



Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Barre VT

Children's Ministries Policies



Dear Staff Member or Volunteer,

Welcome to Covenant OP Church [COPC]!

At Covenant, we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

This handbook provides a general overview of procedures and guidelines for COPC staff members and volunteers. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children. The following procedures have been adopted and will be strictly enforced.

After you have carefully read this policy manual, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page.

Sincerely,

Trustees of Covenant OPC
Mike Breen, Chair of Trustees

Overview of the COPC Safety System

Because we love children and desire to protect them, COPC requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

STEP ONE: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

COPC Policies and Procedures require that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of the COPC Safety Committee.

Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip COPC staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, COPC requires all staff members and volunteers to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This Training will be renewed every three years.

STEP TWO: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the COPC Screening Process, which includes:

- Employment Application (staff members only)
- Youth Volunteer Application
- Face-to-Face Interview
- Reference Checks

**A volunteer must attend COPC or another evangelical church for at least six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing access to children, students or vulnerable populations.*

STEP THREE: Policy Manual Review

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page, indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: Background Check

COPC requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children or student activities or programming undergo a Background Check. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of Background Check may be required. Individuals who have committed sexually-oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to children or students. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

Child Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

COPC supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Vermont law for any staff member or volunteer to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any child participating in COPC programs. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at COPC to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event staff members or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to their program Supervisor and/or one of the Trustees or Elders of COPC.

Program Supervisor:	Olivia Durham	802-476-5412
Pastor/Elder:	Carl Durham	802-272-5864
Trustee/Elder:	Mike Breen	802-922-5789
Trustee/Elder:	Chris Liff	802-479-3171
Trustee/Elder:	Mike Sherburne	802-274-1701
Trustee:	Rob Sikora	802-829-9183
Trustee:	Kevin McMahon	802-238-3464

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

COPC staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all COPC policies. Anyone working with children or students at COPC is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff members and must follow these guidelines. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from a position in Children's Ministries – for both staff members and volunteers. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Board of Trustees of COPC.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

COPC is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to local law enforcement (or Child Protective Services) and the COPC Safety Committee Chair.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the COPC Safety Committee. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are to report *grooming behavior*, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor or a member of the COPC Safety Committee.

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, COPC staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior are to be directed to an immediate Supervisor in the Ministry area, and/or one of the COPC Trustees or Elders.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in COPC Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement, Child Protective agencies or COPC.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be precluded from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students or vulnerable populations at COPC. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from COPC.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination (employee) or removal (volunteer). Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students or vulnerable populations at COPC.

Staff members and volunteers are to immediately discuss with their supervisor any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy. The supervisor will then seek counsel from the church leadership and attorney, if needed.

REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to local law enforcement or the Vermont Child Protective Services Emergency Response Hotline:

1-800-649-5285

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Vermont reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, COPC utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a COPC supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR VOLUNTEER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT, CPS OR THE ABUSE HOTLINE *DIRECTLY*. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from COPC before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing COPC personnel.

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to an immediate supervisor or a member of the COPC Safety Committee. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting children involved in COPC programs.

COPC must not investigate as a condition of reporting.

When in doubt, report.

SAFETY COMMITTEE

Recognizing the importance of providing and maintaining a safe environment for children, COPC will appoint and maintain a Safety Committee, which will review these Policies and Procedures at least annually. Each ministry will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees for compliance with these policies: Sunday School, Nursery ministry, Trail Life, Winter Weekend, Youth Campout, and English for Kids and Kids' Camp.

The purpose of the Safety Committee is to enable COPC Children's Ministries to carry out appropriate Ministry activities while safeguarding program participants against emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

COMPOSITION

The Safety Committee will be comprised of the following members:

- The Trustees of COPC
- The Pastor of COPC
- The administrator(s) of various COPC youth programs

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Safety Committee will be charged with the following duties:

1. Applying existing COPC Policies and Procedures related to children's safety and risk management issues.
2. Monitoring all Children's Ministries programs for ongoing compliance with safety policies.
3. Making recommendations to the COPC Board of Trustees regarding safety issues.

Children's Ministries Staff Monitoring Plan

BUILDING SAFETY

Every ministry supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during programming serving children. This includes unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and children. No child should be left unattended in a ministry area or on a playground during regular programming schedule, including arrival and departure times.

SUPERVISION

Only parents and family members of children participating in a COPC youth program, screened ministry volunteers, church staff members, and children are allowed in areas where ministry to children is occurring. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or Safety Committee member should be notified.

All Adult Volunteers must be trained and screened. Windowed doors and close circuit cameras are active in all instruction rooms. No volunteer should be alone with an individual child in any room or during any ministry program.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child, take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise children and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones, wearing headphones, etc.).

