/paid staff with all laws, rules, and regulations.

**Paid/Volunteer Staff Guidelines**

The key to child abuse prevention in any organization is its staff - both volunteer and paid staff. Careful selection, adequate training, and sufficient supervision reduce the likelihood of abuse or neglect. Our goal is to recruit the best people possible to work with children and youth.

In that effort, all volunteer/paid staff, nursery staff, drivers, Sunday School teachers, and youth sponsors must:

- Complete the church's Volunteer-Paid Staff Information Form
- Acknowledge (w/ signature on Volunteer-Paid Staff Information Form) receipt and understanding of these Guidelines and the church Code of Ethics
- Attend training programs prescribed by the church
- Give written permission to the church for it to conduct a background check through the ministers (This consent form will be retained indefinitely as required by the Child Protection Policy guidelines.)
- Whether disclosed voluntarily or as a result of a Criminal Background Check or other background check, any of the following will automatically disqualify an applicant from any staff or volunteer position working with children or youth:
  1. History of alleged sexual abuse of children or voyeurism
  2. Conviction for any crime in which children were involved
  3. History of any violent or sexually exploitive behavior, whether involving children or adults.
  4. Any other charges or convictions for other crimes not listed above, unless waived in writing by the church's Senior Minister or Associate Minister following an investigation by that minister, taking into consideration:
    - § The urgency of and circumstances surrounding the conduct in question
    - § The age of the individual at the time of the offense
    - § The probability that an individual will continue the type of behavior in question
    - § The individual's commitment to rehabilitation and to changing the behavior in question
    - § Whether any recurrence of the conduct has occurred

The basis(es) upon which an individual may be denied a voluntary or paid position with the church need not be disclosed by the church to that individual.

- Any person with a dispute concerning information that appears on his/her criminal history record should first address the issue with the Senior Minister or Associate Minister. An investigation may, at the discretion of the church, that minister, or that individual, be conducted to determine the facts. This may involve submitting fingerprints to verify that the record is or is not the applicant's own criminal record. If the issue is so investigated and is not resolved to the satisfaction of the minister and that individual, the issue may be referred by the minister or that individual to the Worship Committee and then to the church

General Board.

- Confidentiality / record storage: All records obtained as a result of the Criminal Background Check will be treated as confidential, limiting the number of people who have access to applicant information to only those who have a need to know (ministers and legal counsel of the church), provided that the church shall be entitled to disclose and use such information in its discretion in any legal proceeding between the church and such individual or if such information is part of the public record. If there is a dispute over findings, such information may be shared with the Worship Committee and/or the General Board at the request of the individual for a review.

### **Expectations for Training for Child and Youth Workers**

- Any individuals desiring to volunteer in a youth ministry position that would leave them in sole responsibility of youth will be required to attend worship or Sunday School at Louisa Christian Church regularly for at least three months.
- Workers that have otherwise been cleared for hiring by the church or to volunteer for the church should attend an initial training session to be conducted by or for the church at its discretion, before beginning work with children or youth on behalf of the church. This training session will include a review of these guidelines and other information deemed relevant by the church. In the event that a worker is unable to attend a scheduled training session and that session cannot be made up at another time, he/she should meet individually with the Associate Minister.
- Approved workers should make every effort to attend additional training events or appropriate program workshops when offered. If they are not capable of attending, they should meet with the Associate Minister.
- All workers will receive a copy of the Louisa Christian Church, Louisa, VA Child Protection Guidelines and Code of Ethics and must acknowledge in writing that he or she attended the training session and received a copy of these Guidelines and Code of Ethics.

### **Youth Leadership**

The church endeavors to provide opportunities for youth leadership experience and training. Realizing that the church has a responsibility to protect all children, including youth serving in the capacity of volunteer youth leader, the following guidelines are established:

- Prospective youth leaders are expected to attend appropriate training programs that may be provided by the church.
- The minimum age for youth volunteers assisting an approved adult volunteer/paid staff member is 6th grade. (Exceptions may be made in the discretion of the minister or Worship Committee as part of a particular program.)
- When assigned youth leadership responsibilities, youth will be supervised by an adult leader who has likewise met the requirements of these Guidelines and is following the Code of Ethics.
- If a child must be disciplined, the adult leader will have the responsibility for administering appropriate disciplinary measures. In no event shall those disciplinary measures include corporal punishment or other physical contact with, or confinement of that child, which could reasonably be expected to embarrass or demean that child or to place that child in harm's way.
- Adults should monitor leadership techniques used by youth leaders to ensure that they are positive and not punitive.
- Volunteers must be 18 (and meet volunteer/paid staff requirements) to be assigned in a lead position working with children or youth. Exception: Youth under the age of 18, but no younger than 13, may serve as childcare providers for small group meetings where:
  - 1) Adults are meeting on church property; and
  - 2) Youth has attended the training session prescribed by the church for such activities
  - 3) Another approved youth or adult volunteer is present

### **Program Guidelines**

The church will strive to provide age appropriate programming for children and youth that is designed to promote religious and social growth, while providing for the physical and emotional safety of the participants.

