

WESTERNPORT CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Westernport Church of the Brethren is a Christ-following community, which takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, and adults. All volunteers and employees, who are in leadership roles in the church, are living out the vows taken in baptism to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith.

Once upon a time, when the church needed a Sunday school teacher or a youth group volunteer, the church just recruited someone. When he/she said, "Yes," your job was done.

Times have changed. Stories of child abuse make the headlines, and churches are not exempt.

"He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.'" Matthew 18:2-6 NIV

Employees of Westernport Church of the Brethren

- 1. Complete an application, listing prior employment and volunteer experiences with children and youth.**
- 2. References and screening**
- 3. Background Checks for Criminal Record and Driving Record**
- 4. All records will be kept confidential in a locked area.**

Volunteers

A volunteer is any individual who desires to work with children or youth, for a long or short period of time. In the case of working with children and youth, the volunteer must be at least 5 years older than the group he/she is leading.

- 1. Complete a volunteer application form, including experience working with children or youth.**
- 2. Background check for Criminal Record and Driving Record**
- 3. All records will be kept confidential in a locked area.**

No applicant or volunteer, who is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant/volunteer abused, exploited, or neglected children or youth, will be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant. The church board and the pastor reserves the right to disqualify applicants, who have been convicted of other violent offenses or have been convicted of behaviors which indicate that the applicant is ill-suited to work with children or youth (such as drug-related convictions, DUI/DWI convictions within the past five years, or other convictions for offenses such as rape, murder, domestic violence, theft, etc.).

Nursery Protection Procedures

These procedures cover the activities dealing with the nursery, at the Westernport Church of the Brethren. The nursery is for children from birth through age 4. (The pastor, in conjunction with the board chair, can grant exceptions or alternate accommodations for special needs children.)

1. All parents or guardians should receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary guidelines on their first visit to the nursery.
2. All parents and guardians must complete a Nursery Registration form, and it shall be kept on file with the Nursery Director and/or adult volunteer. If a parent stays in the nursery with their child, they cannot take responsibility for any other children. There must be an approved adult volunteer in the nursery if there are any other children present. The child must be signed in and out each time the nursery is used.
3. ONLY the parent or guardian may bring a child to or pick up a child from the nursery. The child shall not be released to siblings or to other individuals, unless the parent signs a form, in advance, and designates that individual as someone that child may be released to. Anyone designated must be, at least, 16 years of age. The nursery will be open 15 minutes prior to worship and will stay open 15 minutes after worship. (Nursery registration needs to list who can pick up a child.)
4. ONLY the Nursery Director or other designated volunteers will be allowed in the nursery.

Nursery – newborn thru age 4

Elementary – kindergarten thru grade 5

Youth – grade 6 thru grade 12

General Safe Sanctuary Code for Children and Youth

- A. **Two-Adult Rule** – Whenever possible, a minimum of two adults (not married to each other) shall be present during any activity involving children or youth. This allows for protection for all involved.
- B. **Open-Door Policy** – All children's classrooms will have either a viewing window, which will remain free of covering, or a dutch door, where the top door will remain open at all times. If the classroom does not have a dutch door or viewing window, the door must remain open at all times. The pastor, teachers, or volunteers shall never be in a closed-door situation with any children. If a room needs to be closed for noise reasons, two adults must be in the room at all times. If an adult needs to step out, the door will remain open until the 2nd adult returns.
- C. **Discipline** – Corporal punishment of any kind is never appropriate. Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults, or shouting. Teachers or volunteers are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs, or give alternate choices. If a child is disruptive, a teacher or volunteer may be sent to locate the parent or guardian.
- D. **Transportation** – Staff or volunteers cannot transport children or youth between church and home, unless there are a prior agreement and written permission from a parent or guardian. Transportation for activities requires a signed activity form.
- E. **Dismissal for Children** – Children, from Pre-K through grade 5 will not be allowed to leave the building after Sunday school or other events, unless the parent or guardian comes into the building to get the child.
- F. **Computers** – Children and youth will not be allowed to use any church computer in the building, unless under the supervision of an adult.
- G. **Photos or Videos** – Photos or videos of children or youth will not be used in church website information, church Facebook posts, or local newspapers without signed permission from the parent or guardian. If any photos or videos of children or youth are taken without prior consent, it must be done with only the backs of those involved displayed. (This does not apply to community events,

such as Day Camp, Easter Egg Hunts, Block Parties, or the Santa Secret Shop, where it would be impossible to get parent or guardian permission.)

