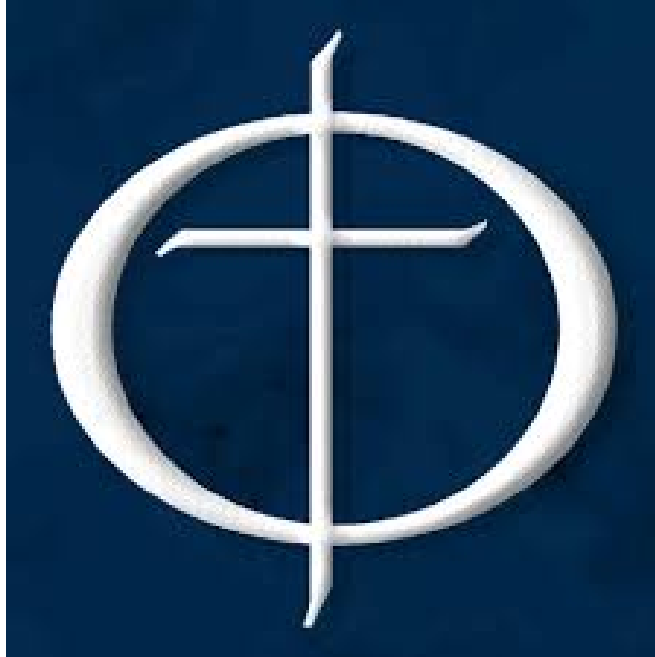




Zion PCA

Minor and

Vulnerable Adult

Protection Policy

(updated 02/13/25)

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Minor and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

(Updated 2/13/25)

Biblical Foundation

Made in the Image of God (Genesis 1.26-27) All peoples, young or old, rich or poor, upper class or lower class, are all made in the image of God and are deserving to be treated with dignity.

God is light (1 John 1.5-10) and in him is no darkness. If we claim we have fellowship with God, we are to walk in the light as he is in the light. His light will also reveal all darkness and sins that we try to cover.

God Loves Children (Mark 10.13-14) God takes delight in children because they are made in his image and Jesus welcomes them into his kingdom.

God Hears the Prayers of the Abused (Exodus 22.21-24, Psalm 10.17-18; Romans 8.26) God hears the prayers, groanings, and complaints of the children who have been abused.

Authority and Power are given to serve (Matthew 18.5-6, Mark 10.43-45) Power and authority are given for the service of others. They are not to be used to abuse those who are weaker or under that authority. God shall judge those who use their power to abuse the weak.

Speak for the silent (Proverbs 31.8-9, Ex 22.21-24, Leviticus 19.13-15, James 1.27) We are to speak for those who have no voice and fight for them. We are to ensure that everyone is treated justly and rightly. Children who have been abused have the smallest voice and we must speak up for them.

God is a God of justice and equity (Proverbs 11.1, Deuteronomy 15.18-20) God loves justice and hates a false balance. We are not to show partiality towards the adult (accused) or the child (abused) but long for justice to be carried out.

We are all sinners (1 John 1.8-10) Everyone is a sinner; there is therefore no sin beyond any person's potential to commit. (Nor is there any sin outside of God's grace). Everyone may be a potential abuser and we all must be accountable to one another and to God.

God is the final Judge and Healer (Revelation 20.11-16; 21.1-6) In the end we trust that God will bring final judgment and justice. On this side of glory, justice may not be fully carried out; so we await the day when Christ will come and judge the nations. Not only will Christ bring final judgment, but he will make all things new, he will wipe away all of our tears, and death shall be no more. "Come Lord Jesus come."

Core Beliefs

- We believe in promoting healthy relationships between adults and children.
- We believe that protecting children and providing an environment where they can flourish is an adult's responsibility.

- We believe in preventing and responding to abuse with training and accountability.
- We believe in justice, fairness and impartiality.

Guiding Principles

The following principles guide our child protection plan. They flow from the biblical foundation and our core beliefs:

An intergenerational church is God's covenant plan: Zion Church highly values the role that loving, godly adults have in discipling and nurturing children and how children bless adults in the church. Our congregation vows, at a covenant child's baptism, to "undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child." (PCA BCO 56-5)

Protecting children honors Christ: Jesus holds Zion Church accountable for protecting our children, and calls us to follow his lead in loving children. Good policies, procedures, systems, and structures facilitate mutual accountability as we submit to Christ.

We must proactively work to protect children: Preventing and responding to child abuse takes a heavy investment of time, money, and resources. However, the spiritual, emotional, physical, and financial toll of child abuse is far greater if passively allowed.

Up-to-date child protection is in everyone's best interest: Churches that practice good child protection procedures protect children as well as adults who serve children because training and accountability will build trust among parents, volunteers, and church staff.

Child protection requires humility: As Christians, we confess our spiritual brokenness and sin, and therefore we must all humbly submit to boundaries established around children. Moreover, those who have committed child sexual abuse and other crimes against children will not be allowed to serve with children.

