

Revised 5/23

Staunton Church of the Brethren Child Protection Policy

Purpose

1. To help STCOB provide a caring and safe environment for children and youth in all areas of church life.
2. To help STCOB provide structured expectations for caregivers including paid and volunteers.
3. To help STCOB comply with legal statutes and insurance recommendations as well as reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

Biblical Foundation

"...but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'" Matthew 19: 14

As the church body serves as the hands and feet of Christ, we take a pro-active stance on protecting children from abuse. Our goal is to fulfill our Children's Ministry mission statement which is: "to expose students to God's love, to help them grow in their faith, to have them offer themselves in service to Christ and to care for one another."

Virginia's Child Abuse Law

The legal definition of child abuse along with the types and indicators of child abuse and neglect according to the Code of Virginia can be found in a Guide for Mandated Reporters in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

According to the Code of VA any person responsible for the care, custody and control of children must report suspected child abuse. While some people are required by law to report, every person who suspects abuse has a moral obligation to report.

Policy Administration:

The Child Protection Policy applies to all activities in which children/youth participate. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, Sunday morning activities such as Sunday school and Children's Church, Evening Activities, Children, Jr. and Sr. High Groups and Vacation Bible School. The Child Protection Policy at Staunton Church of the Brethren will be administered by the Child Protection Coordinator and shall be applied to any person who is hired, appointed, or who volunteers to work with children/youth.

All persons who work with children/youth will:

1. Receive orientation regarding our congregation's "Child Protection Policy" and sign and return the "Child Protection Covenant." This orientation includes:
 - i.* The facts of child abuse
 - ii.* Rationale for the emphasis on protecting children/youth from abuse in the church
 - iii.* Policies and procedures for protection
2. Sign and return the job application or "Volunteer Profile" which will be filed in a secure location in the church office. All records of staff and volunteer applications, references, clearance forms and covenant agreements shall be maintained in a confidential manner in a secure location with access controlled by the Child Protection Team. Two references

will be contacted by the Child Protection Team. Each newly hired staff person will undergo a criminal background check. At each employee's annual review, he/she will affirm his/her compliance with the written policy concerning ethical accountability stated in the contract.

3. Regularly attend the church for a continuous six (6) months prior to working unsupervised with children and youth.
4. Begin ministry only after approval from the Child Protection Team. Approval for those who will accompany children or youth overnight is contingent upon interview process, Criminal Records Check and Child Abuse Clearance and Form documentation.

No person who has been convicted of any form of child abuse will be accepted as a volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity. Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth or vulnerable adults will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.

Restrictions will be placed on any registered sex offender by providing a designated chaperone who will be responsible for monitoring the offender's personal activities while the offender is on the church premises or participating in church-sponsored activities. The offender will enter into a written agreement with the church acknowledging any restrictions and agreeing to abide by all the rules established by the church.

GUIDELINES FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Supervision: Two-Adult Rule: No fewer than two unrelated adults will be present at all times during any church-sponsored ministry or activity that involves children and youth.

2. Open Door Policy: Church programs have an open-door policy. The staff, pastors, and parents are free to visit and observe the program at any time unannounced. All doors will remain open unless there is a window in the door. Restroom doors will remain ajar unless the child is in the restroom alone or with a family member.

3. Parental Permission: Parents should be well informed of all information regarding the events in which their children will be participating. In a situation where an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child, parental consent should be obtained. Written parental consent should be obtained on a per event basis for all off-site church-sponsored group activities. Consent should include permission to provide medical treatment for all events involving physical risk.

4. Overnight trips: All adult chaperones (supervisors, sponsors, parents, and helpers) must be approved by the Child Protection Team before they can accompany children/youth on an overnight activity. Parental permission will be obtained for all overnight activities. Both male and female adult chaperones must be present at all times for overnight events if children/youth of both genders are participating. No one who is not at least 5 years older than the age of the youth can serve as a chaperone.

5. Non-Sponsored Activities: Activities for children and youth are sometimes held in conjunction with other organizations, in which case, Staunton Church of the Brethren does not have the authority to approve all adults. In this case, Staunton Church of the Brethren does not guarantee that the sponsoring organization has adopted a Child Protection Policy.

6. Transportation: Anyone transporting children/youth must be 18 years of age or older, hold a valid driver's license, present current insurance of car being used and obey all traffic laws, including use of seat belts. There should be at least two children/youth per adult driver.

7. Classroom Discipline: Children will be treated with respect and will not be disciplined in ways that would deprive them of their basic rights to be safe and comfortable. No physical discipline shall be administered at any time. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is to be. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table by himself to work alone away from the other students. If the offending behavior continues, the child may be taken to **the parent/guardian**. Please see the Youth Covenant (Appendix D) for youth discipline procedures.

8. Exceptions: In the case of whole church events, when childcare is needed, the Nurture Commission may seek persons to provide childcare from outside the congregation. If a situation arises during which any of the policy goals cannot be reasonably met due to unavoidable circumstances, the adults involved should accommodate the policy as far as they are able, act in accordance with the spirit of the policy and report the situation to the Child Protection Coordinator. However, it is the intent of this policy that such exceptions are rare.

9. Gifts: Because gift giving can be a form of buying silence or loyalty, volunteers are not to give gifts or money to individuals without the prior knowledge of parents and pastoral staff.

10. Individual Meetings: One-on-one interactions should be conducted in an environment that provides visibility. If possible, another adult should have knowledge of the meeting. A signed parental consent is required.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE:

We believe that all workers in ministry with children/youth have a personal responsibility and moral obligation to report any suspected abuse to any member of the Child Protection Team and to cooperate in any subsequent investigation. **From this point on the report will be handled by the Child Protection Intervention Team. This Team will be made up of the Church Board Chairperson, Shenandoah District Attorney on retainer and church member.**

Report suspected incidents of physical or sexual abuse as follows:

1. Intervene immediately if an incident is in progress. The safety of the victim must be the church's primary concern.
2. Get another adult to come and be second witness and to assist with the situation.
3. Notify the parents or guardian of the victim, unless the parent or guardian is the alleged abuser. Take any necessary steps to assure the child's safety until the parents arrive.
4. The volunteer or paid staff who is making the observation or receiving disclosure of suspected abuse, shall contact a member of the Child Protection Team to report the observation or disclosure immediately and to assist in completing the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form. (Appendix C)
5. All efforts should be made to maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Do not talk with other witnesses about what happened so that your memory is not altered by what they say they saw.

Appropriate investigation and action will be taken according to established guidelines.

APPOINTMENT OF THE CHILD PROTECTION COORDINATOR AND INTERVENTION TEAM

The Nurture Commission shall assume responsibility for appointing a Child Protection Coordinator. This person will work together with the Christian Education Director and the Pastor to form the Child Protection Team to administer the Child Protection Policy. The Child Protection Coordinator will be appointed to a three-year term with a limit of two consecutive terms of service. An Intervention Team will also be appointed by Nurture Commission, as needed. It will consist of the Church Board Chairperson, The Shenandoah District Attorney on retainer and a member of the congregation. The Church Board Chairperson will act as an official spokesperson designated to speak to the media and to law enforcement if the need arises.

PERIODIC POLICY REVIEW

The Child Protection Coordinator will initiate a review of this policy with the Nurture Commission at least every 3 years.

DEFINING CHILD ABUSE

To create a safe, Christian, nurturing environment for children and youth, we need to know the symptoms or signs of child abuse, whether it be physical, sexual, or emotional. In this way, we can be instrumental in preventing further abuse. Also, knowing what signs to report in a suspected abuse case is a safeguard against being sued for neglecting, ignoring, or not reporting possible abuse situations. Signs and symptoms of child abuse are found in A Guide For Mandated Reporters published by the Virginia Department of Social Services.

