



Hanover Valley Presbyterian Church
Child Protection Policy

Hanover Valley Presbyterian Church (HVPC) exists to assist people in knowing Jesus Christ, until there is a visible difference in their quality of life and in the community. We believe that the Gospel of Christ has a tremendous power to produce positive transformation spiritually, psychologically, socially, and culturally – first through ourselves and then through the community by word and deed.

What kind of church do we need to be to make a difference in Hanover? To help people know, love, and serve God through Jesus Christ. We are striving to be a church with an open door to those who seek Christ and a clear path for those who are journeying toward Him.

Part of being this kind of church is having a commitment to the welfare of children within our church and community. The following document outlines the practices that we have in place to protect the children under our care. We require all staff and children's ministry volunteers to attend child protection training and to read and understand this child protection policy. In addition, we encourage all members and regular attenders to do the same in an effort to become better advocates for children in all contexts.

In Jesus,
The Session of Hanover Valley Presbyterian Church

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. – Psalm 9:9 (ESV)

Policy Goals

We intend for this policy to:

1. Create a safer environment for children in the church.
2. To help make abuse socially unacceptable and immediately recognizable.
3. Policy violations will serve as early indicators of potential abuse.
4. Provide clear guidelines for adults to report suspected abuse as necessary.
5. Be a document that is frequently updated to reflect best practices in the field of child protection.



Policy Section One: The Foundation

1.1 Defining Abuse

Types of Abuse

There are five categories of abuse:

1. Sexual Abuse
2. Physical Abuse
3. Psychological (emotional) Abuse Sexual Abuse
4. Spiritual Abuse
5. Economic abuse*

**Economic abuse will not be covered in this policy. Sexual, physical, psychological (emotional) and spiritual abuse will be covered in this policy.*

Definition of “child”:

- **Pennsylvania Legal Definition of “child”:** Any person under 18 years of age.
- **HVPC definition of “child”:** Any person under 18 years of age.

Sexual Abuse

- **Pennsylvania State Definition of Sexual Abuse:**
Any of the following: (1) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct, which includes, but is not limited to, the following: (i) Looking at the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or another individual for the purpose of arousing or gratifying sexual desire in any individual. (ii) Participating in sexually explicit conversation either in person, by telephone, by computer or by a computer-aided device for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification of any individual. (iii) Actual or simulated sexual activity or nudity for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification of any individual. (iv) Actual or simulated sexual activity for the purpose of producing visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting or filming. This paragraph does not include consensual activities between a child who is 14 years of age or older and another person who is 14 years of age or older and whose age is within four years of the child's age. (2) Any of the following offenses committed against a child: (i) Rape as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3121 (relating to rape). (ii) Statutory sexual assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3122.1 (relating to statutory sexual assault). (iii) Involuntary deviate sexual intercourse as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse). (iv) Sexual assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3124.1 (relating to sexual assault). (v) Institutional sexual assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3124.2 (relating to institutional sexual assault). (vi) Aggravated indecent assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault). (vii) Indecent assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3126 (relating to indecent assault). (viii)



Indecent exposure as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3127 (relating to indecent exposure). (ix) Incest as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 4302 (relating to incest). (x) Prostitution as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 5902 (relating to prostitution and related offenses). (xi) Sexual abuse as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children). (xii) Unlawful contact with a minor as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 6318 (relating to unlawful contact with minor). (xiii) Sexual exploitation as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 6320 (relating to sexual exploitation of children).¹

▪ **HVPC Definition of Sexual Abuse:**

This policy agrees with the entirety of the Pennsylvania State definition of sexual abuse listed above. We would further clarify and emphasize the following:

Physical contact includes:

- Touching, grabbing, patting, slapping, pinching, rubbing, fondling, groping, poking, or other forms of contact, whether over or under clothing.
- Rubbing one’s genital area up against another person or touching another person with one’s genitals, whether over or under clothing.
- This includes instances when an individual acts as though the rubbing was inadvertent but was in fact intentional.
- Sexual intercourse of any kind.
- Sexual or intimate body parts include, but are not limited to: breasts, buttocks, genitals, groin area, and upper thighs.

Other forms of sexual activity include:

- Photographing, videotaping, or making any other visual, descriptive, or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person’s body.
- Displaying to another any writings, photograph, videotape, or other visual or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person’s body.

