

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ASHEVILLE
CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

The congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Asheville (“FPC-A”) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

I. PURPOSES, COMPONENTS, APPLICABILITY AND SCOPE

A. Purposes

1. To provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth at FPC-A.
2. To protect children and youth from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse while participating in FPC-A activities.
3. To guide FPC-A as an institution in the conduct of its employees and volunteers and to prevent incidents and allegations of child abuse.
4. To protect volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

B. Components of Protection

This policy includes the following four (4) components of children and youth protection:

1. Screening applicants for employment and volunteer service for a history of behavior potentially detrimental to children and youth.
2. Training employees and volunteers in children and youth protection.
3. Responding to accusations, allegations, claims, and incidents of abuse/neglect/dependency.
4. Appropriate reporting of allegations, claims, and incidents of abuse/neglect/dependency.

C. Applicability

This policy applies to all persons, whether FPC-A employees or volunteers, participating in all children and youth programs of FPC-A, including but not limited to:

- ◆ Children’s Programs: 0 to 5th Grade:
 - Faith Development Classes
 - Church-sponsored Childcare*
 - Children’s Choir
 - Fellowship events
 - Outreach programs
 - Vacation Bible School

*The Child Care Center of First Presbyterian Church is an independently run non-profit center governed by its own policies and is not included in this policy.

- ◆ Youth Programs: 6th-12th Grade:
 - Faith Development Classes
 - Youth Choir
 - Outreach programs
 - Overnight events
 - Fellowship events
 - Youth Group

- ◆ Church sponsored retreats, mission trips, conferences, etc.

- ◆ Events in partnership with other organizations.

*Asheville Youth Mission is an independently run non-profit organization governed by its own policies and is not included in this policy.

All employees and volunteers (whether or not “member”) of FPC-A are governed by this policy, which supersedes all prior FPC-A child protection policy statements.

With regard to any employee(s) of FPC-A, perceived conflicts or ambiguities in interpretation and application of this policy shall be resolved by the Church Administrator and Senior Pastor.

With regard to any volunteer(s) of FPC-A, perceived conflicts or ambiguities in interpretation and application of this policy shall be resolved by the pastoral staff or designated program staff.

D. Scope

1. All employees and volunteers shall abide by the policy.

2. An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to observe and abide by this policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation if, in the case of an employee, the Senior Pastor, Church Administrator, or Personnel Committee determine that the Child Protection Policy and procedures have not been followed, and if, in the case of a volunteer, the pastoral staff, or designated program staff determines that the Child and Youth Protection Policy and procedures have not been followed.

3. Individuals who fail to follow the procedures listed in this policy place themselves at risk for accusations, allegations and claims of child/youth abuse.

4. The possibility of being accused of child or youth abuse, whether true or false, is a risk each employee and volunteer faces when working with the children at FPC-A. Each person must assume responsibility for his/her own actions in working with children and youth and for attending training offered on child and youth protection.

Outside Groups Using FPC-A Facilities

All adult leaders of non-FPC-A youth groups (which includes participants under the age of 18) using FPC-A facilities must receive, review, and adhere to these policies, and must recognize that FPC-A will not perform background checks, or review personal and professional references, employment records, and civil and criminal record reviews for such groups. FPC-A will not offer training to non FPC-A youth leaders. All non-FPC-A leaders must sign the **Employee and Volunteer Agreement** to acknowledge their review of it and to confirm their agreement to follow it. All outside organizations shall have a policy in place that is as stringent as this policy (as determined by the church administrator). The Childcare Center of First Presbyterian Church and Asheville Youth Mission shall sign acknowledgement of this policy each year, verifying that they have their own policy in place and shall provide a copy of such policy to the church administrator annually and upon any modification of such policy.

