

SAFE CHURCH – CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH -- COLUMBUS, INDIANA
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SAFE CHURCH – CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COLUMBUS, INDIANA

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Mark 10:14

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to help the church implement and maintain a safe environment for children, youth, and adults that will help them participate freely in the church’s ministries and programs. The goal is for all of God’s children to feel the welcome and love of Jesus Christ and to develop a lifelong relationship with God.

We believe that we are called to love one another and to be the family of God. We believe that all children and youth are important, for they are God’s gift to us, entrusted to our care and love. We should always strive to provide a healthy, safe, clean, loving place in which children and youth can thrive and ultimately know that they are loved by God through us.

OBJECTIVES

Implementation of the Safe Church Policy communicates the importance of a safe church for children, youth, adults, and the church. The objectives of this policy are to:

Protect Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons: The intent is to provide a safe environment for children and youth to learn, grow and experience God’s love. Effective ministry for children and youth requires relationships with caring, loving, and mature adults, teachers, and youth leaders who can demonstrate God’s love to them. Safety policies are intended to keep these relationships and all aspects of ministries with minors safe from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior. **Children** are defined as birth through 6th grade. **Youth** are defined as grades 7-12. **Vulnerable Persons** are defined as persons of any age who lack the functional mental or physical ability to care for themselves.

Protect Adults: When adult leaders are interacting with children and youth, they need to be in a safe place as well. The intent is to create an environment that sets appropriate guidelines and boundaries and to provide the support that staff and volunteers need to be effective in their roles with children and youth, and to protect & prevent adults from encountering a situation where they could be wrongfully accused.

SAFE CHURCH COMPONENTS

All staff and volunteers leading children or youth are expected to do everything reasonably possible to provide a safe environment. The following actions are required:

Screening

All volunteers who may have direct supervision of children or youth must have been a regular attender of this church for the last six months and be members of this church, or a Minister in good standing in a Presbytery of PCUSA or equivalent judicatory. If not a member, the volunteer must be a regular attender for one year. This interval allows for better evaluation and suitability of the volunteer for working with children. All Volunteer Applications must be approved by the Director of Children, Youth, and Young Adults (Director) and the Nurture Committees. Both staff and volunteers must be at least 18 years old to supervise children, and at least 25 years old to supervise youth. They must comply with screening requirements before being placed in a supervisory role. The following forms must be completed (and resubmitted at least once every three years):

- Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form
- Disclosure and Authorization-Background Investigation Form

Screening will include reference checks, as well as a Criminal Background and National Sex Offender Registry check through ProtectMyMinistry.com. Cost will be covered through the office budget. First Presbyterian Church does not run credit checks on volunteers, and only in rare cases for staff employment applications. The Head of Staff will designate a staff member responsible to initiate and conduct this screening, and confidentially maintain records of such. Anyone declining to authorize a criminal/sex offender registry check will not be cleared to work with children. What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Director and Head of Staff on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. All personal information, including the Application form and background check results will be maintained in confidence.

Authorized Ministry staff will attend all boundary/child protection/safe church workshops required by the Presbytery of Ohio Valley, or will attend at least one workshop on the topic every 3 years, whichever is most frequent.

Training

- Sexual Misconduct Policy - Self Certification
- Safe Church - Child Protection Policy

All staff and volunteers working with children and youth will receive a copy of the Safe Church – Child Protection Policy and the Sexual Misconduct Policy. These two policies must be read and signed prior to assuming leadership of children or youth and resigned and submitted every year of volunteering thereafter. All staff and volunteers working with children or youth will also attend formal training that will include appropriate lectures, videos, or other teaching aids. Until such a time as training has been completed, they will be supervised by a leader who has completed the training.

The Head of Staff and Director will be responsible for seeing that such training is provided, and policy compliance maintained, with the participation of the Safe Church Committee. The Children’s Nurture and Youth Nurture Committees will be responsible for implementation of and compliance with Safe Church Policy. A training event will be offered at least once a year for volunteers in the fall with the start of the new school year.

