

**Protecting Our Children Policy
of
First Presbyterian Church, Winchester**

I. Purpose

First Presbyterian Church, Winchester seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

II. Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse includes any kind of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect of a child. Sexual abuse or misconduct includes touching or non-touching interaction for the purpose of sexual stimulation between a child and a volunteer or staff member. This behavior is always considered nonconsensual when the victim is a minor.

III. Definition of Volunteer

The term “volunteer” used in this policy describes any person who is leading, supervising, or assisting minors or participants as part of any children’s or youth ministry program of First Presbyterian Church and any program held on the premises of First Presbyterian Church. This includes, but is not limited to, child care volunteers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and shepherds, Vacation Bible School volunteers, youth and children’s music ministry volunteers, and youth group chaperones, drivers, and leaders, and scout leaders.

IV. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within First Presbyterian Church, Winchester, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two person rule, and standards of appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms. All church staff as well as volunteers serving with children or youth must abide by this policy and sign a statement agreeing to do so.

1. Social Media and Communications Policy

With constantly changing social media and communication techniques it is important to have a set policy in place for communication with youth and children, and their families. Adults should not maintain relationships with students without parental knowledge and consent. This is in place to keep all parties safe and accountable, while giving the students an opportunity to be mentored, challenged, prayed for, and encouraged by adult leaders in the church.

Children 4th grade and younger should NEVER be contacted without a Parent/Guardian being included. Parents/Guardians of youth ministry (5th-12th grade) will be asked to indicate how they would like the church and volunteers to communicate with their children. Each year when parents fill out the Youth Permission and Medical Release they will be asked the following question.

Social Media and Communication: We believe there is importance in relationships that foster and encourage strong faith development. With this in mind, I give the church's approved adult mentors, staff, and volunteers permission to communicate with my child for the purpose of an invitation to large group events and encouragement via a variety of platforms, including social media, phone, texting, and email.

Answers will include-

-I grant permission

-I would prefer that the church communicates with my child(ren)'s guardians

-I grant permission for the following platforms ONLY, with a space to input those platforms.

-or I grant permission for the Director of Youth and Children's Ministries only to connect with my child in the form of the platforms I pick

All Volunteers must follow the guardian's guidance on this matter. If there is not an up-to-date response, or a completed Youth Permission and Medical Release, volunteers, should connect with the guardian or Director of Youth & Children's Ministries before contacting the student.

Along with the above, volunteers will only contact students during "Reasonable or Home Phone Hours," Which means that any messages being sent should be at a time that you would also call a home phone.

It is very important the communications between minors and volunteers are as transparent as possible. This means that at no time should any conversation or communication be deleted. Volunteers should not communicate with any students on social media that automatically deletes or hides communication.

2. **Screening and Training of Employed Church Staff and Continuing Contractors**

Before beginning employment, each employed staff member will sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged and disclosing whether or not he/she has been convicted or has pending charges related to any other crime, or has had any other crime expunged. Each employed staff shall, prior to his/her employment, undergo a criminal background screening to determine acceptability of employment. Such record check shall be renewed every five (5) years. The church will cover the cost of this background screening.

Before beginning employment, all employed staff will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Each year the church will offer a training session on child protection. Employed staff will be required to attend the training session initially and every three (3) years. Employed staff members who have particular roles as program directors, mentors, and pastoral care givers have been carefully screened before employment. Their professional roles necessitate circumstances that do not adhere to the Two Person Rule set forth below – except in a situation involving overnight activities. With parental permission, children and youth may be in an individual or group supervised activity, or in a mentoring or pastoral care situation with an employed staff member, as long as the circumstances are consistent with the scope of that staff member's employment. In no event shall any mentoring or pastoral care be overnight.

Continuing contractors (i.e. custodial personnel or other contractors likely to have contact with children on a weekly or more frequent basis) will be required (1) to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged, and (2) to undergo a criminal background screening. Such screening shall be renewed every five (5) years. The church will cover the cost of this background screening.

3. **Volunteer Screening**

Before beginning the first year of service, and every three years thereafter, each volunteer for any church ministry related to children or youth will be asked to complete the final page of this

policy document, and a Volunteer Application. The Volunteer Application shall include the following: general information, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, and prior experience with children or youth. The volunteer must also sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse nor had such a conviction expunged. The volunteer will also disclose whether or not he/she has any pending charges, prior convictions, or has had a conviction expunged for any other crime. Anyone who does not complete the form, has a child abuse conviction or expungement, or who has certain other offenses in their criminal history will not be permitted to work with children or youth. Criminal history disclosed on the Volunteer Application will be reviewed by members of the Child Protection Committee to determine if the volunteer is permitted to serve. The strictest confidentiality will be maintained.

