

A Vision for Children and the Church

Our Presbytery affirms...

...That all children are a gift of God,
created by God and created good.

...That all children depend upon adults for safety and security
in a world that does not always value children.

...That we hope for a world where
all children can find a safe place.

...That Jesus welcomed children
and encourages us to welcome them in his name.

...That we take seriously our baptismal vow
to nurture all children committed to our care.

*Excerpts from "A Vision for Children and the Church"
Adopted by the 205th General Assembly of the PC(USA) in June 1993*

Purpose

Our Presbytery believes that children and youth are a gift of God to the whole of the human community. They are an integral part of the community contributing to its worship and ministry. It is in the church that children and youth receive nurture and hear the good news of God's love and protection. Therefore, the church must strive to provide safety and security for children and youth as well as for the adults to whom they are entrusted.

Prohibited Acts.

The following acts are prohibited during any Presbytery activity for children and youth. Additional information about identifying child abuse and neglect is attached as Attachment A.

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct toward a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child or youth.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to Presbytery activities. Adequate supervision means the type of supervision a reasonable person would provide in the same or similar situation.
- Causing mental or emotional injury to a child or youth.
- Possessing or accessing obscene or pornographic materials at any Presbytery activity.
- Possessing illegal drugs or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while participating in any Presbytery activity designed for children and youth.
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a child or youth.
- Carrying any type of weapon.

Screening

Application. All volunteer YOUTH leaders, all volunteers who drive children and youth, and all employees must complete an authorization and release form (attached) and be screened and approved by the Presbytery.

Criminal History Checks. Criminal history checks must be conducted by the Presbytery for volunteer YOUTH leaders. The General Presbyter will review the criminal history report. If the report shows a "Not Clear" status, the General Presbyter will discuss the report with the individual. If the individual desires to continue pursuing his or her application to work with children and youth, the General Presbyter may discuss the report with Presbytery Counselor at law and the Minister of the Word of the local church. Criminal history checks should be updated periodically.

Disqualifying Offenses. Whether disclosed voluntarily or as a result of a criminal history check or motor vehicle report, the following will disqualify a person from participating in the leadership of any activity involving children and youth: any indictment alleging the offense of, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance with a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or a conviction for domestic abuse. If an individual disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history check or motor vehicle report, he or she may appeal through the appropriate governmental agency.

Confidentiality. While this screening process understandably intrudes into the privacy of our own lives, our Presbytery believes that the safety of our children and youth outweighs the personal invasion inherent in this process. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all criminal history checks and motor vehicle reports, and the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of making such disclosures will be considered confidential. This information will be handled only by the General Presbyter and staff person(s) responsible for administering this process. A neutral third party outside the church may be retained to conduct criminal history checks or motor vehicle reports, the results of which will be presented to the Executive. The General Presbyter will maintain a secured storage facility in the Presbytery's business office for all confidential information.

Violations

Reporting Prohibited Acts. Anyone witnessing the occurrence of a prohibited act is asked follow the steps outlined below. If a child or youth reports that a prohibited act occurred while participating in a church activity or involved church volunteers or employees at any time or place, the person initially contacted by the child or youth is asked to follow these same steps. A prohibited act must be reported immediately, and any failure to do so will be considered a procedural violation of these guidelines. The Presbytery may treat such violation as grounds for termination of an employee or as grounds for the suspension or prohibition of any person participating in church activities involving children and youth. All questions or concerns regarding any suspected violation should be directed to the General Presbyter.

1. Personally secure the safety of the child or youth.
2. Do not leave the child or youth alone to report the incident.
3. Report the incident immediately to the General Presbyter or the Stated Clerk.
4. Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of the policy.
5. Complete a Confidential Incident Report and deliver it to the General Presbyter or the Stated Clerk.
6. Report abuse and neglect to local authorities as required by law.
7. The Response Team (see next paragraph) is solely responsible for all communications on behalf of the church.

