

## SAFE PLACE POLICY

### Dorchester Presbyterian Church

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." Mathew 9:14

Dorchester Presbyterian Church has established the following policy in an attempt to minimize the risks of abuse and other injury with respect to the children and youth participating in the church's programs, and in an attempt to protect church staff and volunteers participating in the church's programs. It is the purpose of the members and staff of Dorchester Presbyterian Church to encourage people to grow in their relationship with God and one another in a safe and secure environment. Abuse, exploitation or harassment in any form, physical, emotional or sexual, will not be tolerated.

#### I. STAFF/VOLUNTEER CATEGORIES

- a. Category A: The paid staff of Dorchester Presbyterian Church
- b. Category B: Adult volunteers (over age 17)
- c. Category C: Youth volunteers (under age 18)

#### II. SCREENING AND TRAINING

The church will provide screening of all categories of volunteers defined above. This screening will help make the church aware of potential issues prior to any activities with children and youth. The church will provide training on a regular basis to educate church staff and all volunteers who work with children/youth. Following the hiring by the church of new staff, as well as volunteers working with children and youth, the screening will be accomplished as follows:

- a. The church will perform a background check for anyone 16 and older who plans to work with children/youth. A parent's endorsement is required for those under the age of 16.
- b. Continued background checks (based on a random lottery system) will repeat for all volunteers and staff working with children.
- c. The background checks will be conducted by the pastor.
- d. The pastor will review the screenings and determine if the candidate has any convictions. Any applicant with convictions of a violent or sexual nature is not to work with the children.
- e. See Addendum D (Adult Volunteer) and Addendum E (Teen Volunteer applications which are used to secure permission for background checks.

#### III. ADULT SUPERVISION

The church's requirements for adult supervision on and off campus have the goal of providing a safe physical environment for children and youth. The church will permit volunteers to assist in appropriate situations once the following policies are met:

- a. Each room set aside for children and youth on campus shall have a door with a window. Doors without a window shall remain open when in use. The doors of bathrooms used for children (under age 5) requiring adult supervision shall remain open. For overnight events appropriate sleeping arrangements shall be made and the event will have male and female adult supervision.

- b. At least two workers shall be present at all activities involving children or youth. At no time will only one worker be allowed to be alone with a child or youth. The only exceptions to the two-adult rule would be situations in which the adult and child or youth are in a public place, or other persons are in and out of the area or room. In such cases, doors shall remain open. The policy is not intended to restrict pastoral counseling and caregiving. The following are not violations:
  - i. On-campus and during the church school hour on Sunday mornings, if a designated adult supervisor moves in and out of the classrooms and monitors the hallways.
  - ii. One-on-one interactions between a child and adult conducted in a public space with the prior knowledge of a paid church staff member and the prior consent of the parent of the child.
  - iii. When an emergency or other situation (for example, bathroom breaks, calming a distraught child, or a sick child) requires one adult to be alone with the children or youth and another adult is notified immediately before and after that time period.
  - iv. Carpooling to and from church events with the consent of the parent or guardian of the child or youth obtained in each instance or with written consent. Parent or guardian must be notified upon departure and arrival.
  - v. Diaper changes, if not being performed by a child's parent or guardian, shall be performed by paid church staff members only. See Addendum A for Nursery guidelines.
  - vi. In settings where the premises are governed by other organizations, such as Montreat, mission trips and events or retreats organized by the Charleston Atlantic Presbytery, the policies of those organizations as agreed to by the participants shall govern.
  - vii. By following the rule of three, and adult may work with two youth/children.
  - viii. All adults are to follow our discipline policy listed in Addendum B.

#### IV. TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

- a. While volunteering or working directly with children/youth, personal telephone calls, texts, emails and other forms of personal communication should be avoided while supervising minors and should only be used in the case of an emergency. Cell phone use should be kept to a minimum while operating a vehicle. Texting is not allowed by any driver.
- b. Church employees, volunteers and members are to uphold appropriate and faithful communication with children/youth in all contexts, refraining from the use of explicit language, the use of sexual imagery or sexually explicit discussion, and the promotion of illegal activities (e.g. drug use, underage drinking). This requirement extends to voice, text, social media, email, and all other forms of electronic communication. If an adult employee, volunteer, or member feels that they have been inappropriately contacted by a child/youth, they are to report the incident in writing (preferably email) to the pastor.
- c. Use of prudent judgement is asked in the time you contact children/youth through electronic or social media. Communication should take place between 9:00am and 9:00pm. If contacted by a child/youth outside of these hours, wait until morning to reply. In the event of an emergency, contact the parent immediately.

