

Valley View Church
Louisville, Kentucky

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE

Implementation Period: August 25, 2016 to Sept 30, 2016

Effective Policy Date: October 1, 2016

Policy Version: 1.0

Valley View Church (VVC) of Louisville, KY recognizes and acknowledges the trust that parents / custodians extend in permitting VVC volunteers and staff the privilege and honor of caring for their minor children and conveying eternal truth to them. Therefore, VVC is obligated to implement abuse prevention plans to provide a safe place for all children and students and for those adults who work with them. We recognize that the Child Development Center will also need to follow all specific state and federal laws specific to its operations. Please see Ministry Area Guidelines for additional guidance.

This Risk Management Policy includes the following:

- 1.0** Purpose of Policy
- 2.0** Definitions
- 3.0** Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers
- 4.0** Volunteer Staff Enlistment – Screening and Training
- 5.0** Volunteer Staff Supervision
- 6.0** Volunteer Staff Guidelines
- 7.0** Volunteer Staff Training
- 8.0** Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Abuse
- 9.0** Reporting Procedures
- 10.0** Appendix
 - A.** Volunteer Staff Application
 - B.** Authorization for Criminal Background Check
 - C.** Suspected Child Abuse Report Form
 - D.** Suspected Child Abuse Follow-Up Report
 - E.** Kentucky Law Regarding Reporting

1.0 PURPOSE OF POLICY

- 1.01** Members of VVC come with various experiences, backgrounds and needs. We have many adults who have children in our Children and Student areas. Our commitment as a church is to provide an environment as safe as possible for children and students who attend our church or any church-sponsored activities and to take the necessary precautions to protect church leaders and volunteers from unfounded accusations or

suspicious. We recognize the need to have formal, written policies and guidelines to help prevent the opportunity for abuse.

- 1.02** This policy is intended to apply to all Valley View Church (VVC) ministries, including but not limited to age-group ministries, Child Development Center (CDC), recreation, and all other ministries wherein the supervision of those under 18 occurs.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.01 Application Package** – package provided to an individual interested in working with minors that consists of the following information:
- (1)** Cover Letter
 - (2)** VVC General Policy for the Prevention of Child Abuse
 - (3)** Volunteer Staff Application
 - (4)** Authorization for Criminal Background Check
- Application Package can either be physical or digital.
- 2.02 Risk Management Team (“RMT”)**– a group made up of a minimum of three ministers to review any issues pertaining to the volunteer staff and incidents involving minors. This includes, but is not limited to, Ministers of Students and Children, and others as needed for review purposes. The Executive Pastor shall always be one of the three review members.
- 2.03 Church-Sponsored Event** – an activity on or off site, that is scheduled and endorsed by Valley View Church where VVC could be viewed as having control and responsibility for the event.
- 2.04 Deferred Adjudication** – The offender has offered a plea of guilty or nolo contendere (which means the offender does not have to enter a plea of guilty but will not contest the charge) and his sentence is “deferred” or set aside and he is placed on probation. The probation conditions are basically the same as a person who has a regular conviction. This is not a conviction and an offender can legally answer “no” to any question that asks if he/she has been convicted of an offense. If he does not complete the probation sentence successfully, he will go back in front of the judge who may revoke the probation and sentence the offender. If he does complete the probation successfully, there is no conviction on his record.
- 2.05 Unscriptural Conduct** – Any behavior that violates moral principles as set forth in scripture as interpreted by Valley View Church's Covenant, Bylaws and standards.

3.0 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS & PAID STAFF

3.01 Any person 18 years or older desiring to work with minors (people under age 18) must submit to a screening procedure. The screening procedure consists of the following components:

- 1) Employment Application (paid staff only)
- 2) Volunteer Staff Application
- 3) Personal Interview
- 4) Personal Reference Check
- 5) Authorization for Criminal Background Check (every 3 years)
- 6) Child Abuse Prevention Video Training

3.02 At times, VVC partners or hires outside organizations to provide care for children at VVC. Each of these organizations is expected to agree to abide by the intent of this document and maintain documentation accordingly.

