

College Hill Reformed Church

Beaver Falls, PA

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Adopted by Session August 2023

Policy Purpose

College Hill Reformed Church, hereafter College Hill, is committed to providing a church environment that is a safe place for children and youth and that will protect them from abuse when they are involved in church-related activities. College Hill adopts these policies and procedures to maximize safety and prevent child abuse from occurring within its church community and guide and protect leaders, teachers, and helpers, whether volunteers or staff, from unwarranted allegations of child abuse. Above all, we seek to honor Christ, the head of our church.

This policy statement of College Hill is subordinate to the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) which includes a Directory of Church Government and a Book of Discipline.

Terms and Definitions

Child or youth, as used throughout, is a person under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons who participate with the children or youth in College Hill church-related activities.

Immediate Family Member, as used throughout, is any person within one level of familial separation (e.g., child, parent, legal guardian, sibling, or spouse).

Close Family Member, as used throughout, is any person within two levels of familial separation (e.g., Grandchild, Grandparent, Niece/Nephew, Uncle/Aunt, or First Cousin).

Distant Family Member or Close Friend, as used throughout, is any person with three or more levels of familial separation (e.g., third/ fourth cousin, cousins several generations removed, great-nephew/ niece), or a close friend.

Child abuse, as used throughout, is any act committed by any person that is not accidental and harms or threatens harm to a child's or youth's physical or mental health or welfare. Types of abuse may include physical abuse, including physical injury or threat of injury, sexual abuse, and/or emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse, as used throughout, is the use of inappropriate, belittling, or threatening words and/or actions directed toward a child or youth for the purpose of coercion or manipulation.

Physical abuse, as used throughout, is any physical force perpetrated towards a child or youth with the intent to cause harm. Spanking administered in love by parents to their own children as a disciplinary action does not generally constitute physical abuse.

Physical injury, as used throughout, is any injury resulting from child abuse or any injury requiring medical attention.

Sexual abuse, as used throughout, is any sexual contact or sexual interaction between a child and another person; any use of a child for the sexual stimulation of another person or the child. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, inappropriate nudity, inappropriate touch, fondling, and/or the making or sharing of sexually suggestive media. We also include any communication, whether verbal or electronic, that may be suggestive or a comment that is sexual in nature or any coarse, sexual or suggestive joking. Even if a child or youth, out of ignorance, innocence, fear, or any other motivation, does not resist, it is still abuse. While this other person is often an adult, sexual abuse toward a child may be perpetrated by another minor. We recognize the need for wisdom in discerning the difference between childish exploration and sexual abuse in protecting all of our children. While we recognize the sad reality that sexual abuse often occurs within the immediate family, we also want to clarify that appropriate and welcome physical affection between family members does not generally constitute sexual abuse.

College Hill Church-Related Activities, as used throughout, are any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission, or recreational events organized or paid for by College Hill. Examples of such activities include, but are not limited to, youth group functions, church school classes, counseling, elder group gatherings, VBS, and all childcare activities. These policies and procedures will be in force for all such activities regardless of geographic location.

Chaperone, as used throughout, is an appointed person who will remain in immediate proximity to a particular person at all times at designated College Hill activities or events. Chaperones shall be ordained College Hill officers or someone designated by the Session at least 25 years old. Chaperones shall be married couples or individuals of the same sex as the person to whom they are chaperoning. Multiple persons may be assigned as an individual's chaperone for particular events.

Helper, as used throughout, is any person who may or may not be employed by College Hill who, at any time during the year, helps with College Hill church-related activities involving children and youth. A helper is distinguished from a leader or teacher. A helper shall not lead or oversee any College Hill activities or ministries or children and youth participating in a College Hill activity or ministry. Helpers serve under the supervision of leaders or teachers.

Leader, as used throughout, is an adult that is an ordained and currently installed office bearer of College Hill, and/or any individual who has been directly or indirectly given the responsibility to manage a College Hill church-related activity. Examples of leaders include, but are not limited to, teaching elders, ruling elders, deacons, youth group leaders, church school leaders, and nursery leaders. Adult leaders shall normally be a minimum of 21 years of age. It is recommended that leaders be a minimum of four years older than the children or youth they are supervising. Exceptions to this shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Staff, as used throughout, are paid employees of College Hill. All church staff that have regular contact or responsibility with children or members shall receive the required Pennsylvania clearances as prescribed by Pennsylvania law. Staff refers to teaching elders, administrative associates, or others hired by the church for specific work.