The church is a place for sinners: We want to be a church that is safe for hurting, broken people to come and find grace, hope, and healing. Prioritizing child protection creates an environment of humility and accountability where such healing can take place.

First-rate protection: Because any setting where children are present may be sought out by those wishing to harm them, we aspire to be a place where parents walk in and sense that their children will be loved and safe. We also want to conform to the most up-to-date laws and research about child abuse and abuse prevention. In this way, Zion Church can be known as the safest place in our city for children.

Justice requires impartiality: It is very easy to side with the accused or the one who has been allegedly harmed. We must be cautious and aware of our own partiality so that justice may be done.

Protecting every child: Zion Church's *Child Protection Policy* applies to any child, eighteen and under, at any Zion Church activities.

Prayer: We must pray because we need the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom, discernment, and courage

Key Commitments

- We have a zero-tolerance policy for child abuse.
- We report child sexual abuse to the civil authorities.
- All employees and volunteers will be screened according to the *Child Protection Procedures* of Zion Church.
- We do not employ anyone who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
- We do not allow anyone to volunteer who has been convicted of or confessed to sexually abusing a child.
- Any employee or volunteer accused of sexually abusing a child will be immediately suspended from serving children, and we will do our best to ensure they have no access to children in our church or in the community until we have clarity on the situation.
- Any employee or volunteer who does not abide by or help enforce our *Child Protection Procedures* and our *Code of Conduct* will not be allowed to work with children or youth.

Child Protection Code of Conduct

Purpose

As image bearers of God and as God's People, we are called to treat everyone with the respect and dignity that is due them. As adults, it is our responsibility to ensure that children are safe and treated with dignity by abiding by the following *Code of Conduct*.

Accountability

Every activity is interruptible and we are all accountable to one another. All employees and volunteers (both youth and adult) at Zion are subject to the *Code of Conduct*.

Visibility

As much as possible, ministry with children and youth should occur in highly visible areas. Observability is a key factor in minimizing the risk of child abuse. This means utilizing open spaces, classrooms with big windows, and avoiding isolated areas.

Restricting One Volunteer-One Child Situations

Most abuse happens in isolated, one-on-one situations—i.e. one adult or youth volunteer with one child. A primary objective of this *Code of Conduct* is to eliminate as many of these situations as

possible. This does not mean there cannot be any private conversation between an adult and a child. However, these conversations need to take place in an open and observable area to the greatest extent possible. If ministry objectives or child safety cannot be accomplished apart from an isolated one-on-one environment, the adult/youth volunteer is compelled to make every effort to inform appropriate adults of the situation and the plan and timeframe for returning the child to a group or home environment. Volunteers working with minors need to avoid isolated areas and be within sight of other adults at all times.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Touch

(Used with permission by ECLA Diocese of Atlanta)

Appropriate Touch

God created us as physical beings, and physical touch is an aspect of relating, serving, and loving one another. At the same time, all touch should be appropriate and should respect the dignity of all parties. Adults or older children showing physical affection to a child must do so only in the presence of other adults. If a child or witnessing parties are uncomfortable by the physical contact, then the adult should cease the physical touch. At no time should a child, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals, or buttocks. Children 5 years or older should never sit on the lap of an adult or youth volunteer during a ministry program. (See addendum on appropriate and inappropriate touch).

Adults shall monitor each other, youth, and older children regarding physical contact with children, help each other follow these guidelines, and point out anything that could be misinterpreted. Any sexually abusive or suggestive touch must be reported to the authorities and the session.

Examples of appropriate touch include, but is not limited to:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- "High-fives" and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

Examples of inappropriate touch include, but is not limited to:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kissing a child or student on the mouth, cheek, neck, etc.
- Holding children over five years old on the lap

- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas, or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed in any context with a child or youth
- Tickling children over 5
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Sexually explicit comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to the physique or body development of a child or youth.
- Snapping bras or giving “wedgies” or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing

Parental Involvement

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Along with other adults, parents have a key role in keeping their children safe. The involvement of watchful parents leads to a safe environment for all children. Parents are encouraged to be educated in our *Child Protection Policy, Procedures, and Code of Conduct*, and help with their enforcement.

Discipline

The authority of the church is spiritual in nature, therefore any form of discipline given by the church is to be corrective only and not punitive. If correction or admonishment is necessary then it should always be given in love and not in anger. Never administer physical punishment on a child. That is to be left to a parent's judgment. Furthermore, discipline should never include yelling, shaming, or in any way belittling a child. If a child is not responding to the discipline, then the child should be taken to his/her parents for further action. If a parent is not on the premises, see the on-site Ministry Leader or Overseer for further instruction.