EDUCATING THE CONGREGATION

Our mission is to provide an environment for our children which is safe from all forms of abuse and neglect. To be both effective and successful in these efforts, the entire congregation must understand and embrace the policies which will lead to our goals. Therefore, it is essential to have a program to educate the congregation of the concerns and needs in this area.

A program to educate the congregation should include the following:

1. Share the facts by means of the Lamplighter and or bulletin.
2. Identify the symptoms and signs of child abuse.
3. Identify the potential impact of an allegation of abuse on our church.
4. Communicate the need for a program to prevent child abuse that can be shared and interpreted in many settings and must be reinforced through several education opportunities. They may include, among others, the following:
 - a. Have a series of Sunday School classes for adults on the topic of child abuse and the need for a program to protect the children.
 - b. Hold a special meeting for the entire congregation to focus on a child abuse prevention program.
 - c. Hold a special meeting for parents dealing with issues of child abuse including recognition of signs of abuse; a healthy way of alerting children to certain dangers; and in general, raising the awareness of the parents. This could include an educational session with the children using age-appropriate materials.
 - d. Hold meetings for current church workers to educate them in the area of child abuse and raise their awareness. See Training Church Workers below.

Always be aware of other creative opportunities to reinforce the concerns in this area.

TRAINING CHURCH WORKERS

An important element of success in the child abuse awareness program is to train all church workers serving in infant, children, and youth ministries. This training should be resourced by workers who have had experience in this area, such as a counselor, social worker or a representative from a child abuse/child protection agency or law enforcement agency. The training should include a definition of child abuse, the prevalence of abuse in the area, the cause and effects of abuse, and a focus on abusers, including the general characteristics and traits of abusers. An explanation of the child protection laws of the state should be given, along with the requirements which the law would place on the church. Also, detailed explanation of the child abuse prevention program should be shared, along with an outline of the procedures under which the program will be implemented.

All children and youth leaders, helpers, mentors and volunteers will read and sign the STCOB Child Protection Policy and *"A Guide for Mandated Reporting in Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect"* (published by the Department of Social Services) and will sign a statement acknowledging having read both.

They also will take the online workshop, <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/abuse/cps.cgi> and bring in the certificate (or documentation of having completed similar workshop.)

Written updates and management tips will be offered quarterly.

RESPONSE PLAN TO SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Any suspected child abuse shall immediately be reported to a member of the Child Protection Team (the Child Protection Coordinator, the Christian Education Director, and Pastor), or Intervention Team. Person reporting the suspected abuse must be willing to cooperate in any subsequent investigation. Upon receiving such report, the Intervention Team will initiate the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse form (Appendix C).

1. The Intervention Team shall follow up on the report by:
 - a. Speaking with the reporting person. If the reporting person is a child, a parent needs to be present before any discussion with the Intervention Team takes place. However, if the parent(s) are indicated as the abuser by the child, Child Protective Services shall be contacted immediately and they would proceed with any follow up.
 - b. After listening to the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident, and through an abundance of caution and protection, consult with legal professional (i.e. Child Protective Services, Law Enforcement, Attorney) to determine the path going forward.
 - c. Temporarily remove any staff (paid, part-time or volunteer) member from their position pending completion of any investigation.

- d. Any further action on the part of the Intervention Team will be guided by the information and guidance from the above legal professionals.
- e. Notification shall be made to the Church's liability insurance company of the initiated investigation immediately.

Unsubstantiated allegations:

- 1. The Intervention Team will meet with the accused to determine a follow-up course of action.
- 2. Such actions may include, but not be limited to a public statement to the congregation by the accused, restore the person to their original position, a public statement to the congregation by the Intervention Team, or any other action agreed upon by the accused or church legal counsel.