Lack of consent includes:

- Explicit indication of lack of consent.
- Physical/verbal force or intimidation, whether express or implicit.
- Circumstances making it obvious that consent has not been granted, such as:
 - If one individual is an adult and one individual is a child, since children cannot legally consent to sexual activity with an adult.
 - Being too intoxicated to say “no”.
 - Being asleep.
 - Lack of knowledge of the activity’s activity’s occurrence.
 - Otherwise not having the physical or mental capacity to consent

¹ As listed in the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law chapter 63 - Title 23
<https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/CT/HTM/23/00.063..HTM>



Physical Abuse

- **Pennsylvania State Definition of Physical Abuse:**

The term "child abuse" shall mean intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following: (1) Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act. (2) Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act. ... (5) Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act. ... (7) Causing serious physical neglect of a child. (8) Engaging in any of the following recent acts: (i) Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child. (ii) Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement. (iii) Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age. (iv) Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age. (v) Interfering with the breathing of a child. ... (9) Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.²

- **HVPC Definition of Physical Abuse:**

This policy agrees with the entirety of the Pennsylvania State definition of physical abuse listed above.

Psychological or Emotional Abuse

- **Pennsylvania State Definition of Psychological or Emotional Abuse:**

(3) Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury* to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.

**"Serious mental injury." A psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment, that: (1) renders a child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic or in reasonable fear that the child's life or safety is threatened; or (2) seriously interferes with a child's ability to accomplish age appropriate developmental and social tasks.³*

² Child Protective Services Law Chapter 63.

³ Ibid.



- **HVPC Definition of Psychological or Emotional Abuse:**

This policy agrees with the Pennsylvania State definition in its entirety and would further clarify and emphasize that:

Psychological/emotional abuse includes acts toward a child that cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to the child's physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development. Emotional abuse might include, but is not limited to, patterns of:

- Restricting a child's movement
- Discrimination (e.g., serving snack to all the children in a youth group except for one child or one group of children)
- Blaming, belittling, denigrating, ridiculing, or humiliating
- Threatening or scaring
- Unrealistic expectations and demands other non-physical forms of hostility or bullying

Spiritual Abuse

- **Pennsylvania State Definition of Spiritual Abuse**

The state of Pennsylvania does not currently acknowledge spiritual abuse.

- **HVPC Definition of Spiritual Abuse**

The guide defines child spiritual abuse as abuse administered under the guise of religion. Examples include:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child
- Compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his or her will
- Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church)
- Abuse perpetuated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor)
- Invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser.



1.2 Indicators of Abuse

Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse and Child Maltreatment

Because the majority of children who are sexually abused will be moderately to severely symptomatic at some point in their life, HVPC is familiar with and attentive to potential indicators of child sexual abuse. As the church’s front-line for children’s and youth programming and pastoral counseling, church professionals and volunteers have regular opportunities to observe children’s behavior, family dynamics, and care-giving styles. They are often privy to the intimate details of congregants’ lives. Unlike formal educators, church professionals have ongoing contact with the entire family unit and its acquaintances, and as such may be in the unique position to detect child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment.

Health care professionals will consider the possibility of sexual abuse if a child has:

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty, pain, or blood in the genital area when walking, sitting, or using the bathroom
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Injuries (e.g., bruises, tearing, bleeding), itching, or swelling in the genital, vaginal, or anal area
- Urinary tract infections, yeast infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy

*Volunteers and ministry staff **should not** actively check for these indicators, but should be aware of them in the event that a child intentionally or unintentionally discloses any of the above indicators of sexual abuse.*

Normal and Abnormal Sexual Behavior in Children:

<i>Normal sexual behavior in children</i>	<i>Abnormal sexual behavior in children</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Touching their genitals or masturbating ▪ Showing others their genitals (e.g., “I’ll show you mine if you show me yours”) ▪ Playing house or doctor ▪ Showing interest in bathroom functions ▪ Using dirty language for bathroom functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Placing mouth on sex part ▪ Asking others to engage in sexual acts ▪ Trying to have intercourse or imitating intercourse ▪ Undressing others, especially if done forcefully ▪ Imitating sexual positions with dolls ▪ Inserting an object into vagina or anus, especially if child continues to do so despite pain ▪ Manually stimulating or having oral or genital contact with pets ▪ Making sexual sounds ▪ Inserting tongue in mouth when kissing



