



Safe Church Policies and Procedures Manual

First Presbyterian Church
Anderson, SC
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Purpose of the Safe Church Policy

As members of First Presbyterian Church of Anderson, we are called to create a community of faith that seeks the welfare of its members and visitors. Therefore, we are committed to the protection of all children, youth, and other persons participating in the activities and programs of First Presbyterian Church. The Safe Church Policy has evolved from a shared concern that the church must be a safe and secure place for our children, youth and adults. The church is not only potentially legally liable, but it is morally responsible for providing a safe environment for our ministries. The Safe Church policies and procedures are meant to reduce the possibility of sexual misconduct in our church. As our baptismal vows imply, we also undertake to preserve the integrity of each person within our church family. A well-implemented Safe Church Policy protects children, youth, and the adults who minister to them.

Implementation of the Safe Church Policy

All church members should be aware of the Safe Church Policy. All compensated and volunteer staff needs to be aware of our responsibility to provide a safe environment for children, youth and adults in the ministries and missions of the church.

A notice of the policy will be provided periodically to members, staff, volunteers, and officers of the church in order to inform and educate about prevention of sexual misconduct in the church.

Child Abuse Prevention

Definitions

Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by an activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.

Sexually Abusive Behaviors

Sexually abusive behaviors shall include, but not be limited to: voyeurism, fondling, pornography, intercourse, oral-genital stimulation, sodomy, verbal stimulation, exhibitionism, and suspected grooming.

Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse is any non-accidental injury to a child/youth under the age of 18 by a parent, leader or caretaker. These injuries may include beatings, shaking, burns, human bites, strangulation, or immersion in scalding water, with resulting bruises and welts, broken bones, scars, burns, retinal hemorrhage, or internal injuries.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological Abuse includes behaviors belittling, humiliating, and ridiculing a child.

Neglect

Neglect includes not providing a child with appropriate support, attention, and affection.

Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Actions

General

As the Church of Jesus Christ, 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 wrong doings 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 established these guidelines for responding to and reporting allegations of inappropriate activity. It is the goal of First Presbyterian Church that these issues of reporting and responding be handled with graciousness and CONFIDENTIALITY.

The person witnessing or receiving the report of the alleged abuse or suspicious activity must report immediately to two people in the following priority order: 1) a Pastor 2) Clerk of Session 3) Director of Youth and Family Ministries and/or a member of the Faith Formation Team. They will assist in notifying appropriate authorities. Do not confront the wrongful party beyond whatever action is necessary to stop the misconduct and to secure the safety of the child(ren) or youth.

After making the report, the duties as a reporting party are over. The report and all matters related to it are confidential and should not be discussed with any party beyond law enforcement authorities and legal authorities. 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.

The reporting party should not attempt to investigate the matter any further. No investigations are to be performed by the members or employees of the Church, the pastoral staff, the accusing party, or the accused, or any family member, friend or agent of these parties.

South Carolina State Law establishes the following individuals as Mandatory Reporters: health professional, school teacher or employee, child care worker in any daycare center or clergy. All First Presbyterian Church paid staff are also considered mandatory reporters. These individuals are required by law to report any known or reasonably suspected reports of child abuse to a local law enforcement agency or Department of Social Services.

The Session, in consultation with the Pastors, shall determine whether, when and in what manner the congregation shall be informed within legal guidelines of an allegation of abuse. In the event of an allegation, the only statement to be made to the public or press is "no comment."

Responding to Reports of Suspicious or Inappropriate Actions

All reports of alleged abuse shall be taken seriously for the safety of the alleged abuser and the alleged victim. The following procedures should be followed in every case and the actions, and the reasons therefore shall be documented. Subject to the reporting procedures herein, all reports of alleged abuse shall be treated confidentially and should be discussed with no one except those whom this Policy provides are to receive notice. This protects Church members from damaging false allegations and protects the Church and its members from liability for damages caused by the dissemination of false allegations. This also protects the privacy of abuse victims.

Upon allegations and an official incident report, a Responding Committee will be formed. The Responding Committee is to be made up of a minimum of five members and a maximum of seven members. They are to represent the Session, staff and the congregation at large. They are to be a member in good standing and a member of First Presbyterian Church (with a minimum 1-year membership). Should the allegations involve an employee of the Church, the chair of the Administrative/Personnel Committee will be a member of the Responding Committee. Any member of the Responding Committee who receives a notice of alleged abuse shall then ensure that each of the other members of the Responding Committee is notified. Upon notice of each of the above persons, a Responding Committee shall be deemed to have been formed.

The purpose of the Responding Committee is to determine the appropriate steps the Church should take in response to allegations and findings of child abuse. The responding committee is not designed to determine guilt or innocence of the individual accused of child abuse or neglect.

