

First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg - Strasburg PA
POLICY REGARDING CHILD SAFETY AT
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, STRASBURG

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INTRODUCTION

The people of God live out their faith in the midst of a particular historical reality. Inherent in every time is promise and possibility, opportunities for the ministry and the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ to be carried forth. The beginning of the new millennium has demanded that we deal with the issues related to human sexuality. While affirming that God created us as male and female, to live together in ways which proclaim the worth and dignity of each individual, human sexuality has been a basis for opposition, degradation, violation and injustice: manifestations of our sin.

Our sexuality is a gift from God and when rightly used, leads to the wholeness of life which God intends for all people. Those who serve through the offices of the Church bear particular responsibility in making manifest the goodness of God's gift of sexuality.

The ethical conduct of all who minister in the name of Jesus Christ is of vital importance to the Church, for through these representatives and understanding of God and the Gospel, good news is conveyed. In light of the confusion around sexual issues, the statistical information regarding sexual abuse, the number of cases of sexual misconduct and abuse in the Church, and God's call for justice, these policies have been developed for First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg. The Church's desire is for the best spiritual environment for all persons-children, youth, and adults.

THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS

Who we are and what we do is based on our understanding of God, known in the prophets and priests of the Old Testament, proclaimed and incarnated by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, manifested by the Holy Spirit who informs and sustains the Church today. It is this triune God who calls us to share the good news of the gospel

with love and integrity. This policy is based on the following understanding of God:

- Our human sexuality is a gift from God who created all things good
- God entered into a covenant relationship with the people of Israel. That covenant was based on God's act of liberation and the people's response through obedience to ethical and religious regulations on which the community's life was to be based.
- To live in covenant relationship with God is to know shalom which is health, wholeness, unity and peace
- From the prophets sent by God comes forth the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness
- All are sinners, falling short of the ethics of the Kingdom.
- Forgiveness and redemption are offered to all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- God has particular concern for the poor, oppressed, abused and powerless. In Matthew 18, Jesus speaks in striking terms of the high value children have in the kingdom of God, when he places a child in front of the disciples and then says, *"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea."*

PURPOSES

The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg adopts this policy on child sexual misconduct for the use of the Church. Its purposes are as follows:

1. **To set and enforce standards** of ethical behavior consistent with Scripture and secular law
2. **To provide procedures** for inquiry and effective response to allegations of breach of emotional, spiritual, and physical care and protection of children which lies

on all who represent the church in any way

3. **To serve as a guide** for prevention of child sexual misconduct
4. **To provide a policy** for reporting suspected child abuse to appropriate authorities
5. **To demonstrate pastoral concern** for victims of, as well as those accused of, sexual misconduct
6. **To assure a loving, warm, open atmosphere** for adults, youth, and children to worship, study, and live their Christian faith

SCOPE

This policy shall include all persons at First Presbyterian Church involved with children and youth ministries, including but not limited to, all paid staff of First Presbyterian Church and/or Great Beginnings Preschool as well as volunteers who work with children/youth in First Presbyterian Church and/or Great Beginnings Preschool.

Enforcement of this policy, and response to violations of same, shall be the responsibility of the appropriate staff member(s) and/or Session committee(s). Pennsylvania has several laws and requirements related to child abuse, including reporting child abuse and requiring child abuse clearances. Child abuse clearances will be maintained on file, electronically or hard copy, by the Christian Education Committee.

Christian Education shall maintain a list of all approved church workers and volunteers.

DEFINITIONS

"Child Abuse" - The term "child abuse" shall mean the following:

- (i) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a minor.
- (ii) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes nonaccidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a

minor.

- iii) Any recent act, failure to act or series of such acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or exploitation of a minor.
- iv) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.
- v) Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location, or the duration of the restraint or confinement.

"Child Sexual Misconduct" of any person shall include, but not be limited to, any contact or interaction between a person who is a minor and an adult, when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or third party. The behavior may or may not involve touching. It includes but is not limited to offensive, obscene, or suggestive language or conduct; unacceptable visual contact; touching or fondling which is injurious to the physical or emotional health of the minor. Sexual behavior between a minor and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child. The upper age limit for "minor" is that set by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

"Child/Youth Worker": any paid staff or volunteer who has been approved (see approval procedures on pg. 6) to work with children and youth. in the ministries of First Presbyterian Church and/or Great Beginnings Preschool, whether on campus or beyond. As a general rule, no person shall be allowed to work with children/youth, or to serve in a counseling role, unless he/she has been active within the Church for at least the prior six months. Persons who do not meet this requirement will be paired with a person who has been active within the Church for at least one year.