- H. **Counseling** – Any counseling done with a child or youth must be done in an area where other adults are available, with the door of the room open and with blinds or curtains open. The only exception would be counseling by the pastor. In that case, the pastor should never counsel a child or youth alone in his/her office. (If the pastor is counseling a child/youth, the door can remain shut, if a window is available, or other means of video monitoring is available. Video monitoring will not include audio to maintain confidentiality.)
- I. **Restrooms** – Staff or volunteers accompanying a child to the restroom will remain outside of the restroom, within earshot. The adult may help with handwashing, as long as the main door is open, so that others can see into the room. In the case of little ones in the nursery needing to be changed or taken to the restroom, the parent will be notified to take care of it. At no time should staff or volunteers be alone with a child in the stall. This is for the protection of the adult, as well as the child.
- J. **Reporting** – Any inappropriate conduct between a staff member or volunteer and a child or youth should be reported promptly.

Specific Youth Procedures

- A. For safety purposes, with high school and middle school students, there will be, whenever possible, one adult for every seven youth, during a youth group activity. A husband/wife duo counts as one adult. If there are not enough adults available for the activity, it must be canceled.
- B. For the purpose of supervising youth (in a high school setting), an adult is defined as anyone who is at least 23 years old. (As a reminder, the 5-Year Rule applies, regarding age.)
- C. For any youth functions (other than regular meetings), on or off the church premises, a signed permission slip, by the parent or guardian, will be required from each youth attending. Failure to have a signed slip will result in a telephone call to the parent or guardian...or the youth being sent home.
- D. No driver is to transport any youth alone.
- E. If staying in a hotel, no adult may stay in the same room as a youth, unless it is a parent/child situation. (If staying in a large area, such as a gym or fellowship hall, adults may stay with the appropriate gender groups.) No members of the opposite sex will be allowed to sleep in the same room unsupervised.
- F. If traveling with youth, an adult must check a single restroom, first, before letting the youth enter. If using a restroom with multiple stalls, a minimum of one adult must always stay in the restroom.

RESPONSE PLAN

Staff and volunteers should complete and file a Suspected Abuse Report to document the events which raised concerns that abuse may have occurred. For example, if a child returned to the Sunday school room, from an escorted visit to the bathroom, and acts differently from that child's normal manner (appears upset, overly quiet, withdrawn, or fearful, especially of the person that escorted the child to the bathroom), a report should be filled out, after the safety of the child is established.

- The care and safety of alleged complainants (and family) is the first priority. All allegations are to be taken seriously and documented in the Suspected Abuse Report.
- In no way should the complainant be made to feel responsible for the event occurring.
- The response to allegations must be handled with due respect for EVERYONE's privacy and confidentiality.
- Do not confront the accused but ensure that further contact with the complainant will not happen until the incident is resolved.
- Treat The accused with dignity and respect. If the accused is a paid staff member, he/she should be relieved temporarily of duties, until the investigation is completed. A decision will be made to maintain or suspend his/her income, as appropriate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities, with guidance from the congregation's attorney.
- Church leadership will issue a public statement to inform the congregation and respond to press inquiries (if needed). This statement should communicate that the congregation regards these allegations seriously and offers responsible action, concern, and support for all involved.
 - A. No details of the accusation will be released.
 - B. Do not deny the incident occurred.
 - C. Do not assign blame, do not minimize the situation (ex. "It wasn't that serious.")
 - D. No statement will be issued until it has been approved by the congregation's attorney.
 - E. The Church Board will appoint one official spokesperson to deal with any and all media inquiries.

