



# MCC Safe-Child Policy

Murrysville Community Church is committed to do everything we can to not only deny the evil presence of abuse in our church, but even the appearance of such evil. It is our commitment to maintain the highest standards of protection for the most vulnerable and helpless among us, especially our children.

It is for this reason that we require our staff, leaders, and volunteers to take this Safe-Child Policy, with the upmost sincerity and respect.

The intention of this document is to clearly describe the expected behaviors on the part of children and students who are under the age of 18 at MCC, as well as the adults who serve them in our various ministries.

## Definition of Terms

**Children** include all persons under the age of 18, including infants, toddlers, four year olds, five year olds, and those enrolled in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

**Students** include all persons under the age of 18 who are currently enrolled in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

**Adult Volunteer** include all persons 18 years of age or older, who work regularly with children and students at MCC, whether as a volunteer, staff member, elder, or deacon.

**Student Volunteer** is a student who aids an adult leader or teacher in children's ministry at MCC. A student volunteer must be 12 years or older and demonstrate a sustained pattern of moral integrity and godly character. All student volunteers must be approved and scheduled to

serve by the MCC Children's Director or an MCC Pastor. Student volunteers are restricted to serve in the Nursery, Children's worship, Powered Up, and Vacation Bible School only. Student volunteers are required to sign a statement of affirmation of this MCC Safe-Child Policy as are adult volunteers.

**Teacher** is a MCC Sunday School teacher.

**Abuse** is defined as any action that intentionally harms or injures another person.<sup>i</sup> Abuse includes verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual forms.<sup>ii</sup>

**Child Abuse** is defined as when an individual acts or fails to prevent something that causes serious harm to a child under the age of 18. This harm can take many forms, such as serious physical injury, serious mental injury, or sexual abuse or exploitation.<sup>iii</sup> The definition of child abuse has been amended by the PA General Assembly on December 31, 2014 and states that child abuse includes acts or failures to act which are committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly.<sup>iv</sup>

**Physical Abuse** is the infliction of injury by another person.<sup>v</sup>

**Sexual Abuse** of a child refers to any sexual behavior between an adult and child or between two children, one of whom is forcefully dominant or significantly older.<sup>vi</sup>

**Mandated Reporter** includes *any adult who works with minors under the age of 18 and either directly or indirectly witnesses the abuse of a minor or has knowledge of an allegation of abuse of a minor.* According to the Pennsylvania's **Child Protective Services Law (CPSL)** which was amended December 31, 2014, this includes a clergyman, minister, or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization, *an individual paid or unpaid; who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.*<sup>vii</sup>

## Child Abuse

Child abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional) or neglect is not tolerated by Murrysville Community Church. Anyone who is determined to have committed, been convicted of, or confessed of child abuse is not eligible for service and if serving, will have his or her employment or volunteer status with Murrysville Community Church revoked.

1. In order to prevent child abuse. Murrysville Community Church addresses child safety through the appropriate screening, state required background checks, and supervision of all activities involving children and youth.
2. Anyone who is known or determined to have committed abuse of a child under the age of 18 or a mentally or emotionally handicapped person at any time during his/her adult life is not eligible for service either as an employee or as a volunteer and, if already serving will have his/her service with Murrysville Community Church terminated immediately. Murrysville Community Church will not knowingly allow anyone who has been convicted of abuse participate in any children's ministry, either as staff or volunteer.
3. Anyone who committed child abuse or neglect before the age of 18 will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account such factors as age, seriousness of offense, acknowledgment of responsibility, and effective treatment.
4. Any employee or volunteer whose dependent children have been determined to have committed child abuse will be asked to follow through with an action plan to resolve the causes and effects of the abuse. Failure to follow the action plan will lead to termination of their service with Murrysville Community Church. Reapplication would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with consideration for factors such as age, age difference between offender and victim(s), seriousness of offense, acknowledgment of responsibility, and effective treatment.
5. The Murrysville Community Church Safe Child Policy will be utilized in determining appropriate administrative actions for anyone accuse of or found to have committed child abuse or neglect.
6. If Murrysville Community Church is asked for a reference for anyone whose service or membership was terminated due to violations of our Code of Conduct, Murrysville Community Church will generally disclose the reasons for termination. Further if Murrysville Community Church becomes aware that a former employee or volunteer who was dismissed becomes employed or volunteers in another organization, Murrysville Community Church will seek legal counsel of our duty to warn the organization and make aware the reason for termination.
7. Failure to follow the Safe Child Policy or the Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action up to an including termination of employment, if staff. If a volunteer such failure will result in the exercise of church discipline by the session and according to the Book of Church Order.
8. Murrysville Community Church staff and volunteers will comply with all Pennsylvania Mandated Reporter laws.