Appropriate Discipline: (The following section is used with permission from Capitol Hill Baptist Church)

- All volunteers and staff are responsible for providing a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which children can learn, play, and interact with others. This atmosphere should be maintained by preparing beforehand, proactively directing children towards acceptable activities, verbally encouraging positive behavior, and, when necessary, correcting or redirecting inappropriate behavior.
- Acceptable means of redirecting inappropriate behavior may include: Correcting the child verbally, withholding a certain privilege or activity for a brief time, or separating a child from the situation or problem for a brief time (particularly if his behavior is endangering or upsetting other children). During correction, a child should never be removed from the classroom. Correction should be discrete; in the classroom (not in the hallway); and never outside of the sight of others.
- Steps of correction might include (depending on the age of the child): (1) removing the child

from the situation or problem; (2) pointing out the problematic behavior; talking to the child about his/her sin and need for Christ; (3) praying for the child and redirecting to a new activity; (4) helping the child to reconcile with the offended children when appropriate. Volunteers should view misbehavior as an opportunity to speak about the Gospel and the grace of Christ to the child.

- When a child's behavior escalates to the level of being removed from the classroom, volunteers are to contact the security team member assigned to the children's area and/or the director of children's ministry. They will remove the child and contact the parent(s). Anytime a child is removed from the classroom/event, an incident report is to be filled out and given to the Executive pastor and a copy to the parent(s).
- Volunteers and staff are strictly prohibited from using any form of corporal punishment such as slapping, kicking, punching, spanking, or hitting. They should never speak harsh words, insults, belittling comments, threatening words, or any other verbal humiliation to children.
- If a child's behavior is uncontrollable or the child does not respond to the acceptable means of discipline indicated above, volunteers or staff should contact the child's parents. If the child assaults, harasses, or bullies other children, misbehaves beyond minor correction, or has a pattern of misbehavior, the parents should be immediately called so the child can be removed.
- Volunteers or staff are allowed to physically restrain a child ONLY if he/she is physically endangering other children. Please report any of these problems (as well as the appropriate response taken to deal with the behavior) to the proper ministry coordinator and the Director of Youth and Family Ministries.
- Once a child is removed, reinstatement is possible at the determination of the pastor/director who oversees children's ministry and the session. A child may be reinstated if the risk of re-offense has been adequately reduced.

Diapering

Small children are extremely vulnerable. We must ensure there is good visibility and adequate staff and volunteers to supervise the nursery. When changing diapers, inform another nursery worker and change the diaper quickly and with respect for the child. Diapers should only be changed in designated observable areas where there are at least 2 approved volunteers. Diapers must be changed by female volunteers.

Bathroom Assistance

No adult or youth should take a child to the bathroom alone.

As a general rule, if a child needs to use the restroom, take a 'bathroom break' and include the whole group whenever possible. Follow these guidelines: ensure the bathroom is safe to enter and prop the door(s) open, if not already propped. Encourage the children to go on their own. If children need assistance, allow for accountability while respecting the privacy of the child(ren) as much as possible.

- **For preschool (Ages 3-5)** When the entire class bathroom break is not possible and on days when the toddler nursery is staffed, you may take 2-3 kids to the toddler nursery restroom,

which minimizes the need for assistance, as the toilet is shorter and easier to use for younger children and observability is built in.

- **For lower elementary children (K-3rd Grade)** When the entire class bathroom break is not possible, take a group (do not send them alone). The door should be left ajar and the adult should wait outside the door. Adults should only enter if the child asks for assistance. Generally, stay in the hallway or stand in the bathroom door--not in the stall. If an adult must assist a child in the stall, when possible, notify the stationed security volunteer.
- **For upper elementary children (4th/5th Grade)** When the entire class bathroom break is not possible, the children should be sent to the bathroom in groups, never alone. The door should be left ajar and the adult should wait outside the door.

Special Events

When special one-time events occur in the church, two approved adults must be present and have direct oversight of the children and youth. If paid babysitters are hired to watch the children, they must be vetted according to this policy and approved by the Executive Pastor. Other volunteers who have not yet been through the screening process may assist with the children and youth under supervision of an approved adult. Those deemed “ineligible” are excluded. Volunteers who have not been fully approved may **not** have positions of authority or responsibility over the children and youth. They should never remove any child or youth from the presence of the approved volunteers.

Technology

Any employee or volunteer working with children or youth is responsible to ensure that any technology is used appropriately. All pornography, and any other sexually explicit or suggestive content is strictly prohibited. Adult volunteers and leaders must not communicate with minors via social media including but not limited to Messenger, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. These forms of communication are easier to conceal and are not acceptable or appropriate for adults to communicate to minors through since this is not an open and observable relationship. Any sexual conversation between an adult and a child over electronic media is abusive and is strictly prohibited.

Youth Ministry Addendum

Knowing that youth ministry requires specific policies that do not pertain to younger children, this addendum is added to the policy for the specific protection of minor

students from 6th to 12th-grade. Everything in the above policy applies to the youth ministry addendum.

