

In chapter 14 of Acts, Paul and Barnabas ordain Elders of the church stating the Lord has appointed them to the care of the people who believe. As the Elders of Antioch were entrusted with the well-being of all members of the church, First Presbyterian affirms the covenant of caring for all its believers. In this policy, the church affirms the need to protect all the children of God.

General Purpose Statement

First Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the policies and procedures outlined in this document, our goal is to protect the children of First Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until s/he has been involved with First Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between church leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by church leadership. The application shall include but not be limited to:

- Basic contact information
- Previous experience with children and church affiliations,
- Reference and employment information
- Voluntary disclosure of any prior accusations, participation in or convictions of sexual misconduct and
- Authorization for First Church to secure necessary background checks.

The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the First Presbyterian office.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position. In such cases, volunteers will be interviewed by the Director of Educational Ministry and at least one member of the Safety and Security Committee. The Human Resources Committee and/or its designee will conduct employee interviews.

d) Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicant's references may be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the First Presbyterian office. –The Director of Educational Ministry and/or a member of the Safety and Security Committee may check a volunteer's references. The Human Resources Committee is responsible for contacting an employment applicant's references.

e) Background Clearances

Background clearances are required for all employees (regardless of position) and for volunteers having routine interaction with children or providing direct care, supervision, guidance or control of children. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Those who will be involved in our nursery and educational classes;
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;
- Those counseling children;
- Those involved in the mentorship of children; and
- Those having occasional contact with children (such as vehicle drivers and chaperones for youth events).

Employees must obtain the following:

1. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check,
2. Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, and
3. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Background.

Volunteers must obtain the following:

1. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check,
2. Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, and
3. If a volunteer meets the following requirements, s/he is *not* required to obtain an FBI clearance:
 - a. Has been a resident of Pennsylvania for the previous consecutive ten-year period and
 - b. Swears or affirms in writing that s/he has not, within the past five years:
 - i. been named as a perpetrator in the statewide child abuse database;
 - ii. been convicted of one or more of certain offenses (see Section 6344 (c) attached) under PA Title 18 (relating to crimes and offenses) or an equivalent crime under Federal law or the law of another state; or
 - iii. been convicted of a felony offense under the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act.

4. If a volunteer cannot meet both conditions under #3, s/he must also obtain an FBI clearance.

Employees shall provide completed background clearances to the Chairperson of the Human Resources Committee and volunteers shall provide the same to the Chairperson of the Safety and Security Committee. The above-mentioned clearances must be obtained and a copy provided to the respective Committee every 36 months. All documents relating to background clearances will be maintained in confidence at the church. If an individual fails to provide the above background clearances, s/he will not be permitted to work with children.

First Presbyterian will absorb the cost of said background clearances for all of its current employees and those volunteers who work with children on a routine basis. New full-time employment applicants must pay for and produce said clearances prior to official start date, unless otherwise determined by the Human Resources Committee.

f). **Disqualifying Offenses**

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an employee from working with children will be determined by the Human Resources Chairperson and the Pastor. The Pastor and the Safety and Security Committee Chairperson will determine the same for volunteers seeking to work with children. Each decision will be made on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances and will be in compliance with relevant state guidelines or requirements. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission, will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying factor.

g). **Subsequent Arrests or Convictions**

Any worker (paid or unpaid) subject to the above requirements who is arrested for, or convicted of, an offense that would constitute grounds for denying working with children (see 3(b)ii/iii above), or is named as a perpetrator in the state child abuse database, shall provide written notice within 72 hours to the Pastor.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

All workers (paid and unpaid) having direct contact with children are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at First Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, the individual must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313. A mandated reporter making an oral report of suspected child abuse shall also make a written report to ChildLine, which may be submitted electronically, within 48 hours. Additionally, the worker should immediately report the suspected abuse to the Pastor. If the Pastor is not available or is allegedly involved, a report should be made to the Clerk of Session.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at First Presbyterian Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and First Presbyterian Church will comply with the state’s requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. First Presbyterian Church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The First Presbyterian Pastor or designated Elder will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.

7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Mandated Reporter Training

Employees having direct contact with children shall complete three hours of mandated reporter training once every five years. Employees will provide proof of said completion to the Human Resources Chairperson to be kept on file at the church. Volunteers working with children shall complete periodic training regarding recognizing signs of and reporting abuse. The Director of Educational Ministry and the Safety and Security Committee will work collectively to make training available and ensure compliance.