- Staff and volunteers as mandated reporters are required to make a report of suspected abuse when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse.
  - Mandated reporters must not try to determine whether abuse has happened. They are not investigators and should not ask questions about what happened, who did it, and so forth beyond reaching the threshold of reasonable cause to suspect that the child has been abused.
  - In the state of Pennsylvania as a mandated reported willful failure to report (having a reasonable suspicion of abuse and deciding not to report it) may be punished by law. The first offense of willful failure to report is a second-degree misdemeanor. Penalties are increased to a third degree felony if the mandated reporter willfully fails to report child abuse that is a felony of the first degree or higher and the mandated reporter has direct knowledge of the nature of the abuse.
9. If it is determined that a staff person has violated the Code of Conduct or willfully harms a child, they will not be allowed to voluntarily resign but will have their employment terminated. Additionally in cases where corroborating evidence shows that a person previously employed by Murrysville Community Church committed child abuse while in the employment of Murrysville Community Church, their personnel file will reflect such and they will be considered ineligible for re-hire.
10. Once an Incident Report has been filed by an adult or student volunteer, according to our Reporting Protocol, a report must be made to ChildLine 1-800-932-0313 or online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home> within 24 hours of the original disclosure or suspicion of abuse.
11. No portion of this policy can be amended by any individual, nor can any individual grant permission to deviate from this policy. Any changes to this policy must be granted only by a vote of the Session and no one else.

## **Weapons, Threats or Acts of Aggression**

1. Any form of bullying or act of intimidation is strictly prohibited at all times.
2. Pushing, hitting, and throwing objects with the intention to harm another is strictly prohibited at all times.

3. Any child, student, adult volunteer, or staff attempting to verbally or physically harm, intimidate, humiliate, embarrass, degrade, or otherwise abuse another person, will be removed from the MCC ministry where the incident has occurred. In the case of a child or student, their legal guardian will be contacted immediately.
4. Any child or student found in possession of a weapon will be removed from the MCC ministry where the incident has occurred, and their legal guardian will be contacted immediately. Adult volunteers who have a legal concealed carry permit are requested to disclose this to the ministry leader overseeing the MCC ministry.
5. For any of the above situations, only after the child, student, adult volunteer, or staff and their legal guardian, meets with a pastor or elder of MCC to discuss the alleged incident, may that child, student, or leader be considered for admittance back into the MCC ministry from which they were removed.
6. Depending on the infraction, as determined by an MCC pastor or elder, the child, student, adult volunteer, or staff may receive a verbal warning, a definite or indefinite suspension from leading or participating in the ministry, and/or be requested to make repairs or restitution for damages.

## **Substance Abuse**

1. Any child, student, adult volunteer or staff found in possession or under the influence of alcohol and/or illegal substance of any kind, will be immediately removed from the MCC ministry where the incident has occurred. In the case of a child or student, their legal guardian will be contacted immediately.
2. Only after the child, student, adult volunteer or staff and their legal guardian if under 18, meets with a pastor or elder of MCC to discuss the alleged incident, may that child, student, or staff/volunteer be considered for admittance back into the MCC ministry from which they were removed.
3. Depending on the infraction, as determined by an MCC pastor or elder, the child, student, adult volunteer or staff may receive a verbal warning, a definite or indefinite suspension from leading or participating in the ministry, and/or face legal ramifications.

## **Technology**

1. Volunteers or staff should not engage in social networking with children without permission of the parent or guardian.
2. Volunteers or staff should not share photos or information about children without parent permission.
3. Viewing sexually inappropriate, provocative, or pornographic material is prohibited.

