

St Mark Lutheran Church (ELCA) Child Protection Policy

*Let the children come to me and do not stop them for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs”
Luke 18:16*

Indeed, the church should be a safe place where children are welcomed and nurtured in the Christian faith. In order to protect children and youth, the Mission Council of St. Mark Lutheran Church, ELCA, has developed and adopted the following Child Protection Policy.

In addition to protecting children and youth, this policy will help protect volunteers against the possibility of false accusations.

All employees and volunteers who work directly with children are required to read and sign one copy and are given a copy for their own files.

Standards

Sexual Abuse Prohibited: Those who accept the special responsibility of working with children and youth shall not violate that responsibility by engaging in acts of sexual abuse.

Screening

All staff persons and volunteers who work directly with children and/or youth shall be required to give permission for a Virginia Criminal Records Background Check as well as a Virginia Department of Social Services Registry check. Working with children and/or youth at St. Mark Lutheran Church will be contingent on a favorable outcome of these screenings. Cost of these background checks will be borne by St. Mark Lutheran Church. St. Mark Preschool will pay the cost for its staff and volunteers.

Visual Access

Classrooms and other spaces where children are served will have windows installed in their doors so that there is visual access to the room. These windows shall not be covered. The window will be approximately 11in x 14in.

Two Person Rule

Except as provided below, at least two CPP trained workers, at least one of whom is an adult, shall be present at all church activities involving children and/or youth. Activities which meet in a classroom-like setting (e.g. Sunday Church School, Vacation Bible School, Choir Rehearsal) may be supervised by one worker in a classroom where there is visual access to the classroom (e.g. a door with a window, an open door) and there are other workers in the immediate vicinity. Nursery workers and Sunday Church School Teachers of preschool children shall always work in pairs. The second worker may be a youth of at least 6th grade age.

The staffing requirements of the St. Mark Preschool shall be determined by state licensing and will supplant this section of the Child Protection Policy.

Six Month Waiting Rule

New members and active non-members shall not be recruited or encouraged to accept positions that work directly with children or youth until they have been members for six months. This has the added benefit of allowing new members to integrate into the congregation before accepting a volunteer position that requires great commitment.

The Pastor can waive this requirement if it can be verified that the applicant has worked with children and/or youth in another congregation, and in good standing, for at least one year.

Supervision

Employees of the preschool will be supervised by the Director of the Preschool; church volunteers will be supervised by the staff person responsible for that specific area of ministry. Most often that is the pastor or other program staff person.

Training

All staff and volunteers will undergo periodic training on child sexual abuse and its elements, and the Child Protection Policy and its requirements. The Mission Council, in consultation with the Pastor, shall determine the nature and scheduling of such training. A standing Child Protection Policy Committee will be established for the purpose of providing training and overseeing periodic review of our Child Protection Policy.

Accountability

Anyone who has knowledge of child sexual abuse taking place at St. Mark Lutheran Church or during a St. Mark Lutheran Church sponsored event is required to report the abuse. We ask that they notify the Pastor. Ideally, the person who is aware of the incident will, with the Pastor, notify the Department of Social Services and/or the local police authorities. They may also notify the Mission Council President. Mandated reporters, by law, must report; it is permitted to report anonymously.

Our policy is to report all alleged incidents of child sexual abuse to the appropriate government authority as required by law. We will cooperate fully with government authorities investigating allegations of abuse.

Nothing in this policy shall prevent any individual who has knowledge of child sexual abuse taking place at St. Mark Lutheran Church or during a St. Mark Lutheran Church sponsored event from directly notifying appropriate local law officials as that individual deems appropriate.

Definitions

For purposes of the Child Protection Policy, and in keeping with Virginia Department of Social Services... "Sexual Abuse" refers to any interaction between a child and a substantially older person when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the older person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual abuse between a child and an older person is always considered to be forced; a child or youth cannot give consent.

A "child" or "youth" is any person considered to be a minor under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. A person who is incompetent is considered to be a "child" irrespective of his/her age.

An "employee" is anyone called to work for the church for salary or wages. A "worker" may be either an employee or a volunteer. A "volunteer" is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or other pecuniary benefits.

Name _____ **Date** _____

Signature _____

Witness Signature _____

04/08/2016