Volunteer Requirements: Adults working with youth/vulnerable adults MUST be at least 19 years old and at least 5 years older than the youth with whom they work.

High school youth involved in middle school or elementary small group leadership roles must be at least 3 grades older than the students in their group (10th graders can lead 6th graders, etc. But must be done under adult supervision).

Volunteers must go through the volunteer process as outlined in Zion's Minor and vulnerable adult Protection Policy

Communication: Volunteers, staff, and leaders may communicate with students in the following manner:

- Text messages
- Phone calls
- Emails

Volunteers, staff, and leaders should not communicate with students via social media apps that automatically delete or make it easy to hide conversations from parents such as, but not limited to, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Instagram Messenger, etc.

Youth workers may follow and be followed by students on social media with the knowledge that what they post is a reflection of Christ and His Church.

Driving Students: In youth ministry, it is common for students to need a ride to and from events. Adults approved by both the youth pastor and executive pastor may drive groups of students to official youth events if they have written parental permission (email or text included). The decision regarding students driving other students to and from youth group events is left to the discretion of the parents.

Rules for Communication

- The content of any electronic communications should be readily available to share with the student's family.
- Texting is only allowed between staff/volunteers and youth with the following caveats. Texting communication is only allowed during the hours of 7 a.m. to 9

p.m. unless there is an emergency. Text messages with groups are encouraged rather than individual messaging. If a staff/adult volunteer receives a one-on-one text from a youth, the staff/adult volunteer is to follow the “3 text rule.” This means the staff/adult volunteer may respond three times, and then another staff/volunteer, parent, or student must be added to the messaging stream, OR the text conversation should be ended.

- Any parent/guardian may request in writing that their youth should not be contacted by staff/volunteers through any electronic communication or that photographs or videography may not be posted on ministry associated websites. Their wishes must be followed.

Overnight events: At any Zion youth group overnight event the following procedures must be followed:

Before the event:

- All official overnight events must be approved by the executive pastor and reported to the session at least 1 month in advance by the youth staff.
- The church must communicate the following information to those going on the trip: cost; deadline to submit registration fees; and all details regarding the trip.
- Prior to the trip, any youth leaving early or arriving late must have written parental consent and approval by the youth staff.
- All relevant information will be given to each youth and his/her parent/guardian including: trip departure, return, relevant phone numbers, plus any other pertinent details.
- All forms must be submitted to the leader prior to departure including a code of conduct and expectations for students.
- All volunteers must be members of Zion PCA and vetted and approved via the protection policy.

During the event:

- Students and volunteers of the opposite sex must be in separate living spaces (with different floors of a building being preferred).
- At no time may youth or adult leaders enter the sleeping area or bathroom area of the opposite sex.
- Common areas for youth to congregate will be established by the youth workers and the staff on the trip and will be supervised by adults at all times.
- Two youths will not be allowed in a closed area by themselves.
- Designated adults will inspect the sleeping area at the beginning and end of a trip for lost items.

- Youth may not leave designated areas after curfew. These areas will be established by the staff and communicated to all attendees.
- Rooms should be assigned for maximum supervision by leadership.
- Two-adult rule to be followed. Individuals must have their own bed; exceptions may be approved with siblings sharing a bed with parental approval. On retreats, 1 adult/8 youth is the desired ratio.
- Appropriate modest sleeping attire must be worn – both tops and bottoms.

Minor and Vulnerable Adults Procedures

(Updated 02/13/25)

Introduction

Jesus places a heavy responsibility on those who are to care and shepherd children. (“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” Mt 18.5-6) God is a God who cares and hears the cries of the most vulnerable (Dt 10.17-19; Ps 9.69; Ps 10.17-18; Lev 19.13-15). Children are among the most vulnerable people in the church, and God charges his people to care for and protect the most vulnerable.

We are committed to promoting a safe environment for all children, youth volunteers, and adults at Zion Church. Working toward this goal, we believe in promoting healthy relationships between adults and children. We will not tolerate any form of abusive behavior-verbal, emotional, physical or sexual. The responsibility for promoting a safe environment for the protection of the children rests on all adults at Zion Church. We have committed to the following procedures as we seek to prevent and respond to abuse with sound training and appropriate accountability.

Definitions for Eligibility, Screening & Training

Eligible – Any person who meets our Eligibility Requirements below. An Eligible person may ask to be screened and trained, in the hopes of receiving Approved status, which allows them to serve within Children’s & Youth Ministries at Zion Church.

Exception – Any person who wishes to apply to volunteer, but who does not meet our regular Eligibility Requirements.

Ineligible – A person who does not meet our Eligibility Requirements or a person who has been determined by the Session to be unqualified to work with children and youth based on the information obtained in the screening process or through other means.

Approved – Status of a person whom the Session has approved to work with children and youth based on the successful completion of the screening and training process*

Member – A person who has taken the Welcome Class, been interviewed and approved for membership by members of the Session, and who has taken vows before God to support the church in its worship and work.

