

Child and Youth Protection Policy

First Presbyterian Church Greensboro, NC

Revised October 2020

A Vision for Children and the Church

Adopted by the 205th General Assembly, 1993

Because we affirm that all children are a gift of God, created by God and created good;
all children are a gift to the whole of the human community;
all children have a real faith, and gifts for ministry;
all children have the right to be children;
and all children are not just tomorrow, they are today.

Because we believe that all children depend upon adults for safety and security in a world that does not always value children;
all children are affected first and most deeply by those things that work against health and wholeness;
where there is disease, children sicken and die;
where there is homelessness, children sleep on the streets and in other dangerous places;
where there is war, children are frightened and without a safe place;
where their air and water are polluted, children feel the effect in their bodies and in their futures;
where there is shame, children's spirits are wounded.

Therefore we hope for a world where all children can find a safe place;
where all ages, races, genders, creeds, and abilities are recognized, valued, and celebrated;
where all adults hear the voices of children and speak with as well as for them;
where all children have "first call" on the world's resources and first place in the minds and hearts of the world's adults.

Because Jesus welcomed children and encouraged us to welcome them in his name;
Jesus lifted up a child as an example of what the realm of God is like;

Therefore we hope for a church where we take seriously our baptismal vow to nurture all children committed to our care;
where we bring good news to all those places where children are in need;
where adults and children alike share in ministry.

We covenant to act so that this vision may be made real for all children, now and in times to come.

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“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 a safe place for children and youth; an environment that will protect them from any 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 and protect volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

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. Types of abuse may include physical abuse, including physical injury or threat of injury; physical neglect, such as failure to provide necessary care to a child; sexual abuse; mental abuse or neglect; emotional abuse; and spiritual abuse. Child abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- ***Neglect of Basic Needs*** - A form of abuse. Denial of food, water, cleanliness, clothing, and sleep are not appropriate means of discipline.
- ***Physical Abuse*** - Any physical force applied by an adult or older youth in a position of care or authority to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Physical force (hitting, spanking, shaking, shoving, etc.) is not to be used by leaders in our programs.
- ***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 simulation of an adult, a third person, or the child; any risqué jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome casual touch, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs and kisses, and sexually suggestive pictures between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult. Including electronic communication and/or solicitation. Even if a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse.
- ***Emotional 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 or by guilt to motivate a child into a particular action or behavior.

Employee – Any person who works for salary or wages at First Presbyterian Church (FPC) (including, but not limited to FPC Weekday Preschool School employees and nursery staff.)

Volunteer – Any person not employed by FPC who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children and youth activities, or is in the presence of children or youth. These activities include, but are not limited to, Church School, Nursery, Childcare, FPC youth, Children & Youth Choirs, Summer Camps & Conferences, Children & Youth mission trips, Scouting, Confirmation Mentors, and Weekday Preschool.

Leader – An adult designated by FPC or by a sponsoring organization to have responsibility for children and/or youth. The adult must be a minimum of 18 years of age. Leaders of overnight trips must be at least 21 years of age. 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.

Child or Youth – Any person under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include legally incompetent persons aged 18 or over.

Screening

Staff: Background Requirements

Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at FPC will be required to provide, complete or undergo the following:

1. An Employment and Volunteer Ministry Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
2. A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
3. A reference check covering, where possible, the two immediate past employers, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.
4. Prior to hiring an applicant, FPC will obtain a criminal record report for that individual. Every three years, FPC will perform national criminal database searches and national sex offender registry searches on existing employees, and each employee shall be required to execute any documents that FPC might request for such purpose. Any individual who has lived outside North Carolina in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court search.
5. Upon being hired, each new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FPC Child & Youth Protection Policy, understands it and will comply with its terms.
6. Each new employee MUST complete 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 employment who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse or neglect cannot be employed by FPC. Conviction for any of the following could disqualify an individual from employment: drug-related behavior, pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy or abuse of a minor

Screening

Volunteers: Background Requirements

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

1. An Employment and Volunteer Ministry Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
2. A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
3. Prior to becoming a volunteer, FPC will obtain a background check for that individual. Every three years, FPC will perform national criminal database searches and national sex offender registry searches on existing volunteers and each volunteer shall be required to execute any documents that FPC might request for such purpose. Any individual who has lived outside North Carolina in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court search.
4. Each new volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FPC Child & Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
5. Each new 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 and youth at First Presbyterian Church. Refusal to complete the Volunteer Application process or a conviction for any of the following will disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: drug-related activity, pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor.

Leaders of other groups of children or youth (e.g., Girl Scout and Boy Scout leaders) who use FPC's facilities will also be required to read the Policy, sign the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement, and complete a training session.

