

# Immanuel Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy

## General Purpose Statement

Immanuel Lutheran Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Immanuel Lutheran Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations. Note that individual programs may impose additional policies and guidelines as appropriate.

## Definitions

For purposes of this policy, (a) the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years, (b) the term “program” means all events, classes, programs or activities occurring at, or sponsored by, the church, (c) the terms “volunteer” or “volunteers” mean unpaid persons who work with children, (d) the terms “we,” “our,” the “church,” and “us” refer to Immanuel Lutheran Church, and (e) the term “youth” means children in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and older.

## Selection of Volunteers

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

a) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children 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, previous church affiliation, and references. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

b) **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.

c) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, one or more of the applicant’s references may be checked. We prefer references from other volunteer positions or positions working with children. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

d) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for the following categories of volunteers:

- those who will be involved in overnight programs with children
- those who will be involved in driving children to or from programs
- those involved in formal mentorship of children, including but not limited to volunteers involved in Sunday school and Confirmation

Before a background check is conducted, prospective volunteers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to conduct the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form for a national criminal background check, s/he will be unable to work with children. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the church may determine, in its sole discretion in light of the circumstances, that a volunteer may serve without, with an alternate type of, or with evidence of a current, background check.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the senior pastor on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances.

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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.

The background check authorization forms and results will be maintained in confidence on file (either electronically or in hard copy, at the church's discretion) at the church for not less than two (2) years.

### Two Volunteer Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two volunteers will be in attendance when children are being supervised during our programs. Some youth programs may have only one adult volunteer in attendance during the class session. In these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than two students with the adult volunteer.

### Parent Drop-Off / Pick-Up Policy

Children from birth to fourth grade should not be dropped off at a program without a volunteer or staff member present, and should be picked up by a parent or a person designated by the parent from any program in which they participate.

Children in fifth grade and older may be released on their own at the end of a program unless otherwise instructed by a parent or the circumstances necessitate otherwise.

### Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways, and may include (without limitation):

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Volunteers may become aware of child abuse of the children participating in our programs. In the event that volunteer becomes aware of suspected child abuse of a child participating in our programs, this should be reported immediately to the senior pastor or staff responsible for the program for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of child abuse is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our programs, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the child abuse will immediately be placed on leave from working with children and instructed to have no contact with the child pending an investigation.

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3. The church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified.
5. The senior pastor or his/her designee will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of child abuse, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We may seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church will refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is found guilty of child abuse will be removed from their position working with children.

### **Open Door Policy**

Classroom doors should remain open while children are within unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it.

### **Youth Volunteers**

We often involve youth to assist in caring for children during programs. The following guidelines apply to youth volunteers:

- Youth volunteers may be asked to complete portions of the volunteer selection process (i.e. application, references, interview).
- Youth volunteers will be under the supervision (which supervision may be indirect or sporadic) of an adult volunteer.

### **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Immanuel Lutheran Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT participate in any program:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

### **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of Immanuel Lutheran Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent. Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted only in special circumstances to parents of children with chronic conditions, in need of medication on a timed schedule, or while on an overnight program. Parents of such children should address their situation with the staff member in charge of the program to develop a plan of action.

### **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of Immanuel 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. Volunteers should consult with the paid program staff in charge of the program if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

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## Restroom Guidelines

Children should use a classroom restroom if one is available. If a classroom restroom is not available, children in fourth grade and under should be escorted in a group by a volunteer to the hallway restroom. Volunteers should never take a single child to the restroom alone. The volunteer should prop open the restroom door. The volunteer should remain outside the restroom near the open door and escort the children back to the classroom as a group. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the volunteer should call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the volunteer should leave the stall door open as they assist the child. Children in fifth grade and older may go to the hallway restroom without a volunteer, but should be sent with at least one other child.

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

## Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child is injured while participating in a program, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, adults will provide first aid (bandages, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will be contacted. If warranted by circumstances, 911 will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. The completed form will be turned in to the church business administrator for filing.

## Training

Immanuel Lutheran Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new volunteers working with children and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Updated and Approved by the Executive Council August 13, 2015