Emotional or behavioral signs of child sexual abuse may include:

- Depression; emotionless or passive behavior; withdrawal from family, friends, church, or school; exhibiting low self-esteem or self-loathing
- Lack of attachment to a caregiver; displaying distrust or wariness at the approach of adults, caregivers, or specific people; fear of going home that may manifest by arriving at youth groups early, staying late, and appearing frightened or upset when it is time to return home
- Being constantly watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Sudden changes in behavior, including academic changes
- Extremes in behavior, such as over-compliance, overachieving or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or behaving more responsibly than would be expected of a child that age
- Aggressive, destructive (e.g., fire-setting), demanding, or disruptive behavior; frequent and inexplicable anger, rebellion, or running away
- Self-degradation; self-injury (e.g., “cutting”) or wearing long sleeves on hot days (to hide bruising or other injuries); suicide attempts
- Delays in emotional, cognitive, physical, or academic development
- Unwillingness to change for or participate in certain youth department activities such as a gym night or swim program
- Being inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or infantile (e.g., rocking or head-banging)
- Bed-wetting in children who have previously outgrown it; nightmares; difficulty sleeping
- Exhibiting high anxiety, including through physical problems associated with anxiety, such as chronic stomach pain or headaches
- Frequent, unexplained absences at school

Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, burns), especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of injury
- These injuries may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments
- Pay particular attention to injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body

Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- Is obviously malnourished, listless, or fatigued
- Begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger
- Is consistently dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Untreated illness, injuries, health (e.g., unfilled cavities) or serious educational needs
- Broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aid, or other necessary aids or equipment
- Has an untreated need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention.
- Stays at school outside of school hours
- Frequently absent or significant academic struggles
- Is inappropriately left unsupervised
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs



1.3 Impact

Though a child's injuries may be hidden from the untrained eye, child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment can result in immediate and/or lasting impact in all realms of the person's well-being. Understanding how child sexual abuse can traumatize the child and have lasting impact in the life of a surviving adult is a critical first step in preventing abuse and responding compassionately. Not every child will display the impact of their maltreatment and not every adult will experience the long-term consequences of their traumatic childhood experiences, but all are at increased risk.

Impact on Emotional Health The ACE study* found that children who had suffered one of the ten adverse childhood experiences surveyed were at an increased risk throughout their lifetime for: obesity, smoking, illicit drug use, alcohol abuse, marrying an alcoholic spouse, early initiation of sexual activity, unintended or teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, anxiety disorder, depression, attempting suicide, experiencing domestic or sexual violence, difficulties with academics, employment, or relationships, hallucinations, memory disturbances, or sleep disturbances.

Impact on Physical Health The ACE study* found that children who had experienced maltreatment were more likely to suffer from a variety of serious medical problems, including cancer, heart disease, lung disease, liver disease, autoimmune deficiencies, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, and obesity as adults.

Impact on Spiritual Health Spiritual injuries from child sexual abuse or child maltreatment might include negative shifts in victims' perception of God (e.g., perceiving God as cruel, unfair, punitive, and distant), a ruptured relationship with God (e.g., feeling unloved by God), disruptions of faith (e.g., doubting God's existence), decreased involvement in organized religion (e.g., less willing to attend formal religious events), and a decline in spiritual well-being and functioning (e.g., feeling angry, guilty, or disconnected from one's sense of personal spirituality). Children who have suffered sexual abuse often endure spiritual injury and may feel guilty, doubtful of God's existence, or believe that God is unjust. Victims report a sense of enhanced betrayal when their abuser is a person they perceived as holy, and numerous studies have found that spiritual injuries are more pronounced in instances when the perpetrator is a member of the clergy.⁴

* "ACE Study" refers to the "Adverse Childhood Experiences" study. You can learn more at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>

⁴ See Felitti, and Anda, "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences,"; V. J. Felitti, R. F. Anda, D. Nordenberg, D. F. Williamson, A. M. Spitz, V. Edwards, M. P. Koss, J. S. Marks, "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14 (1998): 245–58; Academy on Violence and Abuse (AVA), Dr. Vincent Felletti's overview of ACE study, retrieved from www.avahealth.org/ace_study/ace_study_dvd_institutional_license/ace_study_summary_14.html; S. R. Dube, et. al., "Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim," 430–38. Retrieved from [www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(05\)00078-4/fulltext](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(05)00078-4/fulltext); Centers for Disease Control Child Maltreatment, "Consequences," retrieved from www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/consequences.html; L. Starcheski, Can family secrets make you sick? (NPR News: All Things, Considered, 2015), retrieved from www.npr.org/blogs/health/2015/03/02/377569413/can-family-secrets-make-you-sick.