If any member of the Responding Committee is an alleged abuser or an alleged victim, that member is disqualified from serving on the Responding Committee and the remaining members of the Responding Committee must by majority vote elect another member in good standing in the Church to serve on the Responding Committee in the disqualified member's place.

The Chairperson of the Responding Committee shall be the first member from the ordered list of Responding Committee members who is able and willing to serve as chairperson. The committee shall elect a secretary whose duties shall include maintaining documentation and ensuring proper signatures on each resolution of the Responding Committee. The secretary shall maintain at least the following documentation: (1) dated notes of all meetings of the responding committee (2) dated notes of all interviews and investigations, and (3) all other relevant evidence reviewed by the members of the Responding Committee. Each committee member shall sign and date in a substantially contemporaneous manner a statement indicating approval of the minutes of each meeting and the resolutions of the Responding Committee.

The Responding Committee shall meet as soon as practical after its formation in order to determine the actions to be taken protect the alleged victim(s) and the alleged abuser(s). The Responding Committee shall meet thereafter as needed until the committee votes by majority to dissolve. In all cases in which the reports of alleged abuse results in investigations by the Department of Social Services or law enforcement, the Responding Committee shall remain in effect until those investigations have been concluded. A determination of not guilty in a judicial setting shall not be binding upon the Responding Committee, but it should be seriously considered in light of all available evidence to determine the Responding Committee's final resolutions.

The Responding Committee shall act by majority vote and its actions and resolutions require the votes of each member. Parliamentary rules set forth in Roberts Rules of Order shall be controlling authority for the conduct of the meetings should they be required.

The following actions shall be considered by the Responding Committee along with any and all other appropriate actions to protect each and every member of the Church community:

(1) The Responding Committee will determine if there is any probable cause to believe that abuse or neglect occurred. If any member of the Responding Committee reasonably suspects that child/youth abuse or neglect has occurred, he or she may report the incident to the appropriate authorities without the approval of the Responding Committee. However, if a member of the Responding Committee chooses to act without the approval of the Responding Committee as a

whole, the member shall make it clear that her or she is acting on his or her own without the approval of the Church or the Responding Committee. The member so acting should also give due consideration to any obligations of confidentiality by which he or she is ethically bound.

(2) The Responding Committee may determine that the allegations have little merit and will require no further action on the part of the Church to protect the congregation.

(3) The Responding Committee may determine that the reporting of the incident to agencies outside of the Church is not warranted. In each of these instances, the Responding Committee should verify that the alleged victim is aware of the other options for reporting the alleged abuse should the alleged victim wish to report the matter.

(4) The Responding Committee shall determine whether, when, and in what manner the Church body shall be informed of an allegation. This should rarely be required and should be discussed with legal counsel unless the Responding Committee determines that the notification of the Church is necessary to protect all members of the congregation from an imminent threat.

(5) The Responding Committee shall determine when and whether to notify the Church's insurance carrier. The insurance carrier should be notified promptly if the charges are deemed to have merit.

(6) The Responding Committee shall determine whether the alleged abuser shall be suspended from Church activities involving direct contact with children/youth pending final resolution of the matter. Such suspension of the accused shall continue until an investigation of the report of alleged abuse has concluded, and it is found that such allegations have no merit. Ordinarily, the alleged abuser should be temporarily relieved of his or her duties within the life of the Church until an investigation is concluded. This should be accomplished with the oversight and direction of legal counsel. The Responding Committee should determine the most discrete and appropriate manner in which to relieve the accused of his or her duties.

(7) The Responding Committee, prior to speaking with the alleged abuser, should determine whether such independent investigation may interfere with the ultimate investigation of the alleged abuse by law enforcement. If the allegations are determined to be serious, the Responding Committee should undertake its duties without discussing the matter with the alleged abuser and should not reveal the report of abuse to the alleged abuser. The Responding Committee shall not approach the accused person without consulting legal counsel.

(8) The Responding Committee shall document in the records of the Responding Committee any findings of innocence or recantation by the alleged victim(s).

(9) The Responding Committee shall make findings and resolutions which shall be documented and signed by each Responding Committee member. The final resolution of the Responding Committee shall terminate the existence of the Responding Committee for each report of alleged abuse.

Compensated Staff and Volunteer Staff Selection

General

The Compensated Staff and Volunteer Staff Policy of First Presbyterian Church applies to paid Church employees and all volunteers who work in some capacity with the ministries and missions of the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church. The purpose of the Staff Selection Policy is to safeguard the church environment for all children and youth who are taking part in church ministries and activities of First Presbyterian Church.

Forms

The Staff and Volunteer Selection Policy includes the following forms:

Background Check Screening Form – This form is for all paid staff and for persons who volunteer for service with First Presbyterian Church and work regularly in some capacity with children or youth of First Presbyterian Church.