All Elders and Deacons will receive a copy of the Safe Church – Child Protection Policy and the Sexual Misconduct Policy. These two policies must be read and signed, and resigned and submitted every year. The Clerk of Session will be responsible to collect and maintain signed policies from all officers. Training in the Safe Church-Child Protection Policy will be a part of annual church Officer Training for deacons and elders.

First Presbyterian Church will strive to provide opportunities for additional training events on an annual basis. All leaders are strongly encouraged to attend these events. Training in the Safe Church-Child Protection Policy will be a part of church Officer Training for deacons and elders. OWL Educators are available to lead a Safe Touch/Body Autonomy role play activity lesson for children.

Accountability

Everyone involved with children and youth are responsible for making sure that the church’s Safe Church Policies and Guidelines are understood and followed. Ministry Staff is responsible for evaluating how well these policies and guidelines are being followed. Ministry Staff, and the Safe Church Committee, will be responsible for providing the ongoing training and support necessary to ensure this policy is implemented consistently. The Safe Church Committee will meet as needed, at least annually, to determine if implementation is consistent.

GENERAL POLICIES FOR CHILDCARE, CHILDREN’S, AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

Supervision

TWO-ADULT RULE

Supervision of all church sponsored programs and activities involving children and youth, whether on or off campus, will consist of at least two unrelated adults over the age of 18. If two related volunteers are working with children and youth, a third adult volunteer must be present. A youth, middle school or older, and having completed formal training in the supervision and protection of children, may assist, but is not counted in the Two-Adult Rule, and will assist in the direct presence of an adult. Background checks will be waived for youth volunteers.

Adults must remain in sight of one another at all times, except in emergency situations. Adults in leadership roles are expected to avoid situations where they are alone with children and youth by having leadership teams of at least two adults for all activities. The presence of two or more adults prevents awkward circumstances where child abuse or misconduct could occur or be alleged, allows shared leadership, and facilitates appropriate discipline. The policy extends to all overnight and off campus events.

Children’s classes taking place in the children’s upstairs classrooms may be supervised by one teacher in each classroom, windows remaining unobstructed and the doors left open, with no fewer than 3 students. In addition, there will be a third adult present in the large room space to provide additional adult presence, and to assist as needed.

Children’s classes having fewer than three children must move to a public area such as the Gym.

Unplanned situations when there is only one volunteer will require immediate contact with the Director or available clergy. During this time, the volunteer and child/children must be in a location that is visible to others, such as the gym. Guidelines for unplanned situation exceptions to the Two-Adult Rule follow this intent: that even when only one leader is present, the actions of that leader are known and visible to others. This is accomplished by the adult choosing to be in visible and public locations, and by communication with other ministry staff/volunteers. Participants should be readily visible to each other.

BREAKOUT/CLASSROOMS

Some ministries use breakout rooms for small group times. There may be times when a room will only accommodate one small group at a time. When this occurs, windows should be unobstructed (curtains or blinds open) AND the door left open. The small group leader should place themselves in visible sight of the hallway/entrance so that they may be seen from outside the room. An adult leader should periodically walk by the breakout rooms to ensure these policies are in effect.

OFF CAMPUS ACTIVITIES AND OVERNIGHT EVENTS

The Two-Adult rule should be followed during all off-campus activities. One exception is when youth are being transported in vehicles. For situations where only one adult is present, the volunteer and youth must be in a location that is visible to others. For example, during off campus trips, sometimes a youth or advisor needs to break off from the main group for some need. If only one adult can break off from the main group, they should take several youth, not just one, even if only one needs to leave the main group.

For youth, the nature of some off-campus activities requires them to be without direct adult supervision for some of the time (e.g., ski trips). In these cases, youth should always be in at least pairs (never alone), they should be told how to reach a ministry leader, and they should be given clear instructions about geographic and time boundaries.

When leaving the church property, leaders should bring a copy of the Information & Emergency Form, a copy of each student's insurance card (for overnight trips only), and a First Aid Kit.

Whether an on-campus sleepover or an off-campus trip, students must sleep at least arms length apart, with no bodily contact, and with adult leaders supervising. The Director and leaders will determine specifics based on the facility and group. Students and adults are required to wear modest sleep attire.

All adults participating in an overnight activity jointly with children or youth, such as an intergenerational trip, will be required to submit all Safe Church paperwork, including background checks.