Response to Reported Prohibited Acts. When the General Presbyter or the Stated Clerk receives a report involving a prohibited act, they may consult with others as needed and take such immediate steps as are deemed appropriate. The report will be referred as soon as possible to a Response Team comprised of the General Presbyter, and up to three additional persons appointed by him/her who understand the issue of confidentiality. The Response Team shall take such actions as it deems appropriate in the investigation and handling of the report. The Response Team will be responsible for timely contacting law enforcement authorities as required by law. Designated members of the Response Team will be responsible for all communications on behalf of the church, including those with parents, civil authorities, presbytery, the church's insurance company, and the media. If necessary, the Response Team shall have access to an attorney and counselors for both the alleged victim and the alleged abuser. The Response Team will ensure that pastoral care needs are addressed and

will notify the accused and the accuser that they have the right to retain their own counsel. The church's counsel will represent the church but not individual interests.

Consequences of Committing a Prohibited Act. Any person who is accused of committing a prohibited act, whether a volunteer or employee, will be suspended automatically from any further participation in any church activity for children and youth. The suspension will continue until a disposition of the report has been made by the Response Team. The disposition shall be based upon such evidence as the Response Team deems appropriate. The evidence may include the results of any investigation by the church or law enforcement or child protection proceeding, or the filing, prosecution or outcome of any criminal charges or other legal proceedings. The Response Team may, at its discretion, delay disposition pending the outcome of any investigation or proceeding involving the alleged violation. Upon disposition, if a majority of the Response Team believes from the evidence that any person has committed a prohibited act, such person shall be prohibited from future participation in all church activities for children and youth, either permanently or for such length of time and in such manner as the Response Team shall determine in its discretion. If the person is an employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment. If the Response Team determines that the allegations are false, the General Presbyter will determine any appropriate pastoral response.

Oversight

On behalf of the Presbytery, the General Council oversees the implementation of these guidelines.

Attachment A
To “A Vision for Children and the Church”

Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

Adapted from information provided by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

The Role of Adults Who Work with Children and Youth

Observer. Adults should be aware of the physical signs of child abuse and neglect, as well as changes in behaviors and relationships with peers. Sometimes it is hard to determine what is different, but remember if it doesn't seem right, it usually isn't.

Listener. Adults should listen to what children say. They may speak directly to you or a friend, but they may also speak through play, school work, or their reaction to books they read.

Role Model. Children need adult role models who provide them with positive, nurturing reinforcement of their own worth. Church volunteers and employees are in a unique position to be such models. Their behaviors and actions are regularly seen by children and may provide a basis for learning.

Possible Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

Physical Abuse

- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes, or burns, especially when the child cannot adequately explain the cause
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate a human bite, cigarette burns, or the use of an instrument on the face, arms, or palms
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Fear of going home or seeing a parent
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Unseasonable clothes that may hide injuries to the arms or legs
- Reluctant about sitting down; unable to hold a pencil
- Evidence of poor self-concept
- Complaints of beatings or other harsh treatment
- Chronic runaway

Sexual Abuse

- Physical signs of sexually transmitted disease
- Evidence of injury to the genital area
- Pregnancy in a young girl
- Difficulty in sitting or walking
- Extreme fear of being alone with members of the opposite sex
- Exhibits sexually suggestive or promiscuous behavior
- Knowledgeable about sexual relations

Sexual Abuse (continued)

- Reports sexual assault
- Complaints of pain or itching in genital area
- Unusual odors from genital area
- Drawings or writings with strong, often bizarre sexual theme
- Suicide attempts
- Regressed, clingy behavior
- Poor peer relationships
- Declining grades
- Abrupt change in behavior

Emotional Abuse

- Speech disorders
- Habit disorders
- Conduct disorders
- Developmental lags
- Delinquent behavior
- Overly adaptive behavior
- Substance abuse

