

Child and Youth Safety Policy

Article 1: Purpose

Central Vineyard seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. We have a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of abuse. The Child and Youth Safety Policy details how Central Vineyard will pursue these important objectives.

Article 2: Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of Children and Youth

1. **Definitions:** for the purposes of this policy:
 - a. The term “adult” means all persons eighteen (18) years of age or older and eighteen-year-olds who are not in high school.
 - b. The terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years and eighteen-year-olds who are still in high school.
 - c. The term “youth” means a person under the age of eighteen (18) but being thirteen (13) years or older and eighteen-year-old high school students. Such a person is also a “child” pursuant to the herein definition.
 - d. The term “employee” refers to anyone paid by Central Vineyard for their labor.
 - e. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in any activity or circumstance which requires, obligates, or necessitates a person to volunteer time to interact with a “child” or “children” (as those terms are defined herein) on behalf of or for the benefit of Central Vineyard, including, but not limited to, a family ministry activity, in church-sponsored activities involving minors, in the counseling of minors, or in the one-on-one mentoring of minors.
 - f. The term “childcare worker” or “youth worker” means an employee or volunteer involved in any activity or circumstance that requires, obligates, or necessitates a person to interact with a “child” or “children” (as those terms are defined herein) as part of children’s event programming at Central Vineyard, including, but not limited to, in a family ministry activity, in church-sponsored activities involving minors, in the counseling of minors, or in the one-on-one mentoring of minors.
 - g. The term “church-sponsored program or activity” means any event or circumstance which is organized, hosted by, sponsored by, or otherwise participated in by Central Vineyard, and in which the Central Vineyard provides childcare or youth-serving programming.
 - h. The term “responsible adult” refers to the person who is eighteen (18) or older and who brought the child to the church-sponsored program or activity and claims

responsibility for such child. By way of example, this may be the child's parent, family member, guardian, or friend.

- i. The term "church-designated youth overseer" and "church-designated children's overseer" refers to the individual(s) responsible for overseeing youth and/or children's ministry at Central Vineyard.
2. **Selection of Workers - Screening Procedures:** All persons who desire to work with the children participating in Central Vineyard's programs and activities will be screened prior to being considered to work with children. Permission to work with children may be granted by a designated church employee only, and is not guaranteed even if screening benchmarks are met. The screening process includes the following:
 - a. **Six-Month Rule:** The church welcomes volunteers to serve our children after they have been involved with the church for a minimum of six (6) months.

Limited exceptions to this rule may be granted on a case-by-case basis with the written approval of the individual who oversees the relevant ministry (e.g., church-designated youth overseer or church-designated children's overseer). Exceptions are discouraged but may be granted when the prospective volunteer is a known person with a longer history of relationship and connection with Central Vineyard, is a new employee at the church, and/or similar situations.

- b. **Criminal Background Check:** A criminal background check is required for all Central Vineyard employees and volunteers in roles related to children's and youth ministry. The criminal background check will include a nationwide check, state and local check, and sex offender database/registry check. It may also include additional local, special interest, and/or international checks and social media review. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form for the background check, he or she will be ineligible to work with children. Background checks shall be occasionally repeated for all persons working with children. If a person refuses to submit a background check at any time, they will immediately become ineligible to work with children.

A disqualifying offense or other information returned on any background check that might otherwise prevent an individual from working with children will be reviewed by the church-designated children's overseer for individuals seeking to work with younger children or church-designated youth overseer for individuals seeking to work with youth. Offenses shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and in light of all the surrounding circumstances and at the sole discretion and final determination of the church.

If an individual with a documented offense, such as a dated, non-violent criminal charge, is permitted to work with children and/or youth, the offense must be documented by the appropriate church-designated overseer, and the individual(s) to whom the church-designated overseer reports must be notified of the decision before the individual seeking to work with children or youth is permitted to work with

children or youth. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency, and any conduct contrary to Central Vineyard's mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children.

Failure to disclose a criminal conviction or other offense described above, on the application form (or at any time at which such conviction or offense occurs, if in the future) will also be a disqualifying event.

