

## **Synod of the Northeast Child Protection Policy**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Synod of the Northeast seeks to provide a safe and secure environment in which children and youth can spiritually develop and are protected from inappropriate treatment of any kind. Our intent is to protect children and youth during all synod events or activities, to educate staff and volunteers concerning pertinent issues, and to protect staff, volunteers and the Synod itself from false allegations of abuse and maltreatment.

### **Basic Policy for Compensated Staff and for Volunteers**

The following guidelines apply to all individuals who work with children or youth at any Synod event or activity. For the purpose of this policy the terms “child” “children” or “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18).

### **Two Adult Rule**

At any Synod event or activity with children or youth there will be no less than two unrelated adults present. In providing transportation of any sort, the same rule will apply. For overnight activities and activities that include housing, there should be at least one adult of each gender, where appropriate.

### **Open Door Policy**

All rooms set aside for children or youth must have a door with a clear window in it through which the room is visible. Otherwise, the door to the room shall remain open.

### Counseling Policy

No counseling shall take place under the auspices of the Synod at any of its events. Staff members and volunteers are expected to avoid to the greatest extent possible any situation in which they would be alone and out of sight of others with a single child or youth.

### Age of Volunteers

Persons who work with children or youth should be at least 18 years of age. We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under the age of 18 to assist in caring for children during events or activities. In this case, the person must be at least 13 years old, must be under the supervision of an adult, and must never be left alone with children.

### Discipline Policy

It is the policy of the Synod not to administer corporal punishment. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Volunteers should consult with Synod staff members if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

### **Selection of Volunteers**

All persons desiring to work with children or youth at Synod events or activities will be screened. The screening includes the following:

#### Six Month Rule

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with the Synod for a minimum of 6 months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children or youth.

### Written Application

All persons who wish to work with children or youth will complete a written application to be supplied by the Synod. The application requests basic information from the applicant and inquires about previous experience with children, church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as the disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application forms will be maintained in confidence in the Synod office.

### Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for working with children or youth.

### Reference Checks

Before working with children or youth, at least two of the applicant's references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references.

### Criminal Background Checks

A criminal background check is required for all volunteers seeking to work with children or youth at synod events or activities. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children or youth will be determined by the Synod Leader or Stated Clerk on a case-by-case basis in light of the surrounding circumstances. Convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application will also disqualify the applicant.

## **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

For the purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse may include the following:

Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental. This can include hitting, beating, shaking, burns, or biting.

Emotional abuse – emotional injury takes place when a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security. This can include threatening, yelling, constant criticism, belittling, bullying or constant teasing.

Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between an adult and child or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim. This can include fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, or pornography.

Neglect – depriving a child of his/her essential needs. This can include lack of provision of food, water, shelter or medical care.

Volunteers may become aware of abuse or neglect of children or youth under their care at a Synod event or activity. If the volunteer suspects abuse or neglect, he/she should report it immediately to the Synod Leader or Stated Clerk for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

If an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at a Synod event or activity, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child or youth will be notified.

2. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of abuse or neglect will be placed on leave from working with children, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified. The Synod will comply with State requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse.
4. The Synod's insurance company will be notified, and an incident report will be filed. Any documents received related to the incident or allegations will be forwarded immediately to the insurance company.
5. The Synod Leader will be the spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the Synod. All other representatives from the Synod should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found to be innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from working with children or youth.

### **Training**

The Synod will provide periodic Child Protection Policy training to insure that all members of the Synod staff and all volunteers serving youth and children are fully informed concerning the Policy guidelines.