Statement of Compliance – This form is for paid staff and all persons who volunteer for service with the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church.

Guidelines for Selecting Compensated and Volunteer Persons

The following guidelines are set up for the selection of paid and volunteer persons who will be working in some capacity with children and youth of First Presbyterian Church.

All prospective employees and volunteers are required to fill out the appropriate forms stated above before they work with the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church.

Individuals who have been convicted of any of the following crimes will not be allowed to work with the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church: murder, rape, aggravated assault, felony drug charges, sexual misconducts of any kind, or abandonment or endangering of a child.

Goals for Specific Activities

General Guidelines for All Activities Involving Children:

It is the goal of First Presbyterian Church to follow these guidelines for all paid and volunteer persons who have been selected and screened to work with the children and youth of the Church.

Paid and volunteer staff, excluding pastoral staff, shall not begin any counseling relationships with individual children or youth. Any counseling or pastoral care needed by the child or youth shall be referred to the appropriate pastoral staff for guidance.

A minimum of two (2) adults should be present at all activities and event for children or youth. While we realize that this will not always be possible, it is our goal. When transporting children or youth to and from offsite activities in private vehicles, the presence of two adults is not required. However, all precautions should be taken to avoid a situation where one child or youth is in a vehicle alone with one adult.

Volunteers and employees must read the Safe Church Policy, complete, sign, and return the appropriate form(s), and submit to the appropriate level of screening and training.

All volunteers working with children or youth (other than those who work with the FPC Dayschool) must be an active participant of the Church for a period of at least six months prior to beginning in any primary volunteer position. This means that a newcomer can participate in children or youth related activities during the initial six months of participation, but that they cannot hold an official volunteer position and their presence would be in addition to the required staff or volunteers.

Paid staff and volunteers are required to report immediately any inappropriate behavior that suggests (1) child sexual abuse (2) neglect (3) physical abuse or (4) psychological abuse.

The door to the room in which children/youth are present should remain open at all times. The door does not need to remain open if the room contains one or more windows or other openings allowing adults from outside the room to have direct lines of sight into the main portions of the room.

During all Church-wide activities involving children and youth one of these shall be present: a paid staff member, a member of the Board of Deacons or Session, a designee appointed by these bodies. These monitors/observers should give care to cause as little disruption as possible when checking on classrooms or activities in other locations.

Restroom use for pre-school age children: When going to the restroom, a child may be accompanied by another child of the same sex. The adult staff or volunteer should be aware of the destination of the children at the time they leave the classroom or activity area. If a young child needs bathroom assistance or help changing clothes, two adults must be in the area.

Off-Site or Overnight Trips

Off-site trips for children or youth require a completed parental authorization form.

As each destination facility will be different, it will be the responsibility of paid Church staff to determine how best to implement and comply Safe Church Policy while away from First Presbyterian Church.

Ideally, if any group stays overnight at the Church, or if a group of children or youth leave Church grounds for an outing, two or more adult leaders must be present. If the group is mixed gender, the adult leaders present must include at least one male and one female. In order to qualify as an adult leader in this instance, the adult leader must be 18 years or older. A married couple only counts as one adult unit.

On overnight trips, male and female children/youth shall be segregated during sleeping time. If it is deemed necessary for adults to share sleeping accommodations with children/youth, our goal is to have a minimum of two adults of the same sex sleeping in the same area as the children/youth they are chaperoning.

Use of Church Facilities by an Outside Non-Church Group

At the time a non-Church group or entity requests the use of Church facilities, it shall be the duty of the Church Administrator to give the leader of the outside group a copy of the Safe Church Policy. The leader should sign the Statement of Compliance Form on behalf of the group requesting usage and be informed that the people or organization leadership using Church facilities are expected to abide by those provisions that apply to their activity's structure while using Church facilities.

REVIEW OF THIS PROCEDURE

The Faith Formation team shall receive reports annually from paid staff and respective ministries as to the effectiveness of this Safe Church policy and shall suggest improvements and report to the Session at least annually on the status of the Safe Church Policy.

Classroom/Activity Management

Creating a positive and safe environment for children and youth will decrease the chances of neglect and abuse; therefore:

1. Courtesy is expected at all times. Unacceptable behavior is dealt with as quickly, lovingly, and firmly as possible. If unacceptable behavior occurs, the leader should explain to the individual involved why that particular behavior is unacceptable and ask him or her not to repeat that behavior.
2. If the behavior occurs again, the individual should be given time out to reflect.
3. If this behavior continues to be a problem, discuss it with the parent/guardian of the individual involved. At any time, you may ask for help from church staff or seek assistance from any leader in nearby classrooms or activity space.

Suggestion: Asking an undisciplined child to "help" you often sidelines inappropriate behavior. Also, sometimes physically standing beside a disruptive child gives him/her the hint to be quiet.