

First Presbyterian Church, Sioux Falls, SD
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PROTECTION POLICY

August 17, 2016

"Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

~ Mark 10:13-16

Policy Purpose

First Presbyterian Church ("FPC") is committed to providing a church environment that is safe for children and that will protect them from abuse when they are involved in church-related activities. FPC adopts these policies and procedures not only to maximize safety and prevent child abuse from occurring within its church community, but also to guide volunteers and employees and protect them from unwarranted allegations of child abuse. This policy applies to the Children's Ministry programs at FPC for children from birth through fifth grade.

Terms and Definitions

Child abuse - An act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he or she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens harm to a child's physical or mental health or welfare. Child abuse includes, but is not limited to:

Neglect of Basic Needs –Denial of food, water, cleanliness, clothing, and sleep are not appropriate means of discipline.

Physical Abuse - Any unreasonable physical force applied by an adult or older youth in a position of care or authority to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Unreasonable physical force includes, but is not limited to, hitting, spanking, shaking, and shoving.

Sexual Abuse – Any sexual contact or sexual interaction between a child (under the age of eighteen years) and an adult; any use of a child for the sexual stimulation of an adult, a third person, or the child; any risqué jokes, innuendo, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs and kisses, and sexually suggestive pictures between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult. Even if a child, out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse.

Emotional or Verbal Abuse - Inappropriately belittling, hateful or angry words and/or actions directed toward a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Discipline by humiliation is also emotional abuse.

Spiritual Abuse- Using religious references to shame a child into a particular action or behavior.

Employee – Any person who works for salary or wages at FPC (including Kingdom Kids).

Volunteer – Any person not employed by FPC who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children's activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, Sunday School, Nursery, Childcare, Kid's Club, Kingdom Kids, Kids Choirs, Music Camp, and Vacation Bible School.

Leader – An adult designated by FPC to have responsibility for children. It is suggested that leaders be a minimum of four years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

Church-Sponsored Activity - Includes any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational event generated or organized by FPC, whether on-campus or off-campus.

Volunteer Ministry – Includes any church-sponsored activity engaged in by a volunteer.

Screening

Staff: Background Requirements

Applicants for employment will follow the policy of the FPC employment manual.

Volunteers: Background Requirements

Volunteers working with children in any volunteer ministry will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

- Each volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, will be required to complete a *Children's Ministry Volunteer Application* which will include:
 - information regarding prior convictions for crimes;
 - a statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct;
 - and an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FPC Children's Ministry Protection Policy, understands the policy, and will comply with its terms.
- FPC will obtain a background check for each volunteer. Prior to beginning any volunteer role, each volunteer will be required to complete the *Consent to Perform Criminal History Background Check Form*. Every three to five years FPC will perform national criminal database searches and national sex offender registry searches on volunteers for whom an initial background check has been completed. Any individual who has lived outside South Dakota in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court searches.
- Each volunteer will be provided orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding related to an allegation of child abuse or neglect MAY NOT work with children at FPC. Refusal to complete the Volunteer Application process or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor. The Director of Children's Ministry shall have discretion to disqualify an individual from volunteer service for past convictions of other related offenses.

General Procedures

Supervision: Two-Leader/Open-Door Policy

Whenever possible, any adult who is present at a church-sponsored activity for children should be accompanied by another adult. Whenever possible, FPC employees and volunteers should not, during an FPC program, be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others.

In order to avoid situations where an individual is alone in a room with children, children's activities should be supervised by at least two adult leaders. Whenever possible, these adults should be unrelated. The presence of two leaders is to protect children against situations in which abuse might occur, and to protect leaders against false allegations of abuse or neglect.

Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other church volunteers.

In the event that two leaders cannot be present in the room, such that one leader is alone in a room with one or more children, a door or half-door from the room should be left open. The leader should try not position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing in the hallway cannot see him or her.

Each classroom for children ideally should have a door with an observation window. If it does not, and two leaders are not present in the room, then the door should remain open.

Ratios

The recommended adult/volunteer-to-child ratio, based on best practices, is 1:6. Gender balance is recommended.

Parental/Guardian Consent

Children must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in church-sponsored activities that involve travel away from the church's physical facilities.

"Six Month" Rule for Volunteers

A volunteer must be a member of FPC, or have regularly attended FPC, for six months before working with children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present. The Children's Ministry Team or the Director of Children's Ministry shall have the authority to waive this six-month, where appropriate.

Policy Review

The provisions of this Policy shall be reviewed annually by the Children's Ministry Team.