3.03 VVC will not knowingly allow any person who meets the following descriptions to care for a minor:

- (1)** has entered a plea of guilty or no contest, or has been convicted of or received deferred adjudication for any criminal activity involving child abuse or neglect, or sexual misconduct.
- (2)** in the case of child abuse or neglect, a person who has been found to be a perpetrator of child abuse in a court, or has made an admission of guilt to a person authorized by state or federal laws to investigate child abuse;

Or

- (3)** in the last three years a person who has entered a plea of guilty or no contest, or has been convicted of or received deferred adjudication for any criminal activity including violence against a person or assault, disregard for the safety of others, the possession, sale or distribution of illegal drugs or alcohol offenses or other conduct as listed in the Leadership Felony Statement on the Volunteer Staff Application.

3.04 VVC reserves the right to make the final determination regarding approval of any volunteers.

4.0 VOLUNTEER STAFF ENLISTMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES **Screening and Training Steps to Volunteer Staff Enlistment**

4.01 The Risk Management Team will review the names of potential volunteers on an ongoing basis as a preliminary screening process. This process will include additional staff as deemed necessary by the Risk Management Team.

- 4.02** Subject to exceptions granted by the Risk Management Team, those considered for a position in the Children and Student areas of ministry must be members of Valley View Church for a minimum of six months before serving in these areas.
- 4.03** A minister or associate responsible for a specific ministry will discuss the basic requirements with all potential Children and Student volunteers. If there is a desire to proceed, the minister will provide the applicant with a VVC Volunteer Staff Application Package or web links to that package. The Volunteer Staff Application Form will require three personal references.
- 4.04** All volunteers/staff ministering in the Children and Student areas, all Adult Life Group Leaders, and volunteers leading children or students in Home Life Groups will complete the Volunteer Staff Application Form and the Authorization for Criminal Background Check.
- 4.05** A third party contractor (not a member of VVC or related to a member of VVC) may review and maintain the criminal background information.
- 4.06** Any issues of concern from the criminal background check or reference check will be brought to the attention of the Risk Management Team and area minister. The minister has two options after verifying the concern:
- a.** Reject the applicant based on the predefined criteria as provided in section 3.03 or at the discretion of Valley View Church (3.04).
 - b.** Bring the issue to the Risk Management Team for a decision.
- 4.07** A Criminal Background Check will be performed on all applicants at the time of enlistment / hire. This will be performed every 3 years. An applicant is disqualified if he or she has a record of conduct as defined in Section 3.03. These individuals cannot serve nor will they be employed by Valley View Church.
- 4.08** All applicants must complete the screening procedure (see Section 3.01) prior to serving as a volunteer. The applicant will turn in the Volunteer Staff Application Form and the Authorization for Criminal Background Check to start the process. The applicant will receive mandatory Child Abuse Prevention training online in conjunction with completing the application package and background check.
- 4.09** VVC realizes God often uses experiences in the Children's Ministry to guide students toward discovering their gifts and sensing a call to future ministry. Thus, students in grades 6-12, who are active in the Valley View Student Ministry, are encouraged to assist adult volunteer/staff during activities such as Vacation Bible School. All Student volunteers must complete a VVC volunteer application form and instruction/training as determined by

the Risk Management Team in order to be approved. Students serve at the sole discretion of the ministers involved. See student ministry guidelines for more information.

5.0 VOLUNTEER AND STAFF GUIDELINES

Supervising ministers and or directors make frequent unannounced visits into classrooms or other program sites.

5.01 Volunteers and Paid Staff Are To Avoid One On One Isolated Situations.

Volunteers and Staff will make every effort to avoid these situations.

5.02 Two Adult Rule – We are committed to always having two adults (age 18 or older) present at all church-sponsored events that involve minors.

5.03 Student Volunteers – Student volunteers are minors. This means that an adult volunteer is not to be alone with a student volunteer at any time. This also means that a student volunteer is never to be left alone with minors.

5.04 Check-In & Dismissal Policies- Specific check-in/dismissal procedures are described in ***Ministry Area Guidelines***.

5.05 Church Sponsored Events – All church sponsored events must be approved by VVC through appropriate staff members. In addition, proper permission slips should be signed by the parent/guardian of each child participating in the event.

5.06 Overnight Activities – Supervisors and all adult volunteers of overnight activities involving minors will follow the two adult rule, avoid one-on-one situations, avoid mixed gender sleeping arrangements, and ensure all efforts are made to be above reproach.

