

AMOSKEAG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
An Orthodox Presbyterian Church
95 BROOK STREET
MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03104



Preaching the Christ of Scripture

Policy on Child Safety

Updated, based on legal review, for final approval 4/15/14

Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (“APC”) takes seriously our responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our young people. This policy applies to our youth workers and provides guidelines for them on proper steps needed to promote a healthy environment in the nursery, the Sunday school class, the youth group, in the church building, and in church-related activities regardless of location. Sadly, we live in a culture where child abuse, including child sexual abuse is real. We encourage parents to educate their children about child safety and how to act appropriately with adult Christians. The positive side of this is that normally children are going to have good and proper relationships with adult Christians. Adults should be examples of maturity, humility, kindness and Christian love for the brethren and not underestimate the impact of how the Lord uses what they do in the lives of children.

Definitions

- **Children and Youth – People under the age of 18 including** the children of members, friends and visitors of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church. In this document, the terms children and youth are used interchangeably.
- **Adult** – A person age 18 or older.
- **Youth Worker** – Any person, paid or volunteer, who is working with the children in the role of church officer (Pastor, Elders, and Deacons), as part of Sunday School, youth groups, the nursery, or in other roles as part of APC activities, such as chaperones for youth activities, overnights, mission trips, etc.
- **Child Sexual Abuse** – “Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child. This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of resisting. Sexually abusive acts may include sexual

penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or voyeurism” (US Department of Health and Human Services). Child sexual abuse also includes any conduct constituting sexual abuse under New Hampshire law.

- **Child Abuse** – Physical, verbal, or sexual abuse of a child.

Scope

This policy applies to all APC youth workers in their interactions with APC youth, regardless of the location of the interaction.

The guidelines in this policy regarding avoiding being alone with youth and requiring appropriate supervision for overnights do not apply to purely social interactions between youth workers’ children and those youth’s friends which are supervised by a youth worker in his/her role of parent, not in his/her role as youth worker (i.e. play dates for young children, get-togethers and time “hanging out” for older children and teens, parties, etc.) which a reasonable person would view as acceptable and about which the parents of all involved youth are informed. *It is the responsibility of the youth worker, not the youths, to ensure that the parents of all participating youths are informed in advance of these social interactions.* Open, transparent, and healthy relationships between youth workers and APC youth are important to keeping our children safe.

Screening and Selection of Youth Workers

The following guidelines will be followed in an effort to ensure the safety of APC’s youth. Any youth worker must:

- Be a communing member of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church for at least one (1) year. In exceptional circumstances an exemption from this requirement may be granted by the Session.
- Be at least eighteen (18) years of age and approved by the Session to work with children. The Session will provide written documentation of such approval.
- Have on file a complete and accurate **Volunteer Application**.
- Authorize a criminal background check. Criminal background checks will be run on all youth workers who regularly work with youth, meaning they do so at least six times in a year. In its discretion, APC may also require a criminal record check on an occasional youth worker. In addition to the criminal record check, a check of the sex offender registry will be performed. In its discretion, APC may also require youth workers to consent to periodic updates of criminal background checks.
- Participate in a pre-service orientation and annual training regarding the prevention of child sexual abuse. A review of this policy, **Amoskeag Presbyterian Church Policy on Child Safety**, will be included in training of all youth workers.

- Volunteer Applications and background check results shall be stored by the Director of Child Safety and training session shall be recorded in Sessional minutes.