- c. **Active Participation:** All volunteers shall be committed attendees or members of Central Vineyard.
- d. **Conversation:** All adults who desire to work with children will have a conversation or correspondence with a church-designated youth overseer, church-designated children's overseer, or the individual to whom the church-designated youth or children's overseer has designated. The following questions must be asked as part of the conversation or correspondence:
 - i. Why are you interested in working with kids?
 - ii. What does your community look like? (This question is asked to ensure that the prospective volunteer is actively supported by discipleship and formation in the church's community)
 - iii. Is there any circumstance or information that would lead you or any reasonable person to believe you should not work with children?
 - iv. Are you aware of any reason why you should not work with children?

As a part of the screening process, the church wants to ensure that all persons who desire to work with children possess the requisite intentionality and care, in addition to necessary qualifications, training, and obligations.

- e. **Application:** All adults seeking to work with children and/or youth must complete a written application. On the application, adults must provide two references from persons unrelated to the adult applicant. The church-designated youth overseer, church-designated children's overseer, or the individual to whom the church-designated youth or children's overseer has designated must review the application and contact references. The application and feedback from the references must be kept on file at the church for the duration of the individuals' service to children and/or youth or 5 years, whichever is longer.
- f. **Youth Volunteers:** Youth wishing to serve with children must satisfy the following:
 - i. Have an adult sponsor who authorizes the youth's volunteer participation and commits to holding such youth accountable.
 - ii. Fulfill all adult requirements above (a-e).

- iii. Youths 16 years and older may be counted in the child supervision ratio (see Two Adult Rule). Youth under age 16 are considered assistants and must serve alongside at least 2 adult volunteers.
3. **Selection of Workers - Onboarding:** All childcare and youth workers are required to affirm their commitment to the Child and Youth Protection Policy and adherence to the code of conduct described therein for childcare and youth workers. This affirmation shall take place during onboarding and then annually thereafter and be signed and dated. Additionally, as part of this affirmation, childcare and youth workers shall affirm:
- a. That they have completed the required training.
 - b. That they have not been accused of or investigated for any abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child.
 - c. That they will immediately report any reasonable suspicion of or disclosure of inappropriate behavior between adults and minors to the church-designated overseer of children's ministry (if involving younger children) or church-designated youth overseer (if involving youth).
4. **Selection of Workers - Training:** All childcare and youth workers are required to complete an annual training that shall include the following topics:
- a. Mandatory reporting requirements
 - b. Reporting procedures
 - c. Signs of abuse and effects of abuse
 - d. Definitions of various forms of abuse
 - e. Grooming
 - f. Importance of being proactive with child/youth safety and protection
 - g. Code of conduct for serving children and youth and consequences for violation of code of conduct

New childcare and youth workers are required to complete this training before working with children and youth.

Article 3: General Policies

1. **Safety Structure at drop off/pick up:** To participate in CV Kids programming, during Sunday services, responsible adults must sign in each under their care who is in 5th grade or younger.

At the designated point in service, childcare workers will return Pre-K through 5th-grade children to the sanctuary and assist them in reuniting with their responsible adults. Babies and toddlers in the nursery must be checked out directly by their responsible adult.

2. **Two Adult Rule:** No child participating in children's or youth programming should be alone with only one adult. Minors participating in children's or youth programming must be with at least two unrelated adults unless in a mentoring situation. In mentoring situations involving children or youth, the parent or guardian must be aware of the time and location of the appointment, the appointment must be visible on the Church Calendar for accountability purposes, and the gathering must either be done in a room with a window in the door, the door must remain open for the duration of the appointment, or in another clearly observable and accountable setting.
3. **Restroom Guidelines:**
 - a. **Diaper Changes:** A responsible adult for the child will be the only one permitted to change diapers during a church-sponsored program or activity.
 - b. **Restroom:** All children will be expected to go to the restroom on their own. If a child is not able to do so, the responsible adult must assist. Children participating in CV Kids programming for children Pre-K through 5th grade shall use the restrooms located on the second floor of the building.
4. **Secure Space:** For church-sponsored events or activities with child check-in (e.g., worship service, special church event with babysitting), individuals are generally prohibited from entering areas which are subject to check-in during church-sponsored event or activity, without visible identification as a childcare worker who has been authorized by Central Vineyard. Authorized childcare workers and other authorized Central Vineyard staff members may enforce this provision at any time.

