

**EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

**Purpose**

To express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness and safety, Eastminster Presbyterian Church seeks to protect children and youth from child abuse or neglect and to be in ministry to families where abuse or neglect may occur. We share the following Biblical understandings upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand. Jesus teaches us that children have both the right and the key to God's kingdom. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch.

*And they were bringing children to Him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the Kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them. Mark 10: 13-16.*

Our goal in response to the Biblical mandate and societal needs is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where their caregivers, teachers, and leaders, both paid and volunteer workers, minister appropriately to their needs. As a church, it is our religious, moral and ethical obligation to take every possible step to prevent and respond to abuse and neglect of children.

**Definitions**

"adult" shall mean any person who is at least 18 years old and is a paid church staff member or church volunteer working with children.

"child", "children" or "youth" shall mean any person who is 17 years or younger.

"church" shall mean Eastminster Presbyterian Church, East Lansing, Michigan.

"policy" shall mean Eastminster Presbyterian Church Safety Policy.

**Screening and Training**

1. The church will screen all adults working with children and/or youth in any activity sponsored by the church including, but not limited to, Christian Education Director, Sunday School teachers, youth advisors, confirmation mentors, overnight or day trip chaperones, and Wednesday night and summer activities volunteers working directly with children. Screening shall, at a minimum, consist of a background check provided or recommended by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and a fully completed application form developed by the church's Christian Education Director or Pastor.
2. The background check shall be completed every three years and the application forms updated every three (3) years.
3. The background checks will be conducted by the Pastor and/or the Christian Education Director with assistance, if needed, from the office administrator. Results of the background checks will be kept in a secure location in the Pastor's office.
4. Adults shall receive a copy of this policy on an annual basis and the Christian Education Director shall review this policy and church expectations with adults either individually or at an annual training session.
5. Adults will not be allowed to work with children if a background check or application show any concerns or violations as determined by the Pastor. If an application is rejected, the adult will be allowed an opportunity to clarify or refute any information found during the screening process

but the Pastor will have final authority to determine whether the adult may work with children and/or youth.

6. Confirmed youth may be allowed to volunteer as a Sunday School teacher or assist with church activities if recommended by the Christian Education Director. If approved by Session, the confirmed youth shall follow this policy as if he or she is an adult.

### **Adult Supervision**

1. Doors and bathrooms - Rooms in the church used for children and youth shall have a door with a window in it or half door. The top half of all half doors shall remain open. Doors without a window or top half shall remain open when in use. When off church grounds for church-sponsored activities or activities, doors to rooms without windows shall remain open. The doors to bathrooms used for children requiring adult supervision shall remain open and an adult shall escort the child requiring adult supervision to the bathroom. Adults may ask another screened adult to escort children who don't require adult supervision back and forth to bathroom.
2. Adult Coverage - At least two non-related adults should be present at all church activities involving children or youth. Adults should avoid one-on-one meetings with a child or youth when another adult cannot see what is taking place. In the unusual event of a one-on-one meeting, it should not take place behind closed doors. The only exceptions to the above-stated requirements are:
  - a. The adult and child or youth are in a public space (i.e. the Green Room) and other persons are in and out of the area or space during the meeting.
  - b. In a classroom but the door shall remain open.
  - c. Pre-arranged one-on-one interactions between a child and adult conducted in a public place with the prior knowledge of a paid church staff member and the prior consent of the parent of the child or youth.
  - d. An emergency or other immediate situation (i.e.; bathroom breaks, diaper change, a sick child) requiring one adult to be alone with children or youth and another adult has to remove the child from the space.
  - e. Diaper changes which shall be performed by paid church staff members only or an adult with consent of parent or guardian.
  - f. Car-pooling previously approved by the parent or guardian of the child or youth and appropriate permission forms have been completed.
3. The Christian Education Director or his or her designee shall make random visits to each classroom during church functions to monitor activities.
4. Under no circumstances shall an adult discipline a child or youth by physically striking or verbally abusing (i.e.; name calling, yelling or bullying) the child or youth.
5. Children in the nursery shall only be released to designated parent or guardian or individuals identified by parent or guardian as authorized to pick up the child.
6. All incidents involving illness or injury of any kind to a child or youth during a church sponsored activity shall be reported to the parent or guardian and also to the Christian Education Director.
7. Special youth activities sponsored by the church (i.e.; lock-ins, mission trips) shall be subject to the following guidelines:
  - a. It is recommended that there is a minimum of one adult to five youth.
  - b. Both male and female adults should be present on church sponsored youth activity/trips that include both boys and girls.
  - c. Supervision shall be maintained before and after the activity until all youth are in the custody of their parent or guardian.

- d. The Christian Education Director shall develop and obtain permission slips from parent or guardian, limited power of attorney for emergency medical treatment, driver forms and any other documentation recommended by the Pastor before embarking on any youth activity that requires overnight travel off church property. Forms shall be approved by the Pastor.

#### **Social Media, Texting and Email**

1. Adults shall not initiate a friend or follow request with children or youth on any social media platform. If a child or youth sends a friend request or requests to follow the adult, the adult shall not accept that request without permission from the child or youth's parent or guardian. If permission is obtained, the adult must agree to not post any inappropriate content.
2. On social media pages/accounts (personal or church), adults will not tag or otherwise identify children or youth in photos (other than their own children or youth) posted online of church-related activities without the permission of the child or youth's parent or guardian.
3. Adults shall not e-mail, text or message on social media with children or youth about anything beyond objective information related to church activities (time, date, location).
4. Any and all communication between a child or youth and an adult that is not objective information about church activities must include two adults, with one preferably being the Pastor or Christian Education Director.

**Reporting** – If there is reasonable cause to suspect that child abuse or neglect has occurred, the church will take all allegations seriously and shall follow the requirements of the Michigan Child Protection Act, Public Act 238 of 1975, as amended. The following process shall be followed by the church:

1. All adults shall report suspected abuse (physical, sexual, neglect, verbal or emotional) of a child or youth to the Pastor. If the allegation or suspicion is about the Pastor, the adult shall report their suspicion to the Clerk of Session. The allegation shall be well-documented by the Pastor or, if applicable, the Clerk of Session.
2. The Pastor or if applicable, the Clerk of Session will immediately remove the accused from their duties until further notice.
3. The Pastor or if applicable, the Clerk of Session shall immediately contact the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and the church's insurance company, and consult with legal counsel familiar with child protection laws for legal advice.
4. The church shall cooperate with all agencies involved in the investigation, will try to assure the child or youth's safety and maintain the confidentiality of the reporter of accusations to the extent it is permitted by law.