

## **Child and Youth Protection Policy**

During baptism, we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection, becoming new creations. We die to what separates us from God and are raised to newness of life in Christ. . . . Baptism points us forward to the same Christ who will fulfill God's purpose in God's promised future. (*Book of Order*, W-2.3002) The congregation as a whole, on behalf of the Church universal, assumes responsibility for nurturing the baptized person in the Christian life. (*BOO*, W-2.3013) Part of fulfilling our baptismal covenant with all persons of the church is insuring that our community life is safe and healthy for all persons, especially our children and youth.

Purpose: Through our actions and our faith, as a community of believers working together, we intend to protect all persons participating in church activities from harm. The focus of this policy is the protection of children and youth from abuse by adults working with them. The policy recognizes the vulnerability of adults to false accusations of wrongdoing. This policy attempts to balance these interests in favor of the protection of children and youth while encouraging adult members of the church to participate fully and without fear in children and youth-centered programs of the church. The guidance provided by this policy will help to assure children and youth participating in programs of First Presbyterian Church are treated in ways that encourage their healthy growth and development.

This policy is supplemental to the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy of First Presbyterian Church, which is incorporated by reference.

Policy: First Presbyterian Church sponsors many programs designed to bring together children, youth and adults as a community for worship, study, celebration and nurture. This can only be accomplished in an environment free of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church to provide many varied opportunities for education, fellowship and spiritual nurture that take place free of any abuse. To accomplish these ends, First Presbyterian Church acknowledges the potential for abuse to occur, establishes processes intended to prevent abuse, defines certain prohibited practices, maintains vigilance to assure that all programs of the church are carried out free from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and establishes processes to assure instances of suspected abuse will be addressed through internal and external resources.

## Guidelines and Procedures

### Application and Training

All adults whether volunteer or compensated, who work with children and/or youth are required to:

1. Complete the Application Form;
2. Successfully complete prescribed child protection training appropriate to his/her duties;
3. Be a member of First Presbyterian Church at least six months, or have a letter of recommendation from his/her previous church, and
4. Annually read and sign a copy of this policy acknowledging understanding of the Child Protection Policy and stating intent to abide by the policy.

Pastoral staff shall review and approve applicants for volunteer participation. Reference and background checks may be made as deemed appropriate by the reviewing pastoral staff. All application forms and the results of reference and background checks will be regarded as confidential. Confidential information will be available only to the pastoral staff and appropriate program directors as determined by the pastoral staff. The standard for release of confidential information to program directors is the need to know in the protection of children and youth. Release of this information shall not be made to any other party without specific written authorization of the applicant or pursuant to court order.

Applicants who have been convicted of a crime against persons, including, but not necessarily limited to, child abuse and neglect or violent crimes against people are excluded from working with children and youth.

The recommended training program (#2 above) will cover at a minimum all of the following items:

- The role of lay adults in children and youth programming;
- A review of the policy emphasizing prevention of abuse, preferred strategies for adults, observation of others' behavior and its role in preventing abuse of children, and reporting of suspicion of abusive behavior;
- A review of the guidelines for church events;
- Information about resources and strategies when the adult(s) have questions or are faced with situations that make them uncomfortable;
- Methods of reporting behavior outside the policy guidelines;
- How to protect children when making a report.

## Guidelines for Church Events

The guidelines reflect desirable practices. Deviation from these practices is permissible, but it is recommended that deviation is carefully considered in consultation with the pastoral staff and/or program directors.

1. As often as practicable, all activities involving children or youth will be supervised or led by at least two adults.
2. If one-on-one interaction is required between an adult and a child or youth, this should be done in an unenclosed area with the knowledge of another adult.
3. Overnight events must be approved in advance by the Session. One adult of each gender should be present when children of both sexes are represented in the event. It is preferable for a member of the pastoral staff to be present.
4. Disruptive behavior will be handled with positive verbal instruction defining behavioral expectations and/or time outs. Physical discipline, isolation and abusive verbal correction are prohibited.
5. All workers with children and youth should actively guard against becoming involved in situations that could give rise to the perception or appearance of inappropriate behavior.
6. Young adults who are leaders or supervisors should be at least five years older than the children or youth they serve.
7. All supervisors should be 21 years or older.
8. All drivers should be 21 years or older, unless there is written permission from the passengers' parents to ride with a driver under 21.

### Prohibited Practices:

- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an adult and a child or youth;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior to a child or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision;
- Language or behavior toward children or youth that is belittling, demeaning or harshly critical;
- Possessing obscene or pornographic materials in proximity to children or youth;
- Possessing or being under the influence of any illegal drugs or chemicals;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol; and
- Using profane or obscene language or gestures.

## Response and Reporting

Concerns about alleged violations to the Prohibited Practices or deviations from General Guidelines enumerated above should be directed to the Children and Family Subcommittee or Youth Subcommittee.

In the event anyone witnesses or is told by a child or youth of an event of abuse or a violation of the prohibited practices relating to individual conduct, the following actions will be taken to the extent appropriate under the circumstances:

1. Personally and immediately secure the safety of the child or youth and any other child that may be at risk in the situation;
2. Do not leave the child alone to report the incident;
3. When the child (ren) or youth are safe, immediately inform the pastor who oversees the particular program and report the incident to law enforcement. **Topeka Police Department Main Number: 368-9551.** See #6 below.
4. Do not discuss the event with anyone else and do not personally confront the alleged violator.
5. The appropriate staff member or his/her designee will then provide guidance regarding:
  - a. Notifying the child's parent(s) or guardian(s);
  - b. Completing the "Suspected Abuse Incident Form";
  - c. Follow-up with appropriate authorities (law enforcement);
  - d. Notifying the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier; and
  - e. Making any communication on behalf of the church.
6. If the accused violator is a paid staff member, then the Head of Staff will be notified. The Head of Staff will then, in turn, notify the Chair of the Personnel Committee. If the accused is the Head of Staff, then the Chair of the Personnel Committee will be notified. In any event in which the paid staff member is accused, then the regulations as set forth in the *Book of Order*, the *Sexual Misconduct Policy for the Presbytery of Northern Kansas* will be followed.
7. In the event that any adult is accused of violation of the Child and Youth Protection Policy, then he or she will be suspended, (with pay, if applicable) from all activities dealing with children and youth pending the results of an investigation. A favorable result of the investigation will be cause for immediate reinstatement of duties. An unfavorable result will be cause for permanent suspension of volunteer work, and in the case of paid staff, may result in termination.

Kansas Statutes mandate that paid child care providers report any reasonable suspicion of abuse. Therefore, any volunteer or paid worker of this church may choose to report an incident directly to the appropriate authorities on his or her own initiative. This policy also requires that a report be made to the appropriate church staff member. Visit in person or call the office (233-9601).