

Highland International Church Inverness

Child Protection Policy – February 2025

Highland International Church Inverness is a registered Scottish Charity (SC046465) and a congregation of the International Presbyterian Church.

In this policy, the term 'children' refers to all children and young people under the age of 18.

Policy Statement

Highland International Church Inverness aims to ensure that all children are kept safe from harm while they are with staff or volunteers in our church. Protecting them from harm is a major priority. All children have the right to be cared for and protected in a safe environment in which their rights are respected. The welfare of children is paramount in the work that we do and the decisions that we make. It is everyone's responsibility to protect children. The policy applies to anyone in Highland International Church Inverness who works with children.

Purpose and Scope of this Statement

The purpose of this statement is:

- To protect all children from harm
- To provide everyone with the principles that guide our approach to child protection.

Policy Implementation

We will seek to keep children safe:

1. By valuing, listening to and respecting them.
2. By appointing a Child Protection Coordinator as agreed by the Church Council.
3. By ensuring that everyone undertaking regulated work (any activity which is organised by the church) will be required to complete a **Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme Member Application Form**, which is sent to Volunteer Scotland. PVG is a membership scheme which makes sure its members are allowed to work with children or protected adults. It is designed to ensure that unsuitable individuals do not have access to children or protected adults through their work. It also aims to ensure that individuals who become unsuitable are detected early and prevented from continuing to work, or from seeking work, with children or protected adults.

The PVG Scheme is managed by **Disclosure Scotland** who maintain lists of individuals who are barred from working with protected groups. The lists provide us and other registered bodies with a way of checking if potential or existing employees or volunteers are barred from undertaking regulated work.

4. By ensuring that the Church Council, the body ultimately responsible for appointments, has to give approval for the volunteer to work with children and young people. This requires to be recorded in the Church Council Minutes.
5. By ensuring that only when the Co-ordinator receives formal clearance from Volunteer Scotland can the Church Council authorise the appointment.
6. By offering regular, appropriate training in Child Protection to those who are registered and work with children. We should encourage retraining at least every three years.
7. By ensuring every volunteer is issued with a copy of our Child Protection policy and we should record they have been given this.
8. By ensuring that an appropriate response and action is made in the event of abuse being suspected, disclosed or alleged
9. By issuing clear Child Protection procedures to all organisations that work with children and
10. By reviewing this Child Protection Policy every three years.

Supporting documents

The policy should be read alongside our organisations' procedures, guidance and other relevant documents, including:

- a. Code of conduct **(p.3)**
- b. Making sure all activities and events are run safely **(p.5)**
- c. Communicating and working safely with young people online **(p.8)**
- d. Taking, storing and sharing images and photographs of children **(p.10)**
- e. Definitions of abuse **(p.11)**
- f. Responding to concerns about a child's welfare **(p.12)**
- g. Managing and recording concerns and information sharing **(p.13)**
- h. Managing concerns about, or allegations made against, staff or volunteers **(p.14)**

Contact Details:

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(a) Code of Conduct

The role of staff and volunteers: in your role at Highland International Church Inverness, you are acting in a position of authority and have a duty of care towards the children we work with. You are likely to be seen as a role model and are expected to behave appropriately.

Responsibility

You are responsible for:

- prioritising the welfare of children
- providing a safe environment for children
- having good awareness of issues to do with safeguarding and child protection and taking action when appropriate
- following our principles, policies and procedures, including our policies and procedures for child protection/safeguarding, whistleblowing and online safety
- staying within the law at all times
- modelling good behaviour for children to follow
- challenging all unacceptable behaviour and reporting any breaches of the behaviour code to your organisation leader
- reporting all concerns about abusive behaviour to an organisation leader (who should pass on to the Child Protection Coordinator), following our safeguarding and child protection procedures, this includes behaviour being displayed by an adult or child and directed at anybody of any age.

Rights

You should:

- treat children fairly and without prejudice or discrimination
- understand that children are individuals with individual needs
- respect differences in gender, culture, race, ethnicity, disability and religious belief systems, and appreciate that all participants bring something valuable and different to the group/organisation
- challenge discrimination and prejudice
- encourage young people and adults to speak out about attitudes or behaviour that makes them uncomfortable

Relationships

You should:

- promote relationships that are based on openness, honesty, trust and respect
- avoid favouritism
- be patient with others
- exercise caution when you are discussing sensitive issues with children
- ensure your contact with children is appropriate and relevant to the work you are involved in
- ensure that whenever possible, there is more than one adult present during activities with children
- if a situation arises where you are alone with a child, try to ensure that you are within sight or hearing of other adults.
- if a child specifically asks for or needs some individual time with you, ensure other staff or volunteers know where you and the child are.

- only provide personal care in an emergency and make sure there is more than one adult present if possible, unless it has been agreed that the provision of personal care is part of your role.

