

Policy for the Protection of Children

First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois

Statement of Purpose

Jesus told his followers: “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Mark 10: 14). As disciples of Christ we hear his call and we strive to provide a loving and safe environment for the children of our church; so their faith might grow, their knowledge of the Bible might deepen and their place in the church family might show them the love of Christ. To this end, we, the Session of First Presbyterian Church do put forth the following policies for the protection of our children:

Helpful Definitions

What is a Child?

A child is a person age birth to 18 years old.

What is Abuse?

Abuse is an act of commission and generally involves non-accidental physical injury, sexual activity or advances, or verbal battering which creates substantial emotional harm.

What is Neglect?

Neglect is an act of commission or omission and generally involves lack of such necessities as food, shelter, medical care or supervision appropriate for the child’s age or developmental level. Neglect can include being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while leading or participating in a children’s function.

What is Mandated Reporting?

Illinois State Law requires certain persons, due to their training or work role, to report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Child and Family Services.

Who is a Volunteer?

A volunteer is someone who works with the children of First Presbyterian Church but who is not paid for that work. They may or may not be ordained.

Who is a Non-Ordained Staff Member?

A non-ordained staff member is someone who is paid by First Presbyterian Church but is not ordained. This includes office, custodial, maintenance, and music staff.

Who is an Ordained Staff Member?

An ordained staff member is a pastor or associate pastor who is paid by First Presbyterian Church.

Policies for the Prevention of Abuse

Background Checks

All paid staff who encounter children in their work at First Presbyterian Church will undergo a background check which will be paid for by First Presbyterian Church. Eligible staff will be required to share private information necessary for performing these checks.

Two Adult Rule

First Presbyterian Church will make a concerted effort to provide two non-related adults for all church sponsored activities involving children. The only exception to this two adult policy will be in a situation in which the contact occurs in a public place and other persons are in and out of the area.

Overnight Policy

For overnight gatherings there will be one adult for every five children with a minimum of two adults present. When both male and female children are participating in an overnight event there will be both male and female leaders present.

Open Door Policy

As further protection for our children, First Presbyterian Church will have an open door policy which means that all Sunday School room doors will be kept open, at least partially, while children are in the rooms. In the case of the nursery, the bottom half of the door will remain closed but the top half will remain open.

Discipline Policy

Children will be treated with respect and spanking, slapping, and shaking are not allowed. Further, a child can not be disciplined in any way that deprives them of their basic rights to be safe and comfortable.

Leaving Church Grounds

No volunteer or staff member may take a child off of church property without the permission of a parent or guardian and without at least one other adult present.

Promoting Policy Awareness

All volunteers and staff who work with children, including persons who transport children, will be made aware of the above policies. Each will receive a copy of this document and be required to sign a copy of it once they have read it and agreed to its conditions. All members of the Session of First Presbyterian Church will also receive copies of this policy.

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I have read the above policies and understand their meaning. I agree to adhere to them when involved in activities sponsored by First Presbyterian Church.

Name

Date

What To Do If You Suspect a *VOLUNTEER* is Abusing or Neglecting a Child

Who do you contact?

If you suspect a church volunteer of abuse or neglect immediately contact a pastor (Clifford Hayes, 217-528-4311, cliff@first-pres-church.org or Shannon Yost, 217-528-4311, shannon@first-pres-church.org) and notify the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). If needed, a pastor will help you in this notification. DCFS will then work with you as they investigate the matter further. This very well might involve formulating an official written accusation.

What happens to the volunteer?

Once an accusation is made the church volunteer will be removed from his/her interaction with children until said accusation has been thoroughly investigated. If the accusation proves to be unfounded, the church worker may return to his/her work with children. If the accusation proves to be founded in any way, the church worker will be permanently removed from his/her work with children.

When will the Session know?

If DCFS deems the accusation is founded in any way, a pastor will inform the Session of the accusation and follow-up investigation at its next meeting.

What To Do If You Suspect a *NON-ORDAINED STAFF MEMBER* is Abusing or Neglecting a Child

Who do you contact?

If you suspect a non-ordained staff member of abuse or neglect immediately contact a pastor (Clifford Hayes, 217-528-4311, cliff@first-pres-church.org or Shannon Yost, 217-528-4311, shannon@first-pres-church.org) and notify the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). If needed, a pastor will help you in this notification. DCFS will then work with you as they investigate the matter further. This very well might involve formulating an official written accusation.

What happens to the non-ordained staff member?

Once an accusation is made the non-ordained staff member will be removed from his/her duties and placed on paid leave until said accusation has been thoroughly investigated. If the accusation proves to be unfounded, the non-ordained staff member may return to his/her work, including work with children. If the accusation proves to be founded in any way, the Personnel Committee will dissolve the relationship between the non-ordained staff member and First Presbyterian Church.

When will the Session know?

If a non-ordained staff member is accused of abuse and/or neglect a pastor will immediately notify the Personnel Committee. If said accusation proves to be founded in any way, the Personnel Committee will notify the Session. If said accusation proves to be unfounded, the Personnel Committee does not need to notify the Session.

What To Do If You Suspect an *ORDAINED STAFF MEMBