

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

The Rye Presbyterian Church

Preamble: It is the overall longing of the Rye Presbyterian Church to build and strengthen its faith community. We seek to foster an environment of respect, kindness, and caring between our existing parishioners and our future parishioners. We are moved by the words of Jesus found in Matthew 25:44–45.

"Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? Truly I tell you, whenever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

We seek to serve as a caring, kind and safe sanctuary where all people can come, be welcomed and worship.

As part of that commitment, we affirm Jesus' special concern for the young by recalling Matthew 18:4-5.

"Whoever welcomes one child in my name welcomes me. Woe to the one who puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones."

To make our best efforts to care for, guide and nurture our children we have in place the following guidelines for this community of faith.

Child and Youth Teacher/Leader Responsibility

1. If, for any reason, a child needs to leave a church-organized program without prior notification, a parent or authorized guardian will be contacted and advised.
2. Every effort will be made to have at least two adults present for all activities involving children and youth, at least one of whom will be over 18 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising. During Sunday School, the presence of at least one teacher and a floater, will meet this requirement.
3. Rooms and areas used for activities for children and youth shall be made as visible as possible. Wherever possible, doors shall have an unobstructed viewing window, or the door shall be left open.
4. When children or youth attend overnight events, they must be accompanied by at least two approved leaders, per these guidelines, both of whom are at least 21 years of age and at least five years older than those whom they are supervising.

5. Any injury, illness or accident that takes place while a child or youth is under the supervision of a staff member or teacher/leader, must be reported by the staff member or approved leader to the Minister of Christian Education and the CAO (chief administrative officer) within 24 hours of the incident.
6. During Sunday School class, preschool age children (typically below age 5) will be escorted to the bathroom. Bathroom doors along the hallway shall remain open at all times.

Parental Responsibility

1. Teachers or leaders must be advised if it is necessary for a child or youth to leave before the scheduled end of a church-organized event.
2. Any time a child or youth participates in an overnight church-organized event, parents are required to sign a permission slip.
3. Parents are responsible for all transportation of children and youth to church events off-site, unless otherwise arranged by the church.
4. It is the responsibility of parents to supervise their children at church when the children are not participating in a church supervised activity.

Child and Youth Teacher, Leader and Volunteer Qualifications

It is our aim to ensure that the many volunteers supporting the vibrant children and youth programs at RPC are qualified and play a positive role in the lives of our young people. As such, the Minister of Christian Education in coordination with Head(s) of Staff (current Co-Pastors), will oversee the qualifications of Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, and other volunteers who work with children or youth at any church sponsored event.

1. Teachers, employees and other volunteers who interact with children or youth on a regular basis or on any type of trip shall undergo a basic criminal background check to be reviewed by the Head(s) of Staff. It is also required that they sign a Sexual Misconduct Information Form (Form B- attached).
2. Any person who is known to have been convicted of, pled guilty to or no contest to, or is presently under indictment for a crime against children or youth or for sexual misconduct of any kind will not be placed in a position involving access to children or youth.

3. The RPC Head(s) of Staff reserve the right to clarify any information or concerns through interview or further screening. They may limit access of any individual to children/youth at any time in the interest of safety.
4. Teachers, employees and other volunteers interacting with children or youth on a regular basis or on overnight trips are required to receive training regarding RPC's children and youth protection policy. They will also participate in the *Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children* abuse prevention program (<http://www.d2l.org>) or an equivalent program, prior to working with children. The Minister of Christian Education shall oversee such training.
5. The Minister of Christian Education may determine that a background check and/or training are required for volunteers or staff who may interact with children or youth on a limited basis.
6. Volunteers shall typically be active in the life of RPC for at least twelve months prior to volunteering with children and/or youth, unless otherwise determined by overseers of the program.
7. Youth volunteers under age 18 shall be supervised by adults covered by this policy.

Receiving and Reporting Information About Suspected Child/Youth Abuse

Child/youth abuse refers to any act or failure to act that results in the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a child or youth.

Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry position (as stated in Book of Order).

Receiving Information about Child/Youth Abuse

Information about child/youth abuse which comes to church employees, ordained officers, Sunday School teachers, or other volunteers, hereafter called Responsible Persons, must be taken very seriously. This includes but is not limited to the following:

- Reports to a Responsible Person by a child/youth.
- Disclosure (direct or indirect) by the abused child/youth to a Responsible Person.

- Observations by a Responsible Person.
- Evidence of possible abuse.

Reporting Abuse

1. Responsible Persons, defined above, are required to immediately report (within 24 hours) any situation where there is reasonable basis for concern that a child or youth may have been abused. The person must report it immediately to a Head of Staff or the Clerk of Session, so long as that person is not the accused.
2. Using the Incident Report Form (Form A attached) as a guide, the Responsible Person along with the Head of Staff and/or Clerk of Session will determine if reason exists to conclude that the child or youth has been abused or is in danger and if so will contact the civil authorities.
3. If it is determined that authorities will be contacted, the Head of Staff or Clerk of Session and Responsible Person together should determine whether the Responsible Person is a mandated reporter or voluntary reporter under New York State Law (<http://www.nysmandatedreporter.org>) and together call the New York State Child Protection Hotline 1-800-342-3720; <http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/cps> and follow necessary procedures.
4. The Head of Staff or Clerk of Session will report notification to authorities to the child's parent or guardian (providing this will not put the child in jeopardy for additional abuse) as well as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Hudson River. If it is determined not to report, the child's parent or guardian may be contacted. The reason for the reporting decision and whether parents were notified shall be explained on the Incident Report (Form A).

Additional Actions

1. When a child is in immediate danger, if possible, secure the safety of the child first.
2. The accused individual, whether staff or volunteer, may not participate in any activities involving children or youth, unless and until the investigation by civil and/or ecclesiastical authorities is completed and he/she is exonerated.
3. The identities of those involved should be kept confidential. The report and the suspected incident may only be referred to and discussed with other members of RPC Clergy and/or Clerk of Session as appropriate.

Documentation

1. Documents shall be retained separately as follows:

- A) Background checks shall be maintained under locked file for ten years, with access limited to RPC Head(s) of Staff.
- B) Incident reports shall be maintained under locked file for ten years, with access limited to RPC Head(s) of Staff.