Investigation demonstrate poor judgment or unwise behavior but not abuse:

- 1. The Intervention Team will hold the offender responsible and accountable for the behavior. Grace and mercy will be extended in the context of repentance, accountability, and justice.
- 2. Education and/or counseling will be required to correct behavior patterns.
- 3. Persons will be removed from susceptible church ministry settings for a period of six months.
- 4. Actions taken will be communicated to the complainant(s) and to the congregation as necessary.

Substantiated Allegations of child abuse:

1. Ministry to the Victim and Family:

- a. Ministry will be done with sensitivity and care.
- b. Pastoral care and spiritual support will be provided.
- c. One person will be named and offered to the victim(s) to serve as an advocate, supporter, and interpreter of the process.
- d. In the case of multiple victims, opportunity will be made for these persons to meet together for mutual support and prayer.

2. Ministry to the Offender:

- a. The individual will be permanently removed from susceptible positions in the church's ministry.
- b. Pastoral care and spiritual support will continue for the offender and his/her family during rehabilitation.
- c. Any further efforts will be dictated by Court Service Officer or Probation Officer.

3. Ministry to the Accused Offender's Family:

- a. Ministry will be done with sensitivity and care, providing support and prayer.
- b. One person will be named and offered to the family to serve as an advocate, supporter, and interpreter of the process.

4. Ministry to the Congregation:

- a. **The Intervention Team** will report to the Executive Committee any **confirmed** abuse and follow-up, including disciplinary action taken.
- b. Trained professionals will be made available to assist the congregation in addressing concerns to bring healing.

The Moderator will have the authority to notify the District Executive as deemed necessary

Appendix A

Volunteer Profile

Confidential: This information will be treated as strictly confidential.

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Age range: _____ 18 or younger _____ 19-25 _____ 26 or older

How long have you been attending Staunton Church of the Brethren? _____

Membership status: () Member () in process of becoming a member () non-member

In which children's/youth program(s) do you want to become involved?

What skills would you bring to the children's/youth program?

What other children's/youth work experience do you have? (Please list)

Organization	Program	Dates	Contact
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Have you ever been convicted (as guilty or not innocent, or a determination of abuse or neglect founded against you) of a misdemeanor (including moving traffic violations), a felony or any offense involving moral turpitude (Moral turpitude is defined as, but not necessarily limited to, lying, cheating, stealing, giving false statements, petit larceny, and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.), the sexual molestation, physical abuse,

neglect, or rape of a child, or any like offense against an adult? (If yes, provide explanation in the space below.)

Are any criminal or non-civil charges or proceedings pending against you?

List previous churches attended regularly in the past five years:

Church Name	Pastor's Name	Years Attended
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Please list individuals outside of your family and the church pastoral staff who can be personal references and/or comment on your past interaction with minors (optional for those attending Staunton Church of the Brethren more than two years). **These persons will be contacted by us.**

Name/Relationship	Address	Phone
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Verification and Release

I recognize that Staunton Church of the Brethren is relying on the accuracy of the information I provide on the Volunteer Profile. Accordingly, I attest and affirm that the information I have provided is absolutely true and correct.

I authorize the organization to contact any person or entity listed on the Volunteer Profile, and I further authorize any such person or entity to provide the organization with information, opinions, and impressions relating to my back ground or qualifications.

I voluntarily release the organization and any such person or entity listed on the Volunteer Profile from liability involving the communication of information relating to my background or qualifications

I have carefully read the policy and procedures of the organization, and I agree to abide by them and to protect the health and safety of the children or youth assigned to my care or supervision at all times.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Please return to the Church Office.

Appendix B

CHILD PROTECTION COVENANT

For all who work with children or youth in the
Staunton Church of the Brethren

I accept the call to serve the Lord through working with children or youth at
Staunton Church of the Brethren

I remember how Jesus welcomed the children, took them in his arms and blessed them.

I know that I follow Jesus' example when I value young people and
care for them with love and gentleness.

