

Child and Youth Protection Policy

As Scripture tells us, “Children are a heritage from the Lord.” Recognizing that nurturing and protecting children and young people is paramount. First Presbyterian Church (FPC) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices of this directive, FPC affirms our commitment to protect the children and youth in our care from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while at the same time protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

This policy is developed so that we comply with the PCUSA Book of Order: “All churches shall adopt and implement a child protection policy.” These guidelines do not apply to programs, events, activities or ministries that are sponsored by sessions or congregations of the Presbytery, as each session must be guided by its own child protection policy required under the Book of Order (G-3.0106).

This policy applies to meetings, events or activities that are explicitly coordinated by the staff of the FPC` committees when such events include or involve children or youth under the age of 18, as the focus of the event or in a separate childcare setting during an adult event. Hereafter in the policy these meetings, events, or activities are known as “event(s)”.

The right to revoke these privileges at any time is retained. If any new information arises about an individual that casts suspicion or violates these policies, the approval will be revoked or suspended immediately.

First Presbyterian Church does not permit or allow sexual abuse or molestation to occur in the workplace or at any activity sponsored by or related to it. In order to make this ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY clear to all employees (volunteer and staff), we have adopted mandatory procedures that all employees,volunteers, family members, and victims must follow when they learn of, witness, or suspect sexual abuse or molestation.

This policy shall be publicly available on the FPC website and by request through the church office. It should be reviewed and updated as needed, at least every three years.

1.0 TRAINING

First Presbyterian Church mandates annual training regarding sexual abuse and molestation prevention policy for all employees, volunteers and staff. All will receive training at FPC at no cost to participants. The Christian education committee will implement this training.

2.0 PREVENTION PROCEDURES

LEADERSHIP SCREENING

- A. Persons who are (1) 18 years of age or older and (2) are no longer in high school or equivalent and (3) are members of the congregation and have been known to that congregation for at least six (6) months are eligible to apply to volunteer to work with

- 4) If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- 5) Never be the only two in a building – go outside, or meet at another time and place or call someone to be with you in the building.
- 6) Inform other employees and volunteers that you are alone with a child and ask them to randomly drop in. (Ask to be supervised.)
- 7) Document and immediately report any unusual incidence, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any other interactions that might be misinterpreted. Submit this documentation to the associate youth minister or minister within three days of the incident.

E. Physical Interactions – showing Approval and Affirmation:

In providing approval or affection, the following guidelines apply:

Appropriate Physical Interactions

- Side hugs
 - Shoulder – to- shoulder or “temple” hugs
 - Pats on the shoulder or back
 - Hand shakes
 - High – fives and hand slapping and fist bumps
 - Verbal praise
 - Pats of the head when virtually appropriate
 - Touching hands, shoulders, and arms
 - Arms around shoulders
 - Holding hands for pray or for escorting young children
- At any time. These permissible interactions may be inappropriate if unwanted by the child or the employee or volunteer.

Inappropriate Physical Interactions

- Kisses
 - Showing affection in an isolated area
 - Lap sitting
 - Wrestling
 - Piggyback rides
 - Tickling
 - Allowing a child to cling to an employee or volunteer’s leg
 - Any type of a massage given by or to a child
 - Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or the employee or the volunteer
 - Complements relating to physique or body development
 - Touching bottom, chest or genital areas
- NOTE: This list is not an exhaustive.

F. Verbal interactions - showing Approval and Affirmation: The manner of speaking with children establishes respect. The following guidelines apply:

- 8) If a person fails a background check at any point, they shall immediately disconnect themselves from all social media and email and text connections with youth that were established through FPC activities or events.
- 9) If an adult whether paid staff or volunteer or pastor moves out of the church or transfers membership to a non-PCUSA congregation, they shall immediately disconnect themselves from all social media and email and text connections with children and youth that were established through church activities or events.
- 10) **On all social media platforms, if approved youth leaders (whether paid staff, contractor, or volunteer), post or use images of drunkenness, lewd behavior, or crass language in their personal accounts, these posts or images may be considered sufficient grounds for removal as a youth leader.**

H. Overnight arrangement, sleeping rooms

- 1) Violations of these overnight rules and requirements will result in the immediate removal of the adult from the current, and all future youth events of the FPC.
- 2) For overnight events, adults are to stay in separate rooms from the youth. If adults must share the same room there must be at least two adults of the same gender as the youth in the room.
- 3) Under no circumstance is an adult to share a bed with a youth.
- 4) The minimum age for a youth spending a night at any church events is 11 years of age and in middle school or higher (grade 5 and up).

4.0 TRANSPORTATION PROCEDURES

- A. Buses and vans used for FPC events must be used in accordance with the church policy and insurance company requirements
- B. FPC may from time to time employ a professional bus service for away events like Montreat Youth Conference, mission trips, and other away trips.
- C. For all mini-bus or van use, two adults must be on the vehicle; the driver may be one of the two.
- D. FPC chaperones normally should not use personal vehicles for transporting youth during an event. If picking up from home or taking a child home in a personal vehicle is necessary then, for the child's safety, the parent(s) should be notified with a phone call and asked for their approval.

5.0 SIGNS OF ABUSE

There are a number of "red flags" that suggest someone is being sexually abused. They take the form of physical or behavioral evidence.

- A. Physical evidence may include but is not limited to:

Sexually transmitted diseases; difficulty walking normally; stained, bloody, or torn undergarments; genital pain or itching; and physical injuries involving the external genitalia.

7. RETALIATION PROHIBITED

A. FPC prohibits any retaliation against anyone, including an employee (volunteer or staff), student, member of the congregation, family member, or other individual who in good faith reports sexual abuse, alleges that it is being committed, or participates in an investigation. Intentionally false or malicious accusations of sexual abuse are prohibited.

B. Anyone who improperly retaliates against someone who has made a good faith allegation of sexual abuse, or intentionally provides false information to that effect, will be subject to discipline up to and including termination.