- d. If you accept to “friend” or “follow” a request from a child/youth, review the accessible content on your profile frequently to ensure it is appropriate.
- e. Dorchester Presbyterian staff are the only persons allowed to post photos of youth and children online or on any social media. The use of photos of minors on social media is only allowed with written permission from the parent/guardian of the minor.

#### V. POOL SAFETY

When hosting or planning pool related events, please review the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act. For this information visit: <https://www.poolsafely.gov/about-us/>

#### VI. REPORTING

All reports of suspected abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, verbal) of children or youth associated with the church shall be made promptly and shall be made directly to the pastor. Paid staff and volunteers will adhere to the requirements of South Carolina law for reporting suspected abuse. In accordance with the requirements of the law, and as far as practicable, such reports shall be treated as confidential. Reference Addendum C for descriptions of abuse as defined by the South Carolina Bar Association.

- a. In the event of a report concerning a paid church staff member, the pastor to whom the report was made shall confer with the Personnel Committee and may request the assistance of another church staff member with regard to the steps to be taken concerning further investigation, if any, further reporting.
- b. In the event of a report concerning a volunteer, the pastor to whom the report was made may request the assistance of another church staff member with regard to the steps to be taken concerning further investigation, if any, further reporting.
- c. All incidents involving illness or injury of any kind to any child or youth during a church sponsored event shall be reported immediately to the parent or guardian of the child/youth, and also to the staff in charge of the event.
- d. In the event of a conflict between this policy and any liability insurance policy of the church, the requirements of the liability insurance policy shall govern.

## ADDENDUM A

### **Infant and Toddler Nursery Guidelines**

1. At least two caregivers will always be present.
2. At least one caregiver must be an adult; one caregiver may be a teenager.
3. Pre-school children are encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the bathroom door shall remain open while caregiver assists the child.
4. All caregivers must wash and/or sanitize their hands before interacting with children.
5. All children must be signed in. Parents/guardians will share their contact information upon arrival so that they can be reached in case of emergency.
6. Parents/guardians must label all their child's belongings.
7. Children may only leave with a parent/guardian or person indicated by the parent/guardian on a sign in sheet.
8. Paid and volunteer nursery staff will always wear nametags.
9. Children shall only receive drinks and food provided by their family.
10. Observe hygienic practices (hand washing and diaper disposal) when changing diapers.
11. Paid caregivers must have CPR/First Aid training. A first aid kit is available in the nursery cabinets.

In the case of emergency, call 911 - a phone is available in all rooms.

## ADDENDUM B

### GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

#### PHILOSOPHY

We foster a loving and nurturing environment where children can grow in their faith and learning. We believe in guiding children toward positive behavior through clear expectations, kindness, and grace. Maintaining a safe and respectful atmosphere benefits every child and allows for meaningful spiritual growth. While challenges may arise, our approach focuses on encouragement, understanding, and gentle correction.

#### ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN

1. **Make the expectations clear** – Begin interactions and lessons with positive language regarding how children are expected to engage with each other and in the setting.
2. **Model Patience and Understanding** – On occasion children seek attention because they need connection. Respond with calmness and empathy rather than frustration.
3. **Lean on Your Team** – Invite other leaders to help gently redirect behavior, ensuring everyone feels supported.
4. **Use Nonverbal Cues** – A kind glance or a warm smile can communicate awareness of a child's actions without embarrassing them in front of others.
5. **Speak to the Child by Name** – Address them respectfully and personally to show care and attention.
6. **Offer Gentle Guidance** – Use positive language to remind the child of expected behavior. For example: "Let's focus on being good listeners right now."
7. **Handle Concerns Privately** – Speak with the child individually to better understand their perspective. Gently explain how their behavior affects others and explore ways they can make better choices. Help them recognize that you're there to support them in growing and learning.
8. **Focus on Restoration, Not Punishment** – Frame consequences as opportunities to learn and grow rather than as penalties. Emphasize forgiveness, encouragement, and grace.

#### USING TIME-INS

If verbal reminders and redirection are not effective, a short "time-in" may help the child reflect and reset:

1. The child remains nearby in the room, seated in a calm space where they can still feel included.
2. Provide them with an opportunity to reflect quietly. This time should be free from distractions such as toys or books.
3. Keep the time brief, based on the child's age (approximately one minute per year of age).

#### PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

Open communication with parents is essential in supporting a child's growth. If a "time-in" was used, caregivers will inform parents afterward, explaining the situation and the steps taken to help the child.

If a child's behavior continues to challenge the group's safety or focus, an additional teacher or volunteer may seek the child's parent or guardian to assist. This partnership ensures the child feels supported both at church and at home.