Session, as used throughout, consists of the elected and ordained elders of the local church who have direct oversight and spiritual jurisdiction over the members of the congregation. (For more information, see *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*, D-28.)

Teacher, as used throughout, is an individual who has been given the responsibility directly or indirectly, by the Session of College Hill, of teaching children.

Volunteer, as used throughout, is any person not employed by College Hill who, at any time during the year, leads, teaches, supervises, or helps with College Hill church-related activities involving children and youth.

RPCNA, as used throughout, refers to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, of which College Hill is a member congregation.

NAPARC, as used throughout, refers to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council.

Screening

Privacy Notice

College Hill is the sole owner of the information collected by College Hill in print or digitally. We will physically secure all information collected by College Hill in print or digitally. We only have access to information that individuals voluntarily provide us via email, applications, or other direct contact from individuals. We will not release this information, except where required by the law of God or of the State, without the individual's prior consent. We will not sell or rent this information to anyone.

Staff: Background Requirements

Any candidate for employment at College Hill will be required to provide, complete, or undergo the following:

- An Employment Application which will include information regarding all past employment.
- A formal interview conducted by members of the leadership of the church.
- A reference check from two immediate past employers or personal references unrelated to the applicant (if no information can be obtained from past employers).

Before hiring an individual, College Hill will obtain the following clearances for the applicant:

- [Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance](#)
- [Federal Bureau of Investigations \(FBI\) Criminal History Clearance](#)
- Upon being hired, each new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the College Hill Reformed Church Children & Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
- All background checks will be renewed every 3-5 years.

Any candidate for employment who has been disciplined by a church, or has a past conviction of, or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or sexual misconduct with a child or youth, CANNOT be employed by College Hill. A conviction of any of the following will normally disqualify an individual from employment: pedophilic behavior, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, or abuse of a child or youth.

Volunteers: Background Requirements

Volunteers working with children or youth of the church in any volunteer ministry will be required to provide the following clearances, which are in accord with the Pennsylvania Keep Kids Safe [policy](#) for volunteers:

- [Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance](#)
- [Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance](#)
- [Federal Bureau of Investigations \(FBI\) Criminal History Clearance](#) - If the volunteer has lived outside the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the last 10 years, then a fingerprint-based federal criminal history (FBI) submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent is required.
 - “If the volunteer is not required to obtain an FBI Criminal History clearance, they must swear and affirm in writing that they are not disqualified from service based upon a conviction of an offense under §6344 of the Child Protective Services Law.”^{1(p2)} (See [Disclosure Statement for Volunteers](#).)
 - All background checks will be renewed every 3-5 years.
 - In addition, before beginning any volunteer role, each new volunteer will be required to sign an acknowledgment that he or she has received a copy of the College Hill Reformed Church Children & Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms

Any candidate for volunteer service who has been disciplined by a church, or has a past conviction of, or pending proceeding related to an allegation of child abuse or sexual misconduct with a child or youth, MAY NOT work with children and youth at College Hill. Refusal to complete the requirements referenced above or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: pedophilic behavior, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, or abuse of a child or youth.

NOTE: Persons receiving small stipends for short-term tasks are considered volunteers and not employees.

¹ Department of Human Services. (2021). *Volunteers - Department of Human Services*. Keep Kids Safe. https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Documents/KKS-VolunteerFAQ_2021.pdf

Protective Care

In the case where a person who has admitted to or who is known to have committed abuse of children or youth begins to attend College Hill, great care shall be exercised by the Session. While those who have committed sins such as these are not beyond redemptive transforming grace, careful precautions are appropriate.

Special care shall be exercised in the circumstances below.

- Any person who is a registered sex offender, or has a past conviction of, or pending proceeding, or has been disciplined by a church-related to an allegation of child abuse or sexual misconduct with a child or youth, shall be subject to the following precautions:
 - A chaperone shall be assigned to them at all times for all church events. A safety plan will be drawn up and used for all church events.
 - The Session shall exercise wisdom and discernment regarding what information about them should be communicated to the congregation. The Session may consult legal advice.

General Procedures

Supervision: *Two-Leader/Open-Door*

Whenever possible, any leader, teacher, or helper present during College Hill church-related activities for children or youth should be accompanied by another adult. During College Hill church-related activities, College Hill leaders, teachers, and helpers should not be alone with children where others cannot observe them.

