




First Presbyterian Church of Athens

**Protection Policy
for
Children and Youth
Ministries**

Updated May 2018

I. PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY

A. PURPOSE

This policy is intended to:

1. Create a safe environment for children, youth, and adults

- a. A child is defined as anyone within the range of newborn to currently in 5th grade.
- b. A youth is defined as anyone currently in 6th – 12th grade.
- c. A minor is defined as any child or youth 0-17 years old.
- d. An adult is defined as anyone who is 18 years or older.
- e. During the summer months when school is not in session, rising sixth grade children are considered youth.

2. Protect children and youth from child abuse.

Child Abuse is non-accidental injury or pattern of physical or mental injuries to a child or youth and may include:

- a. **Neglect**-Occurs when the adults responsible for the well-being of a child fail to provide for the child. Neglect may include not giving food, clothing, shelter; failure to keep children clean; lack of supervision and withholding medical care.
- b. **Emotional Abuse** – Chronic and persistent acts by an adult that endanger the mental health or emotional development of a child including rejection, ignoring, terrorizing, corrupting, constant criticism, mean remarks, insults, and giving little or no love, guidance and support.
- c. **Physical Abuse**- An injury or pattern of injuries that happen to a child that are not accidental. These injuries may include beatings, burns, bruises, bites, welts, strangulation, broken bones, or death.
- d. **Sexual Abuse** – Sexual abuse is the sexual assault or exploitation of children and can include rape, sexual battery, sexual offense, indecent liberties, promoting or participating in prostitution of a minor, sexual exploitation of a minor, disseminating pornography to children, kidnapping or abduction. Sexual abuse may consist of numerous acts over a long period of time or a single incident.

3. Educate staff and volunteers on ways to prevent abuse and avoid situations which might result in allegations.

4. Protect staff and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

B. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies, whether on-site or off-site, to:

1. Program Staff

The term "Program Staff" includes the following people: Head of Staff, Pastors, Associate Pastors, Administration Director, Director of Music, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of Children's Ministries, Weekday School Director.

2. Staff

The term "staff" includes the following people: Program Staff, Administrative Assistants, Nursery Coordinator, Nursery Staff, Childcare Staff, Weekday School Teachers, Interns and any employees of First Presbyterian Church that work directly with children.

3. Volunteers

The term "volunteer" includes: any person participating in a First Presbyterian Church ministry program who is not being paid by First Presbyterian Church to participate in the program.

II. SCREENING, HIRING PRACTICES, AND TRAINING

A. VOLUNTEERS

- 1.** All teachers and volunteers for church activities and programs involving children must be approved by the Education and Discipleship Commission. In case of an emergency, the Program Staff or ministers may temporarily approve use of a church member as a volunteer.
- 2.** Volunteers must be church members or regularly attending worshippers for at least six months. This rule may be waived by the Education and Discipleship Commission with a personal interview and recommendation from a previous church.
- 3.** All adult volunteers must pass a criminal background check to be able to work with children and youth. Background checks will be updated every two years.
- 4.** All volunteers who will be transporting children or youth agree to a driver's license screening to check their driving record and to verify that they hold a valid license and auto insurance at the beginning of their service. Those with moving violations may be prohibited from driving as determined by the Program Staff member responsible for the event.
- 5.** The initial training for new volunteers will include an in-person training session where the information included in the *Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries* will be discussed. In addition, an online training component may be required.

6. An annual review of the *Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries* will be completed by all volunteers working with children and youth and will be certified by a signature and date at the end of the policy form.

B. YOUTH

1. First Presbyterian Church recognizes the importance of children in 5th Grade and younger being allowed to participate in service to the Church. When a child (5th Grade or younger) wishes to serve as a volunteer in any given classroom or program, they will be allowed pending approval of the Program Staff member responsible for the program. This child will be under the direct supervision of staff members and/or adult volunteers.
2. Youth (6th Grade – 12 Grade) who volunteer with the Children's Ministry programs, must read and agree to abide by the *Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries*.

C. STAFF

1. Prior to employment or service, a criminal background check and driving record screening will be conducted, documented, and filed. Background checks will be updated every two years.
2. Prior to employment or service, reference checks will be conducted, documented, and filed.
3. A photograph will be taken of each staff member and attached to the personnel record.
4. All church employees, working directly with children, will participate in an annual review of the church's *Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries*.
5. The initial training for staff members will include an in-person training session where the information included in the *Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries* will be discussed. In addition, an online training component may be required.
6. Program staff will make weekly unannounced visits during church programs with children to ensure that standards, policies, and program quality are being maintained.

