



Child Protection Policy

Purpose

This Child Protection Policy (CPP) aims to promote a safe environment for our children, youth, staff, and volunteers at Lexington Community Church (LCC). While this topic is difficult, it is necessary for us to be aware and to have guidelines in place. If you have any questions or if you are struggling in thinking about these things, please talk them over with us. In all things we pray and trust the Lord for his wisdom and protection.

Definitions

Child – Any person from birth through 5th grade.

Youth – Any person in the 6th through 12th grades.

Minor - Any person who is under 18 years of age.

Adult - Any person who is 18 years or older.

Youth Volunteer – Young people age 13-17 who assist in ministries with children.

Physical Abuse – Deliberate infliction of bodily harm, including any violence with or without the use of an implement.

Sexual Abuse – Deliberate use of a child/youth for sexual stimulation, acts, or exploitation.

Emotional Abuse – Consistent and/or extreme crushing of the spirit with verbal attacks, threats, or humiliation.

Neglect - With respect to a minor, neglect is defined within the meaning of 325 ILCS 5/3 of Illinois law. This could include the failure to provide for the physical, mental or emotional needs of the minor, or to provide appropriate care and supervision of the minor, in relation to a minor's age and level of development.

Implementation

The Discipleship Team Chairperson shall carry out the provisions of this document under the church leadership oversight. Duties shall include the following.

1. Ensure that all provisions of the CPP are followed.
2. Ensure that all who come in regular contact with children or youth are familiar with the CPP.
3. Oversee refinements to the CPP as needed.

Reducing the Risk of Abuse

LCC requires the following safety measures (1) to guard against child abuse in the ministry settings of LCC, whether physical or virtual, (2) to avoid situations that could lead to allegations of abuse, and (3) to assist the church in responding to any such allegations.

1. Screening.

Before commencing any service to children/youth, each volunteer or staff member of LCC must:

- Read and agree to abide by this Child Protection Policy.
- Read the *SafeGuards* handout.
- Complete and sign the LCC Confidential Volunteer Application Form to work with children/youth. The application asks for general information, prior church volunteer work, your spiritual journey and church involvement. It shall be retained on file for the duration of the applicant's service at LCC, and for one year following his/her departure. (Young people ages 13-17 who wish to volunteer for ministries involving the care of children are required to fill out a Youth Volunteer Application Form.)
- Complete the 0.5 hr. Protect My Ministry Child Abuse Awareness video training and pass an online quiz.
- Adult volunteers shall undergo a criminal background check which shall be re-run at three-year intervals. (Applicants must submit: "LCC Confidential Volunteer Application Form" to facilitate this check.)
- Take part in an in-person interview.

Approved volunteers who do not work with children/youth at LCC for five years from the date of their background check expiration shall be deemed no longer to have approval and must be rescreened to resume working with children/youth.

2. Training. Church volunteers and staff working with children/youth, shall be required to undergo training in child safety, which shall include instruction on identifying, recording, and reporting reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect. This training shall be part of the initial screening process outlined in "Screening" above. Volunteers shall undergo refresher training in child safety periodically.

3. Interview. An in-person meeting shall be held to assess the applicant's suitability for working with children/youth at LCC. In the event an in-person meeting is not possible, a video conference meeting or phone call will be acceptable.

4. Approval of volunteers. Each volunteer working with children/youth must be specifically approved by the Discipleship Team Chairperson or designated Ministry Director.

5. Code of Conduct. Church-sponsored programs that involve children/youth will follow these guidelines.

A. Children's Classes:

Doors should be propped open until both approved volunteers arrive to start the class. If a child needs to be escorted by an adult volunteer as outlined in Restroom Procedures below, the remaining adult will open the door to the classroom until they return. If there is only one teacher and a child needs assisted out of the classroom another approved volunteer must be found to stay with the class. Children must not be left unattended.

One-to-One Communication:

All communication must be conducted under the direct oversight of the Ministry Director, Discipleship Team Chairperson, and Elders. This includes private calling, texting, messaging, or emailing between volunteers and minors.

6. Nursery Staffing. The nursery shall be staffed by adults who have been screened and trained, with the staff supplemented by trained youth volunteers. At least one nursery worker in each shift shall be an adult female.

7. Activity arrival and departure. Youth who participate in a church activity shall remain on the premises of the designated location for the duration of that activity and may leave only with parental permission or by direction of adult workers in charge of the event. This policy shall apply also to continuous events in which one activity follows another.

8. Transportation guidelines. Transportation that is arranged or provided by the church for children/youth events shall include an approved adult in each vehicle. Drivers must have a valid driver's license and the required insurance and shall refrain from hand-held cell phone use while driving.

9. Monitoring of activities. Church staff or other church workers screened in accordance with this Child Protection Policy may visit classrooms or childcare rooms at any time without prior notice. Nothing should obstruct the window that makes the interior of the room easily visible from the outside public area.

10. Standards for relationships. Teachers and leaders normally seek to establish personal relationships with those whom they teach, and with their parents. Physical contact is one part of normal communication in such relationships. An occasional hug or hand on the shoulder is normally acceptable. Any touching of intimate areas, or any touching that makes a person uncomfortable is unacceptable. We recognize that small children at times need to be held or carried and must sometimes be physically restrained from hurting themselves or others. When more than a brief restraint is needed, however, a parent or guardian should be brought into the situation. We also recognize that the care of infants requires diapering, which means touching in private areas. This is acceptable so long as it is done with the intention to clean and not to abuse. Diapering should be done by female volunteers in an area where it can be observed by the Nursery Director and/or other approved adult workers. Nursery workers may also need to hold nursery age children to provide comfort or to read to them and would be considered appropriate care in relation to their age and development.

