
Zion Lutheran Church

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Adopted by
Zion Lutheran Church Council
Iowa City, Iowa
April, 2012

Zion Lutheran Church Iowa City, Iowa

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Jesus clearly affirmed the great importance of children when he took a little child in his arms and said in Mark 9:37, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” And again when He said in Mark 10:14, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”

I. Purpose

We affirm that children and youth are a gift from God. We further affirm it is our obligation to protect their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

We recognize that abuse of children and youth can occur anywhere and no place is immune from it, including our church facilities and within our programs and ministries. We also recognize the potentially devastating effects that allegations and incidents of abuse can have on the accuser, accused, their families and the congregation.

The objectives of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures are to:

- Provide a safe, secure and nurturing environment for our children and youth.
- Protect volunteers and paid staff from false allegations of abuse.
- Provide prompt and compassionate response to allegations of abuse.
- Protect Zion Lutheran Church from unfavorable publicity and legal action.

II. Statement of Prohibition

The abuse of children or youth will not be tolerated in any form from any individual(s). Instances of abuse will be reported and dealt with in accordance with this policy. If the instance of abuse is in violation of state or federal law, the incident will be reported to law enforcement authorities for investigation and prosecution. When appropriate, sexual and physical abuse will be reported to the Iowa Department of Human Services.

Individuals who have been convicted of, or plead guilty to or no contest to sexual, mental or physical abuse to children or adults shall not be accepted to work with children or youth in any capacity. No unscreened volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth after June 1, 2012.

III. Definitions

Adult

A person must be at least age 18, be at least three years older than the children or youth he or she is working with, and have met the screening and other requirements of this policy to qualify as one of the two adults under the two-adult rule or in any other function involving the supervision of, or working with, children or youth

Child Abuse

Child abuse as used in this policy means abuse of any child or youth to include the following: physical abuse, including any physical contact intended to coerce or do harm, any hitting, spanking, or shaking; emotional/verbal abuse, including insults, name calling, belittling remarks, unfavorable comparisons with other children or youth, shaming, deliberately causing fear, or using speech to hurt; spiritual abuse, including using Scripture or church authority to coerce, control or shame; using threats about condemnation from God or making threats about God withholding love to control behavior; sexual abuse, which is defined as any sexual contact with children or youth, including fondling private parts, oral, genital, or anal penetration, sexual intercourse, rape, suggestive sexual comments, showing pornography (sexually explicit material), exposing sexual organs, allowing children or youth to witness sexual activity.

Child and Youth

A child is defined as any person from birth through completion of the fifth grade. A youth is defined as any person from immediately following completion of the fifth grade (usually beginning with the summer following the fifth grade) through completion of the twelfth grade or age 17, which ever comes later. During summer fellowship programs a person who has just completed fifth or twelfth grade is considered a youth.

Pastor

“Pastor” refers to the pastor, senior pastor, associate pastor, interim pastor, visiting pastor, or other individual who is serving in the capacity of pastoral leadership with the people of Zion Lutheran Church.

Paid Staff

“Paid Staff” refers to anyone who is paid by Zion Lutheran Church, or through a contract employment agency, for specific work (i.e. administrative office staff, custodial staff, music staff, youth staff, Sunday School staff, nursery staff, health and wellness staff, and any other staff on Zion Lutheran Church payroll).

Volunteer(s)

The use of the word “volunteer(s)” in this document refers only to volunteers who would be working with children and/or youth and require screening as stipulated in this Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

IV. Responsibility for Administration of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures

A. Summary of Responsibilities

The Child Protection Committee is responsible for the oversight of all aspects of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures, including screening of applicants, the training and education required by the policy, ensuring reporting of allegations or incidents of abuse, responding to such reports, and ensuring completion of the process. When practical, the authority to accept or decline any volunteer for any program or area of Zion's congregational life concerned with children and/or youth may be delegated to the senior pastor and the chair(s) of the Child Protection Committee. This Committee shall report to the Zion Lutheran Church Council as needed.

B. Composition and Selection of Child Protection Committee Members

The Child Protection Committee is comprised of three to five individuals selected to represent a cross-section of the congregation and appointed by the Zion Lutheran Church Council. The members shall be members of the congregation and not serving on the Council. Members will hold terms of 2, 3, or 5 years,, with the intent to ensure that the terms of all members do not expire at the same time. Committee members may serve no more than 2 consecutive terms. The Child Protection Committee shall include one pastor.

