



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Children & Youth Protection Policy

Approved by GSLC Congregational Council on May 10, 2011

Personnel Policies Manual Section 2.06 – Children & Youth Protection

INTRODUCTION

Christians believe that God created humankind to be in relationship with one another. From the beginning God declared that it was “not good that the human should be alone.” The relationship between people that we are told of in Genesis is based on the gift that God gives us in each other. This gift of relationship is a powerful blessing that we as Christians understand comes from God.

As people who believe in the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ, we are not able to love or even know our neighbor from a distance. The Gospel tells us that God came to earth to know, live with, love, forgive, and restore humanity. In other words, God came to live in close proximity with creation and to be in loving relationship with humanity. Thus, we as Christians desire to reflect that good news by engaging in personal interaction with each other.

In our Baptisms we were *sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*. Our Baptisms were a promise from God that, no matter the circumstance of our lives, God would continue to be in relationship with us. Thus, we have an everlasting bond with the Holy Spirit that nourishes our faith. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to guide our telling of the Gospel and our Christian ministry.

The proclamation of God’s relationship with us is one of the chief joys of our discipleship in Christ. Reflecting our relationship with God through our fellowship, ministry, and life is our calling as Christians. Our ministry should reflect our belief in a God who is committed to a grace-centered, intimate relationship with all of creation. Thus, Christian ministry contains a degree of nearness and affection in our relationships with those whom we share our church experience.

However, like all aspects of human life, our relationships are affected by sin. This policy is not meant to undermine the importance of personal interaction in ministry, but rather to acknowledge the reality of our world. This policy articulates safe and healthy ways for Christian disciples to live in community together and fully demonstrate the compassion they, the church, and God possess for children and youth. It has been adopted by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church to help create a safe environment for children, youth, and for those who minister to them, so that all may experience the love of God and true Christian fellowship.

PURPOSE

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for ministry to children, youth, adults, volunteers, members, visitors and paid staff.
2. Assist Good Shepherd Lutheran Church to evaluate a person’s suitability for ministry with children and youth.
3. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.
4. Provide a procedure to respond to allegations of abuse.

SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH

Qualifications to become a staff member or volunteer working with children and youth include:

- 1) being a member or associate member of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in good standing for at least 6 months, adhering to the doctrines and principles of the church; this does not apply to staff. For people who have been actively involved in the congregation for at least 6 months prior to becoming members, rostered staff may use discretion in waiving this requirement.
- 2) be at least 18 years of age;
- 3) completion of the Children & Youth Protection Training class;
- 4) successful completion of a criminal background check conducted by Good Shepherd;
- 5) receipt of two personal references which are subject to review by at least two rostered staff (CYP 4) ;
- 6) receipt of completed Volunteer Application (CYP 2);
- 7) receipt of signed Participation Covenant for Volunteers (CYP 5)

If detrimental information is uncovered for a potential volunteer in either the references, the application, or the background check, the rostered staff may choose to discuss this with the volunteer applicant. If a decision is made to allow the applicant to volunteer with children and youth, the reasons for overriding the detrimental information should be documented.

Criminal background checks will be performed by Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. Background checks should be updated every three years. A search of the Georgia Sexual Offender Registry will be conducted annually.

Personal references will only be accepted using CYP 4 and must be sent directly from the person providing the reference to the rostered staff. They should not be provided to the volunteer applicant to give to the rostered staff. Phone interviews between a rostered staff member and a person providing a reference can be used if documented on CYP 4.

In the event that changes are made to the Children and Youth Protection Policy, such changes will be provided to all staff and volunteers. Their understanding of such changes should be documented with updated Participant Covenant signatures.

Information obtained through the screening and application process outlined above will be kept confidential, unless otherwise required by law. All information gathered and obtained through this process will be kept in a secure and restricted location.

SAFE SUPERVISION PRACTICES

Unless a documented extenuating circumstance exists, Good Shepherd:

1. Will follow the Two-Adult Rule. This means that there must always be two eligible adults, one of which is at least 21 years of age, present and supervising the congregational activities of children and youth. Eligible adults include those who have successfully completed the screening and application process outlined above. Only in extenuating circumstances can the two eligible adults be immediate family members. This would require the consent of a rostered staff member on a situational basis. The exception to this is when transporting children and youth in vehicles (see Safe Driving Procedures section below).
2. Will encourage the use of a "buddy system" whenever children and youth go on trips.

3. When possible, all events should strive for the recommended adult-to-child ratios of 1:8 for middle school and senior high youth and 1:7 for younger ages.
4. Will require and enforce the Open Door Rule for activities on and off church property. This means that doors without windows must always be left slightly ajar when conducting children's or youth programs, and that doors must be left open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily.
5. Will enforce the Five Year Difference Rule when making supervision assignments. This means that any staff member or volunteer must be at least five years older than the children or youth they are directly supervising.
6. Will release minors in the 5th grade and younger only to the parent or guardian (or other appropriately-designated adult) and utilize sign-in and sign-out sheets.
7. Will obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment permission form and emergency contacts, prior to taking children and youth on any trips. Good Shepherd will provide prior notification about each trip.
8. Will keep bathroom doors open and lights on for all activities for young children when appropriate. When possible, escorts of the same sex should accompany young children to the bathroom and wait for them outside.
9. Will inform middle school and senior high youth of the Children & Youth Protection Policy, highlighting the Two-Adult Rule, the Open Door Rule, the need for written parental permission for off-campus trips, and other specifics of the policy as necessary to encourage compliance and understanding of policy.

