

Safe Place Policy

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STAUNTON ALLIANCE CHURCH
SAFE PLACE POLICY
COVERING CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Purpose

Staunton Alliance Church (SAC) has established a policy with procedures for the prevention of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults (herein collectively referred to as “At Risk Persons” or ARPs) as they participate in church-affiliated ministries, as well as community activities held at the church or on church grounds; and furthermore for the protection of Staff and Volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

This updated policy is based on the previous SAC “Safe Place Policy” from 2011, and the current C&MA Safe Policy Manual.

By definition under the Code of Virginia, “child abuse or neglect” refers to an act committed against one who is less than 18 years of age, by a parent or other person responsible for his/her care, which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm the child’s physical or mental health or welfare. In addition, adults with disabilities, also known as vulnerable adults, which are those “persons who are 18 years or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability” are also protected by the Code. See Appendix A for the Code of Virginia definitions of “an abused or neglected child” and “protected or vulnerable adults”, and Appendix B for the Virginia Department of Social Services definitions of “abuse and neglect”. Further details can be found the Code of Virginia website.

Biblical Foundation

Staunton Alliance Church seeks to express God’s love and to provide for the personal wholeness of all who gather within its congregation and facilities. This faith community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

‘And they were bringing children to Him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.
Mark 10:13-16

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of inviting all people to the table, a place of safety, wholeness, and transformation. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is precious in God’s eyes and must be allowed to

live free of fear and surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe, and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance for all persons, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon us.

“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

John 13:34

Staunton Alliance Church Staff and Volunteers

Definition of Staff: Every person hired or approved by the Elders and the Lead Pastor for a paid staff position, (hereinafter referred to as "Staff"), regardless of whether the position is full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary and regardless of whether such position directly or routinely involves the care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be subject to this Policy. Staff does not include speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, or performers.

Definition of Volunteers: For purposes of this Policy, individuals approved by Elders and/or Pastors to provide education and care for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults on a volunteer, uncompensated basis shall be referred to as "volunteers." For purposes of this Policy, volunteers include:

- All Kids Discovery teachers, nursery workers, kids n praise, AWANA and youth workers
- Other volunteers not expressly excluded from coverage of this Policy who participate in activities involving children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults

Individuals participating in the ministry to children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults under the direction of the Elders and/or Pastors as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, or performers **will not** be screened in accordance with the procedures set forth above. Pursuant to this Policy, individuals participating as speakers, short-term presenters, facilitators, and performers will not be left alone with any child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults participating in a church-sponsored activity.

Age Requirement: All volunteers must be at least 13 years of age. Volunteers under the age of 18 must work with and under the supervision of an adult volunteer. Youth employees and youth volunteers (under the age of 18) must have signed parental permission (on screening form and volunteer agreement) before they can be authorized to serve with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

The *Code of Virginia* prohibits individuals with certain barrier offenses as defined in Section 63.2-1719 from working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in regulated and licensed programs. SAC adheres to these same requirements for volunteers in any

capacity that involves direct contact with or supervision of children, youth or vulnerable adults. Applicants and volunteers who have been identified as having committed sexual or physical abuse or having a criminal record involving violent crime to another person will not knowingly be employed for service or accepted as a volunteer with programs or activities for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

Reducing the Risk of Abuse

To create the safest possible environment within Staunton Alliance Church, several abuse prevention measures are to be utilized, as outlined below:

Screening

- The ministry lead (in consultation with Pastors) determines if an individual is a suitable, prospective candidate for children or youth ministry.
- Prospective ministry personnel are to submit to the recruitment and screening process managed by the appropriate ministry lead. Individuals will complete the following:
 - Application
 - Reference checks
 - Reading Statement of Faith
 - Criminal background checks (Every 5 Years)
- Prospective ministry personnel must complete the application and screening process prior to being placed in a position of trust.
- Ministry personnel who serve children and young people must have a file kept with church records. These files are to be kept in a locked confidential file.
- Prospective ministry personnel must have attended Sunday Worship on a regular basis for at least 3 months to assist in the children's ministry. Leadership will be considered on a case-by-case request after a 6 month period of regular Sunday attendance and church life involvement.

Training

- All SAC Staff and Volunteers will undergo Safe Place (or similar) training prior to beginning service with ARPs and will participate in refresher every year as specified by the Elders.
- Training records will be maintained in a secured confidential file by the Office Manager.