Guidelines on Interaction between Youth Workers and Youth

- **Individual Counseling** – APC has a strict policy for all church officers regarding the formal counseling of children. No church officer is to be alone with a child when counseling him or her. If counseling is to take place in the church building or any other office space the door will be opened and a parent or church member (delegated by the Session) will be present in the building at all times. In the Pastor’s home study, his wife will be present in the home and one of the doors in the study will be open. For all other youth workers, should an individual child seek or require individual teaching or counseling, the guidelines above are to be followed. If possible the Session is to be notified before the counseling takes place.
- **Ratios of Youth Workers to Children** – It is recommended that at least two adults work together with a child or group of children. Youth workers should avoid being alone with children (other than their own children and other blood relatives such as nieces, nephews, and grandchildren). If this is not possible, then the youth worker working alone with an individual child or group of children is to be in an open space where they may be observed by sight and sound by another adult, and not behind closed doors. Ideally, a youth group of mixed teens should have at least two male and two female youth workers.
- **Physical and Verbal Contact** – It is unrealistic to think that there will be no physical contact between a youth worker and a child. Maturity and discernment are needed when working with different groups of children, i.e. the nursery (see Nursery doc.), older children in Sunday school classes, and youth groups. For example with older youth, a quick hug may be appropriate in some public circumstances, but a lengthy embrace or any hug in private is inappropriate. Hugging is also inappropriate if the child is not receptive, if the youth worker is hugging too often or for too long, or if the contact is romanticized or sexually intimate. An overly affectionate child should be discouraged firmly, but with kindness. Youth workers should always be on the lookout for (and report to their supervisors or a church officer) inappropriate sexual behavior of children, especially as it involves other children.

Appropriate Behavior: Pats on the back or shoulder and the occasional hug in public if the circumstance warrants.

Inappropriate/harmful Behavior: Patting the buttocks, touching of the chest or genital areas, kissing on the mouth, lengthy embraces, intimate, romantic, sexual contact of any kind, inappropriate communications (including via email, text, social media), showing sexually suggestive materials (photos/images, magazines, cards, videos, films, Internet materials), involving children in sexually suggestive

activities, and corporal punishment (including spanking, slapping, hitting, or other force) by youth workers other than the parents of the child being disciplined..

Appropriate Verbal Communication: Praise and positive reinforcement for good work/behavior.

Inappropriate Verbal Communication: Sexually provocative or degrading comments, risqué jokes, comments or compliments regarding physique or body development, and profane language.

- **Overnights and Mission Trips** – Adequate supervision is essential. Overnights with only one adult are not permitted. Supervision should include the youth workers who normally minister to the group and approved chaperones if needed. In mixed groups, there should be at least two male and two female youth workers and/or chaperones. Normally, overnights should take place at a neutral location such as the church building, retreat locations, mission trips, etc. Overnights in a youth worker’s home are not permitted without the express advance permission of the Session. In its discretion, the Session may grant standing permission for certain youth group overnights such that permission need not be requested for each occurrence, although the Session also retains the discretion to revoke permission at any time. For mixed groups there should be separate sleeping quarters for male and female participants. In addition, youth workers should not share beds with children (except their own) and should avoid sharing sleeping quarters with children, except when another adult is present in the sleeping quarters. **Advance Session approval of a plan of transportation and supervision is required.**

Transportation – Discretion must be used in transporting children to and from youth meetings and events. Ideally, parents should provide transportation. *A youth worker should not be alone with a child (other than his/her own) in his or her vehicle without prior parental permission.*

Responsibilities

We all share responsibility for the safety and welfare of APC children. In addition to the general responsibility, the following specific responsibilities have been established:

- **Responsibilities of the Pastor** – The Pastor is the only person on full time paid staff at Amoskeag Presbyterian Church; therefore it is his responsibility to oversee all matters concerning child safety and child abuse, including sexual abuse in the church. The Pastor should seek counsel from the Session in these matters, but he, or his delegate, is the only spokesperson for the church when it comes to dealing with the media on these issues. In addition, the Pastor will have primary responsibility for reporting child abuse, including child sexual abuse to the Department of Health & Human Services Division for Children, Youth and Families (“DCYF”) in accordance with New Hampshire law.