**Any overnight events for children younger than 7th grade require that each child be accompanied by a parent/guardian who assumes responsibility for their safety and supervision. Any exceptions will be decided in advance, jointly by the Pastor, Director, and Event Leaders.

DRIVING CHILDREN OR YOUTH

Anyone driving children or youth for ministry activities, including one-on-one mentoring meetings, must be at least 25 years old and have had a driver's license for at least 3 years. Youth may not transport other youth during a church sponsored activity. Drivers must provide a copy of their driver's license, insurance and vehicle information to the youth director. All students being transported must have their own seat belt. All children under age 12 must be transported in the rear seat, in an age-appropriate car seat as required by law. If the occasion arises where children need to be transported by an adult- the Director, a parent, and event leader permission should be obtained in advance.

Contact with Children and Youth

ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS WITH YOUTH GRADES 7-12

At the beginning of each school year, or upon entry into programing, parents will be informed that advisors may contact youth outside of ministry activities. Parents will be asked to indicate permission on the “Information and Emergency Form.” The advisor should obtain parent permission before the first individual contact. Once parent permission is given, the advisor may communicate directly with the youth. In special circumstances where individual contact may benefit a student and parent permission has not been obtained, the advisor should consult with the Director or Pastor about other ways in which the youth can be supported.

One-on-one meetings between students and screened advisors are an important part of ministries with Middle and High School students. The following guidelines should be followed:

- **VISIBLE LOCATION-** Meetings should take place in a visible area in a public place (e.g., coffee shop, restaurant, visible park area). Adult leaders should never meet with a student in a private home unless the student’s parent or another screened adult is in the home and can view the adult and student at any time. The location should be within a couple miles of the church or the student’s home or school (i.e., advisors should not be planning one-on-one meetings at destinations outside the local community)
- **ONE-ON-ONE: MIDDLE SCHOOL-** Parent permission must be obtained for any one-on-one meeting with students in Middle School. Advisors need parental permission each time they meet with students regarding when and where the meeting will take place and how students will get to and from the meeting. This includes meetings with Confirmation Mentors.
- **ONE-ON-ONE: HIGH SCHOOL-** With signed permission, the parent does not need to be notified of specific meetings unless so requested; however, the Director must be notified. Without signed parent permission, parents must be contacted for permission prior to any meeting between an advisor and student.
- **DRIVING YOUTH-** Adult leaders may drive students to and from meetings, with parent consent, if they inform the Director of this arrangement in advance and they adhere to the guidelines listed in “Driving Children or Youth.”

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between ministry leaders and children. The following guidelines are intended to avoid contact that is, or may appear to be, threatening or inappropriate. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.

Examples of positive and appropriate forms of affection are:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives, hand slapping, and fist bumps
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders and vulnerable adults
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer

The following are considered **INAPPROPRIATE** with children, youth, in a ministry setting. It should be noted that many of these behaviors are used by offenders to groom children and their parents for later molestation and can be construed as sexual abuse. Children can't be expected to discern intention, so even without ill-intention, it is harmful to them to normalize these behaviors in a church setting. Rather than attempting to personally assess if they constitute risk to a child, any knowledge of these behaviors should immediately be reported to the Director or Minister / Head of Staff.

Examples considered INAPPROPRIATE behaviors are:

- Tickling children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Holding children over 5 years old on lap
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Offering to hold or supervise a child without invitation by the parent or guardian, both in or outside of the church setting.
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development

- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth, except for appropriate occasions such as a school or faith milestone.
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear, whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Kisses
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth

NOTE: In case of special circumstances, such as a child with special needs, any exception to the above must be specified in writing and signed by both parents, the Director, and the Head of Staff.

Discipline

The number one rule in ministry with children and youth is that **each of us is a child of God** and should be treated with the kind of respect, love, and support that is expected by the commandment in Scripture to love one another. Clear rules and expectations and consistent messages about behavior are the key to effective discipline procedures. Occasionally, children have trouble following the rules or display disruptive behavior. In these cases, the following steps will be taken.