SAFE DRIVING PROCEDURES

1. Though every effort should be made to secure two eligible adults when transporting children, Good Shepherd recognizes that this is not always possible. When only one adult is present in a vehicle, the front passenger seat can be occupied only by those who meet minimum height and weight requirements. If the front passenger seat must be occupied by a youth, consideration should be given so that there is an appropriate balance of power in the seating arrangement. A child or youth should never be alone in a vehicle with one adult, unless that adult is the child or youth's parent. *When going on trips or outings with multiple vehicles, every attempt should be made for vehicles to "caravan" for accountability purposes.* Caravans should not be larger than two or three vehicles. Where more vehicles are present, multiple small caravans are preferable. Stops should be made together by all vehicles traveling and drivers are required to keep each other informed if issues arise that necessitate a change in route or other travel plans. Youth are not allowed to drive other youth to or from any church-related activity. However, youth may drive themselves to church-related activities.
2. Youth can drive themselves to and from Good Shepherd for youth events held at Good Shepherd. In the event that an activity requires traveling from Good Shepherd to another location, youth must ride in vehicles driven by designated adults. If a parent provides written and signed documentation that his/her child must leave the event early, and therefore needs to drive separately, youth will be allowed to drive themselves only to and from that location.
3. Adult chaperones must be at least 21 years of age to drive youth to and from events.

4. Prior to any activities in which youth must be transported, the event leader will remind drivers to obey all traffic laws and safe driving procedures. Event leaders must also provide all drivers with phone numbers of the leader and other adult chaperones, as well as directions and an address, if necessary.
5. Adults who receive moving violations while traveling to or from a youth event must make contact with a member of the rostered staff within 24 hours of receiving the violation. This may result in possible restrictions on future driving.

PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS SPONSORED BY OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

When youth, children or adults of Good Shepherd elect to participate in youth or children events sponsored by other organizations such as the ELCA-Southeastern Synod which requires the signature of a congregational representative or a pastor/rostered leader, their parents or the participating adult will sign a waiver (CYP 11), to be on file at Good Shepherd and a copy affixed to the application, acknowledging that the event and that the policies, guidelines or covenants of the sponsoring organization are applicable and that Good Shepherd congregation is released from any liability.

It will be the responsibility of the parent or participating adult to identify the guidelines, covenants or policies of the sponsoring organization pertaining to the event and determine their acceptability. The ministry staff of Good Shepherd is available to assist in that identification and determination. Parents and participating adults are encouraged to be particularly aware of screening procedures and training for adult leaders of the event as well as supervision principles for the event.

BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES FOR GOOD SHEPHERD STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

1. Do not provide anything prohibited by law to minors.
2. For overnight co-educational events or activities, male children and youth will be supervised by male chaperones and female children and youth will be supervised by female chaperones.
3. Speaking to a minor in a one-on-one situation should be done in public settings where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other people. In cases of pastoral care in which a rostered person receives a request to speak one-on-one with a minor, the rostered person may meet with that minor in an office which has a windowed door. The rostered person should make another rostered person aware that the meeting is to take place. A second eligible adult must be apparently present outside of the meeting space. When deemed appropriate by the rostered person conducting the meeting, parental permission prior to the meeting can be sought and documented.
4. Adults and youth must use separate shower facilities when available. When not available, there must be separate adult and youth shower times.
5. The following different types of abuse are strictly prohibited:
 - a. **Physical abuse** which is defined as non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.
 - b. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult** which is defined as any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and an adult. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth and any *act as defined by Georgia Law*.

- c. **Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth** which is defined as any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires or any of the children or youth.
 - d. **Emotional abuse** is defined as mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
 - e. **Neglect** which is defined as the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.
 - f. **Economic exploitation** which is defined as the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth's belongings or money.
6. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate love and care for children and youth while simultaneously maintaining safe boundaries.
- a. **The following are positive and appropriate forms of affection:**
 - 1. brief "sideways" hugs
 - 2. pats on the shoulder or back
 - 3. handshakes
 - 4. "high fives" and hand slapping
 - 5. verbal praise
 - 6. holding hands while walking with young children
 - 7. sitting beside small children
 - 8. kneeling or bending down for hugs with young children
 - 9. voluntary hand-holding during prayer
 - 10. pats on the head when culturally appropriate
 - b. **The following are considered inappropriate forms of affection and are prohibited:**
 - 1. lengthy embraces and/or embraces which are "front-to-front" body contact
 - 2. kisses on the mouth
 - 3. holding children over three years old on the lap
 - 4. touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
 - 5. any show of affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas, empty classrooms or other rooms which are isolated from other people
 - 6. occupying a bed with a child or youth (other than a volunteer or staff with his/her own child)
 - 7. touching knees or legs of children or youth (except in the case of first aid administration)
 - 8. wrestling with children or youth
 - 9. tickling children or youth
 - 10. piggyback rides
 - 11. any type of massage by either a child, youth or adult
 - 12. any form or unwanted affection
 - 13. comments or compliments (spoken, written or electronic) that relate to physique or to body development
 - 14. snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
 - 15. giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
 - 16. private meals with individual children or youth