Convicted Sex Offenders

If it becomes known that a convicted sex offender is attending services or participating in events at First Presbyterian Church, the Pastor and the Chairperson of the Safety and Security Committee must immediately be informed. The Pastor and Chairperson will consult with Session and any necessary community service agencies. Information will be disclosed to the congregation in accordance with applicable state and federal regulations. Every effort will be taken to ensure the safety of our children.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Teenage Employees

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for youth under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage employees:-

- Must be at least age 16;
- Must be screened and obtain background clearance as specified above; and
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below third grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. A face-to-face encounter between a worker and a parent, guardian, or adult appointed by the parent/guardian will be required at both check-in and check-out.

Secured Access to Children's Area

The door to the lower level children's area is to remain closed and locked at all times. Access is granted via a keypad access code that will be made available, upon request, to all parents, teachers, and volunteers needing entry. Adults who do not have the code must press the buzzer. Any adult in the Children's Area granting entrance to someone who does not have the code should first secure that person's identity and reason for entering the area.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at First Presbyterian. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Director of Educational Ministry to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Director of Educational Ministry if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Transportation Policy

In cases where youth events occur at locations other than First Presbyterian which will require transportation in private vehicles, the two-adult rule applies. All drivers must be licensed and insured and pick-up/drop-off will occur at either First Presbyterian or other designated location.

Elevator Policy

The elevator in First Presbyterian is meant to provide assistance to those with physical ailments or disabilities. It does, however, provide access to the lower level of the church where many youth classes and activities occur. The elevator will remain secure from 9:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. on Sundays and during other events where children are present in the lower level of the church.

Off-site/Overnight Activities Policy

In instances when First Presbyterian youth participate in an off-site or overnight activity, a consent form must be completed by a parent or guardian. The consent form will include emergency contact information, insurance information, and relevant medical information (e.g., allergies or other medical conditions) as well as a statement giving consent to workers to administer or arrange for medical treatment.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

The Director of Educational Ministry, in conjunction with the Pastor and Safety and Security Committee, will periodically review the Policy with staff, volunteers and parents/caregivers. Staff and volunteers will be asked to sign a statement indicating that they have read the policy and are committed to abiding by it. Additionally, opportunities for additional training classes or events will be offered on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes Chapter 63 Title 23 – Domestic Relations, Section 6344(c) states:

“Grounds for denying employment or participation in program, activity or service...in no case shall an administrator hire an applicant if the applicant’s criminal history record information indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more of the following offenses. . . :

Chapter 25 (relating to criminal homicide).

Section 2702 (relating to aggravated assault).

Section 2709.1 (relating to stalking).

Section 2901 (relating to kidnapping).

Section 2902 (relating to unlawful restraint).

Section 3121 (relating to rape).

Section 3122.1 (relating to statutory sexual assault).

Section 3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).

Section 3124.1 (relating to sexual assault).

Section 3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault).

Section 3126 (relating to indecent assault).

Section 3127 (relating to indecent exposure).

Section 4302 (relating to incest).

Section 4303 (relating to concealing death of child).

Section 4304 (relating to endangering welfare of children).

Section 4305 (relating to dealing in infant children).

A felony offense under section 5902(b) (relating to prostitution and related offenses).

Section 5903(c) or (d) (relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances).

Section 6301 (relating to corruption of minors).

Section 6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children).

The attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the offenses set forth in this paragraph.”

RESOURCES**Amendments to the PA Child Protective Services Law relevant to this Policy**

1. Act 31-2014 (Child Abuse Recognition and Reporting Training)
2. Act 33-2014 (Mandated Reporters)
3. Act 153-2014 (Background Clearance Requirements, et al)

Helpful Websites

1. KeepKidsSafe.pa.gov (information on laws, clearances, training, etc.)
2. www.pa-fsa.org (PA Family Support Alliance - information on laws and training)
3. <http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis> (Online Child Abuse History Clearance)
4. <http://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp> (Pennsylvania Access To Criminal History website)
5. https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_dpw.htm (FBI Clearance)

For Questions Regarding Clearances:

1. Child Abuse History and FBI: (717)783-6244 or (877)371-5422
2. Pennsylvania State Police: (717)783-9973 or (888)783-7972