

**1HILLCREST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE
FINAL - Adopted by Session May 18, 2017**

(Includes revisions by Session from 06/30/16; 10/25/16; 12/01/16; 01/05/17; and 05/18/17)

[Note: The original proposal was drafted by a Committee, consisting of REs Frederick Neikirk and Matthew Miller, and Deacons Lloyd Adams, Timothy Adams, and David Steele. Much of the material was modeled after the materials developed by Christ PCA, Katy, TX. It also built on the “Reducing the Risk” materials from the publishers of Church Law and Tax Reports. See also, Minutes 42nd GA, pp. 57-58, 798-799. Session dealt with the proposal at the meetings noted above and has now adopted all sections of the document with amendments except for the noted policies dealing with nursery procedures. Those have been referred to other bodies for recommendations.

[Note: Items V.A.3; VI.C; and VI.C.1 and following still need action by one or more groups.]

I. PURPOSE, SUMMARY, AND STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. PURPOSE: There are numerous occasions in the ministry of Hillcrest PCA when minor children of church members and visitors are under the supervision and care of church employees or volunteers other than their parents, either on church property or at church sponsored functions. The purpose of Hillcrest’s Child Protection Policy is to establish and maintain a program that maximizes the safety and protection of the children God has entrusted to our care, that reflects our love for them, that protects their rightful interests as image bearers of God, and that minimizes the potential for their abuse. (See Matthew 18:5-6, 19:13-15; Mark 10:14-16; Exodus 20:12; WLCQ 129-130.)

B. SUMMARY OF THE POLICY: The Child Protection Policy of Hillcrest PCA shall contain a) procedures for screening and approving volunteers; b) procedures for training volunteers; c) standards for behavior of volunteers as they oversee children and youth; d) establishment of mechanisms for supervision of volunteers; e) establishment of procedures to maintain the physical plant of Hillcrest so as to protect our children and youth; and f) procedures for dealing with allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct that show care for the well-being of victims and their families, respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals, enable cooperation with the civil authorities in their proper functions, and protect the legal interests of Hillcrest.

C. STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES: The following summarizes Hillcrest’s responsibilities with regard to the care of minor children:

1. When minor children are placed in the care of Hillcrest PCA by a responsible parent for a church-sponsored activity, then the Church assumes responsibility for those children in their care during that Church-sponsored activity. The requirements and procedures of the Child Protection Policy must be followed in those instances. Permission of Session is required for Church-sponsored activities to take place off Church property.
2. On other occasions, however, when minor children are not placed in the care of the Church but are in the care of a responsible adult at a Church-sponsored activity (e.g., when attending Worship (except when a child is placed formally in the Nursery), at social events, at Bible studies or meetings at Hillcrest when the Nursery is not in operation, or at home Bible studies), then the parents are responsible for their minor children, whether on or off church property, and the Hillcrest Child Protection Policy does not apply.
3. When there is no Church-sponsored activity (e.g., when Church members and families meet informally in one another’s homes, or when adults are attending non-Hillcrest sponsored Bible studies, or when the building is being used by a group with permission of Hillcrest PCA but not as an activity sponsored by Hillcrest PCA), then Hillcrest PCA is not at all responsible for minor children who are present at the activities.

II. WHO IS COVERED BY THE POLICY

- A. Sunday School teachers, Covenant Kids and Youth Group staff, VBS adult staff, adult nursery workers.
- B. Here and throughout the policy, and except as otherwise noted, adult means a communicant member or associate member of Hillcrest who is at least 18 years of age.
- C. Throughout the policy, except as otherwise noted, volunteer shall mean any employee or appointed volunteer of Hillcrest who is formally responsible for overseeing children as part of the ministry of Hillcrest PCA.

III. WHAT IS REQUIRED BEFORE SOMEONE MAY WORK WITH CHILDREN AT HILLCREST PCA

- A. At least 6 months of attendance unless transferring from a NAPARC church
- B. Must be an adult communicant member or associate member of Hillcrest. This includes a series of membership interviews by Session. Non-communicant members over the age of 12 and under the age of 18 may be approved as helpers for Bible School or Nursery.
- C. Background check(s) - Unless or until an exemption is granted with regard to the Pennsylvania law and/or until we find a different way of doing background checks, we will require all adult volunteers of Hillcrest PCA who have direct responsibility for supervising or caring for children to use the background check procedures set forth by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and provide those results to Hillcrest.
 - 1. Until further notice, the Clerk of Session and an additional elder or deacon designated by Session will be jointly responsible for maintaining the records relative to background checks.
- D. Training
 - 1. For officers - watching the "Reducing the Risk" videos at the level suggested by their authors
 - 2. For Youth Group and Covenant Kids leaders, VBS Director and Co-Director, and for Nursery Coordinator - attending a teacher training meeting and watching the "Reducing the Risk" videos at the level suggested by their authors
 - 3. For teachers of children and youth Sunday School classes; Youth Group and Covenant Kids staff; VBS teaching staff (classroom leaders, story tellers, gospel presenter, etc.) - attending a teacher training meeting and watching the "Reducing the Risk" videos at the level suggested by their authors (this level is lower than that required for group leaders)
 - 4. For VBS non-teaching staff - no training is required as they have no direct responsibility for children. This limitation must be stressed to such staff.
 - 5. For adult Nursery workers - watching the "Reducing the Risk" videos at the level suggested by their authors.