General Procedures

Supervision: Two-Leader/Open-Door Policy

Whenever possible, any adult who is present in a church sponsored activity for children or youth should be accompanied by another unrelated adult. 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 and youth activities should be supervised by at least two unrelated adult leaders. The presence of two leaders is to protect children and youth 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 or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom.

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 or youth, a door or half-door from the room **MUST** be left open. The leader should 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 and youth should ideally have a door with an observation window or a half-door, such that the upper half may be kept open. If it does not, and two leaders are not present in the room, then the door must remain open at all times.

Furthermore, at any counseling session with children or youth, the door or half-door of the room used must remain open for the entire session. The session should be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

In addition, in any circumstance that requires an employee or volunteer to engage in text messages, social media messages, or digital conferencing with a child, youth, or group of children/youths, at least one other unrelated adult should be included in the messaging group.

Ratios

We will follow the current best practice ratio recommendations based on the age of children and the activities in which children are participating. Teacher/caregiver-to-child ratios in schools operating on our premises are mandated by state child care laws.

Parental/Guardian Consent

Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in church or school sponsored activities or programs that involve travel away from the church's or schools' 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 youth or children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present. The Director of the Weekday Preschool or the Director of Christian Formation shall have the authority to waive this six-month rule where appropriate.

Policy Review

The provisions of this Policy shall be reviewed periodically by the Christian Formation staff. Any proposed changes to the Policy will be brought to the attention of the Human Resources Committee, the Children's Education Committee, and the Youth Committee for input before becoming final. The Christian Formation Committee(s) and/or staff shall present any major changes to the Session.

Code of Conduct

- All staff and volunteers are required to adhere to the FPC Child Protection Policy guidelines in all their interactions with children and youth.
- Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back/high fives), or physical care-taking (changing diapers, etc.) are appropriate in our community of faith. However, those physical expressions of affection should not be excessive or forced and adults should ALWAYS respect a child's right to reject physical touch that makes them feel uncomfortable and shall not disregard a child's right to say no.
- Neither staff nor volunteers may use physical discipline (such as spanking) or withhold necessities (such as food) as a means of discipline. Physical restraint may only be used by trained adults when necessary to protect a child, other children, or staff/volunteers from harm.
- Restroom Supervision: When possible, staff/volunteers will make sure any restroom used is not occupied by any suspicious or unknown individual before allowing children and youth to use the facilities. The staff or volunteer will 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 shall strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible. Diapering and potty training should be handled by FPC staff or a child's parents whenever possible. If not possible, a volunteer will abide by posted guidelines & health safety protocol.
- While supervising children and youth participating in FPC programs, staff and volunteers should know where participants are at all times.
- Staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported according to the FPC Child Protection Policy and in accordance with NC state law.
- Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
- Possessing or using concealed weapons or firearms while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
- Smoking, vaping, or use of tobacco in the presence of children, youth, or parents while working or volunteering is prohibited.
- Profanity, inappropriate jokes and media, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth, or parents are prohibited.
- Staff and volunteers will not release children/youth to any unauthorized person including but not limited to grandparents, older siblings, and/or other church members, unless prior permission has been obtained from the parent/legal guardian.
- Staff and volunteer adult and youth leaders shall wear appropriate dress when volunteering with children and/or youth. Clothes should not display inappropriate pictures or language (such as profanity or racial slurs).
- Staff and volunteers may not date or be romantically involved with program participants or church members who are younger than 18 years of age.

- If a staff member or volunteer has concerns about the way another adult is interacting with or behaving around children or youth, that concern should be reported immediately to appropriate staff leadership.
- In the event that a one-on-one child/youth to adult scenario arises unexpectedly, parent permission should be obtained in writing or by phone when possible. Safe driving guidelines should be followed as specified in this policy.

Reporting

Reporting Incidents

Any individual who observes or becomes aware of any alleged or potential incident of child abuse must, as soon as possible, report the matter to the staff member in charge of the program, the Director of Christian Education, or the Executive Pastor.

Investigation

Upon receipt of a report or allegation of child abuse at FPC, the Director of Christian Education and/or the Executive or Senior Pastor shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and appropriate procedures are followed as required by North Carolina law. The process will include documenting all steps undertaken in handling the investigation, and a Report of Suspected Child Abuse form shall be completed.

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.

Off-Site Trips

Permission Forms

Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two-adult rule must be followed throughout the trip with any foreseeable exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances may one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.

Ratios

The required adult to child/youth ratio for chaperones for any ministry with children or youth shall be 1:6. Gender balance is preferred. For overnight trips, an adult to child/youth ratio for chaperones of 1:4 is preferred, although 1:6 is permissible. Gender balance is required.

