

# **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE- SAFEGUARDING THE WELL BEING OF ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH<sup>1</sup>**

During each baptism of an infant, child, or adult into this covenant of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in the spirit of Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual's relationship with the household of God. The members of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of FPC, from abuse or harassment of any form: physical, mental, or sexual.

In our pledge to sustain one another in the Gospel of Christ, we shall also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our house of faith. We will endeavor to prevent abuse or harassment by anyone, especially FPC employees, teachers or volunteers while on the FPC property or while engaged in FPC activities or programs located elsewhere. The standards implemented in this Child Protection Policy seek to uphold that commitment to the sanctity of the children and youth of FPC, whether members or guests. Therefore, all FPC activities and programs, regardless of location, involving children or youth, will be subject to the following policy.

### **Policy**

The following policies shall not be deviated from unless the well-being of a child is compromised in following them.

<sup>1</sup> The terms Child, Children, and Youth refer to all persons age 17 or younger. Children's programs at FPC include nursery through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Youth programs and activities involve grades 7 through 12.

1. As often as practicable, two adults will be assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth.
2. No person will serve as a teacher or volunteer leader of children or youth activities until an information form is submitted and security background checks have been completed.<sup>1</sup>
3. All staff and volunteers with children and youth must complete, in addition to a background check, Sexual Abuse and Awareness Training through MinistrySafe before being granted access to children and youth at FPC.
4. As often as practicable, all teenage workers or volunteers will be supervised by adults.
5. No fewer than two leaders will be required for all trips and outings.
6. Parents of children and youth are encouraged to provide their own transportation. A staff or volunteer may give a child or youth a ride if prior arrangements have been made with one or more parents or guardians.
7. Private one-on-one contact between adults and children, adults and youth, and youth and children is not permitted unless a personal conference is required, in which instance, the meeting shall take place in view of other teachers or volunteers.
8. Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth members in situations such as changing clothes or taking showers on church trips and retreats. Adults should intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. They should also protect their own privacy in similar situations.
9. On trips adults are not permitted to sleep in the same bed with youth, other than their own child.
10. Appropriate clothing as determined by the staff advisor is required for all activities.
11. Discipline used in church activities should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

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<sup>1</sup> Security background checks will be completed only on persons 18 years of age or older.  
Child Protection Policy revised 5/21/2012

12. Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any church activities.
13. Written parental or guardian permission is required for all overnight outings and trips.

### **Information Form**

Employees, teachers of children and youth, and volunteers for child and youth activities or programs of FPC will be required to complete an Information Form providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background checks and reference checks on each individual. While this process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our own lives, the security of our children and youth outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background and reference checks or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Security background checks for persons 18 and older, including a search for criminal history, will be conducted through a reputable company of our choosing. The results of the security background checks will be reviewed by the Administrative pastor and legal counsel for FPC if such advice is deemed necessary by FPC in its sole discretion. Additionally, character references will be provided and may be checked by the corresponding FPC department. If deemed questionable by either the Administrative pastor or the corresponding FPC department, the Information Form and/or the results of the security background check or reference checks will be forwarded to the Associate Pastor of Christian Nurture and Family Ministry and the Administrative pastor and handled appropriately.

Without the written permission of the staff member, employee, teacher or volunteer involved, the information contained in the Information Form, the results of the security background check or the results of the reference check may be disclosed only to the Associate

Pastor of Christian Nurture and Family Ministry, the Administrative pastor, the Senior Pastor and the chairperson of the Personnel Ministry (only if involving an FPC staff person or candidate), and legal counsel for FPC if such advice is deemed necessary by FPC in its sole discretion.

A secured storage facility in the Church's Business Office will be maintained for all Information Forms and results of all reference checks. Any subsequent security background checks on any employee(s) or any volunteer(s) working with minors may be requested at any time by the Administrative pastor, Pastors, Personnel ministry, or other member of Session.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a staff person or volunteer from participating in activities and/or involvement in leadership or sponsorship of any Children or Youth activity or program:

- Any type of conviction for Murder; Rape; Aggravated Assault; Sexual Abuse; Sexual Assault; Aggravated Sexual Assault; Injury of a Child; Incest; Indecency with a Child; Inducing Sexual Conduct or Sexual Performance of a Child; Possession or Promotion of Child Pornography; Sale, Distribution, or Display of Harmful Material to a Minor; Employment Harmful to Children; or Abandonment or Endangering of a Child.