#### COMMITMENT TO GRACE AND LOVE

Our goal is to guide children in a way that reflects Christ's love and compassion. No other forms of discipline beyond those outlined here are appropriate. Together, we can nurture their hearts and minds.

## ADDENDUM C

**DEFINITION OF NEGLECT**

As defined by the South Carolina Bar Association, child abuse or neglect occurs when the parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare:

1. Inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon the child physical or mental injury or engages in acts or omissions which present a substantial risk of physical or mental injury to the child, including injuries sustained as a result of excessive corporal punishment, but *excluding* corporal punishment or physical discipline which:
  - a) Is administered by a parent;
  - b) Is perpetrated for the sole purpose of restraining or correcting the child;
  - c) Is reasonable in manner and moderate in degree;
  - d) Has not brought about permanent or lasting damage to the child; and
  - e) Is not reckless or grossly negligent behavior by the parents.
2. Commits or allows to be committed against the child a sexual offense as defined by the laws of this State or engages in acts or omissions that present a substantial risk that a sexual offense as defined in the laws of this State would be committed against the child.
3. Abandons the child
4. Encourages, condones, or approves the commission of delinquent acts by the child and the commission of the acts are shown to be the result of the encouragement, or approval
5. Fails to supply the child with:
  - a) Adequate food, clothing, shelter, or supervision appropriate to the child's age and development.
  - b) Education as required by law. A child's absences from school may not be considered abuse or neglect unless the school has made efforts to bring about the child's attendance, and those efforts were unsuccessful because of the parents' refusal to cooperate.
  - c) Health care: though financially able to do so or offered financial or other reasonable means to do so and the failure to do so has caused or presents a substantial risk of causing physical or mental injury. For the purpose of this chapter "adequate health care" includes any medical or nonmedical remedial health care permitted or authorized under state law.
  - d) Has committed abuse or neglect as described in in previous paragraphs, such that a child who subsequently becomes part of the person's household is at substantial risk of one of those forms of abuse or neglect.

\*\*\* It is important to note that "abuse and neglect" is not limited to physical abuse, but includes all of the following maltreatment:

1. Neglect (which includes)
  - a) Physical
  - b) Educational
  - c) Medical
2. Physical Abuse
3. Sexual Abuse
4. Emotional Abuse

*Information collected from sbar.org (Family Law: Child Abuse and Neglect)*

### **FURTHER DEFINITIONS**

Physical abuse – is that which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, burns, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.

Emotional abuse – is that which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child's performance, and isolation from normal social activities.

Sexual abuse / molestation – is that which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse), and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, inappropriate verbal comments, and voyeurism). The perpetrator may be another minor.

Neglect – is the failure to use proper care or supervision of children or youth or the abandonment of the children or youth participating in any church sponsored activities.

What is considered appropriate touch?

Non-offensive touching in a way that comforts or shows caring within proper boundaries and only with the person's permission. (Examples of appropriate touch are high fives and fist pumps). An example of an inappropriate behavior is lap sitting.

ADDENDUM D

**Adult Volunteer Application Form**

This form is to be completed for any volunteer position involving the supervision or care of children, youth, or mentally handicapped. This is being used to provide a safe and secure environment for the activities or programs of the church.

**PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Date of Training:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

**Driver' s License #** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth** \_\_\_\_\_

**Social Security #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Present Address** \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

If you have lived at the above address for less than one year:

**Previous Address** \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

How long have your lived in South Carolina? \_\_\_\_\_

In what other States have you lived? \_\_\_\_\_

If you have used other names, please provide name(s) and time period(s) used.

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of Dorchester Presbyterian Church? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If yes, when did you join? \_\_\_\_\_ If no, how long have you been attending? \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 2: VOLUNTEER HISTORY**

Your honest answers to the following questions will assist us in providing the finest care possible.

- 1. Have you ever been subject to any disciplinary action, complaint or allegations that you violated any employer's or any organization's policy concerning sexual misconduct  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ (If yes, please explain)
  
- 2. Have you ever been arrested, charged, indicted or convicted for any criminal offense (misdemeanor or felony) other than a traffic violation? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
(If yes, please explain)
  
- 3. Have you ever been hospitalized or treated for alcohol or substance abuse? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
(If yes, please explain)
  
- 4. Other than the above questions, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would cause you or the church to have concerns about your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of minors? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ (If yes, please explain)

**PART 3: AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE**

I understand and agree that:

- A. All information I have provided may be verified. I agree to release from liability any person or organization that provides information regarding me. I do hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless, Dorchester Presbyterian Church, its employees, representatives and agents from any claims or causes or action relating in any manner to the verification of or attempts to verify the information provided.
  