The responsible adult for children being dropped off in the check-in area may be permitted to enter the secure area in order to provide comfort or support to their children.
5. **First Aid:** For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, childcare workers may provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's responsible adult immediately or at child pick-up, depending on the nature of the minor injury. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the responsible adult will be summoned in addition to the childcare worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
6. **Policy for Events with Youth:** The church does not permit games or events that encourage anyone under the age of 18 to be alone or together with other minors unsupervised in dark spaces or unlit rooms, except for brief and non-continuous periods of time (i.e., to walk from one room to another). This is to support the creation of safe and visible spaces for children to flourish. Examples of prohibited games and events include Sardines and Church Lock-Ins where minors may be alone together or unsupervised in dark spaces or unlit rooms.
7. **Policy for Mentoring Children and Youth**
 - a. The church supports the work of mentoring and discipleship in the lives of our children.

- b. Parents or guardians may complete the One-on-One Mentoring Consent Form if their child is spending time with an adult from our community.
 - i. By completing the Consent Form parents or guardians give Designated Person(s) at the church permission to check in with both mentor and child about their experience and safety.
 - ii. Designated Person(s) at the church are committed to sharing feedback with caregivers about mentoring relationships as requested or otherwise necessary to protect the child.

Article 4: Abuse and Reporting Procedures

1. Definitions of Abuse:

- a. For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes (but is not limited to) the following:
 - I. **Physical Abuse:** Any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
 - II. **Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least three years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
 - III. **Emotional abuse:** Emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, and persistent teasing.
 - IV. **Neglect:** Depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.
- b. **Mandatory Reporter:** A person who is legally obligated to report suspected or known child abuse, as provided by state or other applicable laws, and typically arising out of the person’s professional training or specific responsibilities (e.g., a nurse, doctor, social worker, or more broadly as identified in some state laws.)

- 2. **Corporal Punishment:** It is the policy of the church that no person will administer corporal punishment at any church-sponsored event. “Corporal punishment” for purposes of this policy means using physical force on a child with intent to cause pain or punishment, even if slight or seemingly harmless.

3. Appropriate Touch Guidelines

- a. Appropriate touch should be a response to the child's need for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based on the supervising adult's emotional needs. Such level of appropriate touch may also be guided by instructions and limitations established by the child's parent or other responsible adult.
- b. Individuals who are authorized by the church to work with children shall not force affection on any child. Physical contact shall always be with the child's consent. For example, a childcare worker adult might ask, "May I give you a hug?"
- c. Physical touch should generally be limited to contact with the child's hand, shoulder, or upper back. For babies and toddlers, hugs and holding are also routinely appropriate.
- d. A child's verbal or nonverbal "no" shall always be respected, unless in unsafe circumstances or emergency (i.e., pulling a child away from a dangerous condition). If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, respect the child's wishes at all times, unless the contact is to mitigate a clear and present danger to the child.
- e. Physical touch should be appropriate for the age of the child or youth. For example, while it is often appropriate to hold a toddler on your lap, it is inappropriate for a teenager to sit on the lap of an adult. For youth, opt for a side hug, touching their hand, or other forms of affection that do not involve excessive body contact for extended periods of time.
- f. At no time should a child, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals, or buttocks.
- g. If a child or youth worker engages in physical contact with a child, it must occur with another child or youth worker present
- h. Anyone observing inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a child should immediately begin the process of reporting suspected abuse or neglect to Central Vineyard leadership in accordance with the Reporting Procedures described at the end of this policy.

4. Reporting Abuse Responsibilities

- a. Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under the church's care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under their care, this should be reported immediately to the nearest available pastor for further action. If a pastor is not available, the allegation should be immediately reported to the primary leader of the ministry/event taking place. In all cases, suspected abuse or neglect of a child should be reported to law enforcement, as may be mandated by state law.