- **Responsibilities of the Session** – The Session must inform the congregation of the church’s policy and insure that it is enforced. The Session will appoint a Director of Child Safety to conduct training sessions for youth workers and process the paper work associated with the policy. The Session will provide a job description for the position.
- **Responsibilities of the Deacons** – The Deacons will develop and maintain a safety plan to ensure that the church building and its grounds are safe and secure.
- **Responsibilities of Youth Workers** – Youth workers must refrain from any form of child abuse, including child sexual abuse. Youth workers must familiarize themselves with this policy and follow it. Youth workers will also attend any required training sessions in support of this policy. Youth workers are also responsible to report any concerns regarding child abuse, including child sexual abuse, in accordance with the reporting procedure in this policy.
- **Responsibilities of Parents** – Parents should be talking to their children about child safety on an ongoing basis and in an age appropriate manner. Parents should also stay informed about and involved in friendships that their children maintain with youth workers. While at church parents should know where their children are at all times, provide necessary and appropriate supervision, and remind them of basic safety considerations, especially during fellowship time following the morning and evening services. Children should not be in unauthorized portions of the building, such as the heater room, kitchen, church office, pulpit area, without adult supervision. Unsupervised children playing outside of the building are not safe and are at risk of being struck by a car or wandering off the grounds of the church.

Reporting and Responding to Alleged Child Abuse, including Child Sexual Abuse

- It is the responsibility of all adult members of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church to be concerned with the safety of the children in the church. If any youth worker or other adult member of APC believes that a child has been (or is being) abused on the church property, or elsewhere in connection with church-related activities, they should immediately report the matter to the Pastor, an Elder, or a Deacon. In the event the allegation is against the Pastor or member of the Session, then the report should be made to another Elder on the Session.
- Timeliness in these matters is very important. Prompt reporting is strongly encouraged.
- Reports may be made verbally or in writing.
- All reports made under this policy will be taken seriously. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible consistent with a thorough investigation.

- Investigations will be conducted promptly. Investigations may be conducted by the Session, by designated member(s) of the Session, by designee(s) of the Session, or by a third party selected by the Session. The purpose of an internal investigation is to determine whether a policy violation has more likely than not occurred, in which event appropriate remedial action will be taken. Remedial action may include, but not be limited to counseling, training, warning, or dismissal/exclusion from activities with children. Remedial action may also include church discipline.
- Internal investigations are not for the purpose of determining whether a crime has occurred. If a report is made to DCYF or the local authorities, those agencies will determine whether and to what extent they will investigate and whether criminal charges may be brought. Full cooperation will be given to the authorities during investigation. APC may take remedial action and church discipline regardless of the conclusion reached by the authorities.
- A person being investigated internally and/or by the authorities may be removed from his/her youth worker position (and other applicable position(s)) during the investigation, in the discretion of the Session. The Session will also use its discretion concerning continued church attendance of the accused at APC during the investigation. Any precautionary measures taken during an investigation should not be interpreted as a presumption of wrongdoing.
- In appropriate circumstances, the Session may also seek legal counsel for assistance in investigating and responding to a report made under this policy.

Failure to Comply

Any youth worker who fails to comply with this policy or the reporting procedure will be subject to disciplinary action, including without limitation removal from APC activities with children and church discipline.

Allegations of non-compliance should be reported to the Pastor, an Elder, or a Deacon.

No Retaliation

APC encourages reports under this policy and will not tolerate retaliation against a person for making a report under this policy or for cooperating in any investigation of any report made under this policy. Any youth worker who believes he or she has experienced retaliation in violation of this policy should report the matter to the Pastor, an Elder, or a Deacon.

**Amoskeag Presbyterian Church
Youth Worker Acknowledgment of Policy on Child Safety**

Please read the following statements and sign below to indicate your receipt and acknowledgment of the Amoskeag Presbyterian Church Policy on Child Safety, and please return the signed form to the Pastor, church secretary, or the Director of Child Safety.

- I have received and read a copy of the Policy on Child Safety.
- I understand that it is my obligation to comply with the Policy on Child Safety, including the reporting requirements.
- I understand that Amoskeag Presbyterian Church may change, modify, or amend the Policy on Child Safety and, in that event, I will be notified of changes as soon as possible.
- I understand that the Policy on Child Safety is not a contract and does not grant any rights, including rights to continued employment or volunteer service.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Youth Worker Position