

Church Letterhead

FIVE STEPS TO KEEP KIDS SAFE AT

YOUR CHURCH

- 1 SCREENING** is an opportunity to prevent a molester from ever having contact with children and youth in our programs. Our careful screening of employees and volunteers in youth and children's ministries includes:
- a. Reviewing signed standard applications for all paid staff and for all volunteers in youth and children's ministries;
 - b. Conducting National Sexual Offender Registry/Criminal Background checks and renewing them every two years;
 - c. Conducting personal and professional reference checks and a thorough social media search;
 - d. Conducting face-to-face interviews;
 - e. Requiring a signature stating that clergy, employees, volunteers and other adult members of their households have not been arrested for or convicted of child abuse or diagnosed with certain psychiatric conditions such as voyeurism or exhibitionism;
 - f. Requiring a six-month minimum attendance rule for all volunteers serving in children's and youth ministries.

- 2 TRAINING** puts the power to protect in everyone's hands and is an important deterrent to child abuse. Those who work with children or youth must be trained to recognize the warning signs of potential abuse, commit to the safe practices specific to **[your church]** and learn the procedures for reporting suspected abuse.

- a. Reading Requirements
All members of the clergy, all members of the vestry, and those staff members with direct supervision over youth or children must certify that they have read, understood and accepted the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic (DOMA) policies and **[your church]** policies on the protection of children and sign an acknowledgement form.
- b. Workshop Attendance Requirements
Every two years, clergy, vestry, staff and all volunteers who have contact with youth and children must complete a diocesan approved child sexual abuse awareness training as well as diocesan approved training on the policy itself (Five Steps to Keep Kids Safe).

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INTERACTING GUIDELINES help children and adults feel safe in ministry and help detect problems before they turn into an incident of abuse. Verbal interactions between clergy, staff members, or volunteers and children should be positive, constructive and encouraging. Staff members and volunteers should avoid talking to children, teens or parents in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

Children’s staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child and never be based on the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer. It is the diocesan policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for the behavioral management of children. No form of physical discipline is acceptable.

Appropriate interactions may include:

- Smiles
- Encouragement
- Handshakes and high fives
- Fist bumps
- Thumbs up
- Side to side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Arm around the shoulder
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Holding or picking up children who are 4 years old and younger
- **[Include any other interactions that are appropriate.]**

Inappropriate interactions may include:

- Spanking, slapping, or any form of physical discipline
- Shaming or belittling a child or youth
- Meeting alone in non-public or isolated places
- Swearing in the presence of children
- Using, possessing, or being under the influence of tobacco products, alcohol, or any intoxicating drugs, when in the presence of children
- Wrestling
- Tickling
- Sitting in laps (except for nursery-aged children)
- Kissing on the lips
- Touching excessively
- Engaging in full frontal hugs or “bear hugs”
- Forcing unwanted affection
- Wearing provocative or revealing attire
- Displaying poor judgment frequently when interacting with children
- Thinking the rules don’t apply to them

Additional inappropriate interactions may include the following **Red Flag Grooming Behaviors**:

- Always wants to be alone with children
- Contacting or “friending” a child or youth on social networking sites without the parent’s permission
- Calling or texting too often (singling a child out)
- Showing favoritism or possessiveness – overly interested in a “special” child
- Giving gifts to children without the parent’s permission
- Giving special privileges to a child (offers rides to and from church, etc.)
- Convincing a child “I am just like you.” Knowing which games, videos, etc. are popular with kids
- Ridiculing the beliefs of a child or youth or those of their parents
- Allowing a child or youth to do things against the wishes of the parents
- Asking a child or youth to keep “secrets” from his or her parents
- Commenting on children’s bodies or teasing about breast/genital development
- Playing games that include touching genitalia (playing doctor)
- “Accidentally” touching genitalia
- Offering children or youth cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs
- Showing sexually explicit images to a child or telling sexually explicit jokes
- Allowing children or youth to view pornography or to visit inappropriate internet sites
- Being nude in front of children (such as on overnight trips, showering, changing at pool parties, etc.)
- Taking pictures while children are dressing or showering or requesting children share pictures of themselves partially clothed, in bathing suits or nude

Photos of children will not be used contrary to the wishes of parent(s). **[Your church]** will refrain from posting any personally identifying information about children pictured online or in print publications without prior permission from parent(s).

