

Child Protection Policy

First Presbyterian Church of Mexico, Mo

Adopted October 2008

Revised September 2019

1.1. Introduction

As Christians, we believe that God creates us to live in community with one another. We understand that life in the church is to be lived according to the rule of love. “Jesus said, ‘You shall love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matt 22:37-39)

As members of First Presbyterian Church, we are called to create a loving community of faith that seeks the welfare of its members and visitors. Therefore, we are committed to the protection of all children and other persons participating in the activities and programs of First Presbyterian Church. Abuse, exploitation or harassment in any form, physical, emotional or sexual, will not be tolerated. As part of our congregation’s baptismal vows, we covenant with each other to take responsibility for the nurture of faith. As such, the members of this church have pledged to uphold one another. In the spirit of Christ we teach, strengthen and support the individual’s relationship within the church family.

As our baptismal vows imply, we also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our church family. First Presbyterian Church is committed to the sanctity of all children and youth. A well-implemented ***Child Protection Policy*** protects not only children and youth, but also protects those adults who minister to them. This ***Child Protection Policy*** covers any person employed by or volunteering at First Presbyterian Church in any capacity involving children/youth and ALL outside organizations using First Presbyterian Church facilities.

1.2. Definitions of Important Terms

- A. **Adult:** a person at least 18 years of age and not in high school.
- B. **Child:** a person under 18 years of age or still enrolled in high school within the last 3 months.
- C. **Youth:** a child that is in the 6th grade or older.
- D. **Child Abuse:** harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare which occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, verbal abuse or sexual abuse.
- E. **Child Neglect:** Failure to provide, by those responsible for the care, custody, and control of the child, the proper or necessary support, education as required by law, nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the child’s well-being.
- F. **Staff:** any person serving at First Presbyterian Church in an official paid capacity.
- G. **Volunteer:** an individual who of his/her own free will offer to help lead or provide child care for the children and youth who come under the care of First Presbyterian Church.
- H. **Worker:** is either a volunteer or staff that works with children or youth.
- I. **Sunday School Hall Monitor:** an adult responsible for monitoring the children and youth classrooms and hallways during the Sunday morning Sunday School hour.

1.3. Requirements

In order to provide a safe community for children, youth and adults, the church requires all staff and volunteers working with children to comply with this ***Child Protection Policy*** adopted by the Session of First Presbyterian Church. In doing so, those individuals will be asked to comply with specific screening criteria depending on the level of interaction with a child/youth during service to the church. All staff will be under the supervision of the Head of Staff/Pastor and the Staff Committee. All qualifying volunteers will be under the supervision of the respective program staff person(s) or appropriate sponsoring committee. Staff and volunteers are required to report immediately any suspicious or inappropriate behavior that suggests (1) sexual abuse or exploitation, (2) neglect, (3) physical abuse, or (4) emotional abuse.

1.4. Review

The Staff Committee shall receive reports at least annually from program staff persons and respective ministries as to the effectiveness of this Child Protection Policy, shall suggest improvements and shall report to the Session at least annually on the status of the policy.

1.5. Categories of Child/Youth Workers

- A. **Category 1 Worker**, include those individuals volunteering in situations where there will be at least two or more adults present in the company of children, such as Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and other activities. May include transportation of large groups.

All volunteers who qualify for a **Category 1 Worker** shall undergo Basic Screening Criteria for suitability and protection to work with children and youth.

Basic Screening Criteria includes the following:

1. Completing a ***Child Protection Worker Application - Part A.***
2. Completing a personal interview with a program staff person or program director designated by the appropriate church committee.
3. Successfully completing a *Child Safety Training* (refer to Section 1.7 Education and Training)
4. Providing a copy of a valid Missouri driver's license for all those who transport children/youth.

- B. **Category 2 Worker**, includes those individuals volunteering in a position that may include the following situations: any overnight or off campus activity with children (e.g. chaperoning retreats, trips, and lock-ins) and any potential one-on-one activity with a child (e.g. counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and the transportation of a child or youth).

All volunteers who qualify for a **Category 2 Worker** shall undergo Advanced Screening Criteria for suitability and protection to work with children and youth.

Advanced Screening Criteria includes the following:

1. All **Category 1 Worker** Basic Screening Criteria
2. Completing a **Child Protection Worker Application - Part B.**
Which includes:
 - Providing 3 references (people not related to you by blood or marriage).
 - Agreeing to a Nationwide Criminal Records Check and any other background checks that are deemed necessary by the ***Child Protection Policy*** (refer to Section 1.6.D.), which may include a full fingerprint criminal background check.

