



GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Session, members and staff of Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church (“MRPC”) recognize that our children and youth are entrusted to the care of adults who lead church programs and activities both on and off MRPC property and also in educational or recreational programs operated by others on MRPC property.

The Session, members and staff of MRPC are committed to maintaining an environment in which children and youth are protected from physical and sexual abuse, and in which church staff, teacher, and volunteer workers are protected from potential false allegations of abuse.

To achieve the goals of preventing either incidents of abuse or the unfounded assertion of such conduct, MRPC has developed appropriate procedures to be followed in the following areas:

- ◆ The screening and selection of workers involved in the supervision or custody of minors;
- ◆ Orientation and training of approved workers;
- ◆ Supervision of these workers by trained leadership;
- ◆ Reporting of and responding to any incident and/or allegation of the abuse of a minor.

This policy is intended to protect children and youth from abuse in church sponsored events. The general policy and procedures shall apply to all persons, whether compensated staff, teacher or volunteer, all church members, visitors, and guests. This policy does not constitute a contract between the church and its workers. As situations arise in the future which are not adequately covered by a specific procedure or policy, this policy may be revised by the Session of MRPC.

DEFINITIONS

MRPC: Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church.

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND/OR MINORS:

Any person under 18 years of age involved in programs provided at or sponsored by MRPC.

TEACHERS AND WORKERS: Any paid staff or volunteer who serves in a MRPC ministry to children. They agree to submit to the leadership and government of the church in their service.

CHILD ABUSE: Any wrongful treatment of a child which results in any non-accidental injury to the child, including physical, emotional, and/or sexual injury. Evidence of injury may include scars, bruises, wounds, medical findings, etc.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: Any teacher, worker or other person or caretaker who has or is involved with the care of a child who commits, permits or encourages the commission of any sexual act, touching, or contact, vaginal intercourse, other sexual gratification, the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child in such, or any other offense against public morality and decency, by, with, or upon a child, or who commits, permits or encourages any act of prostitution with or by a child.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- ❖ MRPC is subject to South Carolina law regarding the protection of children.
- ❖ MRPC will seek to prevent the abuse of children when they are participating in church programs. Preventive measures shall include screening, training and supervision of custodians of minors, including particularly teachers and workers as defined in this policy.
- ❖ It shall be the responsibility of the MRPC staff member accountable for any MRPC program that involves minors to ensure that appropriate practices are implemented within those programs and activities to reduce the risk of abuse. The specific circumstances of each program shall be considered in the development of those program-specific practices.
- ❖ Entities or other organizations that use MRPC facilities in any way that involves minors must agree to abide by this policy. Requests for any exceptions to this policy and provision will be considered only when presented in writing and approved in writing by the MRPC Session or its designee.

TRAINING

1. All teachers and workers will be provided a written or digital copy of this policy. They will be asked to read this policy when applying to serve with the children's ministry.
2. Information and instruction concerning this policy and related abuse issues involving children shall be offered periodically, and at least annually, at MRPC. The following goals will be addressed:
 - ◆ Protection of children in MRPC programs and activities;
 - ◆ Protection of providers from exposure to "high risk" situations and false accusations;
 - ◆ Awareness of the signs and symptoms of abuse;
 - ◆ Understanding of the reporting procedures and the procedures for responding to incidents/reasonably suspected incidents of abuse.
3. This information and instruction is required training for each new teacher and worker involved in the custody of children annually.
4. Training sessions to update and refresh regular teachers, volunteers, and workers shall be provided annually in conjunction with Child Protection Policy renewal requirements.