To avoid situations where an individual is alone in a room with children, all children's and youth's activities should be supervised by at least two adults. The presence of two adults is to protect children and youth against situations in which abuse might occur as well as protect leaders, teachers, and helpers against false allegations of abuse.

Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by leaders or parents. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom. One of the church's teaching volunteers will conduct periodic checks at random, during which this person will occasionally visit other classrooms, unannounced.

If two adults cannot be present in the room, such that one adult is alone in a room with one or more children or youth, a door from the room must be left open. The remaining adult should not position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing the room cannot see him or her.

Each classroom for children and youth should ideally have a door with an observation window. If it does not, and two adults are not present in the room, then the door must remain open at all times.

At any counseling session with children or youth, where two adults cannot be present, the door of the room used must remain open for the entire session. Prior written consent will be obtained from parents or guardians. The one-on-one interactions will be limited to a few sessions of 30-60 minutes. The session should be conducted at a time when other adults are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

Overnight Events

The two-leader policy above shall apply for any overnight events or trips conducted as church activities. Ideally, if the event includes both male and female youth, two male leaders and two female leaders should accompany the group.

Parental/Guardian Consent

Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in College Hill church-related activities that involve travel away from the church's physical facilities.

Rule for Leaders, Teachers, and Helpers

Leaders and teachers working with youth or children must ordinarily be members of College Hill for a minimum of one year. Those who have been members less than one year shall be personally known by one or more church officers for at least one year. Members of other Evangelical congregations may serve if they provide a letter of recommendation from their church leadership. Members of Reformed Presbyterian Missions Teams may serve if they provide a letter of recommendation from their church leadership or the Director of Reformed Presbyterian Missions.

Helpers must ordinarily be members or adherents (regularly attending) of College Hill for a minimum of one year. Those who have been members less than one year shall be personally known by one or more church officers for at least one year. Those interested in serving as helpers and who are not members of College Hill must provide a letter of reference from their home pastor.

Policy and Form Compliance and Review

All College Hill policies and forms shall be updated to comply with the general principles outlined in this policy. The Session must approve all College Hill policies and forms updated for this purpose before they are implemented, and such updates shall be made available to the congregation.

Policy Review

The provisions of this policy shall be reviewed annually by the Session of College Hill or its designees, in consultation with the Safe Church Team and Youth Nurture Committee.

All leaders, teachers, and helpers, whether staff or volunteers, who work with children or youth at College Hill shall annually review this policy and sign the corresponding *Staff Acknowledgement Statement* or *Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement*.

Policy Exemption

The Session of College Hill shall have the authority to waive any rule in this Policy upon request, where appropriate. Such a waiver shall be reviewed by one or more elders of a sister congregation of the RPCNA and be communicated clearly to the congregation. All exemptions must be individually documented or documented within approved College Hill policies.

Responding to Incidents

Reporting Incidents

In the event that any significant harm or physical injury has occurred to any child or youth at College Hill or during College Hill church-related activities while under the care of someone other than a parent, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child or youth will be notified.
2. An Incident Report form shall be completed and submitted to the Session.

Reporting Incidents of Physical or Sexual Abuse

In the event that an incident of child abuse is alleged to have occurred at College Hill or during College Hill church-related activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. Civil authorities will be notified, and College Hill will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. College Hill will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
2. The party(s) aware of the alleged abuse shall inform a member of the Session immediately after reporting the alleged abuse to the civil authorities.
3. A member of the Session shall inform the parent or guardian of the child or youth unless the parent or guardian is the alleged perpetrator.
4. The Session member to whom the allegations have been reported shall inform the entire Session of the allegation.
5. The Session will meet to assess the situation and determine the best course of action.
6. In the event that an ordained officer or student under care of College Hill is alleged to be a perpetrator of the alleged abuse, notice to the Moderator and Clerk of the Presbytery of the Alleghenies (and Ad Interim Commission) will be sent ideally within 24 hours of the Session meeting. This notification provides transparency with investigating authorities should outside involvement be necessary.
7. If the Session does not find credible evidence of the alleged abuse, they may wait to proceed with the following steps until a judgment is made by the civil authorities.
8. If the Session finds credible evidence that abuse has occurred, or if the allegations are admitted, or the civil authorities make a judgment, 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. The Session shall use wisdom and discretion when announcing the presence of allegations or threats to the congregation. Whenever there continues to be a credible and imminent threat, proper notifications are always necessary. Victims and their family will be made known of the steps taken. Further details should be given to the congregation promptly as they are made known, subject to legal counsel. If the perpetrator is a minor, publicly sharing his or her name is subject to legal counsel. These steps are subject to our Book of Discipline in *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*.