- B. I hereby give my permission for Dorchester Presbyterian Church, to obtain information relating to my criminal history record through the appropriate agency. The criminal history record, as received from the reporting agencies may include arrest and conviction data as well as plea bargains and deferred adjudications. I understand this information will be used, in part, to determine my eligibility for a volunteer position with the church. I also understand that I will have the opportunity to review the criminal history, and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received. I, the undersigned, do for myself and heirs, executors and administrators, hereby release and forever discharge and agree to indemnify the investigating agency and each of their officers, directors, employees, and agents and hold them harmless from and against any and all causes of actions, suits, liabilities, costs, debts and sums of money, claims and demands whatsoever, and any and all related attorney's fees, court costs and other expenses resulting from the investigation of my background in connection with my application to become an employee or a volunteer.
  
- C. By signing this form, I certify and affirm that the information I have given is true, complete and correct in all respects.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**PART 4: ADULT COVENANT FOR CHURCH AS A SAFE PLACE**

While working with minors at church sponsored events, I promise to:

- 1. Serve as a role model; remembering actions speak louder than words
- 2. Provide support, encouragement, and spiritual nurture to those around me
- 3. Be fully committed to participating in the event
- 4. Be responsible for my own belongings and respect the property of others
- 5. Use the facilities and grounds with care, obeying all rules of the facility
- 6. Refrain from the possession and use of illegal substances, weapons, and pyrotechnics
- 7. Wear appropriate clothing

**For office use:**

Date(s) Background Check Conducted: \_\_\_\_\_

Any violations or flags: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, is it a disqualifying offense? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, date the volunteer was contacted? \_\_\_\_\_

This form is confidential and will be kept in a locked file in the office of Dorchester Presbyterian Church. Only the Pastor and Associate Pastor will have access to this file.

ADDENDUM E

**Teen Volunteer Application Form**

This form is to be completed for any position involving the supervision or care of children, youth, or mentally handicapped. This is being used to provide a safe and secure environment for the activities or programs of the church.

**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

**Driver' s License #** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date of Birth** \_\_\_\_\_

**Social Security #** \_\_\_\_\_

**Present Address** \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

If you have lived at the above address for less than one year:

**Previous Address** \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

**SAFE PLACE COVENANT**

1. Serve as a role model; remembering actions speak louder than words
2. Provide support, encouragement, and spiritual nurture to those around me
3. Be fully committed to participating in the event
4. Be responsible for my own belongings and respect the property of others
5. Use the facilities and grounds with care, obeying all rules of the facility
6. Refrain from the possession and use of illegal substances, weapons, and pyrotechnics
7. Wear appropriate clothing
8. Also, I understand that in serving as a volunteer or in a paid position for Dorchester Presbyterian Church that I am willing to abide by the Safe Place Policies and Procedures to reduce the risk of child abuse in this church. I understand that child abuse is a serious matter and will do my part in the prevention of child abuse while serving as a volunteer.

Teen Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I do not know of any reason why my child should not serve with children, youth, or the mentally handicapped. They do not demonstrate any signs of being a potential risk to those under their care.

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**This section is only for teens who are 16 years old and older.**

**AUTHORIZATION AND RELEASE**

- A. All information I have provided may be verified. I agree to release from liability any person or organization that provides information regarding me. I do hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless, Dorchester Presbyterian Church, its employees, representatives and agents from any claims or causes or action relating in any manner to the verification of or attempts to verify the information provided.
- B. I hereby give my permission for Dorchester Presbyterian Church to obtain information relating to my criminal history record through the appropriate agency. The criminal history record, as received from the reporting agencies may include arrest and conviction data as well as plea bargains and deferred adjudications. I understand this information will be used, in part, to determine my eligibility for a volunteer position with the church. I also understand that I will have the opportunity to review the criminal history, and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received. I, the undersigned, do for myself and heirs, executors and administrators hereby release and forever discharge and agree to \$1 the investigating agency and each of their officers, directors, employees, and agents and hold them harmless from and against any and all causes of actions, suits, liabilities, costs, debts and sums of money, claims and demands whatsoever, and any and all related attorney’s fees, court costs and other expenses resulting from the investigation of my background in connection with my application to become an employee or a volunteer.

By signing this form, I certify and affirm that the information I have given is true, complete and correct in all respects.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This form is confidential and will be kept in a locked file in the once of Dorchester Presbyterian Church Only the Pastor and Associate Pastor will have access to this file.