SCREENING

1. All teachers, volunteers and other persons involved in the custody and care of children at MRPC shall be a member of the church. Only MRPC members may serve as teachers.
 - a. Exceptions to this provision will be made only in cases where the MRPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry in question recommends and requests that an exception be made to their supervisor. Non-members must serve alongside a current MRPC member.
2. All new teachers and workers involved in the custody and care of children at MRPC shall complete a confidential Primary Screening Application that will ask for references and include personal questions concerning any history of child abuse. The application will be submitted to the MRPC staff person responsible for the ministry or their designee.
3. All compensated workers will be required to complete all screening processes prior to the first day of employment; volunteers will be screened prior to serving.
 - a. Initial DSS and SLED background checks (via on-line websites) and/or reference checks on teachers and workers will be made by or under the direction of the MRPC ministry staff member directly responsible.
 - b. Legal and criminal background screening will be conducted using an independent, fee-based service approved by the church insurance company; this screening process will be directed by the Director of Finance and Operations.
4. Application files for all teachers and workers shall be maintained by MRPC and shall include the Application and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on these forms.
5. The personnel files of all compensated MRPC staff working with children shall include the Application and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on these forms.
6. Confidentiality of the completed and signed forms utilized to implement this policy shall be maintained by limiting the access to these filed forms to the Executive Pastor, the Director of Finance & Operations, the MRPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry specific to the application and the Session or their designees.
7. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the family of MRPC. Individuals who have such a history should discuss their desire to work with children with a member of the MRPC ministry staff prior to applying for or engaging in any volunteer service involving children.
8. The Applications and information gained as a result of any reference check, background check or other related investigation of persons whose offer to serve is withdrawn or declined before serving will be destroyed.
9. Adults who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse are not permitted to serve in any church-sponsored activity or program involving children.
10. Teachers and workers who have not been screened will serve only in the presence of and under the supervision of a teacher or worker who has been screened and approved.
11. All teachers and workers will need to complete the application and screening process in order to serve children at MRPC.
12. All teachers and workers will be required to go through an annual renewal process for their CPP application. Additionally, the background check for all persons will be re-run every three years.

SUPERVISION

1. Teachers, workers and other persons involved in the custody and care of children at MRPC should observe the “two adult rule,” which requires an adult working with children to be accompanied by another adult worker. The “two adult rule” must be adhered to strictly in areas considered to be high isolation settings.
2. The “two adult rule” may include and allow for scenarios in which an adult teacher or worker is assisted by a youth worker who is older than the children being supervised, subject to approval by the MRPC staff member directly responsible for the ministry.
3. One-on-one supervision of a minor or any other exception to the “two adult rule” is acceptable ONLY in the event it occurs in a public area that is not considered to be a high isolation setting OR if parental permission is received in advance.
4. All rooms used by adults and minors together should be accessible and have open visibility (a window in the door or the door left wide open).
5. Only paid nursery staff may change diapers and assist kids in the bathroom for ages k3 and under. Changing tables are publicly visible and bathroom doors are to remain open at all times.
6. Compensated church staff or their designees shall make unannounced visits to all scheduled classes or small group situations involving children, youth, teachers and workers.
7. Parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity involving their child.
8. MRPC teachers and workers will not search children.
9. Physical force will not be used except in self-defense or when deemed necessary to prevent possible injury. Teachers and workers will work together to resolve any significant disruptive behavior situations. The appropriate Ministry Director will be consulted when addressing behavioral issues; parents will be informed about their child’s behavior on a timely basis.
10. Whenever possible, all planned children’s and youth activities away from church property will require a signed permission statement, including any appropriate medical authorizations, from parents or guardians of the children participating.
11. All teachers or workers for any overnight church activity involving minors must be approved in advance by the MRPC pastoral or program staff responsible for that program.
12. The parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that the child is not left alone in an unsupervised area.
13. Pick up of children up to and including 4th grade shall be by the parent, guardian, or family member 15 years old or above unless written, signed notification is provided for other arrangements.

YOUTH WORKERS in KIDS MINISTRY

1. High School students may volunteer to serve at any time.
2. Middle School students may apply to volunteer without their parents present:
 - a. 7th & 8th grade students can apply in July/August
 - b. 6th grade students can apply in December/January
3. 5th grade students and those who have not applied to serve may serve in the same setting as one of their parents.
 - a. Exception for VBS: 5th grade students may serve at VBS with a parent on campus.