- b. In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:
 - i. The child will immediately be separated from the suspected abuser and made safe (with two adults present).
 - ii. The parent or guardian of the child will be immediately notified and brought to the child; unless the parent or guardian of the child is the alleged perpetrator. (In the event that the alleged perpetrator is the guardian of a child, the alleged child victim will be brought to the non-offending parent or guardian. The mandated reporter involved in the event will then provide opportunity for both guardians to be involved in the reporting process. If at any point, either guardian is in disagreement with the reporting process, the mandated reporter will continue to make the report without the involvement of the guardians.)
 - iii. Law enforcement will be notified, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by law enforcement authorities.

Additionally, Central Vineyard's Super Regional Leader will be notified within 24 hours.

- iv. The worker or other person(s) alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be suspended from working with children, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. To the extent the suspected perpetrator is deemed a flight risk, such suspected perpetrator may be requested to remain on-site but in an isolated area of the church until law enforcement arrives.
- v. If the alleged perpetrator is also a child, the suspected perpetrating child shall be separated from all other children. The alleged perpetrator may be suspended from attending any church function until the investigation is completed. At the time of reporting, the minor alleged perpetrator will be treated with adequate care as required by law. The minor alleged perpetrator will be surrendered to their guardians for support. The guardians of both the alleged child victim and alleged perpetrator will be given the opportunity to participate in the reporting process. If at any time any guardian is in disagreement with the report, the mandated reporter will continue with their duty as required by law.
- vi. The church's insurance company will be notified (as applicable), and the church will complete an incident report which is to remain kept on file

during the investigation and for a period of no less than ten (10) years or otherwise as provided by applicable law. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company and further made a part of the church's file.

- vii. A designated pastor will be the church's official spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect unless such person is alleged to be involved. All other employees, volunteers, and other representatives of the church are prohibited from speaking to the media.
 - viii. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
 - ix. A person will be removed from service with children permanently at the church with any probable cause indictment for crimes against children.
- c. Additionally, any individual at the church who suspects that a child at this church or during the church's programs or activities has experienced abuse, sexual misconduct, and/or pastoral abuse or misconduct is encouraged to contact VineyardUSA@guidepostsolutions.com.

In 2022 Vineyard USA engaged a globally-recognized independent third-party organization — Guidepost Solutions — to assess how Vineyard USA and our churches handle leadership misconduct, moral failings, restoration processes, and allegations of abuse and misconduct.

In March 2023, Vineyard USA asked Guidepost Solutions to set up this 24/7 confidential reporting mechanism so that Vineyard USA church attenders and staff can report any concerns or allegations of sexual misconduct or pastoral abuse.

Any concern reported to this email will go directly to Guidepost Solutions and not to Vineyard USA or Central Vineyard. Individuals can report their concerns either with a true name or anonymously. Guidepost will not identify any reporter by name to Vineyard USA without the reporter's expressed consent.

If individuals are reporting criminal activity, they are encouraged to also contact the appropriate local law enforcement agency. To be clear, reporting to Guidepost does not replace legal mandatory reporting required by state or local law enforcement.

- d. **Documenting Policy Violations:** Violations to the Child and Youth Safety Policy will be documented by the church-designated overseer of children if the violation involved young children, and the church-designated overseer of youth if the violation involved youth.

Article 5: Exceptions to Policy

The Board of Directors at Central Vineyard may, in its sole discretion, approve a modified version of the above Child and Youth Safety Policy for particular church-sponsored programs or activities if the following conditions are met:

1. The modified policy is requested by the designated youth overseer or designated children's overseer. The designated youth overseer may request approval of a modified policy for an event or activity for youth. The designated children's overseer may request approval of a modified policy for an event or activity for younger children.
2. The requested modification must, in the judgment of the Board of Directors, be a reasonable accommodation likely to maintain the overall safety and well-being of the children involved. Approved modifications will not, under any circumstances, alter policies on Abuse and Reporting Procedures (Article 4).
3. Before leaving their children with a child or youth worker at a church-sponsored program or activity with a modified Child and Youth Protection Policy in place, responsible adults sending or dropping off children must be notified that a modified policy is in place and told what modification has been approved.