

HICKORY WITHE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (HWPC) GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE AFFECTION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Hickory Withe Presbyterian Church believes it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate in interactions between adults and children or youth and interactions between and among children and youth. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows staff and volunteers to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth. These guidelines are based, in large part, on avoiding behaviors known to be used by child molesters to groom children or youth and their parents for future abuse. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all staff and volunteers working around or with children or youth in HWPC programs and activities.

1. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.

Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on head when culturally appropriate

2. The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children or youth in a ministry setting because many of them are the behaviors that child molesters use to groom children or youth and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves, considered forms of sexual abuse.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces, including frontal hugs
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over three years of age on the lap
- Touching of personal areas, such as bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with children or youth

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- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touching of underwear, whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth, without knowledge of their parents/guardians
- Private meals with individual children or youth
- Emailing or texting youth without copying the parent or legal guardian.
- Any type corporal punishment

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