(Must be age 16 or older to serve in Crib rooms)

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE

Incidents Involving Minors:

1. MRPC will follow and comply with current South Carolina laws concerning mandatory reporting of child abuse as prescribed by the South Carolina legislature Title 63 – South Carolina Children’s Code <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/title63.php>

For additional guidance, see the Mandated Reporter Guide located at https://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/law/centers/childrens_law/docs_general/mr_guide_9.1.19.pdf

2. The identity of any person making such a report will, pursuant to South Carolina law, be kept confidential by the agency or department receiving the report, except as provided by law. Such exceptions would include the DSS providing such information to the law enforcement agency investigating the report.
3. Incident of abuse that occurs or are reasonably believed to have occurred at MRPC, and where a child’s physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected, shall be reported as soon as possible to the county Department of Social Services (DSS) and/or to a local law enforcement agency. Any such incident must also be reported to the MRPC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry who, in turn, will inform the pastoral staff. The staff person and/or pastoral staff member shall make a report or verify that a report has been made to appropriate authorities.
4. Reports to local authorities can be made orally, by telephone, or otherwise. Reports from persons requesting to remain anonymous shall be made by telephone in the presence of a witness of the reporter’s own choosing to verify the filing of the oral report. Such a witness may include the MRPC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved.
5. Organizations that use MRPC facilities that have reporting procedures of their own shall follow those established reporting practices. In addition to following their notification procedures, however, any outside organization that uses MRPC facilities shall also notify the MRPC Executive Pastor or designee as soon as possible about any such incident involving any person affiliated with that organization using MRPC facilities.

PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO QUESTIONABLE CONDUCT

Incidents Involving Minors:

1. All members of MRPC, staff and other adults participating in programs on the property of MRPC are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse of children and youth. They shall be encouraged not to hesitate to caution others that activities they observe are, or may appear to be, questionable.
2. *Questionable* behavior when observed shall be reported to the MRPC staff person directly responsible for the specific area of ministry involved, as such conduct can *precede* abuse, even though the observed act itself is not.

PROCEDURE FOR RESPONDING TO ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

Incidents Involving Minors:

1. Facts and circumstances of an incident shall be documented. Concurrently with the notification to the DSS (refer to "Reporting Procedures"), the MRPC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved or the pastoral staff member shall be notified of the incident of abuse. In the event the person making the report wishes to remain anonymous or otherwise prefers not to document the report, the MRPC staff person or pastoral staff notified of the incident shall document the report.
2. The Executive Pastor or designee shall be responsible for securing the safety of the potential victim in cases where DSS is not responsible for the potential victim, for immediate notification of parents/guardian of the potential victim, and for notification of the person accused of the abuse. The safety of the potential victim must be safeguarded *before* contacting the person(s) accused of abuse.
3. In the event any in-depth investigation becomes necessary, it shall be carried out by DSS and/or appropriate law enforcement personnel and not by church personnel.
4. . Persons accused shall be immediately relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with minors until any investigation is completed and the allegations are cleared *or* charges are formally brought against the accused. If charges are made, the Session or its designee shall consult with the accused regarding future responsibilities.
5. The Executive Pastor or his designee shall report incidents of abuse to legal counsel for the church, the liability insurer for the church and the Session or its designee to receive and address any such reports.
6. The Executive Pastor or his designee shall assure appropriate action is taken to document all steps taken in the course of handling the incident or report. The documentation shall be kept in a confidential file maintained by MRPC.
7. All parties involved in the incident or reasonably suspected incident, including the accuser, the accused, and the victim, shall be treated with dignity, support, and love. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible.
8. The Senior Pastor shall be the sole spokesperson for the church in so far as media inquiries are concerned. However, where appropriate the Senior Pastor and Session may designate another individual to act in such a capacity with regard to a given case. The Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible.