

Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland

Safe Church Policy

Approved by Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland Session, August 24, 2025

POLICY STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland's (CPC) policy is that everyone (particularly children, youth, and vulnerable adults) who participates in our programs and ministries or uses our facilities will be cared for with compassion and safety.

As a caring Christian community, CPC is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as for all employees and volunteers working with them in CPC's congregational life and for organizations that use our facilities.

This Safe Church Policy intends to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse in any form, respond to allegations appropriately, and ensure that those working with them are not exposed to false or unwarranted charges of abuse.

Furthermore, this Policy is grounded in the principles found in our denomination's document, "Life Together in the Community of Faith: Standards of Ethical Conduct for Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." This document outlines the core ethical commitments expected of all church members, and Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland is committed to upholding these standards in all aspects of its ministry and community life.

APPLICABILITY

The **Safe Church Policy** applies to all CPC employees and volunteers, who must abide by the Standards of Conduct outlined below. If it is determined that the policy has not been followed, an individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation.

This policy is intended to be consistent with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the policies of the Presbytery of San Francisco. In the event of any conflict, the provisions of the higher governing documents shall prevail. The Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland will adhere to any new requirements or subsequent editions of the *Book of Order* or Presbytery policies. Any part of this policy found to be in violation of the *Book of Order* shall lose its efficacy.

DEFINITIONS

- **Child** – a person aged 0-11
- **Youth** – a person aged 12-17
- **Child Abuse** is violence, mistreatment, or neglect that a child or youth may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver, guardian, or other adult in a position of trust. The **Safe Church Policy** applies to all children and youth who attend any function sponsored by CPC.
Child Abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - **Physical Abuse** – Includes physical injury (or threat of physical injury) inflicted by other than accidental means, or intentionally injuring a child or youth.
 - **Physical Neglect** – The refusal to provide necessary health care, or the abandonment of a child or youth in one's care.
 - **Sexual Abuse** – The commission or permitting of any act of sexual assault or exploitation.

- **Sexual Exploitation** – Includes unwelcome touching (even casual touching), unwelcome hugs, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo, and unwelcome visual contact for personal gain or profit.
 - **Psychological Abuse** – A pattern of behavior that impairs emotional and/or psychological development. This may include constant criticism, threats, rejection, intimidation or humiliation, acts intended to produce fear or guilt, withholding of love and support, isolation, and witnessing domestic violence.
 - **Exploitation** - Forcing or coercing a child or youth to engage in activities that exceed their abilities or that are illegal or degrading (including sexual exploitation). Exploitation includes the manipulation of a child by an adult through a relationship of trust for the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, including the showing of sexually suggestive images or videos between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by a reasonable adult.
 - **Employee** – An individual hired or called to work for CPC for salary or wages.
 - **Reasonable Suspicion/Reasonable Cause to Suspect** – Includes actions that cause a reasonable person to entertain a suspicion, based upon facts and drawing on their training and experience, to suspect abuse or neglect.
 - **Volunteer** – An individual who provides services to CPC without monetary remuneration.
 - **Vulnerable Adult** – A person 18 and over who (because of age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent), is in a position of dependence on others, or is otherwise at a greater risk of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to that person.
- Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult** is a misuse of power and a violation of trust that includes (but is not limited to) the following:
- **Psychological Abuse** – The attempt to dehumanize or intimidate.
 - **Financial Abuse** – The use of their money or property dishonestly or illegally.
 - **Physical Abuse** – Any act of violence inflicting pain, injury, or mental distress (including sexual abuse).
 - **Abandonment or Isolation**
 - **Abduction**
 - **Deprivation of Goods or Services** that are necessary to avoid physical harm or mental suffering.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

- **BATHROOM**—Adults may not accompany a child into a bathroom stall. Diaper changes must be performed by the child's parent or guardian or a CPC employee (not a volunteer) with the parent's direct or implied permission (e.g., if the parent has left a diaper bag saying you may need it).
- **CELL PHONE USE** – The use of cell phones or electronic devices by CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors while supervising children and youth is limited to usage directly connected to that supervision and activity.
- **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ADULTS, INCLUDING YOUTH ADVISORS, AND YOUTH**
 - All official communications, such as calendars, event announcements, sign-ups, etc., shall be emailed to both youth and parents and posted on the CPC website.
 - Youth may choose to share their email address, home address, or phone number with the whole youth group or choose to keep this information private. If they choose to keep the information private and someone wants to make contact, the Pastor or Director of Youth Ministries will act as a go-between and offer to connect the youth.
 - For example, the Pastor or Director of Youth Ministries might write to the youth, "Dear Carrie, We missed you at today's meeting, and Bob wanted to ask you about your upcoming soccer game. His phone number is 510-555-1234, and you can text him if you want or have me pass a message back to him."

- When a Director of Youth Ministries has reason to email a youth directly, a copy should be sent to both the parent and the Pastor.
- Youth and the Director of Youth Ministries may connect on social media; however, keeping power dynamics in mind, the adult should allow the youth to initiate the connections. For example, a youth may “friend” or “follow” an adult, and then the adult may respond by “friending” or “following” back if desired.
- Any social media communications between youth and CPC adults (including youth advisors) should be in public comments or in a group message moderated by more than one adult.
- Text messaging and phone conversations between youth and youth advisors should be kept to a minimum, for example, to communicate or confirm meeting location or time.
- Any mentoring or pastoral contacts provided to children or youth by CPC adults (including the Director of Youth Ministries) should not occur in isolation; it should occur in person in a public location, such as a coffee shop. If the child or youth specifically requests a discussion to occur in a more private location, a church room with a glass door in a location where other adults are present should be used.
- If a meeting is arranged between a youth and an adult (including the Director of Youth Ministries), the adult must inform the youth's parents/guardians of the place and time of the meeting.
- **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**—CPC employees, volunteers, teachers, and youth advisors are prohibited from using corporal punishment on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult associated with any program or activity conducted by CPC. Physical restraint may only be used when absolutely necessary to protect someone from harm.
- **DRUG, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO USE** – CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are prohibited from using, possessing, or offering cigarettes (including e-cigarettes), alcohol, or illegal drugs to children, youth, or vulnerable adults. CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are prohibited from being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while supervising children, youth, or vulnerable adults, nor shall they be impaired by legally prescribed drugs while supervising, teaching, or leading children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Smoking or using tobacco products (e-cigarettes) while supervising, teaching, or leading children, youth, or vulnerable adults is also prohibited.
- **GAMES**—Games selected for CPC use with children and youth must always adhere to the following guidelines, whether held on or off the Church campus.
 - Games must be designed to include everyone; modifications shall be made so that children and youth of all abilities can participate. When games include food, the food must be something that all participants can eat.
 - When going out of one’s “comfort zone,” there must be no pressure to participate. The adult leaders shall clearly state this before introducing the game. For example:
 - Messy games (such as having a partner feed a person while blindfolded) are optional; participants must volunteer and are not pressured to participate.
 - Games involving physical touching other than hand-in-hand or hand-on-shoulder, including any kind of challenge course in which everyone must work together while touching, must be prefaced with an explanation that all participants can participate at the level at which they are comfortable.
 - Scary games and games played in the dark must have a clearly defined place to go if someone chooses to opt out of the game.
 - Hiding games such as “Sardines” are inherently risky because of the way people scatter and hide. Therefore, these games can only be played if they are:
 - ° Supervised by randomly roaming adults.
 - ° Given clear spatial boundaries (e.g., “inside only,” “these rooms only”); and,
 - ° Prefaced by a speech reminding all participants that their behavior during the game must be appropriate at all times.

- Certain games, such as Truth or Dare or Cards Against Humanity, which encourage people to say or do things that they would otherwise consider inappropriate and/or pressure them to take actions that they may not feel comfortable doing, are not appropriate for use with the children and youth of the Church at any time.
- A game will be forbidden if the group cannot abide by these rules.
- **HARASSMENT, BULLYING** – Harassment or bullying of anyone is strictly prohibited. All behavior (including any written, verbal, or physical) that adversely affects the ability of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to participate in or benefit from the programs of the Church is prohibited. Harassment or bullying of anyone based on their actual or perceived age, race, skin color, ethnic identity, national origin, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual expression, religion, cognitive ability, socioeconomic status, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited. Any such suspected behavior should be immediately reported to the Pastor. If the Pastor is suspected of harassment or bullying, this should be reported to a church elder, preferably the clerk of session or the chair of the personnel committee. However, any allegation of sexual misconduct against a minister must be filed directly with the State Clerk of the Presbytery of San Francisco.
- **INAPPROPRIATE OR UNWELCOME TOUCHING** – Inappropriate or unwelcome touching is strictly prohibited. CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them uncomfortable. CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall respect the right of children and youth to say “no” to any touching. Adults shall discourage children or youth from touching others in an unwelcome manner.
- **NOTIFICATION** – CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are required to make a timely report to one of the pastors or the Clerk of Session of any change of circumstances that might, under the policy, affect their ability to work with children and youth (e.g., criminal investigation, or arrest in a case relating to any sex crime or violent crime).
- **OPEN DOOR POLICY** – CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are prohibited from placing themselves in a situation where they might be alone with a single child or youth and cannot be observed or monitored by other adults. When adults supervise children and youth, they should space themselves in a way so that other adults can see them. To the maximum extent practicable, there shall be visual access into each room where activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are conducted. When two adults meet with a youth, the meeting should occur in a public place, such as a coffee shop.
- **PROFANITY, INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE, OR SEXUAL JOKES** of any kind are prohibited when supervising, teaching, or leading children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- **PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS** – It is the policy of CPC that no adult who has a conviction record relating to a sex crime or any violent crime shall be permitted to work or volunteer in a position in which there is direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. To this end, the Personnel Committee performs criminal background checks on all teachers, adult advisors, and adult volunteers with direct access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- **RELEASE FROM ACTIVITIES**—CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall release children and youth directly to their parents or guardians (or another adult as directed by the parent or guardian) after school, youth group, nursery care, or other events.
- **ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS** – It is strictly prohibited for CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors to pursue or continue romantic relationships with any child, youth, or vulnerable adult who is a participant in Church-sponsored activities.
- **SUPERVISION AND RATIOS** – CPC employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall not leave a child or youth alone during any Church-sponsored event or activity. The ratio of adults to children or youth must be 2:10 for trips and retreats and 2:14 for on-site activities. Adult supervisors must include male and female chaperones for mixed-gender overnight trips.

- **TRANSPORTATION** – All Church-sponsored events for which CPC arranges transportation shall abide by the policies above.
- **TWO-ADULT POLICY**—At least two adults must be present when interacting with children and youth; the two adults are preferred to be unrelated.
- **WEAPONS** – Firearms, weapons, and explosive devices of any kind are prohibited on Church property or at Church-sponsored events.

Reporting Abuse or Suspected Abuse

Any employee or volunteer who observes the abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, or has reasonable grounds to suspect that abuse has occurred or may occur, must follow this two-step procedure:

1. **Report to Civil Authorities First:** You must **immediately** report the observation or suspicion to the appropriate county agency. This is your first and most important step.
2. **Report to Church Leadership Second:** *After* making a report to the civil authorities, report the observation or suspicion to the Pastor or the Clerk of Session.

No part of this policy should prevent a person from making a report directly to civil authorities. The identity of a reporting individual is protected by California law. All reports must be kept under strict confidentiality and discussed only with the appropriate civil and church authorities. No one should conduct their own investigation.

Important Phone Numbers

- Alameda County Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline: (510) 259-1800
- Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline: (510) 225-5277
- Oakland City Police: (510) 777-3333 (non-emergency phone number)
- Alameda County Sheriff: (510) 272-6878 (non-emergency phone number)

Church Discipline

In the event of misconduct, any judicial process in civil or criminal court is separate from the church's own disciplinary process. Chinese Presbyterian Church of Oakland is committed to exercising its authority given by Christ for "the correction and restraint of wrongdoing" (D-1.0201). The church's judicial process "does not exist as a substitute for the secular judicial system" but exists to address the spiritual and communal nature of an offense (D-1.0201). The purpose of this discipline is to honor God, achieve justice and compassion for all participants, uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed, and bring members to repentance and restoration (D-1.0301).

Safe Church Screening, Clearance, and Training

Screening, selecting, and training employees and volunteers is essential to transparency and accountability in keeping God's people safe. Criminal background checking by itself is inadequate because very few predators or people who would become predators have been through the penal system.

Screening and Clearance

Safe Church screening and clearance involves collecting information from prospective staff and adult volunteers (over 18), checking references, conducting criminal background checks, and ensuring that individuals have completed initial training. All CPC staff and adult volunteers working with minors must be Safe Church approved, which means they have passed screening criteria and participated in Safe Church initial training and mandated reporter training required by state law. This applies to:

- All who volunteer to work with youth or children
- All pastors and staff of CPC, including part-time and temporary employees
- Non-CPC groups operating programs involving minors on the CPC campus must also adhere to Safe Church clearance, supervision, and reporting requirements (Boy Scouts, PVTCT).

Clearance Requirements

Prospective staff, leaders, and adult volunteers (over 18) must complete the following within 30 days of hire or signing up to volunteer:

1. Read the Safe Church Policy and sign the acknowledgment form.
2. Sign Praesidium Form allowing a background check.
3. Complete the online Mandated Reporter Training and Sexual Harassment Training provided by Praesidium.
4. Sign Live Scan Information Acknowledgement Form.
5. Get fingerprinted through the Department of Justice (DOJ) if you are over 18. Fingerprinting done in another state or for another organization cannot be used. **Instructions to the applicant:** Print and complete the "applicant information" part of the appropriate DOJ Form found on the **Live Scan Form** and bring it to a Live Scan location for fingerprinting. The fingerprinting results will be sent to the church office and confirmed for you by a Personnel Committee member.

Mandated Reporter Training

In January 2022, California enacted AB 506, which requires youth organizations to set policies to prevent child abuse and assault. As a result of this new law, churches are now designated as "youth organizations." This law states that all staff of youth organizations are considered mandated reporters and must complete mandated reporter training. Volunteers are not mandated reporters, but those over 18 who will have regular contact with minors must complete training on the law. Deacons and elders over 18 are designated as mandated reporters by the PC(USA) Book of Order (but not by California law) and must complete mandated reporter training. All positions under California Mandated Reporter law are to complete the online **Mandated Reporter Training** within the first 60 days of service.

Clearance Determination

If the Praesidium report or sex offender registry shows that an individual has been convicted of sexual abuse, the individual may not serve on CPC staff or volunteer in any programs involving minors. If any of the screening information reveals warning signs that the individual has abused or could abuse minors, the personnel committee will determine whether the individual will be cleared to work with minors, depending on the nature of the warning signs. CPC program staff will also be notified of any registered sex offender.