Youth (in a volunteer capacity) – Anyone aged 12-18.

** If a person leaves the area or the church for a period of six months or more, the screening process will be repeated before the person is eligible to work with the children again.*

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Eligibility for Service

Who may serve within Children's and Youth Ministries at Zion PCA.

1) Adult (19+) Zion PCA Church members or regular attenders (for at least 6 months), 2) Youth (12-18), children of Zion member(s), or a child of a local PCA church member. 3) Children of Zion members, who are under the age of 12 years, may serve alongside their parents

with approval from the corresponding Ministry Overseer (i.e. Nursery Coordinator, VBS Coordinator.) If you do not meet these requirements, turn to the Eligibility for Policy Exceptions, page 10.

Screening For Adults

Background Check. All adults who work/volunteer with children, staff, and church officers will submit the necessary information for a national, criminal background check before working with children. *New background checks will be completed again by all adults every four years.*

Application and References. All eligible adults will complete the *Children's Ministries Adult Volunteer Application* and provide three non-related, personal references.

Statement of Faith. Regular attenders, who are not yet members, should read and sign the *Statement of Faith*, agreeing to uphold what we believe at Zion, while officially volunteering with children & youth.

Interview as necessary. All adult volunteers who work with children may be interviewed by the employee or overseer who will supervise their work.

Training for Adults

Training Step 1: Before supervising children in any capacity, **all adults** must attend ***Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children***, a child sexual abuse prevention training. *All adults who work with children must attend Stewards of Children again, after four years of service.*

Training Step 2: Read and agree to follow the *Child Protection Plan* of Zion Church by signing and returning the *Child Protection Agreement Form* at the back of this packet. Adults must

completely re-read the *Child Protection Policy Agreement* and sign the *Child Protection Agreement Form* every year.

Screening For Youth

Before supervising children in any capacity, youth must complete and submit a *Children's Ministries Youth Volunteer Application*, which will include 3 references who can attest to applicant's character and, if possible, who have observed applicant's behavior and interaction with children. Include references who are 19+ and who are not members of your family.

Training for Youth

Before volunteering, **youth** must read and agree to the *Junior Edition of our Child Protection Plan* by returning the *Child Protection Agreement Form* at the back of the *Junior Plan*. This must be completed yearly. Optionally, youth may complete ***Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children training***, online or in person, according to parents' wishes. *If a youth is 16+, they are encouraged to take Darkness to Light. Youth under 16 can only take with written parental consent. Upon turning 19, they must complete the screening process and training requirements for adult members.*

Eligibility for Policy Exceptions

Regarding who may serve within Children's and Youth Ministries at Zion PCA.

Adults who desire to serve at Zion Kids' Club (Wednesdays) or Vacation Bible School (or another one time special event) or Youth Group special events, and are **members of a PCA Church**.

Exceptions may also include **adults** who are members of a **local gospel-believing Church**, by discretion of the Session. Special permission shall be obtained by a Ministry Leader to include non-PCA members as policy exceptions on an event-by-event basis. These volunteers must complete the Exceptions Screening & Training.

Screening for Exceptions

Background Check. All adults who work/volunteer with children, staff, and church officers will submit the necessary information for a national, criminal background check before working with children. *New background checks will be completed every four years.*

Application and References. All eligible adults will complete the *Children's Ministries Adult Volunteer Application* and provide three non-related, personal references who can attest to your character and, if possible, have observed your behavior and interaction with children. Please only include references who are 19 or older and who are not members of your family.

Exception Agreement. Complete and sign the *Exception Agreement*, which states that you will adhere by our stated core principles when working with children and/or youth at Zion PCA Church.

Interview as necessary. All adults and youth volunteers who work with children may be

interviewed with the employee or overseer who will supervise their work.

Training for Exceptions

If all prior screening steps are approved, then complete training steps.

Training Step 1: Attend ***Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children***, a child sexual abuse prevention training.

Training Step 2: Read and agree to follow the *Child Protection Plan* of Zion Church by signing and returning the *Child Protection Agreement Form* at the back of this packet. Adults must completely re-read the *Child Protection Policy Agreement* and sign the *Child Protection Agreement Form* every year.

Screening and Training for Elders, Deacons, Staff, Overseers of

Ministries Elders, deacons, staff, and overseers of ministries providing childcare must attend ***Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children*** training course and complete a Background Check every four years. Annually, they must: completely re-read Child Protection Policy Agreement and sign the *Child Protection Agreement Form*.

Ineligibility for Service

Who may NOT serve within Children's and Youth Ministries at Zion PCA.

Any adult who has been convicted of child abuse or other violent crimes will not be eligible for employment at Zion Church or service as a volunteer within Zion Church's nursery, Children's and Youth ministries.

Unapproved members who have not completed the Child Protection process or have not been approved may not serve.