5.07 Corporal Punishment-Corporal punishment is **NEVER** an appropriate means for guiding behavior.

5.08 Physical Affection-Physical affection should be limited, appropriate, and always above reproach. See ***Ministry Area Guidelines*** for specific guidelines.

5.09 Use Common Sense – If you feel uncomfortable in a situation with a child or student, seek a supervisor for guidance as soon as possible.

6.0 VOLUNTEER AND STAFF TRAINING

The various ministry areas of our church will provide opportunities for training concerning Valley View Church Risk Management Policies including the prevention and recognition of the sexual abuse of children. Paid and volunteer staff in these areas will participate in the sessions.

7.0 REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE INVOLVING OUTSIDE PARTIES

We recognize that in the course of ministry children and students may disclose allegations of abuse to volunteers or staff involving non-Valley View connected individuals. When a child brings to the attention of a volunteer or staff member an allegation of abuse towards an adult or an allegation involving another minor, we will report it based on Kentucky State Laws as follows:

- 7.01** Volunteers should immediately communicate the allegation to the age group minister.
- 7.02** All allegations need to be taken seriously and will be reported by the age group Minister to the Executive Pastor. Reports will be made as required by law or deemed necessary by church staff or elders. The Executive Pastor or his designee will make these reports to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (1-800-752-6200) or local police (911). Police are to be immediately contacted if we believe a child is in imminent danger.
- 7.03** Confidentiality Statement: Situations must be handled immediately with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- 7.04** Full cooperation must be given to civil authorities under the guidance of our legal counsel.
- 7.05** Appropriate care must be shown for the well being of victims.
- 7.06** Ministry staff, with assistance of volunteers, will document all details of handling the incident.
- 7.07** Ministry Staff: Report the incident immediately to the church's legal counsel.

8.0 REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE INVOLVING A VALLEY VIEW STAFF OR VOLUNTEER OR SPONSORED ACTIVITY.

VVC Ministry Staff and Volunteers will adhere to the following underlying principles in a response to an allegation of abuse.

- 8.01** Volunteers should immediately communicate the allegation to the age group minister.
- 8.02** All allegations need to be taken seriously and will be reported by the age group Minister to the Executive Pastor. Reports will be made as required by law or deemed necessary by church staff or elders. The Executive Pastor or his designee will make these reports to the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (1-800-752-6200) or local police (911). Police are to be immediately contacted if we believe a child is in imminent danger.
- 8.03** Confidentiality Statement: Situations must be handled immediately with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- 8.04** Full cooperation must be given to civil authorities under the guidance of our legal counsel.
- 8.05** Appropriate care must be shown for the well being of victims.
- 8.06** The Executive Pastor or designee will contact VVC's insurance agent promptly.
- 8.07** Ministry Staff, with assistance of others as needed, will document all details of handling the incident.
- 8.08** Executive Pastor or designee will report the incident promptly to the church's legal counsel. Don't try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
- 8.09** A volunteer or minister who suspects child abuse has occurred should report the incident or suspicions to his/her age group minister or supervisor.
- 8.10** Ministry Staff and Volunteers: Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.
- 8.11** Take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed and remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Don't prejudge the situation.
- 8.12** Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church volunteer, that person will be relieved of their areas of service until the investigation is finished. If cleared of allegations, reinstatement will be made based upon the standards found in this policy and specifically section 3. Even in cases where allegations are cleared, VVC reserves the right to **NOT** reinstate a volunteer if determined appropriate by church leadership.

- 8.13** A designated spokesperson will use the text of a prepared statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. Others should refer all media or congregation questions to the designated spokesperson.

Response Plan

In light of the above principles, a thorough response plan will be developed. It will be reviewed with the church's legal counsel and insurance provider, as necessary.

1. **Maintain Adequate Records** – It is our goal to have adequate records of Volunteer Staff applications, references and screening forms. They should be up-to-date and accessible. These records are confidential and will be kept at least five years after the conclusion of their volunteer ministry.
2. **Select a Spokesperson** – If allegations of abuse occur, a spokesperson designated by the Lead Pastor or Executive Pastor will speak to the media and the congregation in a discreet, informed, truthful and diplomatic way. Everyone involved in the ministry of the church will know who the spokesperson is and will not attempt to respond themselves. All inquiries will be referred to the appointed spokesperson.
3. **Position Statement** – The following statement may be considered for release as appropriate.