Neglect

- Obvious malnutrition
- Dirty hair and body/offensive body odor
- Habitually dressed in torn and dirty clothes
- Obvious fatigue and listlessness
- Unattended for long periods of time
- In need of glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Begs for or steals food
- Abnormally short or underweight for age

Attachment B
To "A Vision for Children and the Church"

Confidential Information Form

*Must be completed by all volunteer youth leaders,
all volunteers who drive children and youth, and all employees.*

As covenant members of _____ Presbyterian Church, we are each called to teach, nurture, and protect our children through the myriad of opportunities we are given. As a volunteer "shepherd" please know that information gathered below is only asked in the spirit of utmost interest of our littlest and most vulnerable members, our lambs.

First Name: _____ Middle Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Other Names You Have Used: _____

Name as It Appears on Driver's License: _____

Driver's License Number: _____ State: _____

Social Security Number: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Application to Serve as a Youth Leader:

Yes ___ No ___ I wish to serve as a youth leader at _____ Presbyterian Church.

If you checked "yes," please answer the following:

Yes ___ No ___ Have you been active in the life of _____ for more than six months?

Yes ___ No ___ Have you been convicted of or pled guilty or no contest to a criminal offense (felony or misdemeanor, except minor traffic violations)? If "yes," please describe:

Yes ___ No ___ Have you ever been charged with a sexual offense, offense relating to children, or crime of violence? If "yes," please describe:

Yes ___ No ___ Have you ever been reported to a social service agency, law enforcement agency, child abuse registry, or similar organization regarding child abuse or neglect? If "yes," please describe:

Application to Drive Children and Youth:

Yes ___ No ___ I wish to drive children or youth on behalf of _____ Presbyterian Church.

If you checked "yes," please answer the following:

Yes ___ No ___ Do you have a valid Arkansas driver's license?

Yes ___ No ___ Are you twenty-one years old or older?

Attachment B (continued)

Yes ____ No ____ Have you been convicted of or pled guilty or no contest to any moving violations within the past five years? If "yes," please describe:

Yes ____ No ____ Has your driver's license ever been suspended or revoked?

Yes ____ No ____ Do you carry at least the minimum required level of personal automobile insurance?

Insurance Company: _____ Policy No.: _____

Yes ____ No ____ Do you agree to require seat belt usage at all times and child safety seat usage when appropriate?

Yes ____ No ____ Do you agree to transport persons only in vehicles that are in safe operating condition?

Authorization and Release:

I confirm that the above information is accurate and complete. The church is required by law to obtain the following authorization before requesting criminal background and driving record information: By my signature below, I authorize _____ Presbyterian Church or its agent to obtain information – written, oral, or other – from a consumer reporting agency bearing on my creditworthiness, credit standing, credit capacity, character, general reputation, personal characteristics, mode of living, criminal background, and driving background. I understand that this investigation may include interviews with friends, acquaintances, or others who have relevant information and that this report will be used in evaluating me for employment or volunteer positions within the church. I understand that I have a right to request disclosure of the nature and scope of the report if it involves personal interviews with sources such as my friends, acquaintances, or others who have relevant information. For myself, my estate, my representatives, and my assigns, I release and agree to indemnify _____ Presbyterian Church and its ministers, leaders, employees, volunteers, and agents from any claim resulting from the investigation of my background.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

~~ All information requested or obtained is confidential ~~

Attachment C
To "A Vision for Children and the Church"

Confidential Incident Report
Deliver to the General Presbyter or the Safeguards Committee

Date of Incident: _____ Time of Incident: _____ Place: _____

Name(s) of Child(ren): _____ Age(s): _____

Child's parent or other person responsible for the child's care: _____

Name(s) of those suspected of violating the church's guidelines: _____

Relationship of the accused to the child: _____

Briefly describe what happened: _____

What was the child's demeanor and appearance? What, if anything, did the child say about the incident? _____

What immediate action was taken? _____

Were there any witnesses? Does anyone else have relevant information? (names and phone numbers) _____

Printed Name of Person Reporting: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____