II. SCREENING

A. Screening of Employees

1. Personal interviews, personal and professional references, and employment records are required for all employees of FPC-A. Background checks will be done on all employees at the direction of the Church Administrator.
2. Interviews, reference checks, employment records, and criminal and civil background checks on employees are to be documented in writing. These records are confidential church property. They will not be released to any party except with the written approval of the Senior Pastor or Church Administrator. They will be made available to the employee, but not a candidate for employment, if a written request is made to the Senior Pastor or Church Administrator.
3. All employees are required to sign an **Employee and Volunteer Agreement**, agreeing to follow the policies and procedures of FPC-A pertaining to child and youth protection. This Agreement is a supplement to the personnel application, and is maintained in the employee's personnel file.
4. Any candidate for employment who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse/neglect cannot be employed by FPC-A without the express written approval of the Personnel Committee, including the Senior Pastor and the Church Administrator. The Personnel Committee, including the Senior Pastor and Church Administrator, will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the employment of the individual in question. Notwithstanding the above, a criminal conviction related to any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment with children or youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, child pornography, abuse of a minor, and active substance abuse.

B. Screening of Volunteers

1. Background checks will be done on all regular FPC-A Child and Youth volunteers, and may be repeated at the discretion of the pastoral staff, or designated program staff.

2. Information from volunteer application forms and background checks on volunteers will be reviewed by the pastoral staff, or designated program staff, and will be held confidentially.
3. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth must have been members of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Any exceptions must be approved by the pastoral staff, or designated program staff.
4. Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child abuse/neglect cannot work with children and youth at FPC-A without the express written approval of the pastoral staff, or designated program staff, who will consider the available information related to the circumstances of the situation in order to make a determination about the individual in question. Notwithstanding the above, a criminal conviction related to any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, child pornography, abuse of a minor, and active substance abuse. Information from background checks will be reviewed by the pastoral staff, or designated program staff. If the person is denied volunteer service, this information will be reviewed with the applicant by pastoral staff. The applicant may within 30 days appeal in writing the decision to the Session.
5. All volunteers are required to sign the **Employee and Volunteer Agreement** agreeing to follow the policies and procedures of FPC-A pertaining to child and youth protection. This Agreement will be maintained by the pastoral staff.

III. TRAINING

All employees and volunteers who work directly and regularly with children and youth are required to complete a training session and to sign the required documents regarding children and youth protection. Additional training may also be periodically required. The church will offer periodic training and review opportunities. This training will include the following:

- ◆ Child and Youth Protection Policy
- ◆ Definition and recognition of child abuse/neglect/dependency
- ◆ Prevention of child sexual abuse
- ◆ What constitutes inappropriate conduct
- ◆ Church policies governing working with children
- ◆ Civil and criminal consequences of misconduct
- ◆ Procedures for reporting observed or suspected misconduct
- ◆ North Carolina statutes regarding Child Protective Services
- ◆ Employee and Volunteer Code of Conduct, including the Two-Leader/Open Door Policy and Social Networking Guidelines

The Faith Formation (Christian Education) Committee will be responsible for developing and reviewing this curriculum.

IV. REPORTING

1. In all situations of possible child abuse/neglect/dependency, no matter how unlikely it seems, the FPC-A "Child and Youth Protection Policy" shall be observed.
2. Each employee and volunteer is required to report immediately any situation that presents any suspicion that child abuse may have occurred. Employees will report to their Direct Supervisor, and volunteers will report to pastoral staff and/or designated program staff.
3. Any report of child abuse made by a child about their care by a parent, guardian, youth, adult or FPC-A staff employee or volunteer must be relayed immediately to the pastoral staff and/or designated program staff. Any concerns related to pastoral and/or program staff should be brought to the attention of the Senior Pastor and Chair of the Personnel Committee.
4. Following receipt of a report of possible abuse, the staff person will notify the Senior Pastor and the Church Administrator. As required by law, a report will be made to the Buncombe County Department of Social Services or other local authorities for investigation.
5. As our Church seeks to be a place of safety and sanctuary, members of our faith community are encouraged to speak to any of our Pastors whenever there is a concern about possible child abuse.