1.4 People Who Sexually Abuse Children

People who sexually abuse children utilize authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse.

The three primary categories of people who sexually abuse children are the stranger, the acquaintance, and the intra-familial offender.

Stranger offenders are people that the child has never seen, or people with whom the child has had only minimal prior interactions. Stranger offenders secure access and control over children with authority, trust, and physical force/threats but most frequently utilize physical force/threats and are the smallest category of offenders.

Acquaintance offenders are non-family members—such as a family friend, clergy member, next-door neighbor, pediatrician, teacher, or church volunteer—who is acquainted with the child or the child’s parents. Acquaintance offenders generally prefer to leverage trust to gain access and control. To secure this trust, the acquaintance offender grooms child victims by providing a variety of services and gifts, including but not limited to attention, affection, kindness, privileges, recognition, alcohol, drugs, money, and pornography. The trust that develops as a result of the grooming process will often reduce the child’s inhibitions and increase the offender’s control over the child. This toxic trust eventually renders the child virtually helpless, creating an environment for ongoing abuse, while increasing the likelihood that the victim will remain silent.

Intra-familial offenders are related to the victim and are people who usually, but not always, live in the same house as the victim. The intra-familial offender is generally considered the largest of the three child molester categories. Because of greater accessibility, intra-familial victims tend to be overall younger than non-familial victims. The primary challenge for the intra-familial molester is not access, but the ability to exert sufficient control in order to both abuse and silence the victim. A seemingly greater correlation and interplay exists between the use of trust, authority, and physical force utilized by the intra-familial offender.



Policy Section Two: Protective Practices

2.1 Screening

In keeping with our values of protecting the children in our care, as we hire employees or recruit volunteers, HVPC will require background checks and individual or group trainings to orient our leaders (employed and volunteer) to our child protection policy and church values.

The following screening activities will be conducted for all leaders (employed and volunteer; with further screenings for employees):

- PA State Police criminal record check
- PA State child abuse registry check
- FBI criminal record check (fingerprinting OR waiver)

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child in any way or has been convicted of a sexual crime or a crime involving children, that individual may not work with children in any capacity. In cases where the screening process shows that a candidate has been convicted of another crime that did not involve children and was not sexual in nature, the session will render decisions on a case-by-case basis.

2.2 Safe Behaviors

1. Because most child abuse happens in isolated situations and because most adults seeking to harm a child prefer to do so in private, our church requires two adults to supervise all youth and children activities, including but not limited to, child care, Sunday school, youth group, children's activities and Kids Fest (this can include other adults on the same floor who can interrupt or observe the class through a window).

2. The more an interaction is observable and interruptible, the better. When adults spend time with a child, the adults will inform both the child's caregiver and their supervisor of each meeting. The adult and child will meet at a time and place where the caregiver or supervisor can interrupt the time or observe the time from a distance. Furthermore, the meeting will take place at a public place with high visibility.

3. HVPC prohibits the following:

- Sexually or physically abusive touch
- Touching a child's thighs or stomach
- Corporal punishment
- Any touch that is unwanted by a child
- Unrequested lap sitting
- Tickling
- Unrequested playing with hair
- Unrequested full-frontal hugs



HVPC desires to show healthy affection to its children through the following:

- Displays of affection that are observable and interruptible
- Kind words
- High fives
- Pats on the shoulder
- Side hugs

Extra Attention:

- **Staff** are prohibited from displaying favoritism toward a child or group of children.
- **Staff** may not give gifts to individual children unless the gifts are:
 - Able to be given to other children at other times for similar reasons (e.g., gifts to graduating seniors; a new Bible for students entering middle school; end of the year thank-you gifts to older children who volunteered in the nursery)
 - Signed from the church rather than the individual staff member
 - Given together with another staff member
 - A personal gift from a staff member that meets social expectations and does not signify preferential treatment

In cases where **staff** believe that a child would benefit from extra attention:

- Staff should be able to articulate a clear reason for providing extra attention to a child that focuses on the child's needs, not staff needs.
- Staff providing extra attention must always abide by the Policy (e.g., meet in observable and interruptible spaces).
- Supervisors should be made aware of the situation and occasionally drop by unexpectedly during outings or meetings.
- Supervisors should periodically reevaluate the situation to determine if extra attention is still necessary.