- C. **Category 3 Worker**, includes ALL staff of the church. Oversight for hiring and firing of personnel is handled by the Head of Staff and the Staff Committee in compliance with the Book of Order. This policy shall be included within the written Personnel Policy of First Presbyterian Church.

All staff are considered a **Category 3 Worker** and shall undergo Staff Screening Criteria for suitability and protection to work with children and youth.

Staff Screening Criteria includes the following:

1. All **Category 2 Worker** Advanced Screening Criteria
2. Completing *Child Abuse Prevention Training* (refer to Section 1.7 Education and Training)

1.6. Care of Child Protection Documents

- A. All information shall be treated in a confidential manner.
- B. The documents shall be kept in secure storage at the church.
- C. Personal interviews will be conducted by the appropriate program staff person or program director, application reviews and reference checks shall be conducted by the appropriate program staff person(s)
- D. Any required background checks will be submitted by the Head of Staff, Student Ministries Director or their designee. The result of the investigation shall be reviewed by the Head of Staff, Student Ministries Director or their designee. Approval shall be documented prior to an individual beginning service (employment or volunteering).
 - 1. Applications will automatically be denied for a conviction of certain felonies and misdemeanors, including but limited to the following:
 - Criminal homicide
 - Crimes related to the possession, use, or sale of drugs/controlled substances
 - Sexual abuse
 - Sexual assault
 - Incest
 - Indecency with a youth
 - Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a youth
 - Possession or promotion of child pornography
 - The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
 - Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
 - Public lewdness or indecent exposure and enticement of a youth
 - Any crime that involves sexual misconduct or sexual abuse or abuse with a minor
 - Any crime that involves misuse of technology for sexual purposes, such as collecting or distributing photographs of minors who are naked or in sexual or inappropriate poses (child pornography)
 - Any crime that involves abduction and kidnapping
 - 2. Applications will be reviewed by the Head of Staff, Student Ministries Director and/or their designee for a conviction of certain felonies and misdemeanors, including but limited to the following:
 - Aggravated assault
 - Injury to a youth
 - DUI (Driving Under the Influence) or DWI (Driving While Intoxicated)
- E. Volunteers will be required to complete a *Child Protection Worker Application* and every three years a *Child Protection Renewal Application*, verifying that the information provided in their application is still accurate.
- F. Staff will be required to complete a *Child Protection Worker Application*.
- G. If a volunteer does not complete a *Child Protection Renewal Application* within 6 months after their renewal date, their records may be destroyed/discarded in a safe and secure manner. Such action will be carried out by the Head of Staff, Student Ministries Director or their designee and shall be documented.
- H. If a staff member is no longer employed by the church their records may be destroyed/discarded in a safe and secure manner. Such action will be carried out by the Staff Committee and shall be documented.

1.7. Education and Training

- A. ALL staff and volunteers in ANY of the Categories of Child/Youth Worker shall complete *Child Safety Training*.

Child Safety Training will include:

1. Addressing critical aspects of First Presbyterian Church's ***Child Protection Policy*** and to ensure that all staff and volunteers understand and are in compliance.
 2. Addressing how to handle scenarios involving children/youth.
- B. ALL staff shall complete *Child Abuse Prevention Training*.
- Child Abuse Prevention Training* will include how to prevent, recognize and report different types of child abuse and neglect.
- C. All training shall be completed at the time of application and before working with children/youth.
- D. Training from outside organizations or employers that covers the aspects of *Child Safety Training* may be accepted, as long as it was completed within 6 months prior to the application date and an official certificate of completion has been submitted.
- E. All training shall be completed every 3 years from original application date.

1.8. Status of Child/Youth Worker

- A. **Active Status** - the worker is able to work with children/youth in accordance with their worker category.
- The worker has completed all necessary screening criteria.
 - The worker will have completed the appropriate training within the last 3 years.
 - Volunteers will have an updated application within the last 3 years.
- B. **Inactive Status** - the worker is NOT able to work with children/youth in accordance with their worker category until they have completed the necessary steps to achieve an **Active Status**.

1.9. Ministry Partnership

Ministry Partnership is a continuous ministry with another church or ministry organization. In order to protect and ensure the safety of children and youth, these guidelines should be followed:

- A. All *Ministry Partners* must have a child protection policy and a copy submitted to *First Presbyterian Church*.
- B. *First Presbyterian Church* will submit our *Child Protection Policy* to all our *Ministry Partners* for their records.
- C. Each *Ministry Partner* will manage their own *workers* and ensure that they have been properly screened under their own child protection policies.
- D. Each *Ministry Partner* shall submit a list of all screened workers. This list must be up to date and updated over the course of the partnership.
- E. A *Ministry Partnership Agreement* must be completed annually and approved by session.