V. RESPONDING

In the event of an allegation of abuse, the following procedures are to be followed by all staff members of FPC-A, and all such procedures shall be undertaken within a reasonable period of time following the allegation of abuse.

1. Take every allegation seriously. Adequate care, respect, and confidentiality must be offered to alleged victims and perpetrators until the allegations can be substantiated or cleared.
2. Observe the procedures listed in the previous section on **Reporting**.
3. Maintain written records relating to the matter in confidential files.
4. Carefully document all efforts in handling the situation.
 - a. The Senior Pastor, Church Administrator, and/or Personnel Committee may complete an internal investigation in addition to that which will be carried out by the authorities following the required referrals. An individual accused of child abuse may be placed on leave at the discretion of the Senior Pastor and/or the Personnel Committee.
 - b. The incident(s) will automatically be reported to the Buncombe County Department of Social Services for investigation. If the incident(s) occurred outside of Buncombe County, appropriate local authorities will be notified to investigate. The accused

individual will be prohibited from access to the alleged victim to protect the child or youth from possible further abuse or harassment.

- c. The Senior Pastor, Church Administrator and/or the Personnel Committee will make a determination as to whether the individual will be allowed to return to work as an employee or volunteer at the Church.
 - d. An employee has the right to appeal any decision to the Personnel Committee.
 - e. A volunteer has the right to appeal any decision to the Session.
5. The Senior Pastor or designee will notify the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the alleged victim.
 6. The Senior Pastor or Church Administrator will notify the accused individual.
 7. The Church Administrator will immediately contact the church's attorney and liability insurance carrier.
 8. FPC-A employees and volunteers are encouraged to cooperate fully with the investigation authorities, such as the Child Protective Services Unit of the Department of Social Services, or local police authorities, with guidance from the FPC-A attorney.
 9. All employees and volunteers will refer any and all inquiries regarding the situation to the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor is the only staff person authorized to release any information regarding an allegation except where the law requires others to release information, such as to a protective services investigator or to a police officer.
 10. All FPC-A employees and volunteers will avoid denial, minimization, or blame in dealing with the allegation.

Employee and Volunteer Code of Conduct

1. FPC-A employees and volunteers may not verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually abuse children.
2. Volunteers and staff will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and their right to say no.
3. FPC-A employees and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
4. Physical restraint is used only in situations necessary to protect the child, other children, or staff from harm.
5. FPC-A employees and volunteers shall never leave a child unsupervised while participating in a program.
6. Restroom supervision: Employees and volunteers will make sure any restroom used is not occupied by suspicious or unknown individuals before allowing children and youth to use the facilities. Always send children in pairs, and send younger children with an employee or volunteer. The employee or volunteer will stand in the hall doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the adult (not being alone with a child). If staff is assisting younger children, doors to the stall must remain open.
7. Only nursery staff, following nursery guidelines, will perform diapering.
8. Employees and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported according to the FPC-A Child and Youth Protection Policy.
9. Employees and volunteers are discouraged from being alone with children at times outside of scheduled program activities.
10. In the event of texting or on any social media, all employees and volunteers should have two adults on any communication that involves a child or youth, following the Social Networking Guidelines (see below)
11. Under no circumstances should employees or volunteers release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian.
12. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or being impaired by legally prescribed drugs during working hours or while volunteering is prohibited.
13. Smoking or use of tobacco in the presence of children, youth or parents during working hours or while volunteering is prohibited except in designated areas.
14. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children or parents is prohibited.

15. Employees and adult volunteers may not be romantically involved with program participants who are younger than 18 years of age. Once a participant turns 18, then any romantic relationship would need to be approved by program staff.
16. Employees and volunteers are required to read, sign, and adhere to all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and will attend training sessions on the subject, as instructed by a supervisor.
17. Employees and volunteers are expected to observe the *Two Leader/Open Door Policy* in their interaction with children and youth (see below).
18. All staff members and volunteers are required to report any concerns or suspicions regarding their observations of any adult's interactions with a child. These concerns may be reported to the individual or to his/her supervisor. If the concerns are not alleviated by a change in the individual's behavior, the second report must be made to the direct supervisor, or designated program staff.

