

Safe Sanctuary Review 2016

Each year all of our volunteers who work with children are required to review the Safe Sanctuary Policy. I've highlighted some significant parts of the policy that have changed recently or that would be helpful for volunteers to know.

Why do we have a Safe Sanctuaries policy?

We recognize that our faith calls us to offer hospitality and protection to all children, as well as those who are committed to ministering to them as volunteers and employees. Every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Often, abuse occurs in places where children feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and even churches.

Definitions according to the law:

- a child is anyone who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday
- “Direct contact with children” is the care, supervision, guidance or control of children or routine interaction with children.
- Child abuse: Intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly doing any of the following:
 - Causing bodily injury. (*Changes in law: Bodily injury: Recent act or failure to act (within 2 years of the date of report) that causes **impairment** of physical condition or **substantial** pain:*
 - Old law said “significantly impairs”
 - Old law said “severe” pain
 - Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury.
 - Causing sexual abuse or exploitation.
 - Causing serious physical neglect.
 - Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury or sexual abuse or exploitation.

Who are Mandated Reporters?

- A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or religious organization.
- An adult **paid or unpaid**, who, on the basis of the individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.
- An individual supervised or managed by a person listed above.

Who Must Report Suspected Abuse?

UNDER THE NEW LAW, EVERY VOLUNTEER IS NOW A MANDATED REPORTER. THIS IS A MAJOR CHANGE!!

When do we report?

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred, according to PA Child Protective

Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.S. Chapter 63.

Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur:

1. when any staff or volunteer personally witnesses an incident of abuse,
2. when an allegation of an event of abuse is made to a staff or volunteer by a third party, and/or
3. when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses abuse to staff or a volunteer which meets the criteria of the above PA Law.

This means:

- It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to observe the child in order to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.
- It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to identify the alleged perpetrator to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

*The mandated reporter observing the behavior or receiving the allegation or disclosure must **immediately** file the report to the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline.*

Where do we report?

Reports of suspected child or youth abuse are made to:

Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24/7 service) at **800-932-0313** or PA Department of Human Services electronic filing system

A mandated reporter who fails or delays reporting may be charged with a misdemeanor or a felony, depending on whether the non-reporting is willful and how serious the abuse is.

Other Key Info for All Volunteers:

Background Checks – For all **ADULT VOLUNTEERS** responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children:

- PA State Police Criminal Record Check
- PA Child Abuse Clearance (DPW)
- FBI Clearance (fingerprinting) (\$27.50) – UNLESS:
 - Has been a resident of Pennsylvania for all of the past 10 years
 - Affirms in writing they have not been convicted in any other state of any of the Pennsylvania offenses that prohibit service.
- All the above repeated every 3 years

Supervision

- Two-adult rule
- No child left unsupervised
- Ministries & activities conducted in open view
- No supervision by persons under age 18
- Five-years-older rule
- Written consent forms for activities that include transportation

Two-Adult Rule

- Two adults present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry.
- A roamer can be the second adult, if necessary.
- Protects children from potential abusers.
- Protects adults from false allegations.
- No Child Left Unsupervised: Once parents turn over responsibility for their child to the church, the child must remain supervised by screened and trained adult staff and/or volunteers at all times until the parent assumes responsibility again.

No Supervision by Persons Under Age 18

- Children should not be supervising children.
- Teens can be great helpers for adults supervising younger children.
- An adult must always be in the role of supervisor.

You can access the full training PowerPoint here:

https://www.epaumc.org/sites/default/files/public_html/administration-resources/Safe-Sanctuaries/Safe-Sanctuaries-Update-Training-Oct-2014-Powerpoint.pdf

You can access the full conference policy here:

<http://www.epaumc.org/resources/safe-sanctuaries/safe-sanctuaries-other-resources/>