9. College Hill will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries. If the Session sees a need to speak to the media regarding an incident of abuse or neglect, a member of the Session appointed by the Session will be the spokesperson to the media. All other representatives of the church shall refrain from speaking to the media.
10. In all cases of allegations or charges of abuse or wrong-doing, the Session and Safe Church Team shall carefully follow the prescriptions and guidance of Scripture, including Matthew 18, and the provisions of the RPCNA Constitution.
11. College Hill will be in communication with our insurance company so that they can help guide the response.
12. The Safe Church Team will act as a consultative body to the Session.

Pastoral/Session Care

If the alleged perpetrator admits to the offense, or if the evidence is deemed credible, the Session shall exercise wisdom as they consider whether the accused should be temporarily barred from attendance at corporate worship or other College Hill activities. For as long as the victim or victim's family is a part of the College Hill congregation, the perpetrator will be barred from all College Hill Reformed Church activities.

An elder visit, including a member of the Safe Church Team, will be arranged promptly for any alleged victims and their families, the alleged or admitted perpetrator, and any others directly involved (e.g., direct witnesses of the incident). Counseling will be offered and paid for by College Hill at the discretion of the Session.

Impartiality and Transparency of Church Officers

In the event that the alleged perpetrator is an ordained officer or an immediate family member of an ordained officer of College Hill, the office holder shall immediately take a leave of absence from the practice of his or her office until the allegations are resolved. The officer shall not involve themselves in any way in the investigation of the incident or decisions related to it, except to respond to requests for information from investigators of the incident.

In the event that the alleged perpetrator is an ordained officer or a close family member of an ordained officer of College Hill, the office holder shall immediately recuse himself or herself from any decisions or actions related to the investigation of the incident. Moreover, the office holder shall submit to the will of the Session regarding whether he or she should take a leave of absence from the practice of their office until the allegations are resolved.

In the event that the alleged perpetrator is a distant family member or close friend of an ordained officer of College Hill, the office holder shall submit to the will of the Session regarding whether he or she should immediately recuse himself or herself from any decisions or actions related to the investigation of the incident.

Confidentiality

All investigations shall be conducted in as confidential a manner as is compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.

Outside Groups

All leaders of non-College Hill sponsored groups and events that use College Hill facilities and supervise children or youth shall adhere to these policies with the exception of the “Rule for Leaders, Teachers, and Helpers.” Upon receipt of the Children and Youth Protection Policy from College Hill, the leaders shall review the policy and sign the Outside Group Leaders Release Form to acknowledge their review of it and to confirm their agreement to follow the policy. College Hill will not perform background checks, seek personal and professional references, review employment records, or obtain civil and criminal records for such groups.

College Hill Reformed Church

Beaver Falls, PA

Staff Acknowledgement Statement

I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the College Hill Reformed Church Children and Youth Protection Policy.

I understand the policy and will comply with its terms.

Name (Print)

Signature

Date

College Hill Reformed Church

Beaver Falls, PA

Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement

I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the College Hill Reformed Church Children and Youth Protection Policy.

I understand the policy and will comply with its terms.

Name (Print)

Signature

Date

College Hill Reformed Church

Beaver Falls, PA

Outside Group Leaders Release Form

I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the College Hill Reformed Church Children and Youth Protection Policy.

I understand the policy and will comply with its terms.

Name (Print)

Signature

Date

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT APPLICATION FOR VOLUNTEERS

Required by the Child Protective Service Law

23 Pa. C.S. Section 6344.2 (relating to volunteers having contact with children)

I swear/affirm that I am seeking a volunteer position and AM NOT required to obtain a certification through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), as:

- the position I am applying for is unpaid; and
- I have been a resident of Pennsylvania during the entirety of the previous ten-year period.

I understand that if I have not been a resident of Pennsylvania during the entirety of the previous ten-year period, but have received certification from the FBI since establishing residency, I must provide a copy of the certification to my employer and am not required to obtain any additional FBI certifications.