Adult Supervision Rules for all Staunton Alliance Church Children/Youth Ministries

- It is Staunton Alliance Church general policy that classrooms with ARP's will have two leaders. In cases where only one leader is available, all doors will be open, or windows will have clear lines of visibility.
- For church activities, leaders will be 21 or older.
- Leaders will be either unrelated or if related there will be an unrelated hall monitor available.
- If a group is divided and in separate areas of the facility not within close proximity of each other (e.g. different floors, different sections), each subgroup will maintain the Adult Supervision Rules.
- If any group stays overnight at the church, a minimum of three leaders must be present maintaining Adequate Supervision guidelines.
- Children will be released to parents or designated individuals by the parents (forms are kept in each classroom).

One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation

- Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between a Pastor or Staff or Volunteer and an ARP will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others. At no time should one adult be alone with one ARP.
- Any confidential discussions between a Pastor or Staff or Volunteer and an ARP, that are not conducted in a room or area in plain view of others, must be done in the presence of another qualified unrelated adult, or in the presence of a parent or guardian of the ARP.

Adequate Supervision

- While maintaining the Two Unrelated Adults Rule as outlined above, adequate supervision will always be provided as outlined below for different age groups (using the current VA Dept of SS for Religiously Exempt Child Day Centers). The specific needs of some individuals may require additional supervision:
 - For children from birth to the age <2 years: 1 Leader for 1-4 children, 2 for 5-8, etc.
 - For ≥2 to ≤6 years old: 1 Leader for 1-10 children, 2 for 11-20, etc.

- For ≥6 and over: 1 Leader for 1-25 children/youth, 2 for 26-50, etc.
- Leaders are only counted in the ratio when they are directly involved with supervising.
- With mixed age groups, the Leader-to-child ratios must continue to be maintained for each age sub-group.

Classroom or Activity Discipline

- All Staff and Volunteers responsible for children or youth will use the following discipline measures:
 - If a child/youth is behaving inappropriately, the Leader will tell the child/youth specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building.” or “That type of language is not acceptable here.”
 - If this measure is not effective, the child/youth will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child/youth may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students (within the same space as the rest of the group).
 - No physical punishment, verbal abuse, nor intimidations are to be used at any time.
 - If the child’s/youth’s disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child/youth may be removed from the activity and returned to the custody of the parent or guardian.

Open Classrooms or Activities

- All rooms used with ARPs will have doors with windows, and with the blinds/shades/curtains always open. If this is not always possible, then windowless doors must be left open.
- Classrooms, activity rooms, and childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by Church Staff, Volunteers, Pastors, Parents, Grandparents, Guardians, the Sunday School Superintendent, or other volunteer church workers at any time.
- Brief observations of childcare rooms, classrooms, and activity rooms with children or youth are to be conducted by a designated hall monitor.

Transportation Guidelines

- Occasionally activities may involve transportation by vehicle. Excluding the case of family members driving only their own family members, the following guidelines will apply:
 - All drivers must be adults of age 24 or over and have a valid driver’s license when carrying ARPs as passengers.
 - All drivers will consent to a DMV check of their driving history annually.

- It is preferred that two or more unrelated Leaders be present in each vehicle, while also maintaining Adequate Supervision guidelines. Where this is not possible or practical, then the driver should be in communication with other program Leaders upon departure and arrival at the destination.
- All drivers and passengers must always wear seatbelts when the vehicle is in motion and must follow air bag age and weight regulations per specific vehicle guidelines.
- The use of child safety seats which meet federal guidelines is required for children under 8 years of age.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use Prohibited

- No alcoholic beverages (opened or unopened). Tobacco products or illegal drugs are not allowed on the church property, including all buildings and grounds and church owned vehicles, at any time.
- All Staunton Alliance Church Staff and Volunteers and non-SAC Community program Leaders are required to refrain from the use of alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs during all activities on the church property and will not be under the influence of alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs at any time while on the church property. This also includes offsite church affiliated activities involving children, youth, and young adults ≤21 years old.
- Staunton Alliance Church reserves the right to request Police intervention if there is a suspicion of alcohol or illegal drug use or possession by Staff or Volunteers, or by non-Staunton Alliance Church Community program Leaders, or by children, youth, or young adults in the program.

