



Child Safety

We live in an age in which we must take every step to promote the careful care of our covenant children. First Presbyterian Church officers (session and deaconate), the staff and the members, are committed to maintaining an environment in which children and youth are safeguarded in a biblical, nurturing environment. Simultaneously, they also desire to preserve an environment in which all paid workers (staff) and unpaid workers (volunteers) are protected from false accusations of abuse. The officers, members, and staff of First Presbyterian Church are dedicated to meeting all requirements so that all children can be adequately protected.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidelines about the operation of the ministry to children. As used herein, child, children, or youth shall mean any person under 18 years of age. In being proactive, we address the areas of (1) Screening of workers (2) Safety (3) Training (4) Protection (5) Reporting and (6) Responding.

Implementation

Church leaders request the glad cooperation of those in our church who must abide by the guidelines of this policy.

Screening of Workers

- 1) All volunteers working with children are required to be members, as approved by the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Augusta ("FPC"), for a minimum of six months; and have passed a criminal background check (See consent form attached to Appendix 1). A member of the staff will interview all volunteers to determine their suitability for children's ministry. Information from this interview will not be released to unauthorized persons.
- 2) All adult volunteers will complete the following before assuming any participation in church-sponsored children activities:
 - a. Written application for all volunteer workers are to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
 - b. Initial and periodic criminal background checks conducted by the Senior Pastor or his designee. Volunteer work may commence only after the receipt of a clear background check and the approval of the Senior Pastor or his designee.
 - c. Required orientation and training activities appropriate to level of volunteer involvement.
 - d. Recommend yearly in-service/refresher courses.
 - e. Approval by Session prior to the commencement of work with children or youth.
- 3) The application and results of these screens shall be kept confidential and shall be retained by the Senior Pastor and/or his designee in a secure environment for a period of five years after termination. Administration of applications and results will be by the Senior Pastor and/or his designee.
- 4) All volunteer workers will complete a written acknowledgement stating that they have received and reviewed a copy of the "Volunteer Screening and Child Protection Policy."
- 5) Volunteers of minority age may be used but only in the presence of screened adult volunteers or paid staff. Volunteers of a minority age will not count towards the two minimum adult supervision requirement.

Training:

- 1) Annual training appropriate for the activities involved shall be provided for and required of all volunteer workers who will be working with the children.

- a. Development of appropriate training programs, or securing of same, is the responsibility of the Pastor of Youth and Family, Director of Children’s Ministries, Nursery Coordinator or the Senior Pastor’s designee.
 - b. Training sessions will be conducted for all involved officers, team leaders, staff, and volunteers who work with children, on at least an annual basis.
 - c. All training programs for volunteers who work with children shall include this “Volunteer Screening and Child Protection Policy.”
 - d. After passing the appropriate background check, volunteers must receive Child Protection orientation from the team leader, and attend the next scheduled training session.
- 2) The “Volunteer Screening and Child Protection Policy” of FPC should be included in all new member information packets.
 - 3) The “Volunteer Screening and Child Protection Policy” of FPC shall be publicized annually to all members of the congregation.

Safety/First Aid Training

Church staff who supervise children must maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR. The church will pay the costs for this training. Nursery volunteers and others serving children are to be encouraged to secure training in infant and toddler CPR. Other volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to get training if they regularly work with children.

Protection/Supervision

- 1) Volunteer workers shall follow the direction of the supervisor responsible for each activity. Additional supervisory responsibility for children’s activities is vested as follows:
 - a. First, with the paid staff member responsible for the age group involved (Pastor of Youth and Family, Director of Children’s Ministries, Nursery Coordinator, or paid nursery worker);
 - b. Second, with the involved officer or team leader responsible for the age group involved;
 - c. Third, with the Senior Pastor, and ultimately with the Session.
- 2) An adequate number of trained adults shall be present to supervise all activities involving children.
 - a. At least two adults unrelated to each other should be present during all group activities.
 - b. For activities involving special skills (e.g.: sports), the number of adults present should be appropriate to the activity.
 - c. Supervising adults should remain at each activity until its scheduled conclusion, and early dismissal of participants should not be allowed, except at the express direction of a parent or guardian.
 - d. Doors should have clear glass windows or doors kept slightly open, allowing for an easy view of classroom activities without disrupting teaching.
- 3) Parental permission forms shall be required for any FPC authorized off campus or over night activity involving children.
- 4) At the commencement of an activity when any volunteer worker is the only adult present during any activity involving children, said volunteer shall report that fact to either the immediate supervisor or the pastor.
- 5) Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between an adult and a child must be confronted immediately by an appropriate staff.