III. PROTECTION POLICIES

A. SUPERVISION

1. In order to protect church staff, volunteers, and program participants, the goal for every program is to have a minimum of two adults present with children and youth during programs (Two Adult Rule).
 - a. The adult to child ratio for all child related events/activities is 2:10.
 - b. The adult to youth ratio for all youth related events/activities is 2:17.
2. In case of emergencies and/or if one volunteer or staff member needs to leave a classroom for a brief period of time, one adult teacher (volunteer or staff member) may be in attendance as long as there are two or more children in a classroom with windows or an open door and an unobstructed view of all the people in the room, so they can be observed through the window and/or door at all times.
3. For overnight events related adult chaperones must be accompanied by an unrelated adult and there shall be one adult of each gender when there are one or more minors of each gender in a group.
4. Youth volunteers must be under the supervision of an unrelated adult and will not be designated as the lead person/teacher in charge of teaching in a classroom.
5. All classroom doors have windows and parents are invited at any time to observe their child's classroom. Parents are also invited to visit program sites at any time and do not need permission to do so. If a child or youth activity/program/class is held in a classroom with a door that has no window, the door must remain open at all times.
6. Church staff and volunteers caring for infant and toddlers will be identified by staff shirts and/or name tags.
7. Staff and volunteers should not place themselves in a situation where someone may misjudge their actions. Isolated and/or unobservable one-on-one situations are to be avoided when they occur between:
 - a. Any staff or volunteer with a youth
 - b. Any staff or volunteer with a child
 - c. Any youth volunteer with a child

B. ATTENDANCE/DISMISSAL

1. Tracking of children entering or leaving a program may include, but is not limited to, sign-in and sign-out logs, name tags, contact with parent or guardian and taking attendance.

2. Church staff and volunteers will release children to the authorized parent(s), guardian(s), or an individual authorized by the parents, including siblings and other relatives of the child.

C. DISCIPLINE

1. First Presbyterian Church advocates a discipline policy with an emphasis on positive reinforcement, redirection and prevention.
2. At no time will the following disciplinary techniques be tolerated: any form of corporal punishment, shaming, withholding food or restroom privileges, verbal abuse or physical abuse.
3. At the beginning of each program year, staff and volunteers will be instructed and/or reminded (by Program Staff) to always practice healthy discipline techniques that do not involve physical pain or emotional pain.

D. DIAPERING AND BATHROOM

1. The person engaged in diapering a child should always be visible to other people. Diapering should never take place behind a closed door.
2. When assisting a child with bathroom duties, staff members or volunteers will not close the door to the bathroom or the stall so that they may be observed at all times.

E. DRIVING

1. A single adult and child may not be alone in a vehicle without prior written permission of the parent of the child or youth. This written permission must be given to the supervising Program Staff member.
2. If prior written permission has not been given, then:
 - a. In any vehicle used for church purposes there must either be two adults and one child or youth, or one adult and two children or youth.
 - b. In an emergency case, where a volunteer or staff member must drive alone with a child or youth, a phone may be used to include a third party in on the drive. When using a phone as a third party, it should not be hand held by the driver.

F. OUTSIDE EVENTS

1. When staff or adults volunteering with children and youth attend activities of church children in the community, they attend as an extension of their ministries and should act as they would in their capacity at church.

G. INTERNET USE/SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. No child or youth may access the internet through the church's computer terminals unless there is a staff member or volunteer in the room who is monitoring the on-line activity.
2. Staff and volunteers should not have any technological contact with a child or youth that is not either preapproved by the child/youth's parent or legal guardian with a signed waiver, or the contact is on an open public medium, such as a church website or other social media program.

IV. REPORTING PROCEDURES

A. MANDATED REPORTERS

A mandated reporter is a person who is required by law to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect to the proper designated authorities.