Respect

You should:

- listen to and respect children at all times
- value and take children's contributions seriously, actively involving them in planning activities wherever possible
- respect a young person's right to personal privacy as far as possible
- if you need to break confidentiality in order to follow child protection procedures, it is important to explain this to the child at the earliest opportunity.

Unacceptable behaviour

When working with children, you must **not**:

- allow concerns or allegations to go unreported
 - take unnecessary risks
 - develop inappropriate relationships with children
 - make inappropriate promises to children
 - engage in behaviour that is in any way abusive
 - let children have your personal contact details (mobile number, email or postal address) or have contact with them via a personal social media account other than for church activities and with parental consent.
 - act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive
 - patronise or belittle children
 - make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory or sexually suggestive comments or gestures to or in front of children.
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(b) Making sure all activities and events are run safely

General Guidelines

1. In general, the recommendation is that two adults are present when children are involved in church groups, although it is recognised that this may not always be possible. If a situation arises where you are alone with a child, try to ensure that you are within sight or hearing of other adults.

2. Each church activity will have guidelines for matters specific to the age and situation of the children and adults present at it.

3. Each church activity will have its own register. This should include, for every time the activity takes place:

- The date
- Names of leaders and helpers
- Which children attended
- Any incidents or near misses, particularly if a child hurts him/herself

4. Children should only be left in the care of leaders of church activities with the consent of their parent/carers. For this reason, parents/carers of all children left in children's groups without their parents/carers present must have signed a registration/consent form. Each church activity will therefore maintain a file of current consent forms. These will be kept for at least 5 years after the event. Registers will also be kept for at least 5 years.

5. While under the care of group leaders, children should never be left unaccompanied or allowed out of the room in which the activity is taking place, unless taken out by a parent/carer. An exception can be made for older children using the toilet

6. Children should be collected by their parents/carers or other adult responsible for their care from church activities. Where the parents/carers are not known to the leaders, the child should only be returned to the same parent or adult who dropped him or her off.

7. Children using nappies may have them changed by a creche leader only at the consent of the parents/carer and the creche leader. Children being potty trained may be helped to use the potty without parents present, provided that this takes place in a room where there are two or more helpers present. This will only be done with the consent of the parents/carers. Where permission is not given, parents/carers will be informed to ask them to assist.

8. Leaders/helpers should not initiate contact or conduct communication with children outside of church activities (including via social media) without the consent and ongoing knowledge of the child's parents. Contact should only be for specific purposes relating to the organisation.

Risk Assessment

It is not possible to reduce all risk when working with children. Many activities carry with them an element of risk. However, all activities should be carefully planned and detailed risk assessments will be carried out for certain activities e.g, days out, camps or residential activities.

Transporting Children and Young People

When arranging transport, it is recommended and is good practice for two adults to be present. There may be an occasion where it is impossible for two adults to be present when transporting children. In this situation, it is recommended that the adult, who will transport the child or children, contact the Safeguarding Officer or a member of the Church Council and inform them of the situation and the expected duration of the drive. After the adult has dropped the child or children off, s/he should contact the Safeguarding Officer or the member of the Church Council to let them know that the drive is over.

When considering the issue of transport, either to a specific outing or activity, or to and from regular meetings, the following questions should be considered:

- Is it necessary and possible to provide transport, or might parents/carers be able to make suitable arrangements?
- Are parents/carers fully aware of the arrangements for transporting or collecting their children?
- Whatever decision is made regarding transport arrangements, it is imperative that parents/carers are informed of these arrangements. Parents/carers should know when to collect their child from an activity; the time the child is expected to return from an activity and what will happen if their child is not collected.
- Do you have adequate car insurance? Anyone who might use their own transport for church –related business should check the adequacy of their insurance cover with their insurance provider.
- Has the transport been carefully planned? It is best to transport a group of children who live close to each other, so that an accurate ‘arriving home’ time can be given to parents. If there is a single adult driver, the children or child should always sit in the rear of the car.
- Do you have a contingency plan? If a parent/carer fails to collect a child or is not at home when the child returns home, what will happen? It is imperative that the group working with children has considered this beforehand, and asked parents/carers to provide an emergency contact number so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Days out, Camps, Residential Holidays and Overnight activities

When organising a trip with a group of children, there are many issues to consider. It can be helpful to meet with those involved in a planning meeting to discuss the following issues:

- Is the venue safe: with appropriate risk assessments in place? Ensure that the centre has appropriate insurance cover for all activities to be undertaken.
- Are parents/carers aware of, and have they provided written consent for the trip?
- Parents/carers should be fully informed of the arrangements, including details of accommodation, activities and cost. They should also complete and return the relevant Consent Form giving their permission, emergency contact numbers and health information.
- Do you have adequate staff to supervise the children at all times?
- Many centres have staff or instructors present who should be suitably trained and experienced in supervising children. It is common for these staff only to be available during certain times. This should be clarified and steps taken so that children are always appropriately supervised and supported. Consideration should also be given to overnight supervision. It is important that children and young people are well supervised, whilst also having their privacy. Achieving the balance between supervision and privacy can be difficult and different groups approach this in various ways.
- Ensure that children sleep in single sex accommodation. Ensure that at least one responsible adult is within hearing distance, and that the children know where they are, should they require assistance. It is recommended that an adult does not sleep in the same room as the children. Ensure you have taken account of any medical or dietary needs of the children. A Risk Assessment should be undertaken where there are known concerns about a children or children.

(c) Communicating and working safely with young people online

Introduction

Digital technologies present a huge range of opportunities for innovation and will allow us to meet with young people in groups even when we are not able to meet with them physically.

Good practice tips

As with working one to one with young people/small groups in person, there are some ways in which we can still enable safe, innovative work to take place:

1. Code of Conduct

Consider the following:

- setting some ground rules about respectful modes of behaviour and speech
- appropriate clothing
- what can be seen behind you on the screen

You may also need to decide how to respond if a young person is wearing something inappropriate or you consider something is inappropriate in the background.

2. Time and length of call

Online Group meetings should not meet for as long as a normal meeting and, on most occasions the meeting, should not exceed 1 hour.

Communicating in this way is tiring and difficult to sustain for longer than one hour. If you are doing some direct teaching, then, best practice would be for this to last no longer than 10 minutes at a time. Groups should NEVER begin later than 8.00 in the evening.

3. Record keeping

Ensure a written record is kept of all video calls held, the length of call, staff/volunteers participating in the call and a summary of the content covered in each call. While on most platforms, it is possible to audio/video record calls, *this is not good practice*.

You should **NOT** record any calls. Please retain written records for future collation.

4. Making a Zoom Call

Call set-up and admin:

- Ensure the Zoom call host has the ability to mute/block participants in the event they are displaying/sharing anything unsuitable or illegal.
- No video online youth work can take place below the age of 13 unless there is parental permission
- Regular review – take a moment following each online session to review the session – poor practice, engagement and safety of young people

Use the Parents/carers email address to send the meeting invite to. You can only send the invite once you have received parental consent.

This ensures parents/carers are aware that the Group is happening and can set up their child to access the session appropriately providing oversight if they wish.

Normal youth group rules apply with at least 2 fully accredited staff/volunteers present who would have a natural relationship with the young people being invited to participate in the Online Group.

Make sure both leaders are live before young people arrive. Settings on Zoom allow you to ensure no young people can be online ahead of the Group Leader.

Ideally, use the same time slot as your normal youth group meeting. If young people want to invite friends to join, ask them to obtain a parent's email.

An email will be sent to their parents outlining the details of the Online Group.

(d) Taking, storing and sharing images and photographs of children

We recognise that:

- sharing photographs and films of our activities can help us celebrate the successes and achievements of our children, provide a record of our activities and raise awareness of our work with children
- the welfare of the children taking part in our activities is paramount
- children, their parents and carers have a right to decide whether their images are taken and how these may be used
- consent to take images of children is only meaningful when they, their parents and carers understand how the images will be used and stored, and are fully aware of the potential risks associated with the use and distribution of these images
- there are potential risks associated with sharing images of children online.

Some children, parents or carers may **not** be comfortable with images of themselves or their children being shared. For example:

- if a child and/or their family have experienced abuse they may worry about the perpetrator tracing them online
- children who choose not to have contact with some members of their family may decide to minimise their online presence
- families may have religious or cultural reasons for choosing not to be photographed.

Parental consent should be sought to photograph children.

In situations where children are separated from their parents (for example if they are in care) we will seek consent from someone who holds parental responsibility (for example the carer or the local authority)

We will make sure children, their parents and carers understand what they are agreeing to:

- Make them aware that a photo or video is being taken.
- Explain what the image is going to be used for.
- Ask for their consent to share their image and record this on a written consent form.
- Tell them how long their consent is valid for and how long you will keep the image for.

Keep a record of the written consent that parents, carers and children have given for images being used.

(e) Definitions of abuse

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting, or by failing to act to prevent, significant harm to the child. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. Assessments will need to consider whether abuse has occurred or is likely to occur.

We believe that children should never experience abuse of any kind. We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children, to keep them safe and to practise in a way that protects them.

The following definitions show some of the ways in which abuse may be experienced by a child but are not exhaustive, as the individual circumstances of abuse will vary from person to person:

- **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse is the causing of physical harm to a child. Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child they are looking after.