Sexual Language

HVPC acknowledges that sexual language is more than mere jokes, but a serious boundary violation. As such, the following are prohibited:

- Sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits
- Uploading, downloading, or viewing of pornography
- Music, videos games, and movies with sexual themes

If the church staff or volunteers want to give a lecture or organize a program to help youth understand age-appropriate questions about their body or sexuality, the event must be planned in advance and parents notified beforehand.

When children or teens raise questions about their body or sexuality, HVPC volunteers and staff will answer the question at hand in an age-appropriate way and inform a supervisor.



HVPC encourages positive verbal interactions, including:

- Encouragement
- Kind words
- Positive reinforcement
- Appropriate jokes

2.3 Routine Protective Measures

At the beginning of each ministry year, HVPC will create a registration for any child who attends activities and programs. The registration will record who may safely pick-up a child from an event and other helpful information about the child. Attendance will be taken at all events. Once a child's attendance is recorded for an event, it is the church's responsibility to supervise those children from the time they are dropped off until the time they are picked up by a caregiver.

Registration forms will include the following:

- **Who may pick up a child from a church event** (e.g. Sunday school, youth group, Kids Fest, etc.) A section on a form will be provided to track this information so all teachers and volunteers are aware of the parents' wishes. For example, this can include parents, guardians, grandparents, and older siblings. The key is to use wisdom and ask parents for clarity.
- **Allergy the child has** (e.g. food allergy, medication allergy, seasonal allergy, etc.)
- **Any medical concerns** (e.g. seizures, asthma, etc.)
- **Medical treatment preference to contact in case of an emergency** (e.g. preferred hospital, primary care provider, etc.)



Policy Section Three: Responding to Policy Violations and Child Abuse

3.1 Policy Violations

HVPC takes policy violations seriously. Any staff or volunteer who witnesses a violation is expected to report these violations to church leadership. If the individual witnesses an instance, or suspected instance of abuse or neglect, they will **immediately** report the event to the authorities per Pennsylvania mandated reporter law.

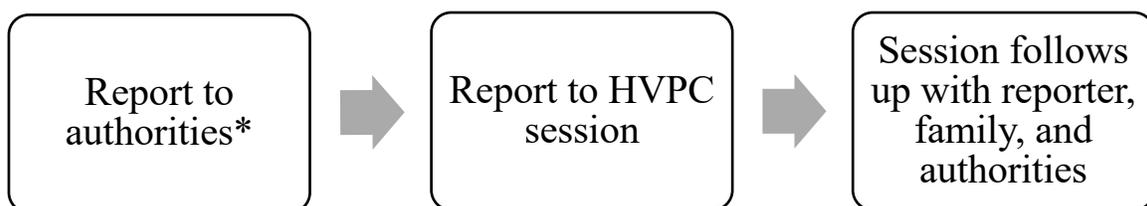
The staff and session of HVPC will respond to any policy violation according to the following:

- If the instance is, or is suspected to be, an instance of abuse or neglect, it will be immediately reported to authorities.
- If the instance is of lesser severity, follow up meetings will occur with the individual to redirect them toward a better practice.
 - If the individual does not comply, additional training will occur, and if there is still reason for concern, they will be removed from their staff or volunteer position. If abuse or neglect is suspected at this point, it will be immediately reported to the local authorities.

3.2 Reporting

When adults report suspected child abuse to the legal authorities, their report could save a child's life. In contrast, silence about suspected abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. HVPC encourages its members, both mandated reporters and not, to contact the authorities immediately when a child discloses abuse, when they witness child abuse, or when they observe signs of abuse.

