

**Child Protection Policy of the Greater Manassas Children's Choir (GMCC)**  
**Sponsored by the Manassas Chorale**

Guidelines for Child Caregivers: "Child Caregivers" include paid and unpaid staff, committee members, and volunteers. Child Caregivers shall observe the following guidelines:

**I. Volunteer Requirements**

- a. At no time is a convicted child abuser or sex offender or registered sex offender to be assigned to a rehearsal space with children/youth.
- b. All volunteers will complete an application that includes questions regarding prior/pending felony convictions or founded/pending child abuse charges. A negative finding will preclude the applicant from volunteering in direct contact with children.
- c. All volunteers working with children/youth will allow GMCC to conduct a criminal and/or background check at least every 5 years. GMCC will bear the expense of these checks.
- d. All volunteers will be required to read this Child Protection Policy and sign the Volunteer Covenant Agreement, indicating that they have read and understood the policy and agree to abide by it.
- e. It is the responsibility of the Child Protection Coordinator to ensure that a signed Volunteer Covenant Agreement is received from every Volunteer.
- f. Helpers who have not met the expectations of the Child Protection Policy MUST serve alongside a volunteer who has.

**II. Staff Qualifications**

- a. As part of the applications process, two or more character references will be contacted. A negative finding will preclude the applicant from employment in direct contact with children.
- b. All staff members will allow GMCC to conduct a criminal and/or background check at least every 5 years. GMCC will bear the expense of these checks. A felony conviction of a 'barrier crime' as defines in the Code of Virginia Section 63.2-1719 will preclude the applicant from employment.
- c. Before beginning employment, staff members will be required to read this Child Protection Policy and sign the Covenant indicating that they have read and understood the policy and agree to abide by it.
- d. Staff will complete a training session related to the Child Protection Policy approved by GMCC.

### **III. Responsibilities**

- a. This policy has been adopted by the GMCC and the Manassas Chorale. Any exceptions and/or changes to these guidelines must have written approval from the Child Protection Coordinator and/or the Chorale Board President.
  - i. The GMCC Committee will present the recommendations to the Chorale Board for approval.
  - ii. A Child Protection Coordinator will have oversight of the responsibilities to implement the Child Protection Policy, and report to the Chorale Board.
  - iii. The Child Protection Coordinator will conduct screening of Child Caregivers and maintain a file including procedures, forms, and related records.
  - iv. The Child Protection Coordinator will establish and maintain a list of recommended Child Caregivers.
  - v. The Child Protection Coordinator will arrange for Child Protection training for Child Caregivers.

### **IV. Adult Supervision of Children**

- a. Rehearsals will strive to use the following ratios (as maximums), with 2 adults minimum:
  - i. Grade 1-4 - 1:15
  - ii. Grade 4-8 - 1:20
- b. Without prior notice, parents/guardians and staff or volunteers may visit rehearsal rooms.
- c. All doors to rooms utilized for children's/youth rehearsals shall have a window or door with a window. If not feasible, the door shall remain open during all sessions.
- d. Any one-to-one conversations with a child/youth during rehearsals should always occur in a public place in the sight of others, never alone in a private room with the door shut.
- e. Coordinators or Volunteers may not meet privately with a child/youth outside of the rehearsal without parents or guardian permission.
- f. Conversations between volunteers and children should be of a positive and appropriate nature to the child/youth. It is considered inappropriate to discuss personal information, relationships, dating or sexual activities.

### **V. Releasing Children**

- a. Children/youth will be released only to a parent or guardian or the adult designated by a parent or guardian. Where a custody order is in effect, release will only be to the custodial party or their designated representative.

## **VI. Discipline**

- a. Teachers/leaders of all activities involving children will follow specific steps to maintain a safe learning environment. Teachers/leaders shall:
  - i. Have reasonable expectations of children's behavior.
  - ii. Communicate expectations of appropriate behavior to the children and encourage appropriate behavior in clear, simple statements.
  - iii. It is the Coordinator's or Volunteer's responsibility to support a child's "no" (verbal or non-verbal), regarding physical contact. Whether it is directed toward another child or an adult, unless the child's safety is endangered, ensure that "no" is respected.
  - iv. Respond to misbehavior appropriately using techniques such as reminders and redirecting. If necessary, teachers/leaders will enforce consequences that are appropriate for the situation. Children will not be harmed physically or emotionally. Teachers/leaders will not use shouting or yelling, ridicule, name-calling, sarcasm, embarrassment, bribes, threats, withholding food or any form of physical punishment. Disciplinary concerns should be reported to the parent or guardian of the child/youth.
- b. Any time that appropriate techniques have not succeeded in maintaining a safe, productive atmosphere for all of the children, the parent/guardian shall be notified and will assist with immediate situation needs.

## **VII. Confidentiality**

- a. Children, especially young children, have not yet developed a sense of judgement about the difference between information that can be shared about their families or information that properly stays within the family. If shared, this information should remain confidential.
- b. Teachers/leaders will respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual child and their families. When there is reason to believe a child's welfare is at risk, it may be necessary to share confidential information with agency representatives who have legal responsibility for intervening on the child's behalf.