Rooming Arrangements

- Rooming arrangements should provide for children and youth of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together.
- When possible, adults' rooms shall be next to youth rooms and youth may be checked on during the night.
- Adults should not share rooms with children. As an exception, an individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child).
- In situations where one large sleeping area is provided, two adults of the same sex shall accompany children or youth of the same sex.

Medical

Each child, youth, adult volunteer, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Each minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.

Whenever possible, all activities with children and youth shall have a staff or volunteer adult leader with current certification in first aid/CPR training.

Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-site events. These forms will be kept on the event site for the duration of the event.

First Aid supplies will be available on the event site. All workers will be informed of the location of First Aid supplies/equipment and shall have access to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.

A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency, or injury.

Driving Rules/Travel

As recommended by our church insurance company, all drivers of children and youth should be over 21 and under 65. In situations where this is not possible, parent permission shall be obtained before the trip and vehicles shall travel together.

When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-leader rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event and two leaders are not available for every vehicle, keeping the other vehicle in sight at regular intervals is an acceptable substitution for the two-leader rule.

Travel arrangements for off-campus events will be coordinated through the church.

All adult drivers of children and youth will be screened through a driving history search. A valid driver's license will be required.

All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting children and obtaining supplies.

Seat belts will be provided and required for all passengers.

Social Media/Digital Policy

FPC's Child Protection Policy applies to digital ministry, including social media accounts, texting, digital conferencing platforms (such as Zoom), and email, just as it does to in-person interactions. Therefore:

- Any and all digital private communication between a child/youth and an adult staff or volunteer must include two unrelated adults.
- Any online or texting groups must include at least two unrelated adults AND at least two unrelated children/youth.
- In social media posts (including but not limited to Facebook & Instagram) children/youth should NOT be tagged or identified by name.
- Parental consent must be obtained in writing before images of children/youth are posted on FPC social media accounts.
- Parental consent must also be obtained if children will be identified in livestreamed worship services or other livestreamed events, such as (but not limited to) baptisms.
- FPC staff and ministry directors should monitor text and social media groups for inappropriate content. Inappropriate content will be removed and individuals who author such content may be removed from groups at the discretion of the group administrator.
- If using a device while in the presence of children/youth, adults should be aware of the content on the device, making sure that children/youth in close proximity are not exposed to inappropriate images, language, or other inappropriate content.
- Pictures of children/youth taken during church sponsored events should NOT be posted on personal social media accounts as the photo consent form grants consent for FPC social media accounts ONLY.

- Adults, whether staff or volunteers, who learn of anything through social media/texting that may indicate a child/youth has been abused, neglected, or exploited must report that information immediately to the appropriate staff, such as the Director of Christian Education or Executive or Senior Pastor.

Outside Groups

All leaders of non-FPC sponsored groups and events that use FPC facilities and supervise children and youth are expected to complete FPC Child Protection Training and adhere to these policies. Upon completion of training, the leaders must sign the Outside Group Leaders Release Form to acknowledge their training and to confirm their agreement to follow the policy. This includes, but is not limited to, groups such as: Boy/Girl Scouts, sports groups, as well as outreach groups, groups renting church space, and visiting youth groups. 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 are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.

Building Safety and Emergency Protocol

As part of an extensive Safety & Security Plan executed by the FPC Property Committee, each room in all FPC buildings is equipped with Emergency Information Cards located by the door of each room/gathering space. These cards are location-specific and give information on handling emergency situations including (but not limited to) fire, inclement weather, missing persons, armed intruders, and injury/accident. When supervising children or youth, adult leaders should familiarize themselves with the cards and emergency procedures specific to their location so they are prepared to act swiftly and calmly should the need arise.

AED devices are located in the Mullin Life Center, the Sanctuary, and with the receptionist. Fire extinguishers are located throughout the buildings as required by fire safety code. Tornado shelter areas are indicated by signs. "Safe Space" signs indicate rooms that can be locked from the inside if persons need to shelter in place.

Any concerns regarding FPC property or safety should be communicated to the Director of Property.

Appendix A, Indications of Abuse

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHILD and YOUTH 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.

N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7B-101.

How can children be at risk in a “safe” place like church?

There may be several reasons children can be at risk even in “safe” places like a church. The following factors may contribute to the risk in a church setting:

- Ready access to children
- Institutional surprise: “We’re good people”
- Many churches have historically failed to prosecute
- Fewer external barriers than other youth-serving organizations
- Challenges coordinating child protection strategies

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”

For more information, please visit:

Prevent Child Abuse America at www.preventchildabuse.org

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina at www.preventchildabusenc.org