

Child and Youth Protection Policy

First Presbyterian Church

Pitman, New Jersey

Approved by Session – July 10, 2023

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Policy Statement and Purpose

As God who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.

Tend the flock of God that is in your charge not under compulsion but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, be examples to the flock.

And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another for God opposed the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Disciple yourselves; keep alert. You know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. Let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

1 Peter 1:15, 5:2, 5:5b; James 3:1; Romans 13:13-14 NRSV

As a caring Christian community, we at First Presbyterian Church (FPC), Pitman, New Jersey, are committed to providing a safe, nurturing environment for all children and youth, and to 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 false 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 18 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, 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. 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 FPC.

Volunteer – Any person not employed by FPC who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children and youth activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, Sunday School, Nursery, Childcare, [Child and] [ins child and] Youth programs, Children's Choirs, Summer Camps and Conferences, Children and Youth mission trips, and Confirmation Mentors.

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, child care, 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 – Persons under 18 years old and considered a minor under the law. This term shall also include individuals over the age of 18 with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Screening

Staff: Background Requirements

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

- An Employment Application, which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
- 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.
- Prior to hiring an applicant, FPC will obtain a criminal record report for that individual. Every three years, FPC will perform N.J. State Police Criminal Record searches and 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 New Jersey in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court search.
- Upon being hired, each new employee are required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FPC Child and Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
- Each new employee 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 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 will automatically disqualify an individual from employment: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor. All documents related to background checks are considered confidential and will be securely maintained in the church office, disposed of securely, and overseen by the designated Personnel Trustee.

Volunteers: Background Requirements

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

- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; and
- Prior to becoming a volunteer, volunteers will provide needed information and permission for a background check. FPC will obtain a background check for that individual. Every three years, FPC will perform N.J. State Police Criminal Record 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 New Jersey in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court search.
- Each new volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, are required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FPC Child and Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.

- 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.

Volunteers will be approved by the Christian Education Committee. An applicant may work as a provisional volunteer under the direction of an employee or member volunteer pending result of the background check and approval by the Christian Education Committee. 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 FPC. Refusal to complete the volunteering process, or a conviction for any of the following, will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor. All documents related to background checks are considered confidential and will be securely maintained in the church office, disposed of securely, and overseen by the designated Personnel Trustee.

Leaders of outside groups of children or youth who use FPC's facilities will also be required to read the Policy and sign the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement.

General Procedures

Supervision: Two-Leader/Open-Door Policy

FPC employees and volunteers must make every effort to not be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others during an FPC program or event. 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. No windows may ever be blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom. If the room does not have an observation window, the door must remain open at all times. All children's and youth activities should be supervised by at least two adult leaders. Whenever possible, these adults should be unrelated. The presence of two leaders protects children and youth from situations where abuse might occur, and protects leaders from false allegations of abuse or neglect. When two leaders cannot be present, the door or half-door must remain open at all times and the solo leader should not position themselves in the room where other adults passing in the hallway or in the area cannot see him or her. 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 present and/or nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. 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.

Parental/Guardian Consent

Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission to participate in church sponsored activities or programs that involve travel away from the church physical property.

Sunday School/Church Activity Release Policy

All children who have completed sixth grade may be released from Sunday School and youth activities without direct adult or volunteer supervision within the church building. Parents have the option to receive custody of their children from Sunday School or youth activities, if that is their preference. Children who have not completed sixth grade will only be released to a parent, guardian, or designated custodian, unless a signed waiver has been received by the Sunday School Superintendent.

“Six Month” Rule for Volunteers

A volunteer must be a member of FPC, or have regularly attended worship or congregational activities for a period of six months, before being allowed to work with youth or children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present.

Administration

The Child and Youth Protection Policy shall be administered by the Christian Education Committee.

Notice

This Child and Youth Protection Policy shall be posted in a commonly trafficked area in the church building and maintained on the church website. Additionally, a copy shall be included once a year in the Annual Report. The policy will be announced annually during church services at the start of the Sunday School year in September.

Policy Review

The Policy shall be reviewed annually by the Christian Education Committee, with any proposed changes submitted to the Christian Education Committee for input. Proposed changes must be approved by the Session.

Code of Conduct

- Staff and volunteers are required to adhere to the FPC Child and Youth Protection Policy guidelines in all their interactions with children and youth.
- Staff and volunteers will respect children’s rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or that disregard their right to say no.
- Staff and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
- While supervising children and youth participating in FPC programs, staff and volunteers should know where participants are at all times.
- Restroom supervision: Children under the age of 10 years should be accompanied by an adult or volunteer whenever possible. The staff or volunteer will monitor the door while children are using the restroom. Staff and volunteers shall strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible.

- 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 and Youth Protection Policy (see Reporting below).
- Staff and volunteers are discouraged from being alone with children or youth without parental permission.
- Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or the use of tobacco products while working or volunteering with children or youth, is prohibited.
- 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.
- 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 be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children and youth.
- Staff and volunteer adult and youth leaders shall wear appropriate dress when volunteering with children and/or youth.
- Movies used in all church settings shall be age appropriate. If any media used is determined to not be age appropriate, the leader will obtain prior consent from parents or guardians.
- Staff and volunteers may not date or be romantically involved with program participants or church members who are younger than 18 years of age.
- Staff and volunteers are required to report any concerns or suspicions regarding their observations of any individual's interaction with a child. Except for concerns related to alleged or potential abuse, which require mandated specific immediate reports (see Reporting below), these concerns may be reported to the individual. If the concerns are not alleviated by a change in the individual's behavior, a second report must be made to the Pastor.
- If it is necessary for an adult to take a child or youth home after an event, all staff and volunteers shall abide by safe driving laws when transporting children or youth.
- In the event where a one-on-one child/youth to adult scenario arises, such as unexpected transportation needs, confirmation mentoring, or a similar situation, written or telephoned parental permission should be provided when possible. It is preferred to have mentors and confirmands meet in pairs and/or public places.