All volunteers who are nineteen years of age or older will also be required to undergo a criminal background check prior to beginning service. If a volunteer has turned nineteen years old since their last training, they will be required to undergo a background check at the time they become due for retraining. Background checks for those nineteen years and older are required in order to remain active as approved volunteers. Such record checks shall be renewed every five (5) years. The church will cover the cost of this background screening.

Should such record check reveal an open warrant or failure to register as a sex offender, the church will report the applicant to the appropriate authorities and the applicant is deemed to have waived any right to confidentiality.

A church staff member (currently the Business Manager) will be assigned the responsibility of handling and maintaining the confidentiality of completed background check forms authorizing the Church to obtain a background check on volunteers. This is especially important because the authorization form contains private information including the volunteer's Social Security Number.

Volunteers authorizing a background check may provide the completed and signed authorization form directly to the Business Manager or to another staff member who they trust to deliver the form to the Business Manager as soon as possible. The Business Manager will promptly relay the confidential information and request for background check to the company contracted to perform the background checks. Until the results of the background check are received, the Business Manager will maintain the authorization form in a locked cabinet. As soon as "clean" background report is received by the Church, the Business Manager will shred the original authorization form (or return to the volunteer who completed it, if so requested). If a questionable report is received, the original authorization form will be kept only until the issue of the volunteer's status is acted on by the Child Protection Committee. The Business Manager will then shred the authorization form (or return it to the volunteer who completed it, if so requested).

4. Self-Reporting

Any volunteer serving in children or youth ministries shall forthwith report any personal allegation of crime or child abuse to the Pastor/Head of Staff or program administrators upon such volunteer learning of the allegation. The volunteer will also inform the Pastor/Head of Staff of the progress and outcome of such allegations.

5. Volunteer Training

Before beginning their first year of service, all volunteers working with youth or children will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not

be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Each year the church will offer training sessions on child protection. Volunteers will be required to attend a training session before beginning service and every three (3) years.

6. Three Month Rule

No person shall serve as a volunteer in children or youth ministries at First Presbyterian Church Winchester unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church for at least three (3) months, and must provide character references. The Shenandoah Presbytery and churches within may require 6 months of active involvement prior to training.

7. Two Person Rule

Except as set forth in sections 1, 7 or 8, volunteers will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. Two volunteers will be at least 5 years older than the children and youth they lead. Additional safe sanctuary trained volunteers who do not meet the age criteria may also volunteer. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two volunteers. If there are not two volunteers available for each group, then absent exceptional circumstances, either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two volunteers, or the activity will be cancelled on that occasion. If any group stays overnight at the church, two or more volunteers must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed in gender.

8. Travel Away from Church Property

If any group of children or youth leaves the church premises for a church-related event or activity, the group must be accompanied at the event by two or more volunteers or staff, qualified to serve under this policy. If supplemental volunteers are required, comparably trained leaders from another church or ministry may help chaperone children or youth from First Presbyterian Church as determined by the staff person responsible for the event. At least one volunteer or staff must be present in each vehicle transporting children or youth to the event. Except for the exemptions from the Two-Person Rule as set forth in paragraph 8, no single child or youth will ride alone in a vehicle with fewer than two volunteers or staff. Parent permission is required for a single youth in a vehicle with fewer than 2 volunteers or staff. When a church-related event away from the premises involves both male and female participants staying overnight, the designated staff or volunteers must include at least one male and one female. A minimum of TWO males and TWO females are required for groups of mixed gender wherever adults WILL be in same sleeping quarters as participants for overnight events. A minimum of one male leader and one female leader is required for groups of mixed gender where adults will NOT be in same sleeping quarters and participants.

9. Other Volunteer Exemptions from Two-Person Rule

Youth, 7th grade & older, with parental permission, may participate in mentoring without the application of the Two Person Rule. Any youth seventeen years of age and older may participate in mentoring without restriction. In no event shall any mentoring occur overnight.

Any other exception to the two-person rule may be approved by the Child Protection Committee, provided it meets the following parameters; youth or children involved have parental permission to participate in the proposed activities, the volunteer involved is otherwise in compliance with this policy and the volunteer has undergone a criminal background screening within the previous five years.

10. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted during all activities.

