

Safeguarding God's Children: Policy Summary, Code of Conduct, and Guidelines for Appropriate Affection

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Port Townsend, WA

Excerpted from The Diocese of Olympia's "Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse," <http://www.ecww.org/sites/default/files/ChildAbusePreventionGuidelines.pdf>

Relationships among people are the foundation of Christian ministry and as such are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through policies, codes of conduct, and guidelines is not meant in any way to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, such policies, codes of conduct, and guidelines are meant to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Relationships in ministry should always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or to allow harm to occur. The following Policy Summary, Code of Conduct, and Guidelines for Appropriate Affection been adopted by the Diocese of Olympia and St. Paul's Episcopal Church Vestry (on 5/20/2014) to help the church create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them.

Policy Summary

St. Paul's Episcopal Church affirms our commitment to protect the children and youth in our care from any form of abuse, and to create an atmosphere of respect, trust, and safety where children, youth, and adults can work together to serve Christ free from any fear of exploitation. To live into this commitment:

- 1) We do our best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
- 2) We adhere to the Diocese of Olympia's "Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse" (<http://www.ecww.org/sites/default/files/ChildAbusePreventionGuidelines.pdf>).
- 3) We conduct background checks on all who work with and/or around children and youth.
- 4) We require abuse-prevention training for all who work with and/or around children and youth.
- 5) We require at least two, unrelated adults, present when conducting church-related programs and activities with children and youth.
- 6) We immediately report any behaviors inconsistent with the "Diocesan Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth from Abuse."
- 7) We report known or suspected abuse of children to the police or the Child Protective Services.

"Church Personnel": Background Checks and Abuse-Prevention Training

"CHURCH PERSONNEL": For the purposes of this document, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for St. Paul's Episcopal Church and/or the Diocese of Olympia: 1) all clergy; 2) all paid church personnel; 3) those contracting their services to the Diocese, its congregations, schools or other agencies; and 4) all volunteers in activities for children and youth, including any person who enters into or offers himself or herself for church related service, or who actually assists with or performs such a service. All of these individuals shall be screened and selected utilizing updated (every 5 years) background checks.

Church Personnel who work with or around children **"REGULARLY"**: 1) all clergy; 2) all paid church personnel regardless whether they work with children or youth; 3) all volunteers in staff positions; all volunteers whose work routinely takes them throughout the facility or grounds (e.g., sexton); 4) all persons

who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs, or activities; 5) all persons who provide transportation to children or youth with other adults in the vehicle, 6) any person whose living quarters are on the ground of the church; and 7) parents who assist more than six times per year with a program in which their child is enrolled. These individuals must receive four hours of training consisting of both units of the “Safeguarding God’s Children” material.

Church Personnel who work with or around children **“OCCASIONALLY”**: 1) persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs, or activities infrequently, generally no more than three times a year for one program or activity other than an overnight activity; 2) persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle, generally no more than three times a year; and 3) Bishop’s Committees and Vestries. These individuals must receive at least two hours of training consisting of the first unit of “Safeguarding God’s Children.”

The Code of Conduct for Protection of Children and Youth

- Church Personnel agree to do their best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
- Church Personnel agree not to physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
- Church Personnel agree to comply with the “General Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Youth” (below).
- Church Personnel agree to comply with the “General Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth” (below).
- Church Personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.
- In the event that Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth, Church Personnel agree to immediately report their observations as outlined in Diocesan policy (<http://www.ecww.org/sites/default/files/ChildAbusePreventionGuidelines.pdf>).
- Church Personnel understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.

General Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Youth

The following guidelines are intended to assist Church Personnel in monitoring and supervising behaviors and interactions with children and youth. These guidelines will help identify and stop those behaviors and interactions which may be used to “groom” children, youth and their parents, or which may create conditions where abuse can more easily occur. These guidelines are also used to make decisions about interactions with children and youth in church sponsored and affiliated programs. They are not designed or intended to address interaction within families.

- 1) Church Personnel who work with children and youth must agree to comply with the Diocese of Olympia “General Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth” (below).
- 2) No person will be allowed to volunteer to regularly work with children or youth until the person has been known to the clergy and congregation for at least six months.
- 3) Programs for infants and children under six years old will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.
- 4) Church Personnel are prohibited from using, possessing, distributing, or being under the influence of

alcohol, illegal drugs, or misusing legal drug, or prescription medications while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children and youth.

- 5) Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before Church Personnel transport children and youth for church for a church sponsored activity or for any purpose.
- 6) Church Personnel will relate to children and youth with respect, consideration, and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, culture or socio- economic status. Church Personnel will portray a positive role model for children and youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience and maturity. They will avoid even the appearance of favoritism.
- 7) One-to-one counseling with children and youth will be done in an open, public or other place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others.
- 8) Church Personnel are prohibited from dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth.
- 9) Church Personnel are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child or youth.
- 10) Church Personnel are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, computer files, e-mails, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children and youth except as expressly permitted as part of an educational program that is pre- authorized by the rector, vicar or canonical equivalent.
- 11) Church Personnel are prohibited from using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children and youth.
- 12) Church Personnel are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the Internet with children or youth.
- 13) Church Personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds, sleeping bags or tents with other children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of the children or youth in the same bed, sleeping bag or tent. An adult may sleep in the same hotel room with no fewer than three other children, providing adult and all children are of the same sex. The adult must sleep alone in a bed or on a cot or roll away bed. The adult must never be alone with a child. The adult will use the bathroom facilities alone, dressing/undressing in the bathroom with the door closed and with no children present. Exceptions to the above is given if any of the children are related to the adult, in which case the adult may sleep in the same bed with a child who is an immediate family member. It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleep in one open space such as a parish hall or camp lodge with children and youth. **A best practice rule is no situation in which one adult is alone with one child unless they are immediate family members.**
- 14) Church Personnel are prohibited from dressing, undressing, bathing or showering in the presence of children or youth.
- 15) Church Personnel are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking slapping, pinching, hitting or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth or others.
- 16) Church Personnel are prohibited from using harsh language, profanity, degrading punishment or any mechanical restraint for behavior management.
- 17) Church Personnel are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities or behaviors that could be construed as hazing.

Guidelines for Appropriate Affection with Children and Youth

The Diocese of Olympia is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for our children and youth ministries that protect our children and youth from abuse and our Church Personnel from misunderstandings. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and which are inappropriate allows Church Personnel to comfortably show positive affection in ministry and yet identify individuals who are

not maintaining safe boundaries with children and youth. The guidelines are based in large part on avoiding behaviors known to be used to “groom” children, youth and their parents for future abuse. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church Personnel working around or with children and youth.

1) Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-fives”
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs initiated by small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Brief hugs

2) The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children and youth in ministry settings because many of them are the behaviors that have been used to “groom” children or youth for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves sexual abuse.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over three years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written or electronic) that relate to physique or body
- Development
- Snapping bras or giving "wedgies" or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
- Private meals with individual children