Revised and Approved – Church Council Meeting 6/7/2026

Suspicion/Allegation of Abuse Report Form

This form is to be completed by the volunteer or paid staff member, whenever abuse is suspected. If a volunteer fills out this form, this form will go to the proper program supervisor, who will then present it to the pastor. All information on this form is extremely confidential.

Name of class or activity _____ Adult Supervisor _____

Name if child/youth/vulnerable adult _____ Birth Date _____

Date and time of abuse (if known): _____

State what was observed or reported:

Was the program supervisor notified? Yes ___ No ___

If Yes – Name of Supervisor _____

Time and Date Supervisor was contacted _____

Signature of person filling out the above information: _____

**Information below will be filled out by the Ministry Supervisor*

When was pastor contacted: Date _____ Time _____

Supervisor's
Signature: _____

Print Name _____

Date _____

Authorization and Request for Criminal and Driving Record Check

Westernport Church of the Brethren
200 Oakview Drive
Westernport, Maryland 21562

I, _____, hereby authorize Westernport Church of the Brethren to request information regarding any record of charges or convictions contained in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file...including, but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by state and federal law. I do release police and sheriff's departments or any agency WCOTB uses to obtain information from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request.

Signature of Applicant _____ Date _____

Print Applicant's Full Name _____

Print all other names that have been used by applicant (if any) _____

Current Address (include city, state, zip) _____

Previous Address if less than 7 years _____

Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____

Driver's License Number _____ State _____

License Expiration Date _____ Social Security Number _____

All information acquired during the recruiting of volunteers shall be treated as a confidential manner. All information obtained will be kept confidential and locked away in an appropriate manner. All information will be destroyed after the volunteer has transferred membership or otherwise left the congregation or 24 months after the volunteer's last active participation in a children's, youth's or vulnerable adult's program.

EMERGENCIES

If necessary, call 911 first. Safety of children/youth/vulnerable adults is a top priority. STAY CALM!

If fire, exit the building immediately to the back grass area. Please follow exit signs, which are located throughout the building.

If tornado, go to designated areas, which include the hallway on the lower level or the ladies bathroom on the upper level. Have students sit on floor, head down, with something covering them, if possible (pillows, rug, etc.). Know how many individuals you have and keep them together.

If terrorist threat, have students get into smallest position possible and protect their heads. You, as the adult, should make every effort to protect them as much as possible. (Ex. If in sanctuary, get students under pews and have them cover their eyes, if necessary.)

Volunteer Application for Westernport Church of the Brethren

This application is to be completed by all persons who desire to work on a regular or temporary basis with children or youth in our church's ministries. This application form is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for the protection of the church and all the children and youth under the church's care. *Indicates mandatory fields for short-term volunteers. (ALL FIELDS REQUIRED FOR STAFF/LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERS) PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.

*First Name _____ *Middle Name _____ *Last Name _____

*Maiden or Former Names or Alias _____

*Sex _____ *Race _____ *Date of Birth _____

*Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Previous Address (If less than 2 years at present address)

Occupation _____

Present Employer _____

Three references/addresses/phone # 1. _____

2. _____ 3. _____

*Name of Church Where You are Attending _____

Pastor's Name _____ Church Phone Number _____

*Volunteer Position Desired _____

List any volunteer positions you have had working with children:

Do you have a valid driver's license? ___Yes ___No Driver's License # _____

Do you have driver's liability insurance? ___Yes ___No

Carrier Name _____

Have you had a traffic violation within the past 5 years? If yes, specify for what and the date(s) of the ticket(s) _____

Westernport Church of the Brethren reserves the right to deny volunteer opportunities to anyone in its sole discretion.

By signing this form, I am affirming that the above statements I have made are true and factual to the best of my knowledge. I am granting permission for all persons, organizations, or agencies, such as the Department of Human Services or State Law Enforcement, be contacted for a Criminal Records Check for the expressed purpose of volunteer screening.

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____