Community Use of SAC (non-church affiliated):

- For all non-Staunton Alliance Church groups seeking the use of SAC as a meeting place, whether a one-time use or ongoing use, which involves At Risk Persons, a Leader of the requesting organization will receive this Policy and submit the completed and signed Community Use of SAC (Non-SAC Affiliated) Consent Form to the Office Manager. This Consent Form is to be renewed on an annual basis. Completed and signed forms will be maintained in a secured confidential file by the Office Manager.
- By signing the Staunton Alliance Church Use and Consent form, the Leader of the organization is confirming that:
 - They will provide all other Leaders from their organization a copy of this policy and procedures.
 - They, and all other Leaders from their organization, understand and agree to abide by the requirements of this policy and procedures.

- They, and all other Leaders from their organization, have no history of convictions or expungements for child, youth or elder abuse or other abusive or violent criminal activities.
- All information provided is complete and accurate.

Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of At-Risk Persons

- Staunton Alliance Church will not tolerate any instances of abuse or neglect of At-Risk Persons and will treat any reasonable suspicion or allegation of such abuse or neglect seriously, while maintaining confidentiality and respect for all individuals involved. Staff and Volunteers and other observers who have reason to suspect abuse or neglect of an ARP should proceed in the following manner:
 - If the allegation involves a SAC Pastor, immediately notify the Elders.
 - If the allegation involves anyone else, immediately notify the Senior Pastor.
- Upon receiving a report of an allegation of abuse or neglect, those notified from Elders (Case A) or a Staunton Alliance Church Pastor (Case B), will immediately contact the Law Enforcement depending on the allegation. The function of those contacted within the church is not to investigate the allegation. The following steps will be taken by those convened:
 - Immediately have a designated Elder (Case A), or the Lead Pastor (or Associate Pastor) and a designated Elder (Case B), contact the accused and remove them from all duties involving At Risk Persons until further notice. If the accused is a staff member they will immediately be placed on paid administrative leave until the investigation is completed.
 - Document in writing the substance of the reported allegation and that these steps were followed in response to the allegation. Having completed steps 1 and 2 contact Law Enforcement in a timely manner.
 - Confidentiality must be maintained for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Lead Pastor, who shall designate the single spokesperson for the church.
 - Under no circumstances should an SAC Pastor or any church Leader or member investigate the allegation. Church Leader(s) should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.
 - Provide Pastoral care for alleged victim and their family as well as the accused.

Appendix A: Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes

Under Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia, an “abused or neglected child” means any child less than 18 years of age:

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of § 18.2-248;
2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in § 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to § 9.1-902.

Furthermore, additions to the Code in 1974 provided for adult protective services in Virginia, which was further strengthened by a 1983 amendment. Adults with disabilities covered under the Code are those “persons who are 18 years or older whose vulnerability is related to impaired physical and/or mental health and/or physical disability.”

More details can be directly in the Code of Virginia.

Appendix B: Types of Abuse

Definitions of “abuse”:

Both children under the age of 18, and vulnerable adults who are 18 years or older as defined in Appendix B are at risk for various forms of abuse. Examples of types of abuse are given here:

A. Types of “Child Abuse” (source Virginia Department of Social Services):

1. Physical Abuse

A physical injury, threat of injury, or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains; dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

2. Physical Neglect

The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child’s health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.

3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child’s care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy, and other sexual abuse.

4. Medical Neglect

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

5. Failure to Thrive

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

6. Mental Abuse/Neglect

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child’s psychological or emotional health or development.

7. Educational Neglect

The child’s caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

8. Bizarre Discipline

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

B. Types of "Adult Abuse" (source Code of Virginia Adult Protective Services)

Adult Protective Services provides the following definitions:

"Adult abuse" means the willful infliction of physical pain, injury, or mental anguish, or unreasonable confinement of an adult. Abuse includes battery and other forms of physical violence including, but not limited to, hitting, kicking, burning, choking, scratching, rough handling, cutting, biting, etc. It includes sexual assault, inflicting pornography, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and other forms of forced sexual activity on an elder or an adult with disabilities. It includes any sexual activity with an adult who is unable to understand or give consent. It includes the control of an adult through the use of threats and intimidation and through the abuse of a relationship of trust.

"Adult exploitation" means the illegal use of an incapacitated adult or his/her resources for another's profit or advantage.

"Adult neglect" means that an adult is living under such circumstances that he/she is not able to provide for himself/herself or is not being provided services necessary to maintain his/her physical and mental health and that the failure to receive such necessary services impairs or threatens to impair his/her well-being.