

Sisters and Brothers of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley,

The materials below represent an attempt to assist congregations in the task of formulating a Child Protection Policy. This is not a required approach to the task. It is more of a starting point and a way to initiate the process. The portions of the template that assist your congregation in the creation of a policy are yours. The portions that do not help your particular situation are yours to ignore.

If there are additional helps that the Presbytery office can provide, please contact me.

Larry Jackman, Stated Clerk

Child Protection Policy— A new mandate from the Book of Order is that “all councils”, including sessions, have a Child Protection Policy. The precise content of such policies is not specified.

The purpose of such policies is clearly to help guard children and youth from harm within the church and church related activities. The safety goals are actually broad and include potential harm on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. The threats of harm or potential harm come from a wide range of risk factors. Those factors could include children who are harmed through neglect, failure to supervise, through other children, etc.

Development of a Policy

Below is a template of material and subject matter appropriate to a local church policy. All elements will not be a part of all church needs. One size does not fit all.

It is suggested that responsible committees in each congregation look at the entire template and determine what parts are needed for the congregation. After the development of a proposed policy, the session should review and adopt the policy either as presented or amended.

Questions and Answers

Q. Do we really need a policy? We don't have any kids.

A. Yes. There is a new denominational rule to consider. More importantly, there are the occasional children and grandchildren that visit in every congregation. With slight exposure your policy may be pretty simple and short, but it is a declaration of how you will care for children when they are present.

Q. We consider our congregation a family. We believe children are safe and we do not want to "hurt anyone's feelings" by acting like we don't trust them. Why should we be forced to do this?

A. Family is no guarantee of safety for children. 80% or more of abuse and neglect happens within a family. That is not a happy statistic. Church school teachers, volunteer youth workers, and other church leaders are, also, protected by policy as much as the children of a church. One important way that everyone is protected is by having standards that are clear.

Q. Even if something bad happens, won't children simply forget it?

A. Actively remembered or not, abuse hurts for decades. Over 80% of children with abuse/neglect in their history end up with diagnosable mental health problems by the age of 21.

Q. Isn't this just one more thing to worry about and one more hoop to jump through?

A. It is indeed. At the same time, we "worry" about our kids, grandkids and youth all the time anyway. The "hoop", as it were, is an opportunity to think through the issues of safety in our churches so that we have taken the very best attempt to keep children safe.

Q. What is really important here?

A. To think through the subject of child safety.

To write a policy that you believe helps safety concerns in your congregation.

Uniformly enforce and implement your policy. An unenforced policy or one that is inconsistently enforced is as big a problem as no policy at all.