“It is always tragic when children are abused or exploited. Valley View Church is aware of the ever-growing nature of child abuse and the harm that is done to the victims. We have taken every precaution to protect the minors entrusted to our care. Our paid staff and volunteers are carefully screened before beginning ministry in our church. Training occurs formally through video and informally by our ministry staff to communicate the various policies implemented to provide for the safety of our children. We also have reviewed with our staff what to watch for and how to report any suspicious behavior relating to the abuse of children. We are distressed by an accusation of child abuse. We will do everything in our power to address this situation. For the welfare of those involved, all information has been directed to the Department of Family and Protective Services.”

VVC will be prepared to explain the specific precautions, the screening process, and the training that the church utilizes to provide a safe and secure environment.

4. **VVC Will Not Engage in Denial, Minimization, or Blame** – when confronted with an allegation of abuse, VVC will **not** respond in one or more of the following ways:
 - a. Deny that the incident occurred, despite clear evidence to the contrary.
 - b. Acknowledge that the incident occurred, but minimize it. For example, a church leader may say, “It only happened once” or “It wasn’t that serious.”
 - c. Blame the victim or the victim's family.
5. **Legal Counsel** – VVC may have the church’s legal representation present while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.
6. **VVC Will Not Be Accusatory** – VVC will avoid spelling out the details of an accusation in a public interview.

9.0 REPORTING

If church volunteers or staff have any concerns regarding suspicions of abuse of a minor, they should report it to their age level minister and the pastoral staff as described in 7.02 and 8.02.

- 9.01 **Who Must Report** – Anyone who has reasonable grounds to believe a child has been or is being abused needs to report to his or her age group minister or Executive Pastor, consistent with Sections 7.02 and 8.02

Social professionals designated to receive reports are trained to investigate and assess the need for intervention. Church staff must not assume this function. **Any evidence of abuse including video, photography, and digital media should ONLY be viewed by appropriate law enforcement.** No action will be taken against a person making a report unless it is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds for belief.

- 9.02 **What To Report** – All volunteers and paid staff who are involved in ministry with children/students should immediately report to the age group minister or Executive Pastor any items of obvious concern relating to child abuse, neglect or exploitation of which they have knowledge or have observed within the scope of their duties. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person or the paid staff to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. Some signs of abuse to watch for are:

- Unexplained bruises, burns, fractures, or abrasions (often in various stages of healing).
- Consistent lack of supervision

- Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene, or unattended medical needs.
- Extremes of aggression or withdrawal
- Moves with discomfort and shies away from physical contact.
- Wears inappropriate clothing for the weather in order to cover body.
- Withdrawn, depressed, listless
- Torn, stained or bloody underwear
- Irritation of the mouth, genital or anal area
- Difficulty sitting or walking
- Inappropriate sex play, acting out seductiveness or promiscuity
- Sudden changes in school performance, appetite or self-worth

9.03 Abuse or neglect need not have occurred for a minor to be in need of protection. It is not necessary to wait until a minor has been harmed to intervene. When abuse or neglect can be reasonably anticipated and there are reasonable grounds to believe a minor is in need of protection, the necessity of reporting applies.

9.04 **Confidentiality** – In these matters it is important to **keep the information confidential at all times**. Therefore, all suspicions of abuse should be directed only to the age group minister and pastoral staff. It is the responsibility of the pastoral staff to contact the local office of the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

9.05 Although physicians, clergy and lawyers consider their professional relationships confidential as part of the solicitor-client privilege, they are not exempt from the duty to report child abuse or neglect.

9.06 **Responding To The Child** – When a child first comes to you be sure to take his or her word seriously. Don't deny the problem, but stay calm and listen to the child. Give emotional support, reminding the child that he or she is not at fault and that he or she was right in telling you about the problem. Do not promise the child you will not tell anyone. As a general policy those working with VVC minors should never promise to not tell. We recommend adults use phrasing similar to the following when asked to not tell... "I won't promise to not tell anyone but I do promise to do the right thing with anything you tell me."

9.07 **Report Form** – Report orally to the ministry head, then complete a Suspected Child Abuse Report Form. These forms may be obtained from the ministry head or pastoral staff. Fill out the report form and submit following the guidelines identified in this document.