- Younger Children: Attempt to redirect young children to another activity.
- Older Children & Youth: Talk with the child and state clearly what the problem behavior is and what the child should do instead, with children and youth old enough to understand.
- If they continue to exhibit problem behavior, the leader should discuss the behavior with the Director. The Director will determine the next step.
- There should NEVER be any spanking, grabbing, hitting, shaking, pushing, pinching, or other physical discipline of children. These actions are considered to be **child abuse**. Anyone found to be in violation will be subject to removal from the position of leadership, and subject also to the report and investigation of abuse.
- Emotional mistreatment such as belittling, bullying, constant criticism, name-calling, and intimidation, is inappropriate, and will not be tolerated.

Restrooms and Diapering

For the protection of all, leaders should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed, and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child.

RESTROOMS

Children in Kindergarten and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, leaders should escort a group of children to another bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The leaders should check the bathroom first to be sure it is unoccupied, then allow the children inside. Leaders should then remain outside the bathroom door. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the leader should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, leaders should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. Afterwards, the children should be escorted back to the classroom or location of activity.

Children grades 1- 6: Children should use the restroom in the classroom when possible. When moving to the gym or other area for an activity outside the classroom, leaders should check the nearest restroom first to make sure it is unoccupied before use by children.

DIAPERING

If diapering facilities exist in the room, these are to be used. Otherwise, diapering facilities in the restroom may be used if the door remains open. Parents may choose to be notified of a diapering need, and diaper the child themselves.

Documentation

CHILDCARE REGISTRATION FORM FOR INFANTS— PRESCHOOL

Each family making use of the childcare service must complete a Childcare Registration form. The form is filled out once per school year, and kept on file. One copy will be maintained by the Director, and the other will be maintained in the child care area to be referenced as needed. Childcare leaders should maintain blank forms as well to be filled out before a new child is left in childcare. When not in use, the binders are kept secure in the church office.

INFORMATION & EMERGENCY FORM FOR GRADES K—12

Parents of children & youth from grade K through grade 12 are required to fill out an Information and Emergency Form with included liability waiver for each school year their children and youth participate in ministry programs at First Presbyterian Church.

All youth grades 7-12 participating in out-of-town activities must provide not only the Information & Emergency Permission Form, but also provide a copy of the youth insurance card. The Director will maintain a file of all completed forms and insurance cards (when applicable).

Leaders of children & youth must have copies of the completed forms available in the area where they conduct their program. Leaders should also have blank forms available to be filled out before a new child is left in the class. Leaders should maintain a packet with copies of the form & cards, and take the packet and a First Aid Kit with on off-campus trips.

SIGN-IN/OUT PROCEDURES FOR INFANTS—GRADE 6

Parents/Grandparents/Guardians are responsible for monitoring their children's location in the church and should communicate with program supervisors about both check-in and dismissal from a childcare room, Sunday school room or other activity. To provide a safe environment, children should not be roaming the facilities unsupervised. Parents are requested to pick up their children promptly after dismissal, to release the volunteer supervisor.

Children leaving for Kids' Church/Planned Activity from the sanctuary after 'Time with Children' during the worship service will be escorted by the teaching supervisors. Parents who have already completed a Childcare/Emergency Form for the school year are not required to accompany the children. Those who have not yet completed forms should accompany their child to fill out a form before returning to Worship. Leaders of infants through 6th grade will maintain a binder with Check In-Sign Out Forms. Notebooks are to be picked up from the church office prior to the start of class and returned to the office afterwards. Each Sunday, they will ensure that the date and names of adult supervisors are recorded, and each child's name should be recorded on the Check-In column. Families personally checking their child into childcare will themselves enter the child's name on the Check-In column. When a family member arrives to pick up the child, they will enter the child's code, and sign them out of supervision on the Sign-Out line. Staff and volunteers are responsible to verify identification of the parent/guardian as needed, by checking the code information on the Childcare Registration Form on file. With prior consent, children over age 5 can be signed out by a sibling over age 12 providing the code and signature. The Director will keep these on file for two years.

