

**POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE PREVENTION AND
DETECTION
OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

St. Paul A.M.E. Church is committed to being a safe and supportive environment for all children who participate in our services and programs attend our Henry Buckner School and use our facilities. Our church shall not tolerate any abuses of children by any minister, officer, member, or persons affiliated with the church. In order to carry forth our mission of being a "church that speaks to the world," we must ensure that our church is a safe and nurturing environment for all those who respond to our call. We believe that preventative steps can be taken to promote the safety of children and those who are paid or who volunteer to teach, supervise and care for them. Therefore, we have adopted a preventive program to reduce the possibility of child sexual abuse as well as false allegations from occurring in this congregation. This preventive program is fundamental to our church's mission and we will strive to incorporate it into every aspect of the life of the church.

**GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR FOR ALL
INDIVIDUALS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN IN THE
CHURCH**

1. Adults should avoid unsupervised time alone with a child (18 years or under) to the extent possible. This includes counseling sessions as well, although individual unsupervised counseling sessions are permitted with the permission of the parent or guardian. In the absence of permission from a parent or guardian, any individual meetings with a child should be held in public areas of the Church or in an office with the door open. Telephone conversations with children should be limited without the awareness and permission of the parent or legal guardian. This applies even when the child has initiated the conversation. Teachers, supervisors, mentors, etc. are not permitted to take children on field trips without the written consent of the parent and notification to the Pastor or his designee (e.g. Youth Minister).
2. Teachers, supervisors, youth leaders, ministers, etc. should refrain from inappropriate physical contact with children. This includes wrestling, kissing, and prolonged embracing, when they are alone with a child.

3. At least two adults should be present during each class or other activity.

4. Bathroom Policy: Teachers who must escort younger children (3 and under) to use the bathroom should go in pairs or groups, or leave the bathroom door propped open if another adult is not available. Teachers may escort older children to the bathroom when necessary but should stand outside the door until they are finished. For infants and toddlers, two persons should be present when they are changed, or the changing process should be done in the open.

5. All individuals who work with children are required to attend and complete training at St. Paul on child sexual abuse. This should be completed before the person is eligible to serve or work with children. All existing youth workers, ministers, etc. will be required to attend training in order to continue participating in their role in the church.

SCREENING OF YOUTH WORKERS

1. An individual, with the exception of the Pastor, Youth Minister and other professional hired to work with the youth, must have been a member of St. Paul at least 6 months before they can be considered for a position involving the youth of the church.

2. All individuals (existing and new youth workers) who want to be considered for a position will be required to complete an application form and have a personal interview with the IMPACT (Immediate Prevention and Advocacy Crisis Team) Committee, before being assigned any position. The application will ask the applicant to identify anything in his/her background (e.g. whether they have been the victim of sexual abuse when they were a child) that might make it challenging for them to serve in this capacity. Extensive background checks will be conducted on all potential youth workers. All the information gathered during this process will be treated confidentially and will only be shared with members of the IMPACT Committee and the Pastor. Each person's file should be updated on a periodic basis.

3. Any adult who has been convicted of child sexual abuse, physical abuse of children, or other offenses against a person, including but not limited to, incest, bigamy, interference with child custody, enticing a child, and harboring a runaway child, will be precluded from volunteering their services for any church sponsored activity or program for children. Convictions for offenses against public order

and indecency, including but not limited to possession or promotion of child pornography, indecency, etc. will also disqualify a person from working with children. Any person with a known history as such will not be considered for a position that includes any direct involvement or supervision of youth.

4. The Church has the right to exclude any person from working with children at any time based upon information received as a result of screening or as a result of any other information (including allegations of misconduct or violation of this policy) that it may receive from time to time.

REPORTING

Sexual abuse is a crime in all 50 states and all states have a mandatory reporting law. Therefore St. Paul, its staff and congregation have an obligation to report any and all suspected cases of abuse, whether they occur on the premises, at the child's home or elsewhere. All workers will be given guidelines for reporting and are asked to report all possible cases.

You are obligated to report the following:

- I. If you have directly witnessed any suspicious behavior on the part of a fellow teacher, parent, minister, or other members of the congregation.
2. If a child exhibits physical and behavioral signs of abuse
3. If a child gives verbal indications that she/he has been molested in some way

Resolve doubts in favor of Reporting

If you have reasonable cause to believe that a child in your program, class, etc. has been abused, you must report to the pastor or his designee immediately. Waiting could put the child in danger, and according to current state law failure to report may be punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000.

Reporting Steps:

1. Give an accurate, truthful account of what you observed or what the child said
2. Statement should be put in writing with specific on time, date place, and other possible witnesses.
3. All report will be treated seriously
4. A standing committee of three individuals appointed by the Pastor should meet with the person filing the report and discuss the situation. Accurate notes of this meeting should be made a part of the written report.
5. A representative from the committee should meet with the parents to inform them and discuss the observations. If the alleged abuser is the parent, then the representative should not meet with the parent if he/she honestly believes that informing the parent might increase the harm to the child.
5. The committee should report the situation to the Pastor. The Pastor (or other persons authorized on his behalf) will contact the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) or other appropriate state or local agency, once he determines in his professional judgment that reporting is required under applicable laws. The Pastor should report if he has “reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering from abuse or neglect.”
6. If appropriate, counseling should be offered for the child and family

REMOVAL OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

In cases involving allegations of child abuse of sexual misconduct by church personnel it is the Church’s policy:

* To respond promptly to all allegations of abuse where there is reason to believe such abuse may have occurred.

* If such allegations are supported by sufficient evidence, to relieve the alleged offender promptly of any duties.

* To comply with the obligations of civil law as to the reporting of the incident and cooperating with the investigation.

* Reach out to the victims and their families and communicate our sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being.

* Within the confines of respect for the privacy of the individuals involved, to operate as openly as possible with members of the community.

In addition to those cases where there has been an allegation of abuse, the Church has the right to remove any person from working with children at any time when it believes such action to be in the best interest of the Church and its community.

General Statement

This Policy Statement is intended as a guide for those working or volunteering with the Church. It is a guide only, and is not to be construed as a comprehensive document intended to deal with all situations. When dealing with situations not addressed in this Policy Statement, workers or volunteers should use appropriate discretion under the circumstances, and promptly refer any questions or concerns to the Pastor.

The Church reserves the right to make changes in this Policy Statement and implement those changes from time to time with or without notice.