1.10. General Guidelines and Procedures

All activities involving children/youth will be supervised or led by at least two trained and screened adult staff or volunteer workers in close proximity (within sight or sound). The only exception to this policy would be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place or other persons are able to clearly witness the interaction by being in and out of the area where the staff or volunteer is working with the children. If a situation unexpectedly does not meet this criterion of the policy, then alternatives shall be put into place so that the activity/event is in compliance.

- A. One of the two adults supervising shall be at least four years older than the oldest youth they are supervising.
- B. A youth may be substituted for one of the two required adult workers provided the youth is at least four years older than the child they serve.
- C. The opportunity for a church member, whether child or adult, to share confidentially his or her private and personal concerns with another member can contribute significantly to his or her spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Indeed, this may be the only time when a person may be willing to disclose any abuse he or she may be suffering. Such private and confidential conversations are an integral part of a caring and loving Christian community. On the other hand, such private conversations create a very high-risk environment for potential abuse situations to arise. If an unaccompanied pastor or program director meets with a single child to conduct a private discussion, that meeting shall be held at First Presbyterian Church when the church is open for activities or shall be held in a public place. In no case shall an unaccompanied pastor or program director meet with a single child at First Presbyterian unless there is at least one other staff, volunteer, or the parent/guardian of the child in the building and aware of the meeting.
- D. Volunteers and staff shall read the ***Child Protection Policy*** for this church, agree to it by completing and signing the appropriate application form(s), and completing the appropriate level of screening.
- E. No person shall serve as a volunteer with children until such person has been an active member of First Presbyterian Church for six (6) months (unless otherwise approved by the Session), has completed a *Child Protection Volunteer Worker Application* and completed all the appropriate screening criteria.

1.11. Additional Guidelines and Procedures

- A. For On-Site Activities
 - 1. A Sunday School Hall Monitor, Student Ministries Director, and/or their designee shall be present on Sunday mornings during Sunday School classes and whenever Vacation Bible School is in session.
 - 2. Restroom use: Preschool age children shall be accompanied to the restroom by an adult who shall assist as needed. If the child needs assistance, the bathroom door will be left open. The child's teacher shall be informed of their destination at the time of exiting and returning to the classroom.
 - 3. At least two adults, one male and one female, shall be present when children/youth of both sexes are represented at an overnight event.

B. For Off-Site Activities

1. As each facility will be different, it will be the responsibility of the adult leader(s) to determine how best to use the facility to comply with this policy.
2. At least two adults, one male and one female, shall be present when children/youth of both sexes are represented at an overnight event.
3. All First Presbyterian Church sponsored off-site events for children/youth, shall have at least two adult leaders present and maintain a 1:5 adult ratio for children aged fifth grade and younger or 1:7 for youth aged sixth grade and above.

C. For Transportation

1. All volunteer and staff persons who drive and/or chaperone off-site trips involving children shall be in conformance with all aspects of the Child Protection Policy.
2. Children shall be transported in groups. An unaccompanied adult volunteer or staff shall not drive a single child (other than his or her own) in a church-sponsored activity without express written permission from the child's parent or guardian.
3. Youth shall not drive other youth or children without the express consent of both the driver's and rider's parents.
4. In the case of an emergency or with written permission of a parent or guardian, a staff member or volunteer will be allowed to drive a single child.

D. For Non-church Sponsored Use of the Church Facility

1. Any non-member or outside group who uses First Presbyterian Church facilities (e.g. Boy Scouts, Head Start, FCA, visiting groups, etc.) shall be required to comply with the Church's two-adult rule as defined in this policy. (refer to Section 1.9 General Guidelines and Procedures)
2. At the time an Outside Group contract is signed with a non-church group or person to use the Church facility the person signing the contract on behalf of the Church shall obtain written confirmation from the outside group's program director of their need to comply with First Presbyterian Church's ***Child Protection Policy***.