## **Increased Visibility and Two Adult Rule**

1. The door to a room should remain open or the door window must be unobstructed by blinds or other items, allowing visual access to the inside of the room with lights on.
2. There must be two adults in a room with children at all times. The only exception is when a student volunteer is assisting an adult teacher or leader in a children's Sunday school class, children's worship, Powered Up, Vacation Bible School, etc.
3. There must be two adults in a room with students under the age of 18 and enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. In the unusual event that Adults need to be left alone with students for any length of time they must do so with doors or windows to the room open and unobstructed with visual access to the room made available.
4. An adult meeting one-on-one in a room with a student or child, over an extended period of time, is prohibited except when a parent or legal guardian gives them permission to do so, in a room with doors or windows open and unobstructed with visual access to the room made available, and the lights on.

## **Touching and Language**

1. Adults and children should not push, hit, slap, pinch, hold, throw objects with the intention to harm or otherwise assault others.
2. The following signs are generally appropriate within specific contexts such as expressions of comfort, affection, and support including prayer: verbal praise, side hugs, shoulder to shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder, back, or hand. For younger children handholding, touching their hands, faces, shoulders, and arms, or hugs, and sitting on an adult's lap or holding them when someone else is present. However, these expressions of affection

must never be demonstrated without each person's consent or the consent of a legal guardian.

3. A child, student, or leader's request not to be touched, must be respected and complied with at all times.
4. The following behaviors between staff or volunteers and children are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate and shall not be engaged in. Touching of the buttocks, chest, genital areas, or thighs; showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child; sleeping in a bed with a child; inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development; flirtatious or seductive looks; any form of affection that is unwanted by the child; showing sexually suggestive videos or playing sexually suggestive games with any child, any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature.
5. Language should be edifying. Inappropriate verbal interactions such as language that is degrading, shaming, objectifying, swearing, vulgar, or threatening is prohibited.
6. Inappropriate verbal interactions also includes telling-off color or sexual jokes, making suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or discussing sexual encounters/desires with children is strictly prohibited.
7. Leaders must report suspected violations of this touching policy with an MCC pastor, ruling elder, or ministry leader. (See the section *Reporting Process*, found below.)

## **Nursery Procedures**

1. Only parents or guardians can drop off or pick up their children. Parents must sign their child in and out of the nursery. The parent will receive an identifier upon their child's arrival to the nursery, and the parent must present the identifier in order to retrieve their child from the nursery.
2. Only scheduled volunteers may assist a child with using the restroom, changing a diaper, giving snacks, or other nursery responsibilities.
3. Diaper changes should be completed by the parent or a female staff/volunteer with parent permission.

## **Procedures for Check-In and Pick-Up of School Age Students**

1. Parents are expected to drop off and pick up their children in Nursery through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade from their classroom unless other arrangements have been made with the teacher.
2. Children 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and older are dismissed independently unless a parent requests otherwise.

## **Student Fellowship**

1. One-on-One conversations between an adult volunteer/staff and a student must take place in view of other students and/or adult volunteer/staff, or with the consent of the student's parent or legal guardian. When meeting a youth one-on-one alert the Assistant Pastor of the plans, drive directly to the destination, meet in a public location, and never be alone with a youth of opposite sex.
2. Confidentiality between a student and an adult volunteer/staff must be broken when a student discusses harming themselves or others, committing a crime, or being abused.
3. There must be two adult volunteers/staff (at least 1 male and 1 female) present at an overnight activity such as a retreat or lock-in event. No adult should ever share a bed with a student. Male and female students, including siblings, must sleep in separate rooms use bathroom facilities separately at all times.
4. When transporting students: obtain parent permission prior to transporting, obey all traffic laws and seatbelt rules, go directly to destination, do not allow youth to drive a volunteer or staff's car, youth are not to provide transportation for other youths without prior permission from both sets of parents. Volunteers or staff are never to be alone in a car with a youth of the opposite sex.
5. Adult volunteer/staff are prohibited at any time from using discipline measures that involve physical pain.
6. Adult volunteer/staff are prohibited from dating or engaging in any sexual behavior with a student at any time.

