

St. Matthew Lutheran Church

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Purpose

St. Matthew Lutheran Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of St. Matthew from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

DEFINITIONS

Within this Policy, the following terms shall have these meanings:

Child or Children: includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Volunteer: Any individual who will foreseeably interact with children during providing unpaid services to St. Matthew, either on or off the church premises.

Worker: Any individual receiving payment from St. Matthew for the provision of services to St. Matthew.

SCREENING POLICIES FOR WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Any adult seeking to be employed as a Worker or act as a Volunteer must undergo a background check administered by St. Matthew Lutheran Church prior to any approval to perform any ministry activities. Following the background and approval process, these results of the background check will be maintained in a secure area at St. Matthew.

The Senior Pastor will have the final authority to determine whether any offense disclosed on Worker and Volunteer Screening Form or background check results will disqualify that individual from serving as a Worker or Volunteer on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, any convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children.

Every Worker and Volunteer will need to be re-qualified every five (5) years by completing new Worker and Volunteer Screening and running a new background check.

OPEN DOOR POLICY

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

TEENAGE WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS

The following guidelines apply to teenage Workers and Volunteers:

- Must be at least age 12.

- Must be screened with approval from the Spiritual Formation Director (the staff member who oversees the program) and these teenage workers or volunteers should be from St. Matthew member families.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT PROCEDURE

For children below sixth grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed for Sunday school and other events where Nursery care is provided.

RESTROOM GUIDELINES - When Child is not with Custodial Parent

Two female Worker/Volunteers shall be present at all times for any diaper changes/restroom assistance of a non potty-trained child. Preferably the Worker/Volunteers should not be from the same family.

A female Worker or Volunteer will accompany potty-trained children five and under to the restroom. They should wait by the bathroom entrance with the door open and allow the child/ren to toilet him/herself whenever possible. Help with outer clothing may be administered at the main entrance to the restroom. If further assistance is needed, two female Workers or Volunteers should be present, and assistance should be provided with the stall door ajar.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- At least two Workers/Volunteers, not from the same family if possible, must be in the Nursery anytime children are present.
- Children need physical contact with adults; however, care should be taken to ensure the child remains comfortable and the contact is appropriate. Workers and Volunteers are encouraged to handshake and high five children. Brief hugs and brief touches on the shoulder are acceptable, and children may sit on an adult's lap if they choose to do so during activities. Children should never be forced to sit on a lap. Workers and Volunteers should always be aware of the child's reaction to judge whether they are comfortable with a certain type of touching.
- A Worker should always be present for the duration of church-sponsored on premises or offsite youth events, and at least two Workers/Volunteers must be present for the duration of the event. At least two of the Workers/Volunteers present must not be from the same family.
- St Matthew sponsored youth events held at any private residence (ie. Bonfires, pool party) will be subject to this Child Protection Policy.
- Any St Matthew sponsored offsite youth events will require a signed permission and emergency contact form from their parent or guardian prior to departure/arrival; electronic forms will be acceptable.
- Transportation provided during a St Matthew sponsored offsite youth event must maintain at least two Workers/Volunteers per vehicle with one child or two children per vehicle where one Worker or Volunteer is present(driving).

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's

physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Workers and Volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under their care. In the event that a Worker or Volunteer becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred on the St. Matthew premises or at an off-site sponsored program or activity, the following procedure shall be followed: 1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified by the Director of Spiritual Formation. 2. The Worker or Volunteer alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses. 3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities. 4. The Sr. Pastor will immediately notify both the attorney and insurance company for St. Matthew and assist in coordinating any information gathering requests or other directives. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the attorney. 5. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be prohibited from serving as a Worker or Volunteer with minors.