11. One-to-one meetings. All one-to-one meetings must be conducted under the direct oversight of the Ministry Director, Discipleship Chairperson, and Elders. One-to-one contacts away from church property shall be conducted in public places and always with the consent of the parent or legal guardian of the child/youth. Staff members planning such visits shall report them ahead of time to the Ministry Director, Discipleship Team Chairperson, or Elders.

12. Classroom Discipline. Students engaging in disruptive behavior should be corrected verbally, moved to a different area of the classroom, or taken to their parents or guardians. In no circumstances shall teachers use corporal punishment. If a student needs to be given one-on-one feedback for the purpose of improving classroom behavior, this shall be done quietly in a public setting in sight of others.

13. Restroom Procedures. These procedures should be followed for toddlers -1st grade (unless otherwise stated in the specific ministry training) in Children's Sunday School, Children's Church, AWANA and for all church-sponsored ministries where childcare is provided.

A. Toddler Through First Grade:

In the event a child from toddler age through the 1st grade needs to use the restroom, a worker shall escort the child to the restroom. Adult workers shall first check to make sure the restroom facility is safe and then wait outside until the child(ren) has finished. If needed, the male or female worker may open the door and use their voice to direct the child(ren). Adult female workers shall ordinarily wait outside but may take small children into a female restroom if necessary. For Toddler – 1st grade children, only adult female workers may escort or assist children into the restroom.

Nursery:

Children using the restroom in the nursery may be assisted only by adult female volunteers, who shall leave the door open while assisting.

14. Injury. Those working with children/youth shall facilitate prompt treatment of injuries that occur in connection with an activity sponsored by LCC. If the injury requires basic first aid or requires professional medical care, the worker shall fill out a Notice of Injury form (located in the church office window file) and give it to the Ministry Director. Parents/guardians shall be contacted immediately for any major or life-threatening injury to the child.

15. Service of accused persons. A person accused of abuse shall be suspended immediately from any role serving children/youth pending the outcome of an investigation by church leadership with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel.

16. Known sexual offenders. Persons known to be on the sex offender registry for offenses against minors may join or regularly attend only if the elders determine that LCC has the resources to responsibly undertake their supervision, care, and rehabilitation; otherwise they shall be encouraged to affiliate with a congregation having such resources.

Reporting Potential Abuse or Neglect

All allegations of abuse or neglect shall be treated seriously. If there is an allegation of abuse or neglect in connection with an activity sponsored by LCC, the following steps should be taken.

1. Reporting to the church. Staff or volunteers at LCC shall immediately, verbally report to the Discipleship Team Chairperson or designated Ministry Director if:

- They have reason to suspect child abuse or neglect;
- They hear reports from others, including children or youth, that a child may have been abused or neglected; or
- They become aware of any incident involving children under their care in which a child or youth might reasonably believe they experienced abuse or neglect from a staff person or volunteer, for whatever reason (e.g. accidental improper touching, injuries received in the course of games that might be construed as poorly supervised).

After the initial, verbal report is given, a written Report of Potential Abuse or Neglect form shall be completed within 24 hours, stating the time, place, and circumstances of the incident, together with the names of those involved and any witnesses and given to the Discipleship Team Chairperson who shall (1) determine whether to make the mandatory report to the government, if the appropriate staff, volunteer, or Ministry Director has not done so already; (2) assist as necessary the person making the report to determine whether he/she should also make the mandatory report to the government, and (3) apprise the Lead Pastor of the situation, or if he is not available, the Associate Pastor or another Elder.

2. Mandatory reporting to the government. As required by Illinois Statutes (325 ILCS 5/), whenever any LCC staff member or volunteer has “reason to suspect” that a child has been abused or neglected, he or she shall immediately report such abuse or neglect to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services online at <https://childabuse.illinois.gov>. In an emergency, call the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873).

Responding to Abuse or Neglect

Whenever the Discipleship Team Chairperson or a Ministry Director shall receive a report as outlined above, they shall work with LCC church leadership to initiate an internal investigation into the situation, with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel. If an allegation is made against the Discipleship Team Chairperson the other Elders shall carry out the investigation, with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel. Any church member or attender accused of abuse shall be suspended from participating in activities for children/youth while the investigation proceeds. Normally the following steps shall also be taken:

- Notifying the parents or guardians of an alleged victim.
- Notifying the parents or guardians of an alleged perpetrator (if a minor).
- Notifying ministry leaders involved in supervising an alleged perpetrator.
- Instructing trustees to notify LCC’s insurer and attorneys.

LCC Leadership

Discipleship Team Chairperson – Andrew Gerber

Children’s Ministry Director – Jenna Bahler

Nursery Director – Annie Besgrove

Elders – Kendall Coffman, Jeremy Besgrove, Rick Baker, Andrew Gerber

Supplemental Documents

Confidential Volunteer Application Form

Confidential Youth Volunteer Application Form

Youth Activity Permission and Medical Release Form (Template)

Notice of Injury

Report of Potential Abuse or Neglect