V. Screening Process for Paid Staff and Volunteer Positions

The act of screening greatly reduces the risk that child abuse will occur and increases the probability that the objectives of the Policy, as defined on page 2 above will be achieved.

A. Screening Process for Volunteers Who Work With Children or Youth

The individuals responsible for children and youth programs will recruit volunteers. The Child Protection Committee is responsible for screening volunteers. This screening process shall include the following:

The ministry teams or individuals recruiting the volunteers will supply each volunteer with the "Application for Volunteers Working with Children or Youth" (hereinafter referred to as the "Application" and found as an attachment to the policy), along with any other appropriate forms, and request they complete them and return them to the Zion Parish Administrator. The Application consists of:

- Summary of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- Code of Conduct.
- Application to work with children and youth as a volunteer.
- Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Verification

The volunteer will complete the Application and any other forms requested and return them to the Zion Parish Administrator in a self-addressed envelope marked "*Confidential, To Be Opened Only By The Zion Parish Administrator*" or a similar message. The volunteer will be requested to sign a release for the church to perform a criminal background check with state and federal authorities (See Attachment D for release).

The Child Protection Committee may contact any organization(s) where the volunteer has worked with children and/or youth to determine suitability.

The Child Protection Committee will screen volunteers to determine if any volunteer would not be suitable to work with children or youth as a result of information gathered through the screening process. The screening will include a criminal background check and check of the appropriate state sex offender registries for every prospective volunteer going back seven (7) years. The Committee may elect to acquire this and other background information through a third party vendor

A list of volunteers who have failed the required background screening, along with the detailed results of the screening, will be provided to the Pastor by the Parish Administrator. The Pastor and the chair(s) of the Child Protection Committee will privately discuss this conclusion with the individual. This discussion will give the individual an opportunity to provide additional information he or she feels would mitigate the decision of the Child Protection Committee. If appropriate the Pastor may suggest that the individual volunteer for a different position for which he or she is qualified and/or withdraw his or her application to work with children and/or youth. The Pastor may disclose the names of individuals who have been rejected to the staff person(s) responsible for the programs working with youth and children (usually the one recruiting the individual). In most cases this disclosure would be made so that the committee does not ask the individual to volunteer for a position working with children and/or youth in the future or as a substitute.

Prior to making a final determination on suitability the Child Protection Committee will review the volunteers for the various programs with the staff responsible in charge of that program, as well as the Pastor. If the Pastor or staff person knows of any reason why any of the volunteers would not be suitable for the position being sought he or she will communicate to the Child Protection Committee that such volunteer should not be considered. If the reason for this judgment is felt to be a confidential matter the reason need not be disclosed to the Child Protection Committee.

The Parish Administrator will maintain a written record of all volunteers who are not selected as volunteers due to the screening results. This list will be maintained in a locked file on the Zion Lutheran Church premises and will be available only to the Parish Administrator. The list will not be circulated to any other individuals or committees except as designated by this policy. In addition, the Parish Administrator will keep on file all completed paperwork used in the screening process. Records will be retained indefinitely, since minors typically may bring charges years after the alleged incident took place. These files may be scanned into computer records.

Volunteers with an active application on record will be screened every five (5) years.

B. Screening Process for All Paid Staff Positions

Screening of all applicants for paid staff positions shall include the following:

- Each applicant will complete an application form supplied by Zion Lutheran Church.
- Each applicant will be interviewed by the appropriate individual(s) and/or committee(s).
- The applicant's previous employer(s) and/or any personal references covering the preceding seven years may be contacted to determine suitability for the position being sought.
- Organization(s) where the applicant has worked with children and/or youth may be contacted to determine suitability.
- The applicant will be requested to sign a release for Zion Lutheran Church to arrange for a criminal background check with state and federal authorities (See Attachment D). Zion Lutheran Church will request a criminal background check be conducted by state and federal authorities or a third party vendor.

- Zion Lutheran Church will check the state Sex Offender Registry for each state where the applicant has lived in the past seven years.
- Paid Staff who will be working with children and/or youth will also be asked to read and sign the “Code of Conduct.” (See Attachment B)

The information contained in the documents resulting from the process described above will be seen only by those who are charged with the responsibility for the hiring decision or making recommendations to the person or group with the final hiring authority.

