

Tontogany Presbyterian Church Youth Protection Policy

Tontogany Presbyterian Church understands the importance of all youth participating in church related activities be safe, secure and free from abuse and neglect. Our church wants to establish reasonable practices and procedures to prevent abuse, and also keep the church and its activities safe for youth. We understand that any workers involved in youth activities have the important responsibility of setting a good example as well as keeping our youth safe, secure and nurtured. Tontogany Presbyterian realizes that a policy is needed to prevent abuse and is also needed for reporting any abuse of youth. This policy would also protect church employees, volunteers, ministers, members, and our church family.

Our thoughts behind this policy are:

- God's love for children. (Mathew 18:1-14)
- Children and youth are an important part of our congregation, now and in the future. It is our responsibility to protect our children from any abuse that may harm them. Abuse can create problems for children that may last their whole life.
- Families in our congregation as well as guests are assured the church is doing all we can to keep their children safe while participating in church activities and services.
- Church staff and volunteers also need protection from unfounded allegations and compromising situations. These situations may cause personal harm and affect their reputations.
- Church leaders may be liable for damages resulting from not implementing a Child Safety Policy and administrating its documentation procedures.
- Tontogany Presbyterian Church itself may be liable for abuse or negligence. This may incur financial loss, extensive legal proceedings and stress upon the congregation.

Policy Applicability and Definitions

We define "youth" as any person under 18 years old.

We define a "youth worker" as any individual who works or provides services for any youth activity or ministry. This may be a paid or volunteer position.

We define "youth activity" as any church activity that is attended by youth on the premises of the church, as well as church sponsored activities attended by youth wherever they may occur, for example off site children's programs or Vacation Bible School.

Mandatory Reporting

The ultimate responsibility for the safety of our youth lies with the Session. Annual training will be given to session members, preferably in the first half of the year. The Clerk of Session is responsible for contacting the trainer. Each year at the annual business meeting the congregation shall be reminded of their responsibility to report abuse and of the process for this reporting. The process is as follows:

Any member or friend of the congregation who suspects that a youth has been the victim of abuse or any other related harmful activity shall report their concerns to the pastor or clerk of session. If they are not available (or are suspected of being the abuser), any current member elder of the church session should receive the report. Whoever receives this report will immediately report it to the Presbyter for Common Life of the Maumee Valley Presbytery. A full report should be prepared at this time providing all pertinent information about the incident(s). This report should include the youth's name, their parents' names and addresses, the age of the youth, and all details of the suspected abuse situation. This reporting requirement is in addition to and not in place of any reporting requirements imposed by state law.

The church worker involved in the accusation shall be informed, and that individual shall be suspended from any further activities with youth until which time the matter is resolved. If the accused is not a church worker but attends our church, the person will be directed by the pastor to refrain from participating or attending any

youth activity until the matter is resolved. The individual is not assuming any guilt but should refrain from attending or participating in any youth activity.

Youth Worker Selection

The following are conditions which must be met by all employees and volunteers working with youth at Tontogany Presbyterian. The Clerk of session will be in charge of signed paperwork.

1. Tontogany Presbyterian Church's receipt of completed signed and approved Volunteer Data Authorization forms, including a signed copy of this policy.
2. Applicants consent to a criminal background check from any law enforcement agency selected by the Church.
3. Attending periodic training sessions on working with youth at Tontogany Presbyterian, the prevention of youth abuse, and reporting of youth abuse.

Confidentiality of Records

The Personnel Team made up of the sitting Clerk of Session, the pastor and an additional member of session appointed annually by the Session shall maintain all youth worker applications, results of background checks, and related information in confidential, secured files. Access will be restricted to the Personnel Team. No person may serve as youth worker who has a conviction on his/her record of certain felonies or misdemeanors, including, but not limited to any of the following:

- Criminal homicide
- Aggravated assault
- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault
- Injury to a youth
- Incest
- Indecency
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance
- Possession or promotion of child pornography
- The sale, distribution or display of harmful material to a minor
- Employment harmful to a youth
- Abandonment or endangerment of a youth
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure
- Enticement of a youth
- A person convicted of a DUI may volunteer for activities other than driving youth

Worker/ Youth Ratio

For youth under the age of 12: At least 2 adult youth workers, whether paid or volunteer, shall be present at all activities for youth 12 and under. A parent attending a youth activity may be considered the second adult worker. A youth 12 years old or above may assist one or more adult workers, but no one under the age of 18 shall be substituted for adult workers. The following are exceptions for the 2 adult rule:

1. A program staff member providing confidential counseling services may meet in private with a youth. This meeting should be in a public place or an office with an open door and/or an unobstructed window in the door.
2. A regularly scheduled Church school-class or nursery session on Sunday mornings may be conducted by one worker, provided the room where the class or nursery is held has an unobstructed window or other opening, permitting those outside the room to see inside or the door to the room remains open while the class is in session.

For youth over the age of 12: the “rule of 3” shall apply: that is, either one adult and two youth; or two adults and one youth should be present. A parent attending a youth activity may be considered the second adult worker.

Parental Participation and Permission

Written parental permission along with youth health insurance information, health issues, allergies, and other special needs may be required before youth participate in certain activities (including but not limited to those taking place off Church grounds). The Church reserves the right to exclude any youth where the required parental permission had not been received.

Supervision of Youth on Church Property

No youth should be alone in any part of the church at any time without parental/guardian permission. If youth are found unattended in the church, they should immediately be returned to their parent/guardian. If a preschool child needs assistance in the bathroom, the staff member or volunteer must leave the outside bathroom door open. A designated teacher's assistant will be available during Sunday School classes and will be able to be reached via cell-phone at any time by the classroom teacher.

Release of a youth to a parent may not be restricted unless signed court documents are produced, verifying custodial and visitation arrangements. The Church shall not hold these court documents. The program staff member in charge will determine safe practices for the release of youth into a non-parental adult’s care once a ministry event/activity has concluded.

Sleepover Guidelines

The goal is to have an adult/youth ratio of no less than one adult to seven youth. At least 2 adult workers should be present at all such functions. The scheduling of a youth sleepover/lock-in must be approved by session. Before such an event can be officially scheduled, a safety statement must be reported to session, approved by session and added as an addendum to this document.

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Tontogany Presbyterian Youth Worker Consent

I _____ have read and am well acquainted with the Tontogany Presbyterian Youth Safety Policy. I consent to background checks through any law enforcement agency as seen fit by Tontogany Presbyterian Church. I promise to protect any and all youth under my care. I agree to attend periodic training sessions on working with youth, the prevention of abuse and reporting of abuse at Tontogany Presbyterian Church.

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Contact information

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