Code of Conduct

1. Staff and volunteers are required to adhere to the FPC Child Protection Policy guidelines in all their interactions with children.
2. Staff and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
3. Physical restraint should be used only in situations necessary to protect the child, other children, or staff from harm.
4. While supervising children participating in FPC programs, staff and volunteers should know where participants are at all times.
5. Restroom supervision: Whenever possible, volunteers should ensure any restroom used is not occupied by any suspicious or unknown individual before allowing children to use the facilities. Whenever possible, send children in pairs with a volunteer. The staff or volunteer should stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff or volunteer (not being alone with a child). Staff and volunteers should strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible.
6. Diapering and potty training should be done primarily by staff members/paid caregivers. Volunteers may be asked to help in certain situations and should follow posted nursery guidelines when performing diapering.
7. Staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Staff and volunteers are required to report any concerns or suspicions regarding their observations of any individual's interaction with a child or any signs of injury and possible child abuse.
8. Staff and volunteers are discouraged from being alone with children.
9. Volunteers should release children only to the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian.
10. Staff and volunteers should not release children to any adult or family member, including older siblings, other than the child's parent/guardian unless prior verbal permission has been obtained from the parent.
11. Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while working or volunteering with children is prohibited.
12. Being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working or volunteering with children is prohibited.
13. Possessing or using concealed weapons or firearms while working or volunteering with children is prohibited.
14. Smoking or use of tobacco *in the presence of* children, youth, or parents while working or volunteering is prohibited.
15. Profanity, inappropriate jokes and media, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth, or parents are prohibited.
16. Staff and volunteers will be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children.
17. Staff and volunteer adult and youth leaders shall wear appropriate dress when volunteering with children.

18. Movies used in all church settings shall meet the voluntary movie rating system guidelines established by the Motion Picture Association of America for age-appropriate content.
19. Staff and volunteers may not date or be romantically involved with program participants.
20. Staff and volunteers are required to read, sign, and adhere to all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and will attend training sessions on the subject.
21. If it is necessary for an adult to take a child home after an event, an effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child. All staff and volunteers shall abide by safe driving laws when transporting children.

Reporting

Reporting Incidents

Any individual who observes or becomes concerned for the safety or welfare of a child involved in a church-sponsored activity must complete, as soon as possible, a *Notice of Concern Report Form* and submit it to either (1) the staff member in charge of the program at which the concern arose, (2) the Director of Children's Ministry, or (3) the Head of Staff. A *Notice of Concern Report Form* is included in Appendix B of this policy and is also available in the church office and on the FPC website. Because of the importance of proper reporting, pastors, employees, Session members, and persons highly visible to church members and visitors should understand the terms of the policy and be ready to help direct any such reports or allegations to the appropriate persons.

Investigation

Upon receipt of a Notice of Concern, the staff member receiving the Notice of Concern shall ensure that the Head of Staff and the Business Manager also receive the Notice of Concern. The Head of Staff and the Business Manager shall, if necessary, (1) notify appropriate authorities or agencies, and (2) commence an appropriate investigation using appropriate procedures. The process will include documenting all steps undertaken in handling the matter.

Confidentiality

All investigations shall be conducted in as confidential a manner as is compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.

Parental Notification

If an incident has occurred on church property or during a church-sponsored event, the parents of any minor involved in any allegation of abuse shall be immediately notified.

Potential Responses

Upon any report of potential or alleged child abuse by an employee or volunteer of FPC, any individual accused of such conduct may be temporarily relieved of any duties involving youth or children pending an appropriate investigation.

Appendix A, Indications of Abuse

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY --INDICATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

What is an “abused, neglected, or dependent child”?

The definition of an abused, neglected, or dependent child is very broad. It includes any child under eighteen whose parents or other person responsible for his care:

- Inflicts or allows to be inflicted, or creates a substantial risk of serious physical injury not by accident;
- Creates or allows to be created serious emotional damage;
- Uses or allows to be used cruel or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify behavior;
- Neglects or refuses to provide care, supervision, or discipline necessary for his health;
- Abandons such child or allows such child to live in an environment injurious to the child’s welfare;
- Is unable to provide for care or supervision and lacks an appropriate child care alternative; or
- Commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law.

Potential indicators of sexual abuse

A **combination** or **pattern** of indicators may indicate the possibility of sexual abuse. Potential indicators include:

- Child does not want to go to a certain place or be around a particular person
- Child shows sexual knowledge or behavior beyond that expected for his or her age
- Child is overly affectionate and seems seductive with peers and adults
- Child has recurring genital infections or pain in the genital area
- Child has difficulty in walking or sitting
- Child has torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Child shows reluctance to change clothes
- Child is withdrawn, chronically depressed, or displays infantile behavior
- Child has exceptionally poor peer relationships
- Child is threatened by physical contact
- Child has unexplained money or “gifts”

Appendix B, Forms

- *Volunteer Application for Children’s Ministry Programs*
- *Consent to Perform Criminal History Background Check*
- *Notice of Concern for Child*