In all cases where watching the "Reducing the Risk" videos is required, the videos may be watched as part of a group or individually. Individuals will sign a form indicating they have complied with the requirement.

- 6. Session has decided that formal applications and reference checks would not be helpful in our context given the nature of our membership process. As such, those are not required under this policy.

IV. MANDATORY POLICIES FOR VARIOUS ACTIVITIES OF HILLCREST PCA

[Note: Many of these policies were already in place prior to the adoption of this overall policy statement.]

- A. Sunday School, VBS, Covenant Kids, and Youth Group classroom protocols
 - 1. All windows in doors must be uncovered at all times
 - 2. There should be at least 2 adult teachers (or an adult teacher and adult helper) in all pre-school (or younger) classrooms; and at least 1 adult teacher in classes with older children

3. There should be at least 1 adult floater during each of the above programs. This person is responsible for helping younger children who need to use a restroom, being an extra pair of eyes, and being available to step in if there is an emergency in a classroom
4. If there are only 1 or 2 students in a given class meeting, either the class shall be cancelled, or it shall be combined with another class, or the teacher shall a) leave the classroom door open and b) be certain the floater is aware that the teacher has only 1 or 2 students so that the floater can be extra aware of the responsibility to monitor the class
5. Classroom lights must be left on whenever a room is in use and must be left on whenever any part of the section of the building within which the classroom is located is in use.
6. Children who are in 5th grade or older may be dismissed when their class is finished. Younger children must wait until they are picked up by a family member who is in 5th grade or older. If the child (under 5th grade) is not from a family where one or both parents are either members of Hillcrest or regular attenders, then the teacher must be given a written statement, by the adult who drops off the child, saying to whom the child may be released. The floater(s) should help in getting this documentation and enforcing the dismissal rules.

B. Nursery

1. It is the responsibility of Session to designate the times/circumstances under which the Nursery shall be provided. Hillcrest is not responsible for the operation of a Nursery at any time other than those designated by Session.
2. See section VI for additional policies regarding the Nursery.

C. Offsite activities

1. All off-site activities must have prior approval of Session. This includes dates, times, place(s), transportation arrangements, what adults will be involved, and what children/youth are eligible to attend.
2. Medical forms and releases must be submitted in advance by any child or young person desiring to participate in such an activity
 - a. A single release may cover all activities for the year so long as those activities are noted on the form.
 - b. The group leader is responsible for keeping the forms until the end of the activity or the end of the year covered by the releases. They shall then turn the releases over to the Deacons who must record the receipt of those releases in their minutes.
 - c. The Deacons are responsible for retaining and storing such records, and for maintaining a record of how long each year's records need to be retained
3. At least 2 adult males and 2 adult females must accompany any group of Hillcrest children or youth on any Hillcrest sponsored activity that takes place off-site (unless the group is single sex, at which point only adults of that sex need to be present).
4. It is up to parents to make arrangements to get their children/youth to and from the meeting place for any event. Hillcrest will not be responsible for transporting children to or from the meeting place of a event unless that responsibility is explicitly approved by Session for a given event.
5. If part of an activity involves children/youth being transported by Hillcrest (for example, the group meets at one location and then must be transported to another location) then, except as follows, only approved volunteers may drive with non-family members in the vehicle.
 - a. If a parent wishes to have another adult, who is not an approved volunteer for the event, drive their child the parent must provide a written statement giving that permission.
 - b. Youth participants in an event may drive themselves and siblings with the parent's written permission, but under no circumstances may a youth participant in an activity drive

anyone other than a member of their immediate family while under the auspices of the Hillcrest sponsored activity.

6. Adults wishing to meet individually with children or young people in their capacity as volunteers of Hillcrest PCA must either meet the child or young person in a public place (to which the child or young person may not be transported by the Hillcrest volunteer); or have a second adult present (and at least one of the adults must be of the same sex as the child/young person); or meet in the church building when another adult is present, the second adult knows the meeting is going on, and the second adult can periodically view the meeting through a window or open door.