Parents are responsible for their children until such time as an activity is scheduled to begin, and after the scheduled activity's ending time. Activity leaders are responsible for publicizing activity times. When children or youth arrive to any church ministry or program, they are expected to remain in that program until the program ends and supervision is transferred back to parents. Students may not leave a program early without parental permission communicated to ministry staff and/or volunteers.

Activity leaders are not responsible for students who do not show up at an activity, even if a parent believes they are at the activity. Parents are welcome to ask youth ministry staff or volunteers about the attendance of their children, including one-on-one mentoring meetings. Providing attendance information to parents is not considered a breach of confidentiality.

Safety in Communications

The guiding principle for contact with children and youth is transparency— communication should be visible to others or documented whenever possible. Any use of photos/ videos of children under the age of 18 requires the written consent of parents. When filling out an “Information and Emergency Form” or “Childcare Registration,” parents/guardians may indicate if they wish to give FPC permission for their child/youth to be photographed, videotaped, or to appear in a livestream. If they sign consent, this gives the church permission to use images within Safe Church guidelines and remains in effect until revoked. Not all parents will give permission, and visiting children will not have written permission yet, so care should be given to never stream or post pictures of children grouped together, such as at Time With Children. This includes the use of photos/videos within the congregational community, as well as any postings on the internet. Pictures of children under age 18 should not be posted or streamed in media without first consulting with the Director, and will not be referred to by last name, or with any identifying information (school, parent names) on the internet, including the First Presbyterian Church Website, Facebook Pages or Groups, or any other social media. The only exception to our policy of not posting pictures or identifying youth online is in private, closed kids-only social media groups such as the First PresbyTeen, First PresbyKids groups, where only family members and kids leaders are in the group.

We acknowledge that children’s names, birthdays, graduations, and other occasional mentions appear in the printed church newsletter and bulletin. When posted publicly on the church website, without the newsletter link provided to members, any identifiers will be omitted. Identifiers are defined as last name, age, birthday, name of school, residence, parents last names, and other such personal information subject to misuse. With written notification, parents may opt out of any printed mention of their child.

The Director will periodically review leader’s records of communication. Leaders are responsible for providing records of communication to the Director. The following provides examples of how different types of communication can be made visible and documented.

PHONE: If parent answers, identify yourself and the reason for your call

EMAIL: Copy Director or save copies. Church staff will use only their church email account for email communications with children and youth. If unable to access church email, staff will copy their church email account in any emails sent from their personal account.

TEXT MESSAGES and NOTE/LETTER WRITING: It should be kept in mind that text messages and note writing are a more personal form of communication, which could at times be misinterpreted by children, youth, or parents. It should also be noted that these more personal forms of communication may be used by potential abusers/offenders. Leaders are advised that text messages should be kept at least 2 months, and may want to keep a copy of personal notes to protect themselves.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Send public messages or save private messages. In our private, closed social media children's accounts such as the First PresbyTeens or Kids Facebook group, youth may be tagged and their names used. Closed private groups such as First PresbyTeens or Kids can be viewed only by FPC's approved youth, their families, youth leaders, and staff. The Safe Church Committee, the Director, and the Head of Staff will monitor all church online media, including the FPC Facebook accounts, Instagram, and the FPC Website at least weekly to ensure the safety of children.

Adults who work with children or youth and who have any social media/networking accounts (ex: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.) will grant full access to such accounts/pages to the Head of Staff and the Director, and are urged to set stringent privacy settings.

All adults who have social media/networking accounts/pages will not submit "friend" requests to children and youth. If a child or youth requests an adult to be a "friend," the adult will discern the level of contact they wish to maintain with such child or youth prior to responding to such request, as well as discerning the youth-appropriateness of the postings on their account.

Adults will not engage in video chats, on-line text chats, blogs, or video blogs with children or youth except as part of official church activities, unless other adults participate in or have access to such video chats, online text chats, blogs, or video blogs and transcripts are saved. These guidelines apply to all adults in the church.

Health and Emergencies

SICK CHILD POLICY

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at FPC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
- Persistent cough
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our leaders to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

MEDICATION POLICY

It is the policy of FPC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy. Youth participating in extended/overnight activities can be given medication with parental consent.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Director to develop a plan of action.