## VIII. Child Abuse

- a. Section 63.1-248.2 of the Code of Virginia defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 whose parent, or other person responsible for the care of the child:
  - i. Causes or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury
  - ii. Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care
  - iii. Abandons the child
  - iv. Fails to provide adequate supervision in relationship to the child's age and level of development
  - v. Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexual explicit visual material
  - vi. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or omissions to act (e.g., lack of care for a child).
- b. The legal requirement adopted by GMCC for staff and volunteers for reporting child abuse is found in the Code of Virginia §63.1-248.3. It states that persons "who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately...to the local department of the county or city wherein the child resides or wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or to the Department of Social Services' toll-free child abuse and neglect hotline." "Any report is confidential and the person making the report is immune from liability for making such a report, unless it is proven that such a person acted in bad faith or with malicious intent."
- c. All allegations of child abuse will be treated seriously. Should there be allegations of child abuse involving children in rehearsals/performances, the following course of action will be followed:
  - i. Responsibility of persons who witness or suspect child abuse
    1. When abuse of a child, volunteer, or coordinator is personally witnessed, call 911. Then proceed to paragraph 2.
    2. When abuse of a child, volunteer, or coordinator is suspected, concerns shall be reported to the Child Protection Coordinator, Artistic Director, and/or Chorale Board President.

3. The Child Protection Coordinator will provide GMCC reporting procedures for reporting suspicious acts. Each report shall require a written statement by the reporting person and/or the Child Caregiver to the Child Protection Coordinator. The Child Protection Coordinator will work with the Chorale Board President and Artistic Director to begin, when there is suspicion, or to complete when there is witnessing, the response action. All reports will be maintained in a confidential file at *Law Offices of Stephen Bamberger in Woodbridge, VA*.
4. All information regarding the matter will remain confidential.

**IX. Sexual Harassment**

- a. "Sexual harassment" is defined as unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature which interferes with a child's right to participate in activities in a comfortable and supportive atmosphere. Under federal laws (Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VII 1964 Civil Rights Act), sexual harassment is illegal.
- b. Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, sexually oriented jokes or humor, sexually demeaning comments, verbal suggestions of sexual involvement or sexual activity, insulting comments about sexual orientation, questions or comments about sexual behavior, unwelcome or inappropriate physical contact, graphic or degrading comments about an individual's physical appearance, expressed or implied sexual advances or propositions, display of sexually suggestive advances or propositions, and/or repeated requests of an individual for social engagements after an individual refuses such social engagements. Some of these activities may be considered sexual abuse when involving an adult or older youth with a child or youth. The Chorale Board President will contact the local Child Protective Services for assistance when there is a question.
- c. Staff and volunteers will ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in activities in a supportive and comfortable (non-hostile) atmosphere. Staff and volunteers will receive training in sexual harassment prevention. Teachers/leaders, staff and volunteers will carefully monitor interactions among children.

- d. The Artistic Directors will make appropriate and timely response to allegations of sexual harassment. A child who exhibits inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature toward another child shall be corrected immediately and the situation reported to the parents/guardians. The Artistic Directors will work with volunteers and parents/guardians to ensure that the behavior does not continue. If an allegation of sexual harassment is made against an adult volunteer or staff member, the Chorale Board President shall be notified immediately.
  - i. If the appropriate response for the alleged behavior is a reminder or explanation of appropriate behavior, the Artistic Director will have a conference with the alleged harasser. This conference will be documented in a confidential file.
  - ii. For a more serious concern, the Artistic Director will contact the Chorale Board President for assistance.
  - iii. The Child Protection Coordinator and the Chorale Board President will investigate the matter in as quick a time as possible. The investigation will be documented and kept in a confidential file along with any supporting evidence. They will keep the matter strictly confidential. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment, they will look at the totality of the circumstances, such as the nature of the inappropriate behavior and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred.

**X. Health Procedures**

- a. Staff and volunteers will be alert to symptoms of communicable diseases in children involved with GMCC. Parents/guardians of children who show symptoms of illness such as fever and vomiting will be asked to take them home. If parents/guardians are not present, they will be notified and the child will be isolated until parents/guardians arrive.
- b. Teachers/leaders will inform parents/guardians when there is an incident that results in a child having broken skin, redness or bruising, or swelling or when emotional or physical pain is indicated by a child.
- c. Children should be free of fever and vomiting for at least 24 hours before participating in any GMCC activity.

**XI. Children's Emergency Contact and Photo Release Form**

- a. Whenever children are in attendance at activities and parents/guardians are on and off site at the same time, emergency contact information must be on file and available to Child Caregivers.

- b. Parents/guardians will indicate on the Photo Release Form whether or not they will allow photographs of their children to be taken. Photographs may be used for news articles and promotional materials. For safety reason, it is the policy of GMCC never to use names and locations to identify photographs of minors on the internet.
- c. If a photograph appears that you would like removed, contact the Director of Operations, Artistic Director, and/or the Child Protection Coordinator, and the item will be removed immediately.

## **XII. Emergency Procedures**

- a. All classrooms will be provided with instructions to follow in case of an emergency. All volunteers and staff will be informed of the location of those instructions.
- b. All leaders/teachers and staff will be informed of the location of fire alarm, telephone, fire extinguishers, and evacuation maps.
- c. Each section of the facility is equipped with a first aid kit. All volunteers and staff will be informed of the location of these kits.

Resources used in creating this policy include:

- Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Social Services. Minimum Standards for Licensed Child Day Care Centers
- Code of Virginia
- Fairfax County Child Protective Services
- Commitment to Children Policy of the United Christian Parish of Reston
- Manassas Church of the Brethren Child Protection Policy