I recognize the importance of the responsibility entrusted to me.

I realize that my words and actions toward children and youth will influence their faith in
God and influence their lives for many years to come.

I promise to be responsible in all of my attitudes and actions,
especially toward the children or youth under my care.

I have carefully read and agreed with this congregation's "Child Protection Policy."

I attest that I have never been charged with nor convicted of child abuse, or any other
criminal conduct related to children or youth or to physical or sexual misconduct.

I covenant and promise to be a good example to the children or youth entrusted to my care. I
will pray and study God's word regularly, and do my best to reflect God's love to them

I accept the responsibility of my ministries to children and youth with gladness and I will
strive to honorably fulfill my responsibilities with integrity.

With the prayers and encouragement of the members of Staunton Church of the Brethren,
with the support pledged to me by the *Christian Education Team*, and with God's
guidance, I am committed to serve in ministry to children or youth.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

REPORT OF SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE

Staunton Church of the Brethren

To be completed by a member of the **Intervention Team (Church Board Chairperson, church member, Shenandoah District attorney on retainer)**, with the cooperation of the person reporting the incident.

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse:

2. Victim's Name

3. Victim's age/date of birth:

Victim's Parent/guardian:

Home address:

Phone number:

4. Date/place of initial conversation with/report from victim:

5. Victim's statement - if appropriate give detailed summary:

6. Name of person accused of abusing:

7. Where abuse took place:

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

9 Reported to the Intervention Team which will decide on which following steps to take

a. Date/time:

b. Summary:

Call to victim's parent/guardian:

a. Date/Time:

b. Name of person contacted:

c. Summary:

1. Call to local children and family service agency (name of agency): _____

a. Date/time:

b. Name of person contacted:

c. Summary:

2. Other contacts:

a. Date/time: _____

b. Name of person contacted:

c. Summary:

Appendix D

Youth Covenant Staunton Church of the Brethren

Because we are a caring Christian community, we ask that youth and their parents read and sign the following expectations:

Participants are expected to follow this agreement any time we are together as a partial or full group and whether we are at the church or off-site. Christian hospitality, respect, and courtesy are expected of group members to help make our time together as safe and meaningful as possible.

Youth will follow directions from a responsible adult at all times. The safety of all youth is important, as well as creating an environment where everyone can learn and participate.

Youth will stay with the group. Youth may not come and go during activities. If they leave, they may not return unless prior arrangements have been made with the youth director. No youth will leave a youth group activity early, especially an overnight activity, without a parent picking him or her up and contacting the youth director in advance. If a youth leaves, we cannot be responsible for him or her while he or she is absent. Youth will not leave an overnight lodging room or facility without a youth leader and as part of a group.

When traveling, youth will wear required safety belts in vehicles. No horseplay or inappropriate behavior will be tolerated for safety reasons.

We insist that participants refrain from the use of offensive language and personal listening devices or video games during meetings and activities. Exceptions for personal listening devices or video games during overnights, retreats, or trips will be determined by leaders and explained as necessary.

We ask that participants help keep our meeting spaces clean and neat. We should always leave our rooms at least as clean as we found them. All participants will be asked to assist with this task.

Confidentiality and trust are important to our developing a safe environment where difficult issues may be discussed. We ask that personal information not be shared outside the group unless issues of safety are involved.

Discipline Procedures:

First offense: The youth will receive one verbal reminder about their behavior.

Second offense: The youth will call his/her parents/guardians to notify them about their behavior. Third offense: Parents will be asked to pick up their son/daughter.

Exception: The use of tobacco, alcohol, **vaping (controlled substances without a prescription)** and narcotic drugs is strictly prohibited. If a participant is found with these or under the influence of these, parents will be notified immediately and be required to pick up their child.

I have read and agree to the expectations stated above.

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Printed Name _____

Parent/Guardian signature _____

Date _____

Printed Name _____