

First Presbyterian Church (Morganton, NC)



SAFE PLACE: ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Adopted by the Session on: July 16, 2009 & August 21, 2014

Introduction

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child.....welcomes me” (Matthew 8:15). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones....., it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 8:16). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection for the little ones, the children. Children and youth (defined as those under eighteen years of age) must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children and youth. Denominations across this country can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. The problem cuts across economic, cultural, and racial lines. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. In response to this church wide challenge, the Christian Education Committee of First Presbyterian Church offers this prevention policy in order to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse.

Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and Guidelines document is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

At the same time, we are concerned about the safety and reputation of the adults who volunteer to make our ministry to children and youth possible.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that enhance the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with

children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Conclusion

In all our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.

GUIDELINES

I. RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

Volunteers will be recruited by the professional staff or volunteers helping to administer a particular program.

- a. All regular volunteers and paid staff shall consent in writing to allow First Presbyterian to conduct a thorough investigation into their background using all available methods of investigation, including a criminal background check and check of the DSS Child Abuse Registry. Results from such investigations will be reported from the investigating agency to the Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor. In the absence of two pastors, the Clerk of Session will receive the report. If the professional staff knows of reasons why a person would not be suitable for a volunteer position, the name will be removed from consideration.
- b. In cases where children, youth, or developmentally disabled adults are to be supervised by volunteers, a Volunteer Application (Appendix 1) must be filed by the volunteer before final approval is considered. A volunteer should be active within the church for six months prior to applying.
- c. No adult who has been convicted of, or pled guilty to, a crime involving child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) will be considered for volunteer status to work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
- d. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and Educational events provided by First Presbyterian or the Presbytery to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.

II. CLASSROOM STAFFING STANDARDS

Every church desires to provide a safe, loving classroom where the child feels comfortable and where learning can take place. Therefore, the following ratios shall be the standard for First Presbyterian Church:

- a. There should be a minimum of two adults in any room with children, except in the event of an emergency situation (hereafter referred to as “The Two Adult Rule”). This standard not only helps provide for a safe and loving classroom, it also gives volunteers more encouragement, creativity, and flexibility. In addition, this arrangement allows for a gift-mix in each classroom that makes for a richer teaching environment.

- b. When it is necessary that only one adult teacher be in the room with children, the door of that room will remain open or the door must have a window.
- c. Two related adults are considered one adult using “The Two Adult Rule.”

III. RECORD KEEPING AND DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

- a. The names and contact information of parents and children shall be carefully maintained.
- b. An accurate sign-in procedure should be maintained for each preschool child including the child’s name, parent’s name, and parent location during the function. A line on this form should be provided for the parent to list the special needs of their child.
- c. During Sunday School, children ages preschool through fourth grade shall remain in the classroom until picked up by a parent, designated adult, middle or high school sibling. Workers may release a child for non-parental pick-up only with prior written permission, with the identification of the parent duly noted.
- d. Other activities involving children through fifth grade shall require children to remain in the classroom until picked up by a parent, designated adult, middle or high school sibling. Workers may release a child for non-parental pickup only with prior written permission.
- e. First Presbyterian Church is responsible for children during scheduled activities. Parents are to follow drop off and pickup procedures. Parents are encouraged to directly supervise their children at other times.
- f. *When not picking-up siblings from a scheduled church activity, students age 13 and under should be in attendance at their scheduled program, or under the direct supervision of a parent and/or guardian or other designated adult. At church meals, or when no program for their age group is scheduled, all students age 13 and under should either attend the adult program, or be directly supervised by their parent and/or guardian or other designated adult.*
- g. *It is the responsibility of the parent and/or guardian to ensure that their children are properly supervised while on the church property.*

IV. DIAPER CHANGING AND TODDLER RESTROOM POLICY

- a. Only approved volunteers and staff workers may change a child’s diaper (other than a child’s parent). Diaper changing must take place in the designated diaper changing area in full view of the classroom. Another non-related adult should be in the room.
- b. Volunteers or staff workers supervising toddlers and preschoolers should always be in view of another volunteer or staff when helping a child in the restroom.

V. RESTROOMS

This is an area in which church leaders need to be very sensitive to the possibility of problems.

- a. One adult will not be allowed into a restroom alone with a child or children. A second adult should accompany them or be within visual contact. One adult may take a child or children to the restroom only if he/she stands in the open doorway.
- b. Developmental needs are to be considered when deciding between diaper changing/toddler restroom policy vs. restroom policy.

VI. WORKER BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

- a. Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall not touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with children/youth in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pats on the back), support (prayers) or physical caretaking (changing diapers, toileting, etc.) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that expressions of affection and affirmation are not excessive or imposed upon the child/youth. Care must also be taken that adults do not act in a sexually stimulating way in front of children/youth during church sponsored activities.
- b. Workers or staff who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting children/youth must report it as soon as possible to the senior and/or associate pastor. In the absence of senior or associate pastor, the clerk of session shall be notified.
- c. For the protection of workers, staff members, and children, adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse. They should not hesitate to caution others if they observe activities which are, or might be interpreted by others to be inappropriate.

VII. FIRST AID AND EMERGENCIES

- a. Workers are not to give or apply medication (other than routine first aid such as application of bandaides and ice packs) without full written permission by the child/youth's parent or guardian, including written directions for appropriate administration.
- b. First aid boxes will be kept on hand and all workers are to review the location and contents annually.
- c. An accident form (Appendix 2) should be completed and filed for any accident or injury requiring first aid (beyond bandaides and ice packs) or medical attention which occurs during supervised church-sponsored activities.

VIII. OVERNIGHT TRIPS AND RETREATS

Volunteer teachers, youth advisors, and confirmation mentors are encouraged to involve their children and youth in service projects and other off-campus events and social activities. The following precautions will be taken in planning and implementing these activities.

- a. Secure a signed Student Ministries Registration Form (Appendix 3) from each parent if the church is responsible for transporting children to these activities.
- b. Always have at least two adults present at overnight trips. Two related adults are considered one adult using “The Two Adult Rule,” therefore another non-related adult must be present.
- c. Any overnight trip involving children or youths of both sexes shall be supervised by both male and female adult chaperones.

IX. DISCIPLINE POLICY

- a. Disruptive behavior should be corrected first by verbal warning. If behavior continues, age appropriate time out should be implemented. No physical force, threats of physical force, or spanking is permitted.
- b. If disruptive behavior is not corrected by verbal warnings and/or time-out, parents will be contacted.

X. PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO AND REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

Hopefully, no incident will ever occur to require the use of this guideline. However, the following are sequential procedures for reporting and responding to allegations of abuse and neglect.

- a. Anyone that observes questionable or inappropriate behavior affecting children/youth must report it as soon as possible to the senior and/or associate pastor. In the absence of senior or associate pastor, the clerk of session shall be notified.
- b. The senior pastor, associate pastor and/or Clerk of Session will follow NC State law upon receipt of allegation of abuse.

XI. MEDIA POLICY

All media inquiries should be directed to the senior pastor, associate pastor, and/or clerk of session.