C. Drivers Who Provide Transportation to Children and Youth

Any paid staff or volunteer who provides automobile transportation to children and youth as a part of an event or program sponsored by Zion Lutheran Church must:

- Be an adult as defined above.
- Have a valid driver’s license and proof insurability.
- Provide a copy of their driver’s license and proof of insurance for the church office for travel outside of Iowa City area.

If alternative driving arrangements are being made, written or verbal parent permission to transport or travel with another youth must be given to the staff or adult volunteer supervising the event.

D. Occasional Volunteers

There will always be the need for occasional volunteers. This would normally be as a substitute for another volunteer. To maintain the integrity of the two-person rule any such volunteer must work with at least one other adult volunteer who has completed the screening process for the position in question. A parent or other guardian who helps in a Sunday School or Vacation Bible School classroom on an irregular basis would be considered an occasional volunteer and would not be required to complete the screening process.

E. Current Paid Staff and Volunteers

All volunteers in positions working with children and/or youth on the date this policy is adopted, and paid staff who are employed on the date this policy is adopted shall undergo screening required by this policy to the extent such screening has not been previously performed.

VI. Selection and Placement of Volunteers

At the conclusion of the screening process the Child Protection Committee will forward to the appropriate staff a list of all volunteers found suitable to work with children and/or youth under the Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

A. Confidentiality of, and Access to, Documents Pertaining to Volunteers

The information provided by volunteers and supplied by references, previous congregations and previous organizations, and information gathered during the investigation of an allegation of abuse will be seen on a need-to-know basis as stated in this policy. All who have access to any such information shall hold it in strict confidence. Only the members of the Child Protection Committee, the Pastor(s) and the Parish Administrator will have access to documents related to screening volunteers, and will use them only to determine the suitability under the policy of each volunteer for the position being sought.

B. Lead-time Required for Recruiting and Screening Volunteers

The Child Protection Committee and the children and youth ministry teams having responsibility for programs utilizing volunteers will coordinate and cooperate to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for the recruiting performed by the child and youth ministry teams, the completion and submission of forms by volunteers, and the screening performed by the Child Protection Committee to be completed well before the volunteers are needed.

VII. Supervision

A. Two-Adult Rule

A minimum of two adults (paid or unpaid), as defined by this policy, must be present to supervise at each activity involving children and/or youth. Exceptions may be made during an event only in extreme circumstances where the safety and/or security of the children or youth would be compromised. Such a circumstance might be the need for one adult to tend to a sick or injured child. It is the intent of this policy that an event will be cancelled if it is known prior to the beginning of the event that at least two adults will not be present to supervise. The two-adult rule is seen as one of the most effective deterrents to abuse.

Recognizing the necessity and benefit of counseling, these one-on-one sessions are to be permitted, but only if the room or office door is kept open, or a glass or clear panel is installed into the door that allows the counselor to be visible at all times. Parents or guardians must be present either in the session with the child or youth or in a place where visual contact can be maintained. Children or youth who take individual music or voice lessons must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. An exception to the Two Adult Rule will be made for small Sunday School classes where only one adult is present with multiple children. In this situation, either the room door must be kept open or a glass panel in the door must allow the pastor, staff member, or volunteer to be visible at all times. A staff member, pastor or other volunteer should check on the class from the hallway or window periodically during the class.

The Two-Adult Rule applies both on-site at Zion Lutheran Church as well as away from the church property. An exception will apply in those cases where a pastor, staff person, or volunteer met the child or youth at a public event and remained visible at all times. For example, eating lunch at school with a child or youth would not be a violation of the Rule. Watching a sporting event or concert from the seating area or bleachers is permissible. In no case should the adult leave the event and be alone with the child or youth.

In cases of retreats and overnight activities involving both male and female children and/or youth, there must be at least two male and two female adults supervising the event(s). In the case of retreats and overnight activities involving only one gender of children and/or youth, there must be at least two adults of the same gender as the children and/or youth supervising the event(s). The Child and Youth Protection Committee can approve exceptions to this provision.

In providing transportation for church sponsored events or programs there may be times when it is not practical to have more than one adult present in the vehicle, the one adult being the driver. In these instances the two-adult rule may be suspended as long as two children or youth are present at all times. An exception to this rule may be made for a staff or volunteer to transport one child or youth alone to and /or from a church sponsored activity or event if the staff or volunteer has written or verbal permission from one of the child's parents.