HVPC Reporting Process



HVPC and Pennsylvania state law requires the following persons to make reports:

- Pastors
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Church leadership

*Required by law (keepkidssafe.pa.gov)



HVPC and Pennsylvania state law requires reporting in the following cases:

- Witnessed abuse
- The disclosure of abuse by a child or another individual
- Consistent and egregious indicators
- A perpetrator's disclosure
- Suspicion a child is being abused, even if it is from second-hand or unconfirmed sources

How to report:

- Call Child Line immediately (this is required by law): 1-800-932-0313 *with another individual present if possible (not required, but preferred)*
 - You will be required to give your name and contact information in the event that a case worker needs to follow up with you. Your information will not be released to the public, but it may be shared with other law enforcement offices or government agencies in the event that more information or clarification is needed.
- Report the knowledge or suspicion of abuse to the HVPC session (this is required by law)
- The session will follow up with the reporter, family, and authorities

More information on mandated reporting and training:

- Keep Kids Safe Pa. <http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/index.htm>

3.3 Independent Reviews

Under the following circumstances, HVPC will consult with a child protection expert to determine if an independent review should be pursued:

- When a suspicion of child maltreatment is reported to the civil authorities and they decline to investigate or prosecute the alleged abuses.
- A district attorney has not pursued legal prosecution because no suspected criminal behavior is reported; however, the session and staff believe the individual's behavior might still violate the church policy, be immoral, be inappropriate, or be unsafe.
- An incident of abuse is suspected or proven to have taken place on church property or when the child was under church supervision.
- Staff violation with complications.

If an investigation is deemed necessary, HVPC will retain an organization that meets the following criteria:

- Completely independent of HVPC
- Experienced in proper investigation techniques
- Up-to-date on child maltreatment research



Policy Section Four: Supporting Survivors

4.1 Abuse Disclosures

Because children and adult survivors are reluctant to disclose abuse, HVPC acknowledges that survivors who choose to do so need our community's utmost support. When children disclose, they almost always do so tentatively or by accident, and may later recant even when there is proof that the abuse occurred. If questioned directly, many child victims may deny the abuse. When children disclose intentionally, children may first test the adult's reaction by pretending that the abuse happened to a friend or by supplying only a small bit of information.

Disclosure of Abuse from a Child:

If a child discloses abuse to you, the following are helpful tips on how to respond in the moment:

- Stay calm.
- Show love and respect for the child.
- Thank the child for telling you and praise the child's courage.
- If the child expresses guilt or concerns about getting in trouble, reassure the child that no matter what happened he or she is not to blame.
- If the child expresses concern about not being believed, reassure the child that you believe him/her.
- Allow the child to talk freely; do not interrupt, ask the child to repeat words, or probe for details. Use open-ended questions such as "What happened next?" or "Tell me more."
- Do not offer false assurances, such as promising to keep the child's disclosure a secret.
- Let the child know what to expect next and incorporate their input where possible.
- Protect the child immediately from the suspected offender.
- Report the abuse to authorities and your supervisors/church leaders.
- Document the disclosure and your report.
- Protect the child's right to privacy and avoid the urge to turn indiscriminately to colleagues, friends, or family for advice.
- Instead turn to professionals experienced in handling cases of child sexual abuse and to carefully selected individuals who can provide assistance and support to the child and you.



Disclosure of Abuse from Adults:

Receiving an adult’s abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Victims often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. By helping adults disclose and process abuse we will help to create an environment where survivors of abuse are helped rather than stigmatized, which in turn helps to prevent further abuse.

If an **adult discloses abuse to you**, the following are helpful tips on how to respond in the moment:

<i>Do Say</i>	<i>Don't Say</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thank you for telling me. ▪ I’m glad you’re safe now. ▪ You did the right thing _____ (asking for help/telling me/reporting the abuse, etc.) ▪ I’m glad you’re talking with me ▪ I’m sorry this happened to you. How can I help? ▪ Take as much time as you need. ▪ Things may never be the same, but they can get better. ▪ I am here. ▪ I stand with you. This congregation stands with you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why are you telling me this? ▪ Why didn’t you _____ (scream/stop him etc.)? ▪ What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do? ▪ Tell me more details about what happened. ▪ Why did he do that to you? Had you done something to make him think that was okay? ▪ You need to forgive and move on. ▪ Don’t worry, it’s going to be all right. ▪ It’ll take some time, but you’ll get over it. ▪ Calm down and try to relax. ▪ Try to be strong ▪ It was long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go. ▪ You should get on with your life. ▪ Time heals all wounds. ▪ Out of tragedies good things happen. ▪ You’re lucky that _____ didn’t happen. ▪ It was God’s will. I know how you feel. ▪ Perhaps you misunderstood



4.3 Ongoing Survivor Support

The purpose of this Policy is to prevent occurrences of child abuse. Yet we understand that no matter how hard we try to protect children, there will always be some individuals seeking to harm them. If HVPC becomes aware that a child has been, or is suspected to have been, abused, they will take the following steps to clearly communicate support for the child and the child's family:

Terminate/Suspend. Immediately suspend or terminate the alleged perpetrator of abuse from any church positions s/he may hold, pending the results of an investigation. Assign a liaison to maintain contact with the alleged perpetrator.