## **Bathroom Policy**

Only MCC adult volunteer/staff, teachers, and student volunteers should take children to the restroom. Adult volunteer/staff and teachers should not use a single bathroom at the same time as a child, nor should they leave their class unsupervised to use the restroom.



When using the multi-stall restroom with a group the restroom door must be kept slightly ajar. Adult volunteer/staff and student volunteers may take children ages 4 through 12 to the restroom as a group, allowing two children to enter a restroom at a time (unless using a single bathroom). The adult volunteer/staff, teacher, or student volunteer should remain in the hallway/doorway while a child or student is using the restroom.

If taking one school age child to the bathroom walk them to the restroom, wait in the hall, and then walk them back to class.

In the nursery with toilet training children a female staff/volunteer should take them to the single family bathroom.

## **Background Checks**

All adults who are around children regularly at MCC, in addition to the Staff, Elders, and Deacons of MCC, are required under Pennsylvania State Law to complete and submit the following background checks.

1. **Child Abuse Clearance**
2. **PATCH Background Check** (Pennsylvania Access To Criminal History)
3. **FBI Criminal Background Check** (If you have lived outside of the state of Pennsylvania in the last ten years)

These background checks must be up to date and submitted to our church office where they will be safely kept on file.

If you have any doubt whether or not your background checks are up to date, please make an inquiry with our Church Administrator, Mel Armstrong.

More information about how you can complete these background checks can be found on the PA Family Support Alliance website<sup>viii</sup> using the link below:

<https://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Resources-for-Mandated-Reporters/Changes-in-the-Child-Protective-Services-Law-CPSL>

## **Reporting Process**

Any allegation of sexual or physical abuse to a minor under the age of 18, and reported during or after they become the age of 18, is required by Pennsylvania state-law to be reported to local law-enforcement authorities.

Should a child, student, parent, volunteer, staff, or any other person suspect another person of violating this Safe-Child policy, they are asked to report the incident to an MCC pastor, ruling elder, staff, or ministry leader using the **Incident Report Form (IRF)**.

A violation of this Safe-Child Policy includes any emotional, verbal, physical, and/or sexual misconduct, as well as a repeated refusal to abide by the guidelines outlined in this policy.

The **IRF** is made available in the church office.

Once an Incident Report has been filed by a staff or volunteer, according to our Reporting Protocol, a report must be made to ChildLine 1-800-932-0313 or online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home> within 24 hours of the original disclosure or suspicion of abuse.

After completing the form, it may be submitted to an MCC pastor or ruling elder through our church administrator Mel Armstrong, by email or by directly handing the form to the pastor or ruling elder.

## **Recognizing Abuse and Neglect**

Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance<sup>ix</sup> provides education, support, and training programs to make Pennsylvania safe for children. On their website, you can find a list of indicators and explanation of possible child abuse.

Should you ever witness a child or student being abused or suspect that a child or student is being abused, please complete and submit an **Incident Report Form (IRF)**.

## **Helpful Resources**

**G.R.A.C.E (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)** is an organization that seeks to empower the Christian community through education and training to recognize, prevent, and respond to child abuse.

Below is a link to their website where you will find many helpful recourses and direction for where and how you can get help if you or a loved one are or suspect you are in an abusive situation:

<http://www.netgrace.org>

## Sources

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- <sup>i</sup> <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/abuse>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.thehotline.org/is-this-abuse/abuse-defined/>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Recognizing-Child-Abuse-Neglect/Abuse-Neglect-Definition>
- <sup>iv</sup> <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/LEGIS/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=23&div=00.&chpt=063.&CFID=246217912&CFTOKEN=44782272>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/abuse>
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/abuse>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Understanding-Mandated-Reporting/Who-are-Mandated-Reporters>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Resources-for-Mandated-Reporters/Changes-in-the-Child-Protective-Services-Law-CPSL>
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.pa-fsa.org>
- <sup>x</sup> Adults Protecting Children, Inc.

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# **Murrysville Community Church**

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