

Participant Protection Policy

General Purpose Statement

Lamb of God Lutheran Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children, dependents, and guests who participate in our programs and activities and the members who lead them. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect participants of Lamb of God Lutheran Church programs from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” or “minor” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “dependent” includes children or adults with special needs under the care of a parent or guardian. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in any event, activity, or area of ministry, a day care, school, or camp, in overnight activities involving minors or dependents, in counseling of minors or dependents, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors or dependents.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Probationary Period**

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors or dependents until she/he has been involved with Lamb of God Lutheran Church and has been evaluated. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children and dependents. The probationary period shall not apply to workers provided to or called by Lamb of God Lutheran Church from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or its affiliated schools or entities, such as vicars, pastors, and/or ministry assistants.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children or dependents must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children or special needs dependents, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at Lamb of God Lutheran Church.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Lamb of God Lutheran Church.

e) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteers as defined above.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Lamb of God Lutheran Church Leadership Council on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Lamb of God Lutheran Church.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children or dependents are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. It is permissible to have two adults and one minor/dependent, or two minors/dependents and one adult. However, except as specified herein, we do not allow one unrelated minor/dependent to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity.

Youth Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to youth workers:

- Must be at least age 12.
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must work under the guidelines specified in this Policy.
- Must be supervised by an adult.

Responding to Allegations of Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s or person with special needs physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Abuse occurs in different ways and includes, but may not be limited to, the following common types:

- **Physical abuse** – generally defined as non-accidental trauma or physical injury caused by physical maltreatment such as punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking, or otherwise physically harming a child.
- **Emotional abuse** – generally defined as a pattern of behavior that can seriously interfere with a child’s/dependent’s cognitive, emotional, psychological or social development caused by emotional/psychological maltreatment such as constant belittling, shaming, or ridiculing; threatening, bullying, or otherwise creating a climate of fear; or other exploiting or corrupting behaviors.
- **Sexual abuse** – generally defined as an act of a person who forces, coerces, or threatens a child/dependent to have any form of sexual contact or to engage in any
- type of sexual activity at the perpetrator’s direction, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, sexual exploitation, and pornography.

- **Neglect** – generally defined as depriving a child/dependent of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities by a worker or volunteer, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. An incident report will be completed.
3. If there is a reasonable suspicion that a church worker is an alleged perpetrator of abuse or misconduct, he/she will immediately be placed on leave from working with children and dependents, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. Depending on the circumstances, limited access may be granted for attendance at worship or other activities that do not involve minors or dependents.
4. The church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse to the appropriate authorities as required by law at the time of the incident. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
5. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The Church Leadership Council President, Pastor, or other person designated by the the Church Leadership Council will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A Pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or dependents.

Workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children and dependents under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children and dependents at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this will be reported immediately to a member of the Church Leadership Council for further action. If there is a reasonable suspicion that a child or dependent under the care of Lamb of God workers and volunteers are victims of abuse or misconduct, all state laws regarding mandatory reporting at the time of the incident will be followed and an incident report will be completed. The church will fully cooperate with civil authorities regarding the abuse.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Lamb of God Lutheran Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Director of the Preschool, the Sunday School Directors, or the Pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should be escorted by workers as a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom

door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Accidental Injuries to Participants

In the event that a child or dependent is injured while under our care, the following steps will be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child or dependent's parent or guardian of the injury at the time they are picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child or dependent has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

Lamb of God Lutheran Church will provide training on this participant protection policy to all current and new workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

(Updated 02.22.2022) (Modified for Lamb of God Lutheran Church, West Lafayette, IN)

This material is for information only and is not intended to provide legal or professional advice. You are encouraged to consult with your own attorney or other expert consultants for a professional opinion specific to your situation.