1. Effective July 1, 2012, House Bill 1176 amended O.C.G.A. 19-7-5, Georgia's mandatory reporter statute, to expand the categories of professionals required to report child abuse and to add clarifying definitions to the categories already in place.
2. The existing category of "child service organization personnel" was clarified through a broad definition that now includes employees or volunteers in the public, private, for-profit and non-profit sectors that provide "care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs, or shelter to children."
3. Clergy were not specifically added to the list of mandated reporters; however, if a clergyperson falls within any of the classes of persons who must report under the mandated reporter statute O.C.G.A. 19-7-5, the clergyperson must report unless the information was obtained in the context of a confession or similar context. In this case the Book of Order G-4.0301 states: "A teaching elder or a ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service may reveal confidential information when she/he reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person."
4. The above expansion of professionals and clarification of "child service organization personnel definition" now means any person employed by or volunteering at a business or organization that provides care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs or shelter to children is now included in the mandated reporter statute and is hence a mandated reporter. <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/faq-0#DFCS21>

B. REPORTING PROCEDURES

1. If a staff member or volunteer has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused the following steps must be taken:

- a. Contact one of the following Program Staff members immediately: Director of Children's Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of Music, Weekday School Director, Associate Pastor, Pastor.
- b. As a mandated reporter, the staff member or volunteer is required to make an oral report to DHS/DFCS within 24 hours of the time the reporter learns of the suspected abuse or maltreatment.
 - i. Reports may be made to law enforcement or the District Attorney if a DHS/DFCS report cannot be made.
 - ii. The statute also gives the volunteer the option to allow a member of the Program Staff to make the report in his or her place.
- c. The Pastor or Associate Pastor must be notified of the report. If it is not possible to notify either of the Pastors, then another Program Staff member and the Clerk of Session must be notified.
- d. If a Program Staff member has been asked by a volunteer to make a child abuse report the report must be made within 24 hours of the time the reporter learns of the suspected abuse or maltreatment.
 - i. The Program Staff person making the report must do it without making any changes to the information from the initial reporter.
 - ii. Additional information may be added to the report.
- e. Confidentiality will be maintained by all volunteers and staff members who have knowledge about the suspected abuse. No one may discuss the report with anyone, including the media, unless permission is granted by the church's lawyer. The only exception is discussion with authorities investigating the suspected abuse.
- f. Contact with the child or parents involved in the alleged abuse case is not allowed unless permission is granted by the church's lawyer.

2. Accusations Against Staff Members and Volunteers

- a. If a reported incident involves a church staff member or volunteer, the supervising staff person will suspend the accused person from all activities involving supervision of children.
- b. Reassignment to administrative duties may be appropriate.
- c. A staff member may be suspended, with or without pay, due to an allegation of abuse. The staff member will remain suspended until the person is cleared or allegations are proven.

- d. Volunteers may be reinstated after all allegations have been cleared to the satisfaction of the investigating agency, the responsible church staff member and the Session.

V. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

All employees and volunteers participating in children and youth programs and ministries of First Presbyterian Church are expected to observe the following guidelines.

- A.** Will not verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abuse children or youth or discipline children or youth by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
- B.** Are expected to observe the Two Adult Rule and Open-Door Policy in their interaction with children and youth at all times except in emergency situations and exercise sound judgment in providing a safe environment at all times.
- C.** Will respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Adults will discourage children and youth from touching others in an inappropriate manner.
- D.** Should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children or youth entering the program. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported to the applicable Program Staff.
- E.** Will not use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or be impaired by legally prescribed drugs during church working hours or church-sponsored programs. Will not smoke or use tobacco during church programs.
- F.** When transporting children or youth on First Presbyterian Church sponsored trips and outings, will refrain from texting or using cell phones while driving.
- G.** Will not use profanity, inappropriate language, jokes, or any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth or parents.
- H.** Will not share inappropriate details of their personal life.
- I.** Will not ask children or youth to share inappropriate details through any form of communication: written, verbal, or electronic.
- J.** First Presbyterian staff and adult volunteers may not have any romantic or sexual relations with program participants under 18 years of age.
- K.** Will report to Program Staff any situations where risk of inappropriate treatment exists, or the policy is not being followed.

VI. SIGNATURE PAGE

Please initial beside each statement once completed, then sign and date.

_____ I have read *The Protection Policy for Children and Youth Ministries* and agree to abide by it in my ministry at First Presbyterian Church.

_____ I have completed the initial *Darkness to Light* Training Program on-line and/or in person.

_____ I have completed my yearly training review of *The Protection Policy of Children and Youth Ministries*.

_____ I have completed the background check process and understand that if I continue to work or volunteer at First Presbyterian Church of Athens that my background check will be updated every two years.

_____ I have agreed to a driver's license screening to check my driving record and to verify that I hold a valid license and auto insurance.

Signature

Date

Name: _____

Ministry Position: _____