ACCIDENTAL INJURIES AND EMERGENCIES

Ministry staff and volunteers should be prepared to protect children and youth in the case of emergencies or injuries. In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Medical Supplies: AED (defibrillators) are located in both the gym and the Sanctuary front entryway. Stop The Bleed Kits are located in the AED boxes. First Aid Kits are located next to the AED boxes, as well as in the large upstairs children’s room, Preschool (Wee Care) Room, Nursery, Teen Dungeon, Coat Area at rear of sanctuary (choir side), Church Office, and Kitchen. The Children’s Nurture Committee and the Youth Nurture Committee will be responsible to maintain supplies in their areas, obtaining supplies from the church office. The First Aid Kits in the kitchen, gym, office, sanctuary front & back, will be maintained by the Office Administrator. Supplies should be checked annually, and AED pads, both adult and child, should be replaced when the expiration dates are reached.

THREATS OF VIOLENCE TOWARD SELF OR OTHERS

Leaders may receive information that someone has thoughts or desires to harm themselves or others. This information should be taken seriously and should be reported immediately to the Director or Head of Staff. If the student seems to have the imminent intent to do harm, a leader or volunteer should stay with the student, and call or text 911.

CRIMINAL OR POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ACTIVITY

911 or local emergency number should be called immediately in cases of suspected criminal or dangerous activities on the church campus or near ministry activities. In a situation of direct threat or imminent danger, leaders should take children and youth under their supervision to the nearest secure area, and call or text 911 if needed. All emergency procedures, for dangerous situations including intruders, fire and weather, are included in the Emergency Policy and Procedures document.

WEAPONS

Weapons will not be permitted on church property, or at any church sponsored activity taking place off of church grounds.

RESPONDING TO ABUSE OF MINOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- Physical abuse – an act or omission that causes a physical injury to a child under the age of 18, that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.

- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or other caregiver or between a child and an older child, including but not limited to, activities such as fondling, intercourse, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Procedures for Response

Any church member may have reason to believe that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Indiana Department of Child Services and to the Director or Head of Staff designee for further action, including ensuring that a report has been filed to the Indiana Department of Child Services as is mandated by state law. All church staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect of children under the age of 18 whether or not it may have occurred in church ministry activities.

If a student or leader shares information about possible abuse, the advisor will listen respectfully, compassionately, and supportively, without minimizing or explaining the behavior of others, and treat this information seriously and confidentially. Regardless of whether the student has given permission to share this information, it should be promptly reported to both the Indiana Department of Child Services and to the Director/Head of Staff Designee.

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES: 800-800-5556

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The Director and the Head of Staff will be notified immediately.
2. The Response Team (Safe Church Team/Committee) will be notified whenever the Head of Staff believes their support to be beneficial.
3. The parent/guardian of the child will be notified immediately by the Director/Head of Staff designee unless to do so would increase the risk to the child.
4. An Incident Report-Suspected Abuse Form will be filled out by/under supervision of the Director or another staff member designated by the Head of Staff, and with the direct input from the person who received the information being reported, to ensure that correct procedures are followed.

5. Indiana Department of Child Services will be notified immediately in accordance with state law. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by the Indiana Department of Child Services and law enforcement. (This directive is part of the Book of Order and may not be omitted or ignored.)
6. If the person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct is involved with the church, that person will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
7. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
8. To maintain confidentiality, concerns about suspected or actual child abuse or the behaviors of leaders and volunteers should be shared only with the Director, Head of Staff, and those directly involved in the reporting process (e.g., church Response Team, Indiana Department of Child Services) and with no one else.
9. The Head of Staff or designee will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
10. Pastoral care may be provided to the reported victim, the victim's family, and the family of the alleged perpetrator. When pastoral care is being provided to both the reported victim and the alleged perpetrator, different staff members or pastoral counselors will be involved in providing the care.
11. If the results of the investigation by the Indiana Department of Child Services substantiates that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect by any person working with children or youth, or if they are adjudicated for sexual abuse, then the perpetrator will no longer be allowed to work with children or youth. If a known perpetrator of **any** sexual abuse is found to be in the congregation, they will not be allowed on the premises without strict guidelines set up and approved by the Director, Head of Staff, and Safe Church, with a 'safe shadowing' arrangement in place.
12. In the case of allegation against a Teaching Elder (staff or volunteer), procedures in the Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures will be followed.