SEXUAL OFFENDERS AT GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

Though God's grace is freely given to all of God's children, those determined to be sexual offenders will not be permitted to join Good Shepherd congregation should they express an interest in doing so. Because our insurance carrier's recommended guidelines for allowing those determined to be sexual offenders to become congregation members would place an undue burden on the congregation and would require that the identity of the offender be disclosed to the congregation, we recognize that our welcome of these persons would be rendered less than full and complete. We would, in good faith, try to identify other worship environments that could fully welcome their presence.

ANNUAL TRAINING OF & NOTIFICATION TO VOLUNTEERS

1. Annually, each volunteer that works with children and youth will be asked to sign a covenant agreement which states that he or she has reviewed the Children & Youth Protection Policy.
2. Good Shepherd has a responsibility to notify, in writing, all volunteers who are eligible to volunteer with children and youth of any changes made to the Children & Youth Protection Policy. This information will also be posted to the web site and any other places that the policy is available.
3. Basic first aid and safety training will be offered annually to volunteers.
4. Sunday School Orientation and training will be provided annually for Sunday School teachers.
5. Other training will be made available for volunteers as deemed necessary.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Good Shepherd will respond promptly to initiate an investigation of any accusation of sexual, physical, verbal or other type of abuse. A Confidential Notice of Concern (CYP 7) form should be completed immediately by the complainant and/or the rostered person to whom the accusation is presented. All accusations will be treated as serious matters. Appropriate pastoral support will be provided to both those making the allegation as well as the accused.

1. All staff and volunteers are obligated to report any known incident of any type of abuse involving an adult(s) and a minor(s), or between a minor and another minor(s), or between adults that occurred during a Good Shepherd Church sponsored activity, either on Church property or off-site.
2. Staff Members and volunteers are expected to report alleged violations of prohibited behaviors to either the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, or the Associate in Ministry as soon as possible or prior to the conclusion of the event in which an allegation has been made. All reports are to be made no later than within 24 hours of the occurrence. A verbal report is to be accompanied by a Confidential Notice of Concern (CYP 7). The Senior Pastor will then report, if appropriate, to the President of the Congregation Council. All facts and allegations are to be documented in writing.
3. The Senior Pastor will report all alleged violations of sexual or physical abuse to the Southeastern Synod office of the ELCA. Any report made to local DFACS offices will be reported to the Southeastern Synod Office.
4. Volunteers alleged to be involved in serious incidents of inappropriate behavior will be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is complete.
5. Any allegations of sexual misconduct on the part of a rostered leader in the ELCA are to be reported immediately to the Bishop of the Southeastern Synod or a member of the Leadership Sexual Abuse Prevention (LSAP) Team either by the complainant or by the Congregation Council President. The

investigation of allegations of sexual misconduct by a rostered person falls under the jurisdiction of the Southeastern Synod and is conducted according to the *ELCA -Southeastern Synod Policies and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Sexual Misconduct in the Church By ELCA Rostered Persons*. This can be accessed at www.elca-ses.org/Downloads/LSAP-Policies.pdf.

6. In Georgia, church staff members are not legally mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect in the home; however, in providing protection to children it may become necessary to make an official report. If child abuse or neglect in the home of a child involved in a program of this congregation is suspected by any staff member or volunteer, the concerns should be documented in writing with as much detail as possible using the Confidential Notice of Concern (CYP 7), and at least one of the following should be notified immediately: the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Associate in Ministry or Congregation Council President. These positions are considered “designated reporters” for incidents of suspected or alleged abuse. As designated reporters they have the responsibility to initiate the following process. If, in the opinion of at least three of the persons listed above, a child is in obvious, immediate danger the police should be called. If, in the opinion of at least three of the persons listed above, there are enough written observations in a file to strongly suggest neglect, a contact should be made with the Division of Family and Children Services (DFACS). If suspected family members are members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and if, in the opinion of at least three of the persons listed above, there is merit in discussing the concerns with the suspected family members prior to calling DFACS, two of the four persons listed above may meet with the family members on church property for such a discussion. Names of persons making allegations must be kept confidential in these discussions. The Senior Pastor or designate will act as spokesperson on behalf of Good Shepherd to convey information, as necessary, to the congregation, the media, and in response to any other public inquiry.

[DFACS guidelines for reporting state: *People who call to report suspected abuse do not have to be sure maltreatment has occurred. They simply report what they have seen or heard. The authorities will investigate and confirm whether or not abuse has occurred. People who call are asked to give the name and location of the child and the name of the suspected perpetrator. Reports are confidential and those who call do not have to give their name. However, it is most helpful to the child in the long run if the reporter is willing to give his or her name and address and, if necessary, testify in court.*]