After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

PLAYGROUNDS

On the playground, remember to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: in the playhouse structure. Children are not allowed to go behind the large rock pile in the back.) Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Any time a child has been entrusted to COPC staff members or volunteers, the church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor *before* releasing the child.

Communicating with Families

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are invited to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. Parents who leave a child in the care of COPC staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

Disciplinary Policies

DISCIPLINE

It is COPC's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. When a child is misbehaving, follow these steps:

1. Go to the child and calmly ask him or her to stop the behavior. (Most children respond immediately and correct the behavior.) Give a warning and remind the child of class expectations, and redirect to a positive behavior. Do this individually when possible, try not to single out a specific child in a large group setting.
**When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.*

2. If the child repeats the action, guide him or her to a quiet place – separate from the other children – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others, and avoid being alone (or unseen) with the child.
3. Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations. (“Georgia, you didn’t stop hitting Cole when I asked you to, so it was necessary for me to separate you from the group.”)
4. After a third time, refer to a staff member. A staff member may inform a parent or guardian, who may be asked to become involved in redirecting misbehavior.

Uncontrollable, dangerous or unusual behavior should be promptly reported to the ministry supervisor.

NEVER...

- Yell at a child.
- Grab a child.
- Threaten a child. Always follow through with your word.
- Hit a child.
- Confront a parent in front of others.
- Openly humiliate a child in front of the class.

BULLYING

Verbal, physical or emotional bullying is not acceptable in COPC ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform your ministry supervisor. There is no *harmless put-down* where bullying is concerned.

1. **First Offense:** Issue a warning to the child and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
2. **Second Offense:** Pull the offending child(ren) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the child’s parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.
 - a. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that the child who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. **DO NOT SINGLE A CHILD OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP...** be discreet.
3. **Third Offense:** Send the child to a pastor or ministry supervisor for a phone call (or communication onsite) with his or her parent(s) and possible removal from the activity or event.

Restroom Policies

No volunteer supervising children should occupy a restroom stall while a child is using it. Supervisors should stand at the restroom door and verbally check that there is only one child per unit. Only adult females may change diapers and must do so on diaper changing stations.

Physical Contact

COPC is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, COPC has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the child, and never based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministries must foster trust at all times.
- Appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children is important for children's development and is generally suitable in the church setting.

AVOID the following interactions:

- Never touch a child in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a child has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- Avoid touching a child between the navel and the knees.
- Never place hands beneath a child's clothing to play, rub or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in 'horse-play' or wrestle with a child.

Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.

Physical affection should occur only in observable locations or when in the presence of other staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others, including other children.

Inappropriate touch and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touch or display of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the or one of the COPC Trustees or Elders.

Electronic Communication

All communication with children must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with ministry leadership or a parent.

CELL PHONES

Cell phones may only be used by staff or volunteers during COPC youth activities for immediate and brief communication needs, during time off. Taking videos and pictures of children and class activities will be done by designated photographers only.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Staff members and volunteers must maintain a high moral standard in social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in children's ministries at COPC. Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect COPC ministry guidelines related to alcohol, tobacco and modesty (dress, posture and content).

Tobacco Use & Intoxicants

COPC requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during COPC activities or programs, whether on campus or away. COPC is a tobacco-free facility.

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, marijuana or any illegal drugs while in any COPC facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children during any COPC program or activity.

Nudity

Staff members and volunteers in COPC Children's Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children. During a weekend or overnight retreat, etc. a staff member/volunteer will make arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

Physical Appearance

Please dress in modest, comfortable attire. Please do not wear thin-strapped shirts or low cut shirts while serving. First impressions are important; please take this into consideration while serving. Please:

- No revealing swimsuits or revealing/form fitting clothes
- Shorts/skirts should be fingertip length
- Necklines should cover cleavage on females.

Medication

Do not administer medication of any kind to any child while serving in ministry programs, including over the counter drugs. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, camps, etc.), COPC will consult parents before administering over the counter medications and require medical forms signed by parents for prescription meds.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may, from time to time, be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children:

- Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops should be avoided.
- When feasible, staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
- Absent an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone, unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- No drivers under age 21 may drive minor children without specific parental permission.

- Transport only the number of children for whom you have seatbelts; Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.

OVERNIGHT EVENTS

Some Children's Ministries activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for children, staff members and volunteers (i.e., camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on COPC property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event.

Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

Please detach, sign, and return to Olivia Durham.

I have received and read a copy of COPC's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at COPC.

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of the COPC Policies and Procedures manual.

Staff member or volunteer name (please print)

Staff member or volunteer signature

Date