

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY
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I. PURPOSE, APPLICABILITY, SCOPE AND POLICY TERMS

Purpose

This policy is intended:

- To be faithful to our baptismal vows as we seek to welcome children and remove stumbling blocks.
- To provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth at First Presbyterian Church (hereinafter referred to as “FPC”).
- To protect children and youth from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse while participating in FPC activities.
- To provide a mechanism to deal with reported concerns and subsequent actions.
- To guide FPC as an institution in the conduct of its employees and volunteers and prevent incidents and allegations of child abuse.
- To protect adult volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

This policy addresses five components of child and youth protection:

1. Screening applicants for employment and volunteer service for a history of behavior potentially detrimental to children and youth.
2. Training employees, volunteers, children and youth in the child and youth protection policy and in appropriate supervision and chaperoning.
3. Reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues.
4. Responding to allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues.
5. Addressing known offenders as members of FPC.

Applicability

This policy applies to persons, including FPC employees and volunteers, participating in all children and youth programs of FPC, including but not limited to:

- Sunday school classes
- Children’s church
- Children and youth fellowship programs
- Children and youth choirs
- Church-sponsored retreats, mission trips, etc.
- Vacation Bible School

- Church-sponsored athletic teams
- Outreach, community service, etc.
- Nurseries and childcare

Scope

Who is covered by this policy?

This policy supersedes all prior FPC child and youth protection policy statements.

All employees of FPC, including the staff of the Weekday Preschool, are governed by this policy. With regard to any employee(s) of FPC, perceived conflicts or ambiguities in interpretation and application of this policy shall be resolved by the Director of Church Administration and Head of Staff.

Generally, FPC does not directly control independent contractors; however, all independent contractors who work with FPC children and youth are governed by this policy.

All volunteers of FPC who work with children and youth are governed by this policy.

What does the policy require?

1. All employees and volunteers shall abide by the Code of Conduct.
2. Each person must assume responsibility for his/her own actions in working with children and youth and for attending training offered on child and youth protection.
3. An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to observe and abide by this policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation if the Head of Staff, Director of Church Administration, Personnel Committee, or Christian Education Councils determine that the Child and Youth Protection Policy and procedures have not been followed.

Outside Groups Using FPC Facilities

All leaders of non-FPC sponsored groups and events using FPC facilities who have direct supervision of children and youth are expected to adhere to these policies. Upon receipt of the policy from FPC, the leaders must review the Child and Youth Protection Policy and sign the Outside Group Leaders Release form to acknowledge their review of it and to confirm their agreement to follow the policy. This includes, but is not limited to, groups such as AA, Al-Anon, VCU Headstart, George Mason tutors (etc.).

Given the nature of the outside groups that use FPC facilities, FPC will not perform background checks, seek personal and professional references, review employment records, or obtain civil and criminal records for such groups. Leaders of outside groups will be invited to attend FPC's frequently scheduled training classes and are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.

Policy Terms

Employee – Any person who works for salary or wages at FPC (e.g., FPC staff, Weekday preschool employees, custodians).

Volunteer – Any person, ordinarily an adult member of FPC, who gives of their time and participates in an FPC-sponsored activity.

Adult Helper – An adult, 18 years or older, who occasionally assists with the care of children and youth.

Church-Sponsored Activity – Any and all gatherings that arise from worship, education, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational events. These events include on- and off-campus gatherings.

Child or Youth – Persons under 18 years of age and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons.

Head of Staff - The Senior Pastor of FPC.

Child and Youth Protection Steering Committee (hereinafter referred to as the "Steering Committee") – A Committee appointed by the Session that regularly reviews concerns, provides appropriate feedback, and assists in the implementation of this Child and Youth Protection Policy. The Steering Committee shall consist of FPC program staff, the Director and Chair of the First Presbyterian Preschool, Chair of the Children's Ministry Council, and Chair of the Youth Ministry Council.

Child Abuse – A non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child. Child abuse may include:

Neglect – Occurs when the adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for the child. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, shelter; failure to keep children clean; lack of supervision and withholding medical care.

Physical Abuse – An injury or pattern of injuries that happen to a child that are not accidental. These injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones or death.

Sexual Abuse – Sexual abuse is the sexual assault or exploitation of children. Sexual abuse may consist of numerous acts over a long period of time or a single

incident. Children can be victimized from infancy through adolescence. Typically, the perpetrator keeps the child from disclosing the abuse through intimidation, threats, and rewards.

Emotional Abuse – Chronic and persistent acts by an adult that endanger the mental health or emotional development of a child including rejection, terrorizing, corrupting, constant criticism, mean remarks and insults.