B. Younger Helpers

There may be cases where it is advantageous to provide leadership training for someone who is younger than 18 and to do so by allowing that person to work with children or youth. In such cases that person must be closely supervised by a qualified adult and there must be at least two adults supervising the activity as defined above. That individual should receive training similar to that received by adult leaders. These children and youth helpers are not subject to screening and do not have to complete a volunteer application.

C. Supervision During and After Events

Supervision will be maintained during and after any event involving children until the child is in the custody of his or her parent or legal guardian. Children and youth participating in activities sponsored by the church will not be left unsupervised. The two-adult rule policy will be in effect during the scheduled hours of the event and until the last child has left the activity.

D. Activities in View

To the extent possible, all activities involving children and/or youth shall be conducted in areas where the activity can be easily viewed by parents and supervisors from outside the space. This will usually be through a window in the door to the space or having the door open.

E. Parents Visit Activities

Parents are to be encouraged to visit any activity unannounced.

F. Children Remain in Area of Activity

Children and youth involved in programs should remain within the area designated for the program and not wander to other parts of Zion Lutheran facilities without adult supervision. This will help prevent abuse by other children/youth and adults.

G. Physical Force

Physical force may be used by an adult on a child or youth only to the extent necessary to restrain the individual under the following circumstances: (1) To quell a disturbance or prevent an act that threatens to harm another person; (2) To obtain possession of a weapon or other dangerous object in the possession of the child or youth; (3) For purposes of self-defense or defense of the safety of others; (4) To protect a child or youth from self-inflicted harm.

VIII. Providing Transportation

A. Permission to Ride

Written permission must be given by the parent or legal guardian for his or her child or youth to ride in any vehicle provided for transportation to any off-site event sponsored by Zion Lutheran Church. Such permission may be included in approval given by the parent or legal guardian for the child or youth to participate in the event itself. A general consent to ride form may be used in lieu of an event specific form, and should be signed prior to the child/youth engaging in any activity that requires transportation to an offsite event. The general consent forms will cover a period from 9/1 – 8/31 annually. Blank forms will be available online. Copies of the signed permission forms will be stored in the main office.

B. *Seat Belts*

All occupants of the vehicle must be wearing seat belts at all times the vehicle is moving.

C. *Route To and From an Activity*

In cases where two or more vehicles begin the journey at the same place and have the same out of town destination, all vehicles will follow the same route.

D. *Provided by Adults*

Transportation from Zion to scheduled activities must be provided by an adult as explained in Section VII.A.

IX. Reporting and Responding to Reports of Abuse

A. *Training for Reporting and Responding to Reports of Abuse*

The Child Protection Committee will coordinate with ministry teams that have responsibility for children and youth programs to ensure effective training is conducted on proper procedures for reporting an incident, or alleged incident, of abuse and responding to such a report.

B. *Reporting Allegations and Instances of Abuse*

1. Preliminary Steps

The person reporting an incident of abuse on Zion Lutheran's property or in conjunction with a program or event, sponsored by Zion Lutheran, (normally an eye-witness or the first adult informed of the abuse, usually by the alleged victim, or the victim's parents) should first:

- Secure the safety of the victim. This may include an immediate call to emergency services as deemed necessary.
- Secure the safety of others and stabilize the environment in which the incident occurred. The area should not be left unsupervised by an adult in order to report the incident. The reporting adult may have to employ the help of another adult to inform the appropriate pastor or volunteer of the incident.

2. Initial Reporting

The reporting adult should report the incident to the staff or volunteer person in charge of the event or program where the incident took place. The person in charge of the event should inform the senior pastor and/or the president of the Zion Lutheran Church Council as expediently as possible. The senior pastor and/or the president of the Zion Lutheran Church Council shall inform the Child Protection Committee. In the event that allegations are made of a rostered staff person, the president of the Zion Council and the Bishop of the Southeastern Iowa Synod shall be informed of the allegations and will work with the Child Protection Committee.

The reporting adult should complete the "Allegation of Abuse Report." (See Attachment G).

Zion Lutheran Church would not normally have a legal obligation to report an allegation or instance of abuse to civil authorities but recognizes a moral obligation to make a voluntary report. When an investigation of an incident or allegation confirms that the incident or allegation is consistent with requirements for mandatory reporting, such reports will be made. This will normally be to the local police department and/or the Iowa Department of Human Services.