I swear/affirm that, if providing certifications that have been obtained within the preceding 60 months, I have not been disqualified from service as outlined below or have not been convicted of an offense similar in nature to a crime listed below under the laws or former laws of the United States or one of its territories or possessions, another state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or a foreign nation, or under a former law of this Commonwealth.

I swear/affirm that I have not been named as a perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse within the past five (5) years as defined by the Child Protective Services Law.

I swear/affirm that I have not been convicted of any of the following crimes under Title 18 of the Pennsylvania consolidated statutes or of offenses similar in nature to those crimes under the laws or former laws of the United States or one of its territories or possessions, another state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or a foreign nation, or under a former law of this Commonwealth.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Chapter 25 | (relating to criminal homicide) |
| Section 2702 | (relating to aggravated assault) |
| Section 2709.1 | (relating to stalking) |
| Section 2901 | (relating to kidnapping) |

Section 2902	(relating to unlawful restraint)
Section 3121	(relating to rape)
Section 3122.1	(relating to statutory sexual assault)
Section 3123	(relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse)
Section 3124.1	(relating to sexual assault)
Section 3125	(relating to aggravated indecent assault)
Section 3126	(relating to indecent assault)
Section 3127	(relating to indecent exposure)
Section 4302	(relating to incest)
Section 4303	(relating to concealing death of child)
Section 4304	(relating to endangering welfare of children)
Section 4305	(relating to dealing in infant children)
Section 5902(b)	(relating to prostitution and related offenses)
Section 5903(c) (d)	(relating to obscene and other sexual material and performances)
Section 6301	(relating to corruption of minors)
Section 6312	(relating to sexual abuse of children), or an equivalent crime under Federal law or the law of another state.

I swear/affirm that I have not been convicted of a felony offense under Act 64-1972 (relating to the controlled substance, drug device and cosmetic act) committed within the past five years.

I understand that I shall not be approved for service if I am named as a perpetrator of a founded report of child abuse within the past five (5) years or have been convicted of any of the crimes listed above or of offenses similar in nature to those crimes under the laws or former laws of the United States or one of its territories or possessions, another state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or a foreign nation, or under a former law of this Commonwealth.

I understand that if I am arrested for or convicted of an offense that would constitute grounds for denying participation in a program, activity or service under the Child Protective Services Law as listed above, or am named as perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, I must provide the administrator or designee with written notice not later than 72 hours after the

arrest, conviction or notification that I have been listed as a perpetrator in the Statewide database.

I understand that if the person responsible for employment decisions or the administrator of a program, activity or service has a reasonable belief that I was arrested or convicted for an offense that would constitute grounds for denying participation in a program, activity or service under the Child Protective Services Law, or was named as perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, or I have provided notice as required under this section, the person responsible for employment decisions or administrator of a program, activity or service shall immediately require me to submit current certifications obtained through the Department of Human Services, the Pennsylvania State Police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as appropriate. The cost of certifications shall be borne by the employing entity or program, activity or service.

I understand that if I willfully fail to disclose information required above, I commit a misdemeanor of the third degree and shall be subject to discipline up to and including denial of a volunteer position.

I understand that certifications obtained for the volunteering purposes can only be used for that purpose and cannot be used for employment purposes.

I understand that the person responsible for employment decisions or the administrator of a program, activity or service is required to maintain a copy of my certifications.

I hereby swear/affirm that the information as set forth above is true and correct. I understand that false swearing is a misdemeanor pursuant to Section 4903 of the Crimes Code.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Witness: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

College Hill Reformed Church INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Use this form to report accidents, injuries, medical situations, criminal activities, traffic incidents, or student behavior incidents. If possible, a report should be completed within 24 hours of the event.

Date of Report: [DATE]

1. PERSON INVOLVED

Full Name:

Address:

Phone:

E-Mail:

2. THE INCIDENT

Date of Incident:

Time:

AM PM

Location:

Describe the Incident:

3. INJURIES

Was anyone injured? Yes No

If yes, describe the injuries:

4. WITNESSES

Were there witnesses to the incident? Yes No

If yes, enter the witnesses' names and contact info:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5. POLICE / MEDICAL SERVICES

Police Notified? Yes No If yes, was a report filed? Yes No

Was medical treatment provided? Yes No Refused

If yes, where was medical treatment provided? On site Hospital Other: [OTHER]

6. PERSON FILING REPORT

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

OFFICE USE ONLY

Report received by: [NAME] Date: [DATE]

Follow-up action taken:

Action Taken: DESCRIBE]