Spiritual Abuse – Using religious references to motivate a child into a particular action or behavior through shame or guilt.

II. SCREENING OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

1. Personal interviews, application forms, personal and professional references, employment records and background checks (both criminal and civil) are required for all employees. Background checks will be done on FPC volunteers. Information gained by these means will be used to determine eligibility to work with children and youth.
2. Interviews, reference checks, employment records, and criminal and civil background checks are to be documented in writing and become confidential property of FPC. These records will not be released to any party except with the written approval of the Head of Staff or Director of Church Administration. These records will be made available to the employee or volunteer, but not a candidate for employment, if a written request is made to the Head of Staff or Director of Church Administration.
3. All current and potential employees and volunteers will be required to complete and sign the Employee or Volunteer Ministry Application, agreeing to follow the policies and procedures of FPC pertaining to child and youth protection. This statement is a supplement to the employment application and is maintained in the employee's personnel file. Volunteer Ministry Application forms shall be maintained by the Director of Church Administration. Each fall, all employees of FPC and all volunteers with youth and children will be required to review the current Child and Youth Protection Policy and sign a Recommitment Acknowledgement.
4. For Employees: Any candidate for employment who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot be employed by FPC without the express written approval of the Personnel Committee, including the Head of Staff and Director of Church Administration. The Personnel Committee, including the Head of Staff and Director of Church Administration, will consider available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the employment of the individual in question. Active

substance abuse or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment with children or youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy or abuse of a minor.

5. For Volunteers: Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot work with children and youth at FPC. Active substance abuse or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor. Any volunteer applicant who is denied the opportunity to serve with children and youth will be informed of the reason(s) for disqualification and how to access information relevant to the decision.

III. SUPERVISION

Two-Adult Policy – At least two adults will supervise all church-sponsored programs and activities involving children and youth whether on- or off-campus. Adults must remain in sight of one another at all times except in emergency situations. Adults in leadership roles are expected to avoid situations where they are alone with children and youth by having leadership teams of at least two adults for all activities. The presence of two or more adults prevents awkward circumstances where child abuse could occur or be alleged, allows shared leadership, and facilitates appropriate discipline. This two-adult policy extends to all overnight and off-campus events. Under no circumstances can one adult alone take or accompany children or youth on an overnight outing.

Adults are to avoid being in a one-child, one-adult situation. If it is necessary for a child to get home after an event, an effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child. This rule can be eased if other adults are close by and can visually observe activities at all times. For example, it is permissible for one adult driver to transport several children and youth in a single vehicle in a convoy of vehicles traveling to or from an event.

When one-on-one interactions between children and youth and employee/volunteers are necessary (*e.g.*, in emergency situations or occasions of pastoral care), care must be taken to conduct the meeting in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Another adult must have knowledge of the employee/volunteer's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.

In situations where it is necessary for an adult to be alone with a child (*i.e.*, emergency situations and pastoral care situations), the adult must notify another adult as soon as possible following the emergency meeting.

Open Door Policy – Doors to rooms in which children and youth are present are to remain open. If noise increases to a level that disturbs other classes, the door may be shut as long as there is clear glass window in the door, nothing impedes vision through the glass, and at least two adults are present. Employees and volunteers are expected to avoid any situation in which they could be alone with children and youth or out of sight of others except in emergency situations. This is to protect children against situations in which abuse may occur, and adults against false accusations of child abuse.

Six Months Policy – Any volunteer in a leadership position with children or youth must have been a member of FPC for at least six months. Any exceptions must be approved by the appropriate program committee for each specific volunteer opportunity. No exceptions will be granted for overnight situations.

Training for Adults – All employees, church officers and volunteers who work with children and youth are required to attend a training session and sign the relevant documents regarding child and youth protection. FPC will offer quarterly training opportunities. This training will include the following.

- The need for a Child Protection Policy
- Definition of child abuse
- Pre-conditions for child sexual abuse to occur
- Definition of inappropriate conduct
- Church policies governing working with children and youth
- Two adult policy
- Open door policy
- Procedures for reporting allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues
- Procedures for responding to allegations and/or concerns regarding child and youth protection issues

Following successful completion of the training and approval of their application, employees and volunteers may be deemed eligible to work with children and youth at FPC. This eligibility must be renewed annually by submittal of a Recommitment Acknowledgement. Training sessions must be renewed every three years.

Code of Conduct

1. FPC employees and volunteers will not verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse children.
2. FPC employees and volunteers will not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
3. FPC employees and volunteers may use physical restraint only in situations necessary to protect the child or others from harm.