- **Emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse is persistent emotional neglect or ill treatment that has severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to them that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve the imposition of age – or developmentally – inappropriate expectations on a child. It may involve causing them to feel frightened or in danger, or exploiting or corrupting them. Some level of emotional abuse is present in all types of ill treatment of a child; it can also occur independently of other forms of abuse.

- **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse is any act that involves the child in any activity for the sexual gratification of another person, whether or not it is claimed that they either consented or assented. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of indecent images or in watching sexual activities, using sexual language towards a child or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

- **Neglect**

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, to protect them from physical harm or

danger, or to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or failure to respond to, a child's basic emotional needs. In its extreme form children can be at serious risk from the effects of malnutrition, lack of nurturing and stimulation.

- **Bullying**

Bullying includes a range of abusive behaviour that is repeated or intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally. It can affect a person's health and development and, at the extreme, can cause significant harm. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, sexuality, race, religion or belief, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse. Everyone has a role to play in preventing all forms of bullying: including online.

(f) Responding to concerns about a child's welfare

All actions should be taken in the best interests of the child. Good practice which protects children requires the careful exercise of knowledge, judgement and skill.

Grounds for concern can arise from a wide range of circumstances and will generally be covered by the following:

- a child states that abuse has taken place or that they feel unsafe
- a third party or anonymous allegation is made
- a child's appearance, behaviour, play, drawing or statements cause suspicion of abuse

Action points for all workers should grounds for concern arise:

- immediately report any concerns to the Child Protection Coordinator, Minister or Church Council Clerk
 - do not wait to gather evidence
 - do not keep information secret
 - do not discuss the matter with others
 - provide a handwritten record of the incident and sign and date it
 - do not question the child directly
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(g) Managing and recording concerns and complaints and information sharing

A complaint is any statement of dissatisfaction, written or verbal, justified or not, concerning the application of the Child Protection principles in our life in the Church.

Who can complain?

Anyone who feels that the Child Protection principles are not being correctly applied. If you don't feel confident to raise the complaint on your own, you can ask a friend or relative to come along to give you support.

To whom should a complaint be made?

Complaints should be made verbally or in writing to the Minister, Church Council Clerk or Child Protection Co-ordinator. Details of how to get in touch with these people are available on page 2 of this Child Protection Policy document or from the Church

How will we deal with your complaint?

We will

- Deal with your complaint in strictest confidence
- Deal with your complaint as quickly as possible
- Keep you informed of the progress made with your complaint and the outcome of our investigations
- Investigate each complaint thoroughly, objectively and independently
- Keep records of all complaints made. This will be in a safe and secure place accessed only by those having a vested interest.
- Report the outcome to the Session

Information with regard to concerns and complaints will be shared with the Minister, Church Council Clerk and Child Protection Coordinator, unless any of them is the subject of the concern or complaint.

In the event of such a concern or complaint, the Minister, Church Council Clerk or Child Protection Coordinator shall arrange for the Church Council to be informed.

(h) Managing concerns about, or allegations made against, staff or volunteers

Allegations may be made against staff or volunteers currently working with children.

Allegations can come from any source-from children, from adults, from parents/carers, other members of staff, members of the general public, or from external professionals e.g., police, NHS services, social work.

Some allegations may be historical, against individuals no longer working with children. Serious concerns about the safety and wellbeing of any child should always be reported to the police and/or social work department in the first instance.

A timely response is crucial to preserve evidence if a crime is suspected.

The Church Council, may also have to consider the person's employment or volunteer status at the same time as responding to the child protection concern.

It may be necessary to immediately suspend a member of staff or volunteer, or remove them from their role, pending an investigation. This will depend on the nature of the allegation and could be for one or more of the following reasons:

- to avoid further possible risk to children or adults
- to avoid possible risk of further allegations against the member of staff
- to prevent contamination or destruction of evidence

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HIGHLAND INTERNATIONAL CHURCH, INVERNESS

Consent and Registration Form

Organisation: _____

Child/young person's name: _____

Date of birth: _____

Class child/young person is in(if relevant): _____

Address: _____

Your contact details Phone number _____

Please give details of any relevant allergies/dietary requirements (NB food and/or drink may occasionally be used as a teaching resource): _____

Please give details of any relevant medical conditions/disabilities we should know about: _____

Does your child receive any additional support at school? _____

Anything else you think we should know? _____

Are you happy for your child to be photographed/filmed for church use?

Yes _____ No _____

For crèche only

If your child is using the potty, are you happy for our volunteers to assist them in using it? Yes / No / Not applicable

If you answer 'No', the children's volunteers will endeavour to collect you to do this, but will assist in an emergency, unless expressly required not to.

If your child is in nappies, are you happy for our volunteers to change it if required?

Yes/ No / Not applicable

If you answer 'No', the children's volunteers will collect you to do this

Signed _____ (Parent/Carer) Date _____