D. Security in the building during times of Worship

1. A Deacon or their appointee shall check before or at the beginning of Worship to be sure all doors that are designated by the Deacons are locked (e.g., closets, storage areas, mechanical rooms, utility rooms, etc.).
2. Because the doors in the connector area and the south entry area cannot be monitored from the worship area, the Deacons and/or Greeters in the south, east, and connector entry areas should remain by their entrances until after the corporate reading during Morning Worship. At that point they should lock all outside doors except the center doors on the south side of the worship room. The Advertising Committee, in consultation with the Deacons shall develop appropriate signage to reflect these policies.
3. No children should be allowed in the basement during or after Evening Worship, dinners, etc., unless accompanied by a parent.

- E.** There should be a clearly posted statement that makes clear that Hillcrest is not responsible for child protection outside of the activities mentioned in IV.A-C, and reminding parents they are responsible for monitoring the safety of their children (see Section I.c).

V. TRAINING AND OVERSIGHT

- A.** The Session is ultimately responsible for the implementation of this policy:

1. Any suspected incidents of child abuse/sexual misconduct are to be reported immediately to the Session by contacting either the Pastor or the Clerk of Session. If neither is immediately available then any other member of Session shall be contacted.
 - a.** Note that contacting a member of Session does not relieve the volunteer who is responsible for overseeing children as part of the ministry of Hillcrest PCA of their legal responsibility as a mandatory reporter to the civil magistrate.
2. If an incident of suspected child abuse/sexual misconduct is reported, then Session, through its Moderator or Clerk is responsible for immediately contacting legal counsel, the church's insurance carrier, and law enforcement. Only the Moderator and Clerk are authorized to make any public statement on the matter.
3. Session will need to develop procedures for investigating such allegations, for how to provide pastoral care for the alleged victim, for how to respond to the alleged perpetrator during the investigation, and for how to respond to anyone who is convicted of child abuse or sexual misconduct. (See materials from Christ PCA for an example of these policies.)
4. Session is responsible for approving the basic contours of the Child Protection Policy, for seeing that it is put in final form (which could, again, involve the use of a Committee), for approving the final version of the Policy, and for approving subsequent changes to the Policy.

- B.** The Deacons are responsible for:

1. Maintaining all records (medical releases/permission slips, clearances, and any other forms approved in the future by the Session and Diaconate)

- a. For the first three years of the policy Session will be responsible for maintaining all records relative to clearances.
 2. Making sure all building related security measures are in place
 3. Being sure that the Nursery Coordinator is aware of all aspects of the Child Protection and Nursery Policies, posting relevant portions of those policies in or near the Nursery, checking periodically to be sure nursery policies are being followed, and being sure the nursery communication system is operable (see VI.C).
 4. Assisting the Session as appropriate and suggesting any possible changes to the policy they deem to be prudent.
- C. The *ad hoc* committee, under the oversight of the Session and in concert with the Christian Education Committee, is responsible for developing the training materials and publicizing the policy after it is adopted. (This is a recommendation and is subject to Session approval.)
- D. The Christian Education Committee is responsible for:
1. Making sure that all volunteers under its auspices meet the above requirements, are trained, and have all appropriate documentation before they begin to serve.
 2. Making sure group leaders are aware of their responsibility to oversee and facilitate the child protection policies for their group
 3. Helping to facilitate the mandatory training, and overseeing the training, under the authority of Session, on an ongoing basis.
 4. Suggesting to Session and the Diaconate any possible changes to the policy that appear prudent.
- E. The Nursery Coordinator(s) shall be formally appointed by Session. The Coordinator shall be responsible for:
1. Being sure that appropriate staff are in place whenever the nursery is in use under Hillcrest's authority
 2. Being sure that all staff are trained and approved as noted above
 3. Making sure all policies regarding the nursery are being followed
 4. Being sure that an emergency contact/backup person is available whenever the nursery is in operation in case a third adult should be necessary in the nursery.
 5. Suggesting to Session and the Diaconate any possible changes to the policy that appear prudent.

Individuals who will be working with children in any capacity need to complete the following and turn in appropriate documentation to the church office:

Child Abuse Clearance

http://www.dhs.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/form/s_001762.pdf

Request for Criminal Record Check - Volunteer Only

https://www.psp.pa.gov/Documents/Public%20Documents/criminal_history/Request%20for%20Criminal%20Record%20Check%20Volunteer%20Only%20-%20SP%204-164A%202017.doc

FBI Background Check

http://www.dhs.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/c_267907.pdf

<https://www.identogo.com/>