4. FPC employees and volunteers will provide proper supervision and exercise sound judgment in providing a safe environment at all times.
5. FPC employees and volunteers will avoid situations during FPC programs where they would be alone with a single child and cannot be observed or monitored by others. As adults supervise children, they should space themselves so that other adults can see them.
6. FPC employees and volunteers are expected to observe the two adult policy and open door policy in their interaction with children and youth at all times except in emergency situations.
7. Restroom supervision:
 - Children will be sent to the restroom in pairs and, whenever possible, with FPC employees and volunteers. FPC employees and volunteers will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom in visual sight of another adult. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for FPC employees and volunteers (*i.e.*, not being alone with a child).
 - If FPC employees and volunteers are assisting younger children, doors to the facility must remain open.
8. FPC employees and volunteers will respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say “no.” Adults will discourage children from touching others in an inappropriate manner.
9. FPC employees and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported to the appropriate program director who will report to the Head of Staff or the Director of Church Administration.
10. FPC employees and volunteers should release children only to the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized in writing by the parent or guardian.
11. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs during church working hours or church-sponsored programs, is prohibited.
12. Smoking is not allowed in the church building. Smoking or use of tobacco during church programs is prohibited.
13. Profanity, inappropriate language or jokes, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents are prohibited.

14. FPC employees and volunteers will not share inappropriate details of their personal life or ask children to share inappropriate details through any form of communication – written, verbal or electronic.
15. FPC employees and adult volunteers may not date program participants under 18 years of age.
16. Because gift-giving can be a form of “buying” silence or loyalty, gift-giving must be done on a group basis and for specific occasions only (*e.g.*, baptism, 3rd grade Bibles, confirmation, graduation). FPC employees and volunteers are not allowed to give gifts to individual children or youth without the prior knowledge and permission of the child’s parent(s) and the appropriate program director.
17. FPC employees and volunteers are required to read, sign and adhere to all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and attend training sessions on the subject as instructed by a supervisor.
18. FPC employees and volunteers are required to report to the Head of Staff or Director of Church Administration any circumstances that under this policy affect their ability to work with children and youth.

IV. REPORTING

The law and this policy make the responsibility for reporting child abuse and suspicions of child abuse very clear. See Sections IV and V of this policy regarding reports of child abuse and the proper response to allegations and/or concerns.

Allegations

1. Every employee and volunteer of FPC is required to report any situation which presents a suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Such report shall be made within no more than 24 hours to the appropriate program director who will report to the Head of Staff and/or Director of Church Administration.
2. Any report of child abuse made by a child about their care by a parent, guardian, youth, adult, or FPC staff employee or volunteer, despite how unlikely such report may seem, must be relayed to the appropriate program director who will report to the Head of Staff and/or the Director of Church Administration. In the event a report of abuse is made against the Head of Staff, the Director of Church Administration and the Chair of the Personnel Committee shall be notified.

3. The Head of Staff or Director of Church Administration shall, as required by law, report the situation to the City of Richmond Department of Social Services or other local authorities for investigation.
4. In addition to the requirements of civil law, allegations against clergy shall conform to applicable procedures set forth in the *Book of Order*.
5. All concerns and reporting shall be kept confidential.

Concerns

From time to time, concerns arise regarding the conduct of our children, youth and adults at FPC, the Children and Youth Ministry Programs, and the adults involved in children and youth ministry that are not clearly abuse-related issues, but impinge upon child and youth protection and safety and require attention and review. Sometimes patterns and trends of a questionable nature may be noticed. This section provides a means to report such issues other than child abuse in a manner that will assure the issues, patterns, or trends are recorded for subsequent review, addressed, and resolved.

Examples of issues reported might include:

- child and youth safety such as transportation issues, behavior issues, safe swimming conduct, etc., during children and youth ministry activities,
 - inappropriate conduct by adults during FPC-sponsored activities such as inappropriate language, dress, conduct, safety, leadership, discipline, substance abuse, etc.,
 - inappropriate conduct by children or youth during FPC-sponsored activities such as inappropriate language, dress, conduct, safety, leadership, discipline, substance abuse, etc.,
 - lack of adherence to the Child and Youth Protection Policy,
 - observations of inappropriate class or group conduct or activities during FPC-sponsored events for children and youth, and
 - potentially inadequate, inappropriate, or unwise leadership of children and youth activities.
1. All adults, youth and children are encouraged to report any issues as soon as possible to the responsible adult leadership or the chair of the appropriate age group Ministry Committee/Council at the time the issue is observed. It is important to bring issues of safety to the attention of responsible adults as soon as possible. Such notification may be verbal.
 2. When it is appropriate or more comfortable, anyone who wishes to have a concern addressed is encouraged to bring the issue to the attention of the appropriate program director or the chair of the appropriate age group Ministry Committee/Council either verbally or in writing. All disciples

are encouraged to be responsible in identifying issues and it is desirable that such concerns bear the name of the originator.