If the incident is reportable to civil authorities or if the incident otherwise appears to be substantive it should be reported to the Southeastern Iowa Synod's Bishop. The Bishop will determine if further action is needed.

C. Responding to Reports of Abuse

1. Initial Response

If the accused is a staff member the initial response should be made by the Pastor in conjunction with the Child Protection Committee. If the accused is the Pastor the initial response should be made by the president of the Zion Lutheran Church Council and the Child Protection Committee.

- The rules of mandatory reporting will be followed. Treat all involved with respect and compassion. An allegation is not a presumption of guilt.
- Preserve whatever evidence is available.
- Ensure the continued stability of the environment.

If the accused is an adult supervisor or paid staff member, relieve that person of duties relating to children and/or youth. The individual shall remain relieved until the investigation is completed and further disposition is made by the Child Protection Committee. If the individual is a paid staff member and the relief of duties amounts to a suspension from all work the suspension shall be with pay.

Inform the parents or legal guardian of the victim and of the accused, if a minor.

2. Further Response

Primary responsibility for further response is with the Pastor and the Child Protection Committee. The Pastor may delegate responsibility for working with the Child Protection Committee on the investigation to the appropriate staff member. It is anticipated that the Pastor, or one designated by the pastor, one or more members of the Child Protection Committee will work closely with civil authorities on the further investigation of the allegation or incident to ensure all aspects are covered completely, accurately and with fairness and compassion shown to all parties as follows:

- Pastoral care will be extended to the victim(s) and family(ies).
- Pastoral care will be extended to the accused, and family.
- Seek legal advice and counsel.
- Avoid prejudging a situation. The accused shall be afforded full due process in handling the complaint. The accused will be supported and treated with dignity.
- Continue the investigation to conclusion with recommendations to the Zion Lutheran Church Council for action.
- Cooperate with any investigations being conducted by law enforcement and/or the Iowa Department of Human Services.

- Document results of the investigation and file as confidential (See “Allegation of Abuse Investigative Checklist” in Attachment H). If law enforcement authorities or the Iowa Department of Human Services have been notified and are, or will be, investigating the allegations, some of the steps suggested in the “Investigative Checklist” may not be necessary or appropriate for Zion Lutheran Church to take.
- Inform appropriate individuals of results of the investigation and action taken. Such individuals may be the victim, accused and parents.
- Keep Zion Lutheran Church’s insurance agent informed of the incident or allegation, investigation progress, conclusions and actions taken, if any.

X. Training and Education

A. Training and Education of Volunteers and Staff

The Child Protection Committee may delegate responsibility for training and educating required by the policy to the child and youth ministry teams responsible for children and youth programs and retain oversight.

B. All Other Training and Education

The Child Protection Committee will be responsible for on-going training and education of children, parents and the congregation in general on the provisions of the policy and the nature of child abuse, but may coordinate the actual training and education sessions with appropriate ministry teams.

C. New Church Members Orientation

New church members will receive orientation of Zion Lutheran Church’s Child Protection Policy and Procedures including requirements for volunteers and staff who work with children or youth.

D. Questions regarding the Policy

Questions, comments or concerns regarding the policy should be directed to the Child Protection Committee. The Child Protection Committee is responsible for providing timely response to any inquiry.

XI. Administration of the Policy

A. Updating Records

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to inform the Zion Church office of any changes in address, phone, and other pertinent information.

B. Response to the Media

One person will be appointed to represent Zion Lutheran Church to respond to the media in all cases of reported child abuse. This person will normally be a pastor. There may be occasions, however, when that person should be the staff or volunteer person in charge of the event where the alleged abuse took place or a member of the Child Protection Committee. That person will utilize a prepared statement in his or her initial report to the media which will state the church’s policy on child abuse and that the allegation is being thoroughly investigated. (See Attachment I for a sample statement.)

C. Maintenance of Screening Documents

The screening documents will be maintained by the Parish Administrator in a secure, locked cabinet on behalf of the Child Protection Committee.

D. Monitoring and Follow-up

The Child Protection Committee will be responsible for monitoring the operation of the policy, evaluating its effectiveness, and recommending amendments to the Zion Lutheran Church Council.

E. Enforcement

If a violation of the Child Protection Policy occurs, the Child Protection Committee should contact the ministry team and the staff person responsible for that ministry team involved privately. If violations persist, or the ministry team involved proves unresponsive, the Child Protection Committee should pursue the resolution of the violation through the congregation council and a pastor.