Policy Overview

- Staff and volunteers who work with children and youth will undergo a background check before entering into service.
- Those working with children, and youth must complete designated child protection training and receive regular training in emergency procedures.
- Two adult caregivers (employees or volunteers) are present at all times, following the Two Leader Guideline. If two adults are not available, implementation of the Open Door Policy will provide the exception.
- Written and online communications with children, and youth must be transparent to other adults, and follow the Social Networking Guidelines.
- Safe ratios are maintained.
- Spaces and equipment are maintained in safe order.
- Injuries and suspected abuse are reported to the proper authorities.

Two-Leader/Open Door Policy

Children should not be in a room with one adult or two related adults with the door closed. This is to protect children and youth against situations where abuse may occur and/or to protect leaders against false accusations or misunderstandings.

If one adult is left alone in a room, designated program staff should be notified immediately.

In the event that two leaders cannot be present in the room, such that one leader is alone in a room with one or more children or youth, an interior door must be left open. The leader should position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing in the hallway can see the leader.

Any counseling session with youth shall be conducted in a public place.

Each classroom for children and youth should ideally have a door with a window in it or a half door, which could then be kept closed. If it does not, and two leaders are not present in the room, then the door must remain open at all times.

The above policy extends to all church-sponsored programs, including overnight and transportation-related events in so far as practicable. If it is necessary, for instance, for an adult to take a child or youth home after an event, an effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child or youth.

During overnight events involving participants of more than one gender, at least one male and one female adult chaperone should be present at all times.

Social Networking Guidelines

Leaders using any social media platform (Facebook, Zoom, SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, Google Hangouts, etc.) as well as digital communication (texting, emails, WhatsApp, Realm) to interact with children, youth or their leaders shall comply with these Social Networking Guidelines.

Comments that are, or could be, construed by any observer to be harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, humiliating, or sexually suggestive shall never be posted to or about anyone.

Adults are prohibited from posting inappropriate pictures or from making inappropriate comments on pictures others post. Adult volunteers should respond primarily to pictures posted by children or youth using FPCA group accounts, rather than on private social media accounts.

Adult volunteers should not privately message a child or youth via text or other social media platform. Any communication with children or youth should have two adults on the communication. Church staff may interact with youth about pastoral matters, and shall inform or include another appropriate adult of, or in, such interaction.

If a person fails a background check at any point, they shall immediately be disconnected from all social media, email and text connections with children or youth that were established through FPCA. Staff may remove leaders or participants as appropriate, including when they leave active participation in the church group.

**CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY
AGREEMENT FORM
First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC**

As a paid staff or volunteer associated with First Presbyterian Church, I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy (either electronically or on paper) of the Child and Youth Protection Policy. By signing below, I am indicating that I have read, understand, and agree to fully comply with this Policy.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

For office use:

Background Check Completed _____ Date

Training Completed _____ Date

**Volunteer Form
Children & Youth Ministries
First Presbyterian Church, Asheville**

This form is used for all regular volunteers who work with children and youth at FPC. Our goal is to make our church a safe and secure environment for all children, youth and adults who participate in our ministries. More information about required training and background check will follow this initial form.

Full Name:

Address:

Preferred phone: (circle: cell or home)

Alternate phone: (circle: cell or home)

Email:

Occupation:

Employer:

Previous volunteer experience with children or youth:

Special interest, hobbies, and skills:

How long have you been a member of FPC-A?

In what capacity or ministry opportunities do you plan to volunteer with children and youth?

Do you have any special circumstances that could affect your ability to work with young people? If so, please, describe.

I agree to complete all required training for volunteers, and share information needed for a background check, when requested.

Signature of applicant

Date

Approved by Session (add new date here)