Any person deemed "ineligible" by the Session may not serve within Children's or Youth Ministries.

Definitions for Reporting

Child – Any person under the age of 19 years or any person whose mental capacity is that of a minor. **Adult** – any person at least 19 years of age.

Employee – Any adult paid for their work at Zion Church.

Child Abuse – Any willful act, omission, or threatened act that results in any physical, mental or sexual injury or harm.

Mandated Reporter – In Nebraska, any person who has a reason to believe child abuse has occurred is *required by law* to report it. In addition, in keeping with biblical principles and for the sake of vulnerable children who cannot protect themselves, all adults are morally obligated to report abuse.

Reporting

God has ordained the civil authorities to be His servants. As God's servants, He gives civil authorities the power to punish those who do evil. God calls us to submit to these authorities as they carry out their God ordained role to punish evil (Romans 13.1-7; 1 Peter 2.13-14). A key aspect of our submission to the God ordained civil authorities is to report the crime of child abuse. Child abuse is not only a sin, but a felony.

All adults at Zion Church are expected by our leadership and are required by Nebraska law to report child abuse. In the following circumstances, follow these steps:

Reporting as an Eye Witness

You witness or discover an act of abuse in progress. In this situation you must

demonstrate courage. ☐ **You must intervene and move the child to a safe place.**

☐ **Call the authorities immediately (9-1-1).** If you need help any Elder, Deacon, or Ministry Leader will assist in contacting appropriate authority.

☐ **Contact a ruling or teaching elder and complete the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.** This form is to be hand-delivered to a ruling or teaching elder and will be disclosed to the ministry director. The elder can then ensure the perpetrator has no further access to children at the church and can initiate appropriate guidance for all parties.

☐ **Do not conduct any interview.** The authorities or The Child Advocacy Center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview.

Reporting because of a Disclosure

A child tells you of abuse he/she has experienced.

☐ After the initial disclosure, **do not conduct any interview.** When there is disclosure of abuse, *no one*, not even the parents or pastor, should conduct another interview of the child or conduct an internal investigation. The authorities or The Child Advocacy Center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview.

- ☐ **Fill out the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.** Give the form any Elder, who will assist in contacting appropriate authorities. **All reports from a child disclosure go through Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline: 800- 652-1999.**

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Reporting due to Reasonable Cause

You have reasonable cause that child abuse has occurred. Reasonable cause does not require absolute proof. Instead, reasonable cause means one or more signs of child abuse are present.

- ☐ Immediately **complete the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.**
- ☐ This form should be hand-delivered to a ruling or teaching Elder, who will assist in contacting appropriate authorities.

Sometimes there are no visible signs of child sexual abuse, but common signs include: 1. Bleeding, bruising, pain, or other signs of trauma around the genitalia (please note when changing a diaper this is very different from a diaper rash)

2. Sexually transmitted disease in a child
3. Sexual language and behavior that are not age-appropriate (including promiscuous behavior)
4. Repeated boundary violations by an adult or youth volunteer (ie: you find an adult or youth volunteer isolated with a child or pushing the limits of inappropriate touch, even after being warned not to do so)
5. Emotional and behavioral signs such as withdrawal, fear, depression, anger, or swings in behavior and mood.
6. Difficulty sitting or walking without pain.

All reports due to reasonable cause need to go through Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline: 800- 652-1999.

Incident Response by Elder Receiving Report

After contacting the authorities, all employees and volunteers at Zion Church should have documented their actions and knowledge with the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form and personally hand the sealed envelope to an elder.

- ☐ The elder will then initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measure that may need to be taken.
- ☐ The elder will also inform the clerk of the Session, the church’s legal representative, and the church’s insurance company.

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Zion Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Session.

After the necessary reports have been made, Zion Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use Biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While Zion Church does not require a strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone who reports to only use their knowledge of the incident for godly purposes, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all parties.

Incident Follow-Up by the Session

When suspected abuse is reported to the civil authorities and the suspected abuse occurred on Zion Church's property or a Zion Church ministry event, Zion Church's Session will form a committee to perform an internal investigation of the incident. Without interfering with the civil authorities' investigation, the committee will seek to discover the following:

- 1) Did adults and volunteers follow all of Zion Church's *Child Protection Policy*?
- 2) If not, what caused the failure to follow the policy?
- 3) Is there an area of our *Child Protection Policy* that should be altered so that such an incident will be less likely in the future?

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Incident Follow-Up (continued)

If a report of child sexual abuse has been made, and the civil authorities do not file charges, the internal investigation committee shall conduct its own investigation in cooperation with the Session to determine whether the person(s) involved shall be allowed to continue working with children. Just because civil authorities do not have enough evidence to file charges does not mean the person is exonerated completely or is well-suited to work with children. Any recommendations should be made to the Session for their final approval. Any powers of church discipline shall remain with the Session. However, information and recommendations from the committee will be given due consideration by the Session.