Social media avenues are important ways for youth ministry staff and volunteer leaders to connect with students. Clergy, staff members and volunteers shall refrain from connecting with students on social media when students are younger than the minimum age as established by each social media outlet.

Online behavior is treated equal to in-person behavior and includes:

- two adult rule
- appropriate language and tone
- appropriate attire and setting
- appropriate topics
- obtaining parental consent for connections

[Your church’s proactive policy for social media includes. . .]

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MONITORING allows us to detect problems before they turn into an incident of abuse and helps adults avoid wrongful allegations of abuse when none has occurred. Research confirms that off-site activities increase the risk of abuse. Vestry, clergy, staff, and volunteers must be diligent in monitoring and supervising children's and youth activities in all settings at all times.

Our monitoring practices include the following:

- **TWO ADULT RULE:** All children and youth activities shall be designed to be supervised by two or more screened and trained individuals at all times;
- **SUPERVISORY PLANS:** An onsite or offsite written Supervisory Plan, that includes all items detailed in the DOMA Policy shall be in place for all educational, pastoral, recreational, or other programming that involves youth or children. Those tasked with supervising youth or children for a specific program must understand their responsibilities as outlined and sign a copy of the specific supervisory plan;
- No child or youth will ever be left unattended during, or following, a church activity;
- Clergy, staff members, and volunteers should not conduct unobserved meetings or interactions with children or youth;
- In a discipleship or mentoring relationship, the interactions should occur in a public place or where other persons are present;
- Everyone is tasked with watching for, responding to, and reporting policy violations;
- An open invitation for parents to visit at any time unannounced;
- A careful review of new programs and/or significant changes to a program structure;
- Keeping interaction with children in full view of others at all times;
- Keeping unused rooms locked;
- Keeping children and youth in supervised areas.

The following restroom policy will be in effect during all children's programming:

- Children who require diapering will . . . [**Specific procedures at your church that comply with DOMA policy**];
- Children who are special needs or nursery aged and being potty-trained will . . . [**Specific procedures at your church that comply with DOMA policy**];
- Elementary aged children will . . . [**Specific procedures at your church that comply with DOMA policy**].

When children are present in the sanctuary, parent(s) are expected to accompany their elementary aged child to the restroom or send them with an older sibling; we ask this knowing that restrooms are often the most likely place for abuse to occur in an institutional setting.

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RESPONDING quickly gives us the power to prevent or stop abuse and gives the child more time to heal. If a child discloses abuse, remember to ask a staff member or trained volunteer to join in listening to the child or youth's account. If possible;

- Respect the child's privacy by finding a private, non-threatening safe place to talk;
- Keep calm, listen and avoid expressing shock or outrage;
- Let the child or youth know that he or she is believed;
- Assure the child or youth that the abuse was not his or her fault;
- Tell the child or youth, if helpful, that they were brave to disclose;
- Avoid questions that could make the child or youth feel responsible or plant ideas that could taint their recollection and account; child victims are often vague in their initial disclosure;
- Write down as accurately as possible what the child or youth disclosed; this information can be used in filing the Report of Suspected Abuse Form for the diocese and the Child Protective Services report if warranted;
- Be honest with the child. Let the know you cannot keep this a secret
- Remember to:
 - **ENDEAVOR** to ensure the safety of the child;
 - **REPORT** the abuse allegation to church authorities;
 - **REPORT** to Legal Authorities [**in accordance with applicable laws and required time frames**].
 - **RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY**: be careful afterwards not to discuss the information with, or in front of, other people who do not need to know what happened.

LOCAL CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES NUMBER

[1-???-???-????]

STATE CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE NUMBER

[1-800-???-????]

(TURN OVER PLEASE)

YOUR CHURCH

I CERTIFY THAT I (check all that apply):

_____ have attended **YOUR CHURCH** Child Sexual Abuse Awareness Training:

_____ have read and understood **YOUR CHURCH** Five Steps to Keep Kids Safe and will abide by the provisions of this policy

_____ will abide by the provisions of this policy as long as I am an employee or volunteer of the church.

Printed Name

Signature

Date