3. Specific concerns related to items 1 and 2 above should be communicated to the Steering Committee in a timely manner. The Steering Committee is available to hear concerns from any member or employee of FPC related to protection and safety concerns of children and youth.

V. RESPONDING

Allegations

In the event of an allegation of child abuse, the following procedures shall be followed.

1. Every allegation shall be taken seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality shall be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegation is substantiated or cleared.
2. The Director of Church Administration will immediately contact the FPC attorney and liability insurance carrier.
3. In consultation with the FPC attorney, the following may be appropriate:
 - Ordinarily, the Head of Staff will notify the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) that their child is the subject of an allegation of child abuse.
 - Ordinarily, the Head of Staff and/or Director of Church Administration will notify the individual against whom the allegation is made.
4. Written documentation relating to the matter, if any, shall be kept in a confidential file.
 - The Head of Staff, Director of Church Administration, and/or the Personnel Committee may complete an internal investigation in addition to that which will be carried out by the authorities, following the required notifications.
 - An individual accused of child abuse may be placed on leave from his/her responsibilities at the discretion of the Head of Staff, Director of Church Administration, and the Personnel Committee. For employees, this may be with or without pay.
 - To protect the child or youth from further possible abuse or harassment, FPC will notify the accused individual in writing that s/he shall not have access to the alleged victim and other children and youth in ministries sponsored by FPC.

- In the event of an unsubstantiated allegation, the Head of Staff or Director of Church Administration will make a determination as to whether the individual will be allowed to return to work as an employee or volunteer at FPC. They will consider the individual's likely effectiveness in working with children/youth following an unsubstantiated allegation and investigation of child abuse. An employee has the right to appeal the decision to the Personnel Committee. A volunteer has the right to appeal the decision to the Clerk of Session who will address the situation with the Session in an appropriate and timely manner.
5. FPC employees and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully with the investigation authorities, such as the Child Protective Services unit of the Department of Social Services, with guidance from the FPC attorney.
 6. All employees and volunteers will refer any inquiries regarding the situation to the Head of Staff and/or chair of the Personnel Committee. The Head of Staff, or his/her designee, shall be the only person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information.
 7. All FPC employees and volunteers who become aware of accusations of child abuse shall avoid discussing or expressing any opinion with regard to the allegations.

Concerns

1. The Steering Committee shall evaluate any report of a concern related to child and youth protection and safety, even if it does not fall under the legal definition of abuse or its suspicion, to assure proper follow-up on the issue.
2. All reported concerns shall be documented and maintained by the Steering Committee for long-term review of notable trends or patterns of unacceptable activity.
3. Over a longer term, the file of written concerns shall be reviewed in summary form by the Steering Committee.

VI. ADDRESSING KNOWN OFFENDERS WHO ARE MEMBERS

At First Presbyterian Church, we seek to live in covenant with God and with one another and to be a redemptive community to all who are members. We also acknowledge that redemptive action and responsible action can, at times, be in tension or even in seeming opposition. We embrace this fact as a natural part of seeking to be the church in the world. We adopt these procedures for ministering to those among us who

are known offenders of children and youth while maintaining our focus on protecting the children and youth of our church.

1. Known offenders are required to make their status and terms of probation, if any, known to the Head of Staff.
2. The Steering Committee shall establish appropriate boundaries, in writing, governing the life of the offender within the church, including areas on campus where s/he may go unaccompanied. Steering Committee members will receive training in protection of children and youth and in dealing with known offenders. No decisions made by the Steering Committee will conflict with any provisions of the FPC Child and Youth Protection Policy.
3. The known offender will give written acknowledgement and acceptance of FPC's Child and Youth Protection Policy and of the boundaries imposed.
4. At no time is a known offender to be assigned to ministries with children and youth.
5. At no time is a known offender to congregate with children and youth.
6. At no time is a known offender allowed in areas of the church or grounds dedicated to children or youth or in use primarily by children or youth.
7. As circumstances warrant, the Head of Staff may identify a known offender to church employees and volunteers whose ministries should be informed.
8. Known offenders will receive the normal pastoral care afforded any member.
9. Should a known offender disregard the terms established in this policy, or should a known offender disregard any boundaries or conditions set by the Head of Staff and the Steering Committee, the violation will be handled through the Rules of Discipline in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

* * * END OF POLICY * * *