### **Classroom and event guidelines**

- In order to plan age appropriate activities, the church will place children according to their school grade. (There is room for some flexibility on an individual basis where pre-school children are concerned.)
- At least one approved worker must be present with children at all times. However, the expectation is that there will always be two adults assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth.
- Periodic "spot checks" will be made by a minister, Worship Committee member, or recognized leader of the church where practical. This method will be in general use but especially if it is necessary to have only one adult present with a group.
- If private conversation is required, the youth and adult may move out of earshot of others, but not out of sight.
- If only one adult is able to be with the youth, the interior door must remain fully open.
- Adult leaders are expected to model Christian behavior.
- Adult leaders will not use bad or abusive language.
- Actions by adult leaders should be non-threatening and should not make the child/youth uncomfortable.
- Topical discussions should be appropriate to curriculum selected or approved by the church and to the setting and age of the children/youth.
- Adult leaders will respect the privacy of children and youth (particularly in overnight situations where changing clothes and showering are necessary). The reverse should also be true.

### **Information and Authorization**

An Information/Authorization form must be on file for each child or youth. Forms will include the following:

- Permission to participate in events on and away from church property
- Transportation release
- Medical information and release

Forms will be reviewed annually and will be distributed to parents/guardians.

### **Guidelines for Drivers Transporting Children or Youth**

All individuals who serve as an approved driver for children or youth must provide documentation or proof of:

- Being 18 years old or older, being currently licensed to operate an automobile and having been licensed to operate an automobile for at least one year.
- Meeting the minimum state required liability insurance coverage.
- The individual's driver's license and insurance card (copy will be kept on file).
- Using a safe, reliable, and licensed motor vehicle.
- Shall use child restraint seats when transporting any children (as prescribed by law).

Note: Drivers are to obey all traffic laws and are to make every reasonable effort to assure the safety of their passengers, including requiring that seat belts be worn by every passenger. Virginia law requires that every minor wear a seat belt. Each occupant will be expected to wear the seatbelt provided. Any youth 12 and younger must be placed in the rear seat of the vehicle, not front. Every reasonable effort will be made to insure that an approved adult driver is the provider of transportation for official church events, departing from the church. Drivers must be given a copy of the Code of Ethics and these Guidelines and sign acknowledgment that they have read it and will comply. They must also complete a background check, just as any youth volunteer would have to do.

### **Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

Under laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, suspected child abuse is not required to be reported by ministers

or general citizens. However, the church encourages all members of the congregation to report suspected abuse to the proper legal authorities as soon as suspected. Additionally, all members are strongly encouraged to also notify the Senior Minister or Associate Minister first. Employees and volunteers are required to notify the Senior Minister or Associate Minister of suspected child abuse. The Senior Minister and Associate Minister may assist any member or worker in reporting suspected child abuse to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

- Reports of suspected child abuse that may have occurred inside the church or on a church sponsored event are to be made as soon as possible.
- If staff or a volunteer is reported, that person will no longer be considered an approved worker until the investigation has been concluded and the minister/s advise/s that the individual may continue as an approved worker.
- Reports of abuse must never be disclosed to anyone other than the perpetrators, ministers, or the authorities.

#### HOW TO REPORT SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, you should call the state number for the Child Protective Services (CPS) agency or the CPS agency in the Commonwealth ... 800-552-7096 (in state) or 804-786-8536 (out of state). As you prepare to make a report, remember the following:

- If a toll free (800 or 888) number is available, it may be accessible only from within that state.
- Federal agencies have no authority to intervene in individual child abuse and neglect cases. Each state has jurisdiction over these matters, and has specific laws and procedures for reporting and investigating. In some states, all citizens are mandated reporters by state law and must report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect (not the case in Virginia).

If you need to report suspected abuse in a state other than your own, please call:

Childhelp® USA National Child Abuse Hot line

1-800-4-A-CHILD® - (1-800-422-4453) - TDD: 1-800-2-A-CHILD

#### **A Word About Appropriate Affectionate Behavior in the Christian Community**

It is widely known that "good touching" is important to life. Numerous studies have shown the importance of holding and touching for infants to survive. Likewise, children do not grow and thrive without the "good touches" of others. We have many examples in scripture where Jesus touched people to heal and to comfort them. The Christian community has a rich heritage of sharing a loving hug, an arm around the shoulder or a squeeze of the hand to say, "You are loved... I care about you". With good touching, the child feels as if someone has given to them or has shared with them rather than taken from them. Children should not be forced to kiss someone they do not wish to kiss. Nor do all children wish to be hugged by persons outside of their family. It is always wise to ask, "May I give you a hug?" By asking this question, the child is given the permission to refuse if he/she is uncomfortable.

It is important in our concern about child sexual abuse that the importance of good touching is not lost. We need to continue to express Christian love in appropriate ways with children. The healing, comforting, and affirming aspects of good touch should be emphasized.