E. For Staff of First Presbyterian Church

1. It shall be the duty of the Staff Committee to give each newly hired staff a copy of the ***Child Protection Policy***.
2. An obligation to comply with and enforce the ***Child Protection Policy*** shall be inherent in accepting employment at First Presbyterian Church.
3. First Presbyterian Church staff are not permitted to form dating relationships with children/youth. Reporting and Responding to Reports of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity & Disclosure

1.12. Reporting and Responding to Reports of suspicious or Inappropriate Activity & Disclosure

As the Church, we believe that God loves all of us as we are all children of God. Periodically, we encounter those who have done more to tear down the community than to build it up. Some of these would be deemed dangerous to children, but even these are worthy of God's love and grace and forgiveness. At the same time, there are those who are accused of these wrongdoings and are innocent. In any case, we as the Church cannot act irresponsibly. To protect all parties involved, and to take the responsibility to be discriminating, we have these policies and procedures. This means these issues of Reporting and Responding shall be handled expediently with graciousness and confidentiality.

A. Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect

According to the law available online at the following site
<https://dss.mo.gov/cd/keeping-kids-safe/can.htm>

B. Initial Reporting of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity

Suspicious or inappropriate activity brought to the attention of staff or volunteers shall be reported immediately to the appropriate staff person or volunteer in charge of the event. An appropriate person(s) to whom to make this report would be: (1) Student Ministries Director or (2) Pastor/Head of Staff. The person receiving the report of the alleged abuse or suspicious activity shall then document the date, time and circumstances of the alleged incident on the *Incident Report Form*.

C. Responding to the Initial Report of Suspicious or Inappropriate Activity

1. The ***Responding Committee*** shall be made up of the Head of Staff and the Clerk of Session.
2. The person receiving the initial report of suspicious activity will report immediately to the Head of Staff/Pastor and the Clerk of Session who will inform legal counsel and the Church insurer. In the case where either the Head of Staff or the Clerk of Session is the alleged perpetrator, or where a member of either person's immediate family is the alleged perpetrator or victim, the Student Ministries Director will replace that person if the individual to receive the report is to be on the *Responding Committee*. In the absence of the Student Ministries Director, the Clerk of Session will receive the report and an active Elder will serve on the *Responding Committee*.
3. The *Responding Committee* shall then determine if they have reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect to a child may have occurred. If the allegation involves staff, the Chair of the appropriate Church committee shall be involved in that determination. If any one of these individuals reasonably suspects that abuse or neglect has occurred he or she is required to report the incident to the appropriate authorities.
4. The *Responding Committee* shall comply with all state laws and shall not further investigate the reported incident to avoid compromising, interfering with, or delaying a legal investigation.
5. All allegations shall be regarded as serious, and due consideration shall be given to the rights and privacy of both the alleged victim and the person being accused.
6. The accused individual, whether staff or volunteer, shall be required to refrain from participating in all child activities until it is determined if further action shall be taken. Care shall be taken to respond to all allegations in a professional manner.
7. In the case of a response to a report of suspicious activity, only the *Responding Committee*, including the appropriate legal counsel, shall have access to the information in these documents.
8. After reviewing the reported circumstances, if there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect (as defined by the State of Missouri), then further action shall be taken. (refer to Section 1.11.D Staff Response to Allegations of Abuse or Neglect)
9. If a reported incident does not provide reasonable suspicion of abuse, the *Responding Committee* has the option to recommend appropriate action, which may include removal from the program, a review of the processes in that program, and/or further education/training.

D. Staff Response to Allegations of Abuse or Neglect

If the *Responding Committee* determines there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, then the following steps shall be taken:

1. A report shall be made immediately to the proper authorities, either law enforcement or the Missouri Department of Social Services.
2. All allegations shall be taken seriously and shall be investigated in a professional manner.
3. If necessary, the Responding Committee may incorporate additional persons to assist the Head of Staff and Clerk of Session with the investigation. Those individuals may include 1) one other member of Session appointed by the Head of Staff/Pastor or the Clerk of Session, 2) legal counsel, 3) others as deemed appropriate by the Head of Staff/Pastor (e.g. additional pastoral counseling or mental health officials).
4. If appropriate under the law, under the guidance of the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier, the *Responding Committee* may also:
 - a. Assign a person to the *Responding Committee* for each of the accused individuals and the alleged victim as a contact and for support.
 - b. Contact the alleged victim's parents, if it will not place the child in jeopardy.
 - c. Maintain documents of all efforts to handle the situation.
 - d. Assign a committee member, preferably the Clerk of Session or legal counsel, to be the spokesperson after the *Responding Committee* has fulfilled its legal reporting requirements. This person will be the sole individual communicating to outside authorities or other persons (including the Session, the congregation and the media) regarding the incident.