



## First Presbyterian Church

Quincy, MA 02169

July 2018

### CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Taken from A Vision for Children and the Church

Adopted by the 205th General Assembly, 1993:

Because we affirm that all children are a gift of God, created by God and created good;

all children are a gift to the whole of the human community;

all children have a real faith, and gifts for ministry;

all children have the right to be children;

and all children are not just tomorrow, they are today.

Because we believe that all children depend upon adults for safety and security in a world that does not always value children;

all children are affected first and most deeply by those things that work against health and wholeness;

where there is disease, children sicken and die;

where there is homelessness, children sleep on the streets and in other dangerous places;

where there is war, children are frightened and without a safe place;

where there air and water are polluted, children feel the effect in their bodies and in their futures;

where there is shame, children's spirits are wounded.

Therefore we hope for a world where all children can find a safe place;

where all ages, races, genders, creeds, and abilities are recognized, valued, and celebrated;

where all adults hear the voices of children and speak with as well as for them;

where all children have "first call" on the world's resources and first place in the minds and hearts of the world's adults.

Because Jesus welcomed children and encouraged us to welcome them in his name;

Jesus lifted up a child as an example of what the realm of God is like;

Therefore we hope for a church where we take seriously our baptismal vow to nurture all children committed to our care;

where we bring good news to all those places where children are in need;

where adults and children alike share in ministry.

We covenant to act so that this vision may be made real for all children, now and in times to come.

## General Purpose Statement

First Presbyterian Church, Quincy, MA, seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of First Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

## Yearly Review and Updating of the Children and Youth Protection Policy

This policy will be reviewed yearly by an oversight committee – a group of three church members, including the Session Liaison to the Children’s Christian Education Committee. This group will be responsible for conducting the review and making any requested and/or necessary changes, subject to Session approval. In addition, any changes requested or mandated by the PC USA and/or the Presbytery should be communicated to this group for policy update, again subject to Session approval.

## Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in activities or classes involving minors, a daycare or school, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

## Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) Six-Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with First Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

c) Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and “volunteers” as defined above.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Teaching Elder 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.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the First Presby<sup>t</sup>erian Church.

## Two-Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open when determined safe based on the age of the children. For the safety of children 0-3 years of age, doors should remain closed as long as there is a window in, or next to, the door.

Youth leaders, specifically those for youth in grades 6-12, may meet one-on-one with or drive a student home with permission from the youth's parent or guardian.

## Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

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 – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at First Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Personal Committee and the Teaching Elder for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

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

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

5. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.

7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

## Registration and Check-in/Check-out Procedure

Children below fifth grade must be registered, either through our online registration or in person, to participate in children's programming, including Sunday School. Child's name, age, allergies and/or any other relevant medical condition, as well as parent or guardian's name and contact information, and a list of approved pick-up people must be on file with the Director of Christian Education. An attendance list, based on the registration list, will be used to check in children to every children's program. If a child is not registered, the child's parent or guardian will be asked to fill out the necessary information before the child may participate. Children under the age of six must be picked up by a parent, guardian, or approved pick-up person in their classroom at the conclusion of Sunday School.

## Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at First Presbyterian Church. 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;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers 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.

## Medications Policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church 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.

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 of Christian Education, the appropriate program leader, and/or the child's Sunday School teacher. An action plan must be on file with the Director of Christian Education and a copy must be kept where the child is (classroom, vehicle, off-site activities). Training should take place to familiarize workers with the action plan.

Youth leaders, specifically those for youth in grades 6-12, may hold and administer medication to youth on overnights or youth trips with parent or guardian's written permission and specific instructions on a liability form.

## Discipline Policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Director of Christian Education if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

## Restroom Guidelines

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.

## Accidental Injuries to Children

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.

## Training

First Presbyterian Church will provide training on this Children and Youth Protection Policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

## Policy Acknowledgment

Once per calendar year, all staff, volunteers, and parents/guardians who participate in children's programming, or who have a child who attends children's programming, must provide a signature acknowledging that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by this Children and Youth Protection Policy. The Children and Youth Protection Policy is posted on the First Presbyterian Church website and a copy will be available in the church office, at staff and volunteer trainings, and at the time of child registration for children's programming.