13. In the case of allegation against a Ruling Elder, the Response team shall (while maintaining confidentiality of those involved) notify the Session that an allegation of offense has been received against an Elder. This reporting triggers the formation of an investigating committee under the Rules of Discipline of the Book of Order of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures.

Responding to Any Other Inappropriate Behavior:

Any behavior or treatment of a child or youth by an adult or a youth caregiver that is considered to be inappropriate but does not meet the definition of child abuse or neglect should be reported to the Director. The Director will be responsible for addressing these concerns under the guidance of the Head of Staff. The Head of Staff will have the discretion to seek support from the Response Team as deemed beneficial. Emotional mistreatment such as belittling, constant criticism, persistent teasing, bullying, intimidation, and lack of nurturing are some examples of inappropriate treatment. Inappropriate sexual behavior includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation or gratification of the adult person or a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

Note: Rather than personally attempting to assess possible risk to a child, all church members and volunteers are expected to report any questionable, careless, suspicious, inappropriate, or problematic behavior of any adult to the Director. It is very important that any inappropriate behaviors or signs of suspected abuse be reported. The Director will decide how to proceed or will consult with church Head of Staff about how to respond. The church will respond immediately to all reports of suspected abuse of children and youth.

In addition, it is appropriate to report to the Director or Head of Staff any incidences in a staff member or volunteer's personal life that could affect the safety of students. Staff members and volunteers are encouraged to seek the support of a pastor, staff member, or other professional or lay person as needed to deal with personal crises and issues.

RESPONSE TEAM PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

1. A Response Team (ordinarily the Safe Church Team/Committee) with no fewer than two members, one male and one female, will be responsible to address concerns or complaints brought under the Safe Church-Child Protection Policy. The Response Team will familiarize itself with the policy as well as the procedures for response to concerns and complaints.
2. When concerns are raised about an authorized minister/Teaching Elder, whether an employee or volunteer, the Response Team will follow the procedures set forth in the

Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy, and without further investigation, send a written statement of allegation to the Executive Presbyter, the Moderator of the Committee on Ministry, and Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Ohio Valley. If the report concerns behavior of an Elder, the Response Team will follow the procedures set forth in the Presbyterian Church (USA) Sexual Misconduct Policy. If the alleged victim is a minor child, the Moderator of Session or Clerk of Session shall immediately report it to the Department of Child Services.

3. The Director/Head of Staff designee will follow and document the steps outlined in the Incident Report-Suspected Abuse Form with the direct involvement of the person who received first hand information of the allegations.
4. When child abuse or neglect is alleged other than as specified in #2 above, the Response Team will take action solely at the discretion of the Head of Staff and:
 - A. Take no action that could interfere with an investigation of suspected child abuse or neglect by the Indiana Department of Child Services and law enforcement.
 - B. Once the Indiana Department of Child Services has completed its investigation, the Head of Staff may ask the Response Team to reach out to parents of the child who was reportedly the victim, to provide support.
 - C. The Head of Staff may also request the Response Team offer support to the person and to the family of the person reported to be the perpetrator.
 - D. If the Indiana Department of Child Services determined that the allegations reported do not meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect, then the Director and the Head of Staff will meet to determine the proper course of action to ensure the safety of children and youth under the care of the church. The Head of Staff may consult with the Response Team or delegate responsibility to the Response Team to resolve the concern, as deemed useful.

FORMS: Safe Church -Child Protection Policy – Signature
Sexual Misconduct Policy & Self-Certification – Signature
Volunteer Application & Disclosure Form
Disclosure and Authorization – Background Information Form
K- 12 Information and Emergency Form
Childcare Registration Form
Children’s Sign-In/Out Form
Incident Report- Suspected Abuse Form
Our Whole Lives (OWL) Educator Policy Adopted: November 18, 2015

Revised: June 2023

I have received and read a copy of the First Presbyterian Church Safe Church – Child Protection Policy.
I understand the policy, and that I am accountable to follow it.

Printed Name

Signature

Date