"Minor": a child under 18 years of age.

“Youth”: A middle or high schooler.

“Paid Staff”: Includes all staff on the payroll of First Presbyterian Church and/or Great Beginnings Preschool.

SUPERVISORY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1. Two approved child/youth workers must be present during any church activity involving children and/or youth. If needed, the two-adult rule may be satisfied with a “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms and activities. The roamer must be in the building for the entirety of the activity and check in with supervising adults frequently.
2. Church staff or volunteer workers will obtain the written consent of a child's or youth's parent or guardian before going out alone with that child or spending time with the child in an unsupervised situation.
3. Church staff and volunteers shall inform a pastor, the Director of Children’s Ministry, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, or the Director of Preschool when a child/youth appears aloof or withdrawn or exhibits a marked personality change
4. The church shall have a child/youth identification procedure that clearly identifies the child/youth and the child's parent or guardian. This procedure will be developed within six (6) months of the ratification of this policy.
5. With regard to the Great Beginnings Preschool, there shall be a minimum of two approved adults present and available at all times when children are present at school. Children may not be left unattended, indoors or outdoors, at any time.
6. If there is any evidence of child abuse or sexual misconduct on the part of a pastor, paid support staff, paid program staff or volunteer teachers or youth leaders, in addition to mandatory reporting requirements (as explained later in this policy) the following process shall be followed:
 - a) *If the accused is a pastor*, Presbytery policy shall be followed
 - b) *If the accused is a volunteer*, he or she shall be removed from his or her position until a review has been completed by a committee

appointed for this purpose.

- c) *If the accused is a non-pastor member of the church staff*, he or she shall be suspended from his or her position with pay until a review has been completed by a committee appointed for this purpose.
- d) *A committee shall be appointed* for the purpose of reviewing child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. This committee shall consist of the Pastor(s) and three sitting members of Session. This committee also may consult with an attorney.

7. Open Door Rule: Doors should be kept open whenever possible except for reasons of safety or excessive noise for all youth activities. Doors that need to be closed will be equipped with a glass opening or window that will allow supervisors and/or pastors to observe.

8. Restroom Guidelines: Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. Escort elementary school age children to the rest room and wait outside for them. For the protection of all, workers 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. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

9. Individual Counseling Rule: In person one-on-one interaction with youth should be undertaken only with careful consideration. As a general rule, there should always be at least two child/youth workers present. If in person one-on-one interaction is imperative, it should be conducted in an environment that provides

visibility from other adults. If extended counseling is needed it should be conducted with the permission of the child's parent(s) or guardian(s).

10. It shall be the responsibility of all child/youth workers and paid staff to report any violations of this policy.
11. Supervision of Ministry with Adults: the Christian Education Committee will consult on a case-by-case basis to outline appropriate transparency, accountability, and supervision for persons in ministry with adults, determining who falls under the purview of this policy and which safeguards would be appropriate for ministry with that person.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

1. All child/youth workers and paid staff of First Presbyterian Church must be informed of their individual responsibility to report incidents of child/youth abuse.
2. When during the course of their duties at First Presbyterian Church, all child/youth workers and paid staff have reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of their medical, professional or other training and experience, that a child coming before them in their professional or official capacity is an abused child, they shall immediately report or cause a report to be made in accordance with paragraph 4 of this section.
3. Any questionable circumstance, act, or situation observed or reported to them which threatens the safety or well-being of any child or youth while attending First Presbyterian Church- sponsored or led events must be immediately reported to a Pastor, the Director of Children's Ministry, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, or the Director of Preschool.
4. All Child/Youth Workers report the abuse or suspected abuse to the legal authorities immediately and file a report with the Presbytery as follows:
 - a. The child/youth worker must report by telephoning both the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800- 932-0313) immediately and in writing within 48 hours after the oral report to the County Children & Youth Services Agency. The ONLY exception to this reporting requirement is for ordained clergy who have received such information as a result of a confidential communication as defined in current

Pennsylvania law.