11. Other Groups

All policies set forth herein shall apply likewise to any other groups during their use of the church facilities. The designated leader of community groups of children or youth, who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, is required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form. The designated leader is responsible for communicating the requirements of the policy to all leaders from their group and for enforcing the policy when using First Presbyterian facilities. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy or do not adhere to this policy. For groups that have an ongoing relationship with First Presbyterian Church, we require that a new policy acknowledgement form be completed annually and that the designated leader complete First Presbyterian Church's safe sanctuaries training. The Weekday School teachers and staff are trained every 3 years, however, we understand and accept that the Weekday School, while a mission of the church, follows the NAEYC protocols, and not this policy.

12. Ministering to People Who May Have a Criminal History

From time to time, young people at First Presbyterian are invited to minister to people who may have a greater likelihood of having a criminal background (e.g. CCAP, Jubilee Kitchen, etc.). First Presbyterian Church believes it is very important for young people to have the opportunity to serve with helping ministries of the church and community, but we require that volunteers and staff exercise a greater level of vigilance in supervising children and youth while in these situations. Volunteers will be reminded by the main leader responsible for the event of the need for more proactive supervision if the ministry opportunity is, or could likely be, a situation where people with prior criminal records are present. The main leader responsible for the event will also disclose to parents when we believe an activity may encounter people who have, or may likely have, a criminal background.

13. The Church's Relationship with Known Sex Offenders

In the event that a church pastor or member of the Child Protection Committee learns that a member, or any person wishing to have an ongoing connection with the First Presbyterian congregation, is a registered sex offender, a pastor or member of the Child Protection Committee will meet with that person to setup a covenant agreement. While resolutely affirming every person's need to be part of a faith community and receive redemption, we hold in balance the imperative to do all we can to keep all our parishioners safe, especially (but not only) our children and youth. To that end, in striving to maintain an environment of love and safety for all, the "covenant relationship" established with that person through a face to face meeting and a signed agreement will include the parameters for being accompanied by a designated attendant while visiting the First Presbyterian premises and their exclusion from serving with ministries to youth and children. If they are committed to keeping this covenant, they will sign and date the agreement. If they cannot or are unwilling to do so, we regret that we cannot allow the person to visit church premises again for any reason.

V. Child Protection Committee

The Child Protection Committee of First Presbyterian Church Winchester shall meet at least annually and be comprised of: the Moderator and Vice Moderator of the Worship and Discipleship Council; the Director of Youth and Children's Ministries; the Assistant for Youth and Children's

Ministries; the Director of Weekday School; and a person selected annually by the Pastor/Head of Staff. The Child Protection Committee shall coordinate the annual training, keep all records of compliance, review policies and procedures to maintain the use of best practices, and suspend or terminate from participation any individual not following the rules herein. All information and deliberations of the Child Protection Committee regarding any individual or situation involving specific individual(s) will be held in strictest confidence by the committee and each of its members. To expedite immediate action, some confidential matters or incidents can be handled by a minimum of two members of the Child Protection Committee or pastor, but the whole Committee should convene as soon as reasonably possible to receive a reporting of any related situations, to provide feedback, to help interpret the policy, and to consider if the situation necessitates any policy changes.

VI. Suspension of Service

If at any time, the Pastor/Head of Staff, Director of Youth and Children’s Ministries, Assistant for Youth and Children’s Ministries, Director of Weekday School, or any staff person in charge of children’s and youth music programs has a reasonable suspicion that a paid staff or volunteer is not following the rules herein, he or she may immediately suspend the paid staff or volunteer from participation in service with children or youth, subject to the final determination of the Child Protection Committee.

VII. Reporting Child Abuse

Any allegation of child abuse, whether arising at the church or elsewhere, shall be handled as follows:

1. The allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously and reported to a pastor or member of the Child Protection Committee.
 2. All procedures which occur in the handling of the allegation shall be documented from its earliest stage.
 3. The Pastor, the Director of Youth and Children’s Ministries, the Assistant for Youth and Children’s Ministries, all staff in charge of children’s and youth music, and the Weekday School Director shall be immediately notified of the allegation. If there is an allegation of child abuse, the Responsible Person will comply with the State’s requirement regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.
 4. In addition to following the protocols above, any person has the option of contacting the department of social services to make a report.
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After reviewing the foregoing Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood, and accept the Protecting Our Children Policy of First Presbyterian Church, Winchester.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone #: _____

I have read and understand the Protecting Our Children policy of First Presbyterian Church, Winchester. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures. I have no convictions for child abuse or expungements of such convictions, and I have disclosed all criminal history on the volunteer application. I authorize and release all churches and persons with whom I have previously worked or volunteered to provide First Presbyterian Church, Winchester with any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my work with children or youth.

Signature

Date