Code of Conduct Violations

Zion Church takes any violations of our *Child Protection Policy* very seriously.

Abusers are rarely caught in the act of harming a child, but they are often seen breaking the rules and crossing boundaries. Every incident of boundary and rule violation does not necessarily signal that child abuse has occurred. However, every incident of boundary violation requires responsible action to ensure children's safety.

To ensure all children are safe, adult and youth volunteers should intervene as follows when they see anyone breaking the *Child Protection Policy*:

- ☐ Remind the violator of Zion's *Child Protection Policy* and *Procedures* regarding appropriate behavior around children.
- ☐ Notify the Ministry Overseer, including when and where the violation took place and by

whom. If, after correction, the violator continues in boundary-crossing behavior:

- ☐ Remind the violator of Zion's *Policy* and *Procedures* regarding appropriate behavior around children.
- ☐ Complete a "Boundary Violation Report" and deliver to the Ministry Overseer.
- ☐ The Ministry Overseer will notify the Child Protection Team of the incident, who will investigate as appropriate.

Anyone who has been reported for a Boundary Violation is suspended until the violation(s) have been investigated and resolved. The individual may be deemed ineligible to serve at the discretion of the Session. All Children's Ministry overseers (Nursery, Children's and Youth), as well as any ministry where childcare is offered, will be notified of the volunteer's suspension.

Regular Evaluation of Our Procedures and Code of Conduct Ultimate responsibility for updating and evaluating the *Child Protection Policy* and *Procedures* and *Code of Conduct* lies with Zion Church's Session. To aid in this, Zion Church's Child Protection Committee will meet every three years to evaluate and update the *Child Protection Policy*, *Procedures*, and *Code of Conduct*, and recommended updates will be presented to the Session for approval unless there is a current ongoing internal investigation. If former members are unable to be a part of the committee then the Session will ask new volunteers to participate in the committee.

Forms

Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse Form

Name of Staff or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of child sexual abuse:

Victim's Name and Age: _____

Victim Address: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Date/Time/Place of Incident: _____

Name of person accused of abuse: _____

Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other):

Summary of Incident (use back of sheet if you need more space):

Name of Church Officer Notified: _____

Date/Time of Notification: _____

Date/Time Civil Authorities were notified: _____

Person who called the civil authorities: _____

Summary of Conversation:

Other action taken (I.e. contacting Child Advocacy Group, giving testimony, etc...):

Signature and Date: _____

Policy Violation Report

Any adult or youth volunteer who observes any other adult or youth volunteer in an isolated area with a child or observes any other adult or youth volunteer violating the policy, should use this form to create a record of the incident. Deliver the completed form to the Ministry Overseer and Executive Pastor. They will notify the Child Protection Team of the incident, who will investigate as appropriate.

Name of Staff or volunteer observing a boundary violation:

Adult or youth involved in the incident: _____

Child(ren) involved in the incident: _____

Location(s) of boundary violations(s): _____

Time/Date(s) of boundary violation(s): _____

Circumstances of the violation(s). Give as much detail as you can remember.

(Use the back of this sheet if you need more space)

Any actions taken in response to boundary violation(s):

Name of person making the report if other than the observer of the incident:

Child Protection Agreement Form

- I acknowledge that I have received, read, understand, and agree to comply with the Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct. Further, I understand and agree to the procedures for reporting inappropriate behavior and suspected abuse.
- I understand the procedures for reporting reasonable suspicion of and/or allegations of misconduct and agree to pursue a culture that protects children and youth.
- I confirm that to the best of my knowledge I have not been accused of, been investigated for, or prosecuted for instances involving any form of abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child.

- I agree not to engage in behavior that is abusive to a child.
- I further agree that as an individual who serves in a position of trust in ministry to children/youth, I will not tolerate the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect of a child/youth.
- As a mandated reporter in Nebraska, I agree to immediately report any reasonable suspicion of, disclosure of, or inappropriate behavior between adults and children to the appropriate civil authorities, as well as to church leadership immediately.

Signature of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name of Applicant: _____

Reporting as a Witness Checklist

You witness or discover an act of abuse. In this situation you must demonstrate courage. All adults at Zion Church are expected by our leadership and are required by Nebraska law to report child abuse.

In the following circumstances, follow these steps:

- ☐ **You must intervene and move the child to a safe place.**
- ☐ **Call the authorities immediately (9-1-1).** If you need help any

Elder, Deacon, or Ministry Leader will assist in contacting appropriate authority.

- ☐ **Contact a ruling or teaching elder and complete the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.** This form is to be hand-delivered to a ruling or teaching elder. The elder can then ensure the perpetrator has no further access to children at the church and can initiate appropriate guidance for all parties.
- ☐ **Do not conduct any interview.** The authorities or The Child Advocacy Center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview.

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Zion Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Session.