- b. The child/youth worker must verbally report the abuse or suspected abuse to the Pastor, Director of Children's Ministry, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, or Director of Preschool, and must fill out an Incident Report (see Appendix B). If the incident involves the pastor, Presbytery policy must be followed.
 - c. If the alleged perpetrator is not the parent or guardian, the parent or guardian should be immediately notified in person by the pastor. If the alleged perpetrator is a parent or guardian of the alleged victim, no such notification shall be made.
 - d. If the incident involves the pastor, any other paid professionals employed by First Presbyterian Church, or volunteer program personnel, a report must also be filed with the Executive Presbyter within 24 hours.
 - e. The church official to whom the report was made shall notify the church's insurance carrier within 24 hours.
5. Reporting Allegations of Abuse Involving Only Adults: Reporting, must first go to Area Agency on Aging (717-299-1523) who will then notify appropriate agencies.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING CHURCH WORKERS

1. All Paid Staff shall follow the following job application procedure:
 - a. Complete an employment application
 - b. Sign the "Acknowledgment of Receipt" form (see Appendix A)
 - c. Undergo a personal interview
 - d. Provide references for reference checks
 - e. Submit a Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check (Employment Version), which has been completed, submitted to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and returned to the applicant by the Commonwealth.
 - f. Submit a Child Abuse History Clearance (Employment Version) from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare obtained within the

preceding one-year period.

- g. Submit an FBI Fingerprint clearance
- h. **Note all clearances must be updated every 5 years per Pennsylvania law
- i. Attend a presentation on this policy and complete the mandated reporter training.

2. Persons wishing to volunteer to work with children and/or youth shall follow the following volunteer procedure:

- a. Attend a presentation on this policy and complete the mandated reporter training.
- b. Sign the "Acknowledgment of Receipt" form (see Appendix A)
- c. Submit a Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check, which has been completed, submitted to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and returned to the applicant by the Commonwealth.
- d. Submit a Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services obtained within the preceding one-year period.
- e. Submit an FBI fingerprint clearance. If the volunteer has lived in PA for 10 years, an affidavit may be substituted for this step.
- f. **Note all clearances must be updated every 5 years per PA law

Volunteers shall only be permitted to work with youth or children after they have been active within the church for at least six months or work with someone who has been active within the church for at least one year.

3. Any adult who has been convicted of or pled guilty to any form of child sexual abuse or physical abuse shall not be allowed to work with children or youth in a volunteer or staff capacity at Church.

4. In lieu of documents indicated in paragraphs 1.e., 1.f., 1.g. 2.c., 2.d, and 2.e. above, a staff member or volunteer may provide the church with a Pennsylvania State Police Report of Criminal History Record and a Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and an FBI fingerprint clearance

obtained for their current employment if such employment is continuous from the dates of the record checks.

5. For all persons working with children/youth, all forms listed in 1& 2 under Recruiting and Screening Church Workers shall be kept on file by the church. Documents indicated in paragraphs 1.e., 1.f., 1.g., 2. c., 2.d., and 2.e. above shall be received and reviewed by the Pastor, who shall initiate any follow-up actions.

MINISTRY WITH PAST OFFENDERS

If a person with a known history of sexually abusing others wishes to be part of the First Presbyterian Church congregation:

1. Such person must sign an agreement with the pastor, the Director of Children's Ministry, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, and the Director of Preschool that requires that person to be accompanied when in the building or any church function, forbids contact with children, forbids use of church computers, and requires ongoing contact between the pastor and the person's counselor. Those unwilling to sign such an agreement are not permitted in the church nor to be present at any church functions.
2. The agreement shall include consequences that will result from violation of any portion of it, which will include exclusion from church premises and church functions.

COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Permissions: Parents (or legal guardians) should be informed of ways that staff and volunteers of the church may be contacting their children (by phone, email, text messages, instant messages, and social media).
2. For minors, birth through 8th grade, only those whose parents or legal guardians have given written permission for their children to receive phone, text, social media, or internet communication from paid staff or volunteers may be contact

directly by paid staff or volunteers. It is the responsibility of the staff member to obtain such permission in writing and understand communication parameters set by the parents / legal guardians.

3. For youth in grades 9-12, paid staff and volunteers will first request in writing permission from parents / legal guardians to communicate via text, call, email, or church sanctioned communication channels.
4. Paid staff and volunteers should not request to “follow” or “friend” any minor via social media platforms unless they are related. If the minor request to “follow” or “friend” it is up to the requested adult’s best discretion, after the parents / legal guardians have been consulted.
5. For all minors, FPC will only use images in print or electronic form from activities/events once signed permission has been given by parents / legal guardians, or if the child’s face is fully unidentifiable.
6. Content: Such communication should never be sexually suggestive, explicit, a “secret,” or otherwise inappropriate to the age of the child or youth or the practice of ministry. If a child asks for clarification on something they overheard that might be inappropriate, the 2-adult rule should be followed by bringing parents / legal guardians or the pastor, or Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries to be a part of the explanation given.
7. Any paid staff or volunteer receiving inappropriate / questionable communication from a minor (in person or otherwise) shall not respond without consulting with one of the paid staff and determining a plan of response, which may involve contacting parents / legal guardians and/or Child Line or the authorities.