All other convictions or charges for other crimes not listed above will be reviewed and acted upon by the Administrative pastor, Associate Pastor of Christian Nurture and Family Ministry, and the Chairperson of the Personnel Ministry (only if involving an FPC staff person or candidate) or an attorney consulted by FPC if legal advice is deemed necessary by FPC in its sole discretion.

If an applicant disputes information that appears on his/her criminal history record transcript, it will be the responsibility of the applicant to appeal through the Texas Department of

Public Safety. Information regarding appeal may be obtained from:

Texas Department of Public Safety  
Error Resolution Department  
P.O. Box 15999  
Austin, Texas 78761-5999

### **Reporting Violation of Policy**

In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all children and youth, the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of FPC must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected activity of abuse or harassment shall be directed to the Directors or Pastors of the FPC Program area. Should the activity of concern involve any of the Directors or Pastors themselves, the matter should be reported to the Administrative pastor and Chairperson of the Personnel Ministry.

In the event anyone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this policy or if the policy is deviated from for the well-being of a child, the attached Incident Report will be completed. Anyone who should witness such an occurrence should consider the following recommendations as to how such a situation should be handled to insure the security of the child or youth involved and to protect against physical, emotional or psychological injury, to all persons involved.

- IS LAW ENFORCEMENT REQUIRED? CALL 911.
- REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY TO THE APPROPRIATE STAFF PERSON.
- DO NOT SHARE THE INCIDENT WITH ANYONE ELSE.
- DO NOT LEAVE THE CHILD, CHILDREN, OR YOUTH ALONE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT!

- DO NOT PERSONALLY CONFRONT THE ALLEGED OR ACCUSED VIOLATOR OF THE POLICY!
- ALLOW THE DESIGNATED DIRECTOR OR PASTOR TO PROVIDE YOU WITH THE APPROPRIATE FOLLOW THROUGH INSTRUCTIONS FOR REPORTING OF THE INCIDENT TO THE PARENTS OR GUARDIAN!
- FPC'S LEGAL COUNSEL IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PASTOR WILL BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL COMMUNICATION ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH!

In the event a child or youth reports abusive conduct, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child will be required to complete an Incident Report. Under this circumstance, the Incident Report should include the precise wording of the "outcry" of the child or youth. All reported details of the child's or youth's first conversation with an adult should be recorded verbatim in the Incident Report. The incident should otherwise be treated and reported as set out before as if the incident had been witnessed at the Church.

In the event the child makes an "outcry" of abuse or neglect occurring in their home, the person initially contacted will make a referral to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services by calling 1-800-252-5400, through the secure website <https://www.txabusehotline.org>, or by calling a law enforcement agency within 24 hours of the "outcry". Failure to report suspicion of child abuse or neglect is against the law in the state of Texas. The volunteer or staff reporting shall provide to the Administrative pastor in writing the date and time the referral is made to the Texas Department of Protective Services.

The following acts or omissions will not be tolerated or accepted during any FPC activity and/or program and should be reported to the Associate Pastor of Christian Nurture and Family Ministry, the Administrative pastor, or the Chairperson of the Personnel Ministry (only if

involving an FPC staff person or candidate) immediately after the safety of the child, children or youth involved has been assured and a written Incident Report will be filed:

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child or youth.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child, children or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of FPC.
- Emotional or psychological mistreatment of a child, children, or youth, including verbal abuse.
- The possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of FPC. This includes inappropriate movies, music or television as determined by the staff advisor. (This does not restrict the use of sex education materials provided by the FPC Christian Education Ministry.)
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
- The consumption of or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a child or youth function of FPC.
- Being under the influence of a legal drug which impairs the employee or volunteer to the extent that it presents a physical danger to a child or youth

### **Consequences of Violation**

Violation of this policy on the part of any member of the staff, employee, member or volunteer will result in immediate dismissal from participation in all child and youth activities and programs of FPC. Such suspension shall continue during any investigations by the church, law enforcement, or child protection agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation in all child and youth activities and programs of First Presbyterian Church. In the case of staff persons and employees, violation of this policy may result in termination of employment.

### **Legal Reporting Requirement**

In accordance with the laws of the State of Texas, and states in which activities take place, any and all reports of abuse will be immediately forwarded to the appropriate authorities. Such reporting must be accomplished in addition to compliance with this Child Protection Policy. Failure to timely report a prohibited act to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of this Child Protection Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all child and youth activities and programs of FPC by any person.