Transportation

- 1) Drivers transporting children during an activity must have a valid driver's license and current sufficient automobile liability insurance and provide evidence thereof. The number of occupants in the vehicle should not exceed the number of seat belts. Seat belts must be worn.
- 2) Drivers transporting children must contact their insurance company regarding the minimum and maximum age ranges and other requirements, to ensure that coverage is in effect for all approved drivers. This must be done for all vehicles and all drivers—privately owned, church owned and rental vehicles.
- 3) When practical, have parents transport their own children to and from ministry activities.

Reporting

- 1) All allegations of child sexual abuse, child molestation or any type of inappropriate behavior should be reported **immediately** to the Senior Pastor or his designee. In case of observed or reasonably suspected incidents, the Senior Pastor or his designee will give a verbal report to the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS) as soon as possible.
- 2) DFACS, not church personnel, shall conduct an investigation.

Responding

- 1) A Response Committee, consisting of the Senior Pastor, an Associate Pastor, the ministry director and legal counsel shall review all reports.
- 2) All reports, along with action will be fully documented.
- 3) Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded.
- 4) The Senior Pastor or his designee shall be the sole spokesmen for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned.
- 5) The church's staff will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

Strategy Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis. The reviewers will submit a report including any necessary program changes or additional risks to the Session. The report will also include a brief summary of policy violations, if any, and the response to these violations.

Modification of strategy

Changes in any policy must be approved by the Session. Policies may be modified or withdrawn by the church at any time. These policies are not intended to create an implied or express contract with any person. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

Reporting:

When the necessity for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect arises, the protection of children must be paramount. Ministers are not required by law to report reasonable suspicion of child abuse, but they must do so

under the provisions of the “Volunteer Screening and Child Protection Policy” of FPC, and they may in other situations in which abuse is encountered. The confidentiality of the minister/parishioner relationship is a very serious consideration, but it is intended to help individuals get help for a problem and prevent further harm to self and others. It is not intended to protect abusers from being held accountable for their actions or to keep them from getting the help they need. FPC shall adopt the following guidelines.

- 1) When a volunteer worker of a FPC sponsored program or event suspects that abuse is taking or has taken place, he or she shall report the abuse to a pastor. The person suspected of abuse shall be immediately suspended and will not be reinstated until a full and thorough internal investigation has been finalized. The suspended individual is restricted from participation in any church-related activity that involves children or youth during the duration of the investigation. The matter must not be discussed with anyone else. As stated above, If the volunteer worker suspects abuse, he or she shall first report the matter to the Senior Pastor. In the event that he or she decides to report the matter to the authorities, he or she should then immediately tell the Senior Pastor of his or her actions.
- 2) Following the report of an incident to the Senior Pastor, the Senior Pastor shall document the report and then speak with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the alleged victim in the presence of a qualified third party who is a member of the accusation response committee.
- 3) After speaking with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the alleged victim, the Senior Pastor and qualified third party shall make a determination whether reasonable suspicion exists that abuse has occurred.
- 4) If the enforcement individual(s) determine that reasonable suspicion exists that abuse has occurred, he or she shall do the following in the sequence listed:
 - a. Promptly make a report to the social services or welfare office.
 - b. Speak with the person accused of the abuse, to inform them of any action being taken.
 - c. All such conversations shall be documented. The documentation should include the following:
 - i. The name of the volunteer or paid worker observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place and any action taken by this person.
 - ii. The alleged victim’s name, age, address and date of birth.
 - iii. Any statement made by the alleged victim, including the name of the alleged perpetrator, and the time, place and nature of the alleged abuse.
 - iv. Name of the accused person, the date, time and place of any conversation with the accused, and any statement made by the accused.
 - v. Any action taken (e.g.: suspension) of the accused.
 - vi. Date and time of call to alleged victim’s parent(s)/guardian(s) and the content of that conversation.
 - vii. Date and time of call to SRS or DFS; name of caseworker spoken to, content of that conversation, and case number assigned.
 - viii. If made, record the date and time of call to law enforcement agency. Document the name of officer spoken to and content of that conversation.
 - ix. Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.