Support Person. A member of the church's leadership will be designated as a "Support Person(s)" and will reach out to the child and the child's family within twenty-four hours of learning of the abuse to express the church's unequivocal support. Understanding that abuse can have ongoing impact on a child and a child's family, the Support Person will seek permission from the child and the child's family to continue offering support on an ongoing basis. This support will include:

- Showing up
- Listening
- Affirming
- Offering to accompany the child/family in filing a police report, meeting with Child Protective Services, to court hearings or trial and other related meetings, interviews, or hearings
- Asking the child and the child's family how else the church can offer support

Support People will understand the limitations of their role and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other expert advice, but will instead function as members of a multidisciplinary team, working when possible to support and complement the efforts of involved professionals to support the child and family. For instance, a child who has been abused may have theological questions or experience spiritual injuries, but at the same time, may find comfort in spirituality, prayer, and other forms of religious engagement. The pastor has a unique role to fill here and will make himself/herself available to provide regular ongoing pastoral support to the child and the child's family.

Support People will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances—even when the abuse is alleged and not proven—will Support People do any of the following:

- place any portion of blame for the abuse on the child or the child's family
- probe for intimate details of the abuse
- express disbelief of the child
- attempt to silence the child or the child's family in any way or for any reason
- encourage noncompliance with the law
- express support of the perpetrator
- urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator



Mental Health Treatment. The church will offer to help the family find a qualified mental health practitioner with expertise treating victims of abuse and their family members. If the family requires assistance paying for mental health treatment, the church will offer to subsidize such treatment or connect the family to resources that may be able to assist in this regard. In the event that the child is found to have been abused by a church employee, volunteer, or other individual serving in an official capacity, or that the church was negligent or otherwise complicit in allowing the abuse to happen, the church will reimburse the entire cost of treatment for the child and the child's family members.

Public Support. The church commits to protecting the privacy of all victims of child abuse. We also understand that all too often child victims of abuse are publicly marginalized while communities rally to protect abusers. In the event that a victim of abuse is publicly attacked or disparaged for the abuse or their response to the abuse, the church leadership will—with the victim's permission—will determine the best way of publicly denouncing and prohibiting such treatment of the victim and urge the community to offer support instead. If the disparagement occurs privately, the church leadership will communicate the same message privately to the relevant individuals.

Creating a Culture of Ongoing Support for Victims of Childhood Abuse. Our church aims to create a space that is safe for all victims of childhood abuse—both those we know about and those we don't. To this end, the church will:

- Create and distribute a referral list of local organizations and therapists who specialize in sexual abuse prevention and treatment
- Host a support group for adults who have experienced childhood abuse
- Publicize the child protection policy, communicating that this institution takes child protection seriously and does not tolerate abuse
- Speak about child abuse publicly and often
- Post the contact information for church leaders who are available to answer any questions about child safety



Appendix

Referral List

Gettysburg

County of Adams Children & Youth Services

525 Boyds School Road Suite 100

Gettysburg, PA 17325

Phone: 717-337-0110

<http://www.adamscounty.us/Dept/CYS/Pages/default.aspx>

Hanover

Safe Home Program

YWCA of Hanover

23 W. Chestnut Street

P.O. Box 824

Hanover, PA 17331

Phone: 717-637-2125

24 hour hotline: 717-632-0007

<https://www.ywcahanover.org/what-were-doing/safe-home/safe-home-services/>

York

Victim Assistance Center (YWCA)

320 E. Market Street

York Pa 17403

Phone: 717-854-3131

<https://www.ywcaYork.org/what-were-doing/victim-services/>

York County Children's Advocacy Center

28 South Queen St.

York, PA 17403-2032

717-718-4253

yorkcac.org

York County Office of Children, Youth & Families

100 West Market St. # 402

York, PA 17401-1332

717-846-8496

1-800-729-9227 – After hours

yccys.org