After the necessary reports have been made, Zion Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use Biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While Zion Church does not require a strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone who reports to only use their knowledge of the incident for godly purposes, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all parties.

Incident Response by Elder Receiving Report

After receiving notice of alleged or potential child abuse, the elder receiving a report should do the following:

- ☐ Ensure all items from the appropriate reporting checklist have been completed. ☐
- The elder will then initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measure that may need to be taken.

- The elder will also inform the clerk of the Session, the church's legal representative, and the church's insurance company.

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Zion Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Session.

After the necessary reports have been made, Zion Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use Biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While Zion Church does not require a strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone who reports to only use their knowledge of the incident for godly purposes, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all parties.

Incident Follow-Up by the Session

When suspected abuse is reported to the civil authorities and the suspected abuse occurred on Zion Church's property or a Zion Church ministry event, Zion Church's Session will form a committee to perform an internal investigation of the incident. Without interfering with the civil authorities' investigation, the committee will seek to discover the following:

1. Did adults and volunteers follow all of Zion Church's *Child Protection Policy*?
2. If not, what caused the failure to follow the policy?
3. Is there an area of our *Child Protection Policy* that should be altered so that such an incident will be less likely in the future?

If a report of child sexual abuse has been made, and the civil authorities do not file charges, the internal investigation committee shall conduct its own investigation in cooperation with the Session to determine whether the person(s) involved shall be allowed to continue working with children. Just because civil authorities do not have enough evidence to file charges does not mean the person is exonerated completely or is well-suited to work with children. Any recommendations should be made to the Session for their final approval. Any powers of church discipline shall remain with the Session. However, information and recommendations from the committee will be given due consideration by the Session.

Reporting because of a Disclosure

A child tells you of abuse he/she has experienced. All adults at Zion Church are

expected by our leadership and are required by Nebraska law to report child abuse. In the following circumstances, follow these steps:

- ☐ After the initial disclosure, **do not conduct any interview**. When there is disclosure of abuse, *no one*, not even the parents or pastor, should conduct another interview of the child or conduct an internal investigation. The authorities or The Child Advocacy Center will have someone who is trained to conduct a child forensic interview.
- ☐ **Fill out the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.** Give the form any Elder, who will assist in contacting appropriate authorities. **All reports go through Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline: 800-652-1999.**

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Zion Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Session.

After the necessary reports have been made, Zion Church encourages everyone involved in the incident to use Biblical wisdom when speaking about it. While Zion Church does not require a strict confidentiality, we would ask anyone who reports to only use their knowledge of the incident for godly purposes, speaking only of the incident in times and places that will help further protect children, aid investigators, or bring healing to all parties.

Incident Response by Elder Receiving Report

After receiving notice of alleged or potential child abuse, the elder receiving a report should do the following:

- ☐ Ensure all items from the appropriate reporting checklist have been completed. ☐ The elder will then initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measure that may need to be taken.
- ☐ The elder will also inform the clerk of the Session, the church’s legal representative, and the church’s insurance company.

When a report is made about suspected child abuse, all employees and volunteers of Zion Church are encouraged to cooperate fully with any legal investigation. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Session.

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4. Did adults and volunteers follow all of Zion Church's *Child Protection Policy*?
5. If not, what caused the failure to follow the policy?
6. Is there an area of our *Child Protection Policy* that should be altered so that such an incident will be less likely in the future?

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Reporting due to Reasonable Cause

You have reasonable cause that child abuse has occurred. Reasonable cause does not require absolute proof. Instead, reasonable cause means one or more signs of child abuse are present.

- ☐ Immediately **complete the “Knowledge of Suspected Child Abuse” form.**
- ☐ Give the form any Elder, who will assist in contacting appropriate authorities. **All reports go through Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline: 800- 652-1999.**

Sometimes there are no visible signs of child sexual abuse, but common signs include:

1. Bleeding, bruising, pain, or other signs of trauma around the genitalia (please note when changing a diaper this is very different from a diaper rash)
2. Sexually transmitted disease in a child
3. Sexual language and behavior that are not age-appropriate (including promiscuous behavior)
4. Repeated boundary violations by an adult or youth volunteer (ie: you find an adult or youth volunteer isolated with a child or pushing the limits of inappropriate touch, even after being warned not to do so)
5. Emotional and behavioral signs such as withdrawal, fear, depression, anger, or swings in behavior and mood.
6. Difficulty sitting or walking without pain.

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- ☐ Ensure all items from the appropriate reporting checklist have been completed. ☐

The elder will then initiate pastoral care for all parties and any disciplinary measure that may need to be taken.

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7. Did adults and volunteers follow all of Zion Church's *Child Protection Policy*?

8. If not, what caused the failure to follow the policy?

9. Is there an area of our *Child Protection Policy* that should be altered so that such an incident will be less likely in the future?

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discipline shall remain with the Session. However, information and recommendations from the committee will be given due consideration by the Session.