Parental Notification

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

Response to Allegations

Upon the receipt of any report of potential or alleged child abuse by an employee or volunteer of FPC occurs, the individual accused of such conduct will be temporarily

relieved of any duties involving youth or children pending an appropriate investigation. An allegation of abuse/misconduct would result in suspension with pay of the employee, or suspension of volunteer, pending results of investigation. If the investigation reveals no abuse or misconduct, the person accused will be reinstated in good standing. An employee/volunteer will be immediately terminated if the investigation reveals abuse or misconduct. An employee may appeal to the Session which, after review, will make a final, binding decision. Church officials shall follow procedures outlined in the Principles of Church Discipline, D-10.0000 et seq. (Book of Order).

Off-Site Trips and Events

Permission Forms

Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms are required prior to all trips for youth and children. 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 will one adult be allowed to be alone when taking, transporting or accompanying minors on an overnight outing.

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.
- Ordinarily, adults should not share rooms with children. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by a parent or guardian (in such cases as Intergenerational Mission Trips).
- 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 for trips away from the church building and grounds. 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 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

- It is preferred that all drivers of children and youth be over 21 years of age.
- 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.
- A valid driver's license and proof of insurance is required for all drivers.
- All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting children and/or obtaining supplies.
- Seat belts will be worn by all vehicle occupants.

Outside Groups

All leaders of non-FPC sponsored groups and events that use FPC facilities and supervise children and youth must 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. Given the nature of the outside groups that use FPC facilities, FPC will not be responsible to 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 scheduled training classes and are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.

Reporting

- Any individual having a reasonable suspicion or knowledge that abuse has occurred, is legally obligated to report it immediately.
 - "In accordance with N.J.S.A. 9:6-8. 10, 8. 14 and 2C: 43-3 and 8, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child may have been subjected to abuse or neglect is legally required to report any and all information regarding the incident to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P). Failure to report is a disorderly person's offense. A person convicted of a disorderly person offense may be fined up to \$1,000 and may be sentenced to six months in jail."
 - "In accordance with N.J.S.A. 9: 6-8.13, anyone acting pursuant to this Act in making a report in good faith shall have immunity from any liability, civil or criminal, that might otherwise be incurred or imposed.

Any such person shall have the same immunity with respect to testimony given in any judicial proceeding resulting from such report.”

- The individual reporting shall immediately report the suspicion to the pastor or the clerk of session, in addition to reporting the incident to DCP&P. If the alleged offender is an employee, the report shall be made to the pastor *and* Clerk of Session. If alleged offender is the pastor, a report must be made to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery For Southern New Jersey.
- In each case of alleged child abuse, the pastor or clerk of session and such persons designated by the session shall contact and involve First Presbyterian Church’s liability carrier and verify that DCP&P has been notified and that proper documentation of the allegations and the proceedings is maintained.
- The pastor and/or clerk of session or such persons designated by the session shall be responsible for maintaining contact with DCP&P and with all individuals and/or families involved. Additionally, the pastor or the clerk of session or such other persons designated by the session shall speak on behalf of the session in the event an allegation that requires speaking to the congregation/community.

How to Report Suspected Incidents of Abuse

The following is taken from www.preventchildabusenj.org

Who is responsible for reporting suspected child abuse in New Jersey?

In New Jersey, ANY person having reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected has a legal responsibility to report it to the Division of Child Protection & Permanency (DCP&P). A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously. Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse or neglect according to the law or to comply with the provisions of the law is a disorderly person and subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 or up to six months imprisonment, or both.

How do I report child abuse in New Jersey?

Call New Jersey’s Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 1-877-NJ ABUSE (652-2873). (TTY/TDD use 1-800-835-5510). They are available and will respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If a child is in immediate danger, you should call 911.

Do callers have immunity from civil or criminal liability?

Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of child abuse or neglect or testifies in a child abuse hearing resulting from such a report is immune from any criminal or civil liability as a result of such action. Calls can be placed to the hotline anonymously.

What happens when I call the Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline?

The hotline is answered by trained caseworkers who know how to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect. This caseworker may ask you about:

Who: The child and parent/caregiver’s name, age and address and the name of the alleged perpetrator and that person’s relationship to the child.

What: Type and frequency of alleged abuse/neglect, current or previous injuries to the child and what caused you to become concerned.

When: When the alleged abuse/neglect occurred and when you learned of it.

Where: Where the incident occurred, where the child is now and whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.

How: How urgent the need is for intervention and whether there is a likelihood of imminent danger for the child.

What happens after I make the call?

When a report indicates that a child may be at risk, the Division of Child Protection & Permanency will promptly investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours of receipt of the report.

What if I tell Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey about my concerns?

While Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey values the health and safety of children — we, like all N.J. citizens, are legally required to forward concerns about suspected abuse to the Division of Child Protection & Permanency. They are the only investigative and protective bodies of the State of NJ responsible for handling them.

We all care about children. We urge you to report any concern about the welfare of a child to DCP&P, the legal authorities responsible for investigating suspected situations of abuse.

You should call 1-877-NJ-ABUSE and let them know the details of your concern. They will take the matter seriously and gather information that is in the best interest of the child.

Appendix A:

Indications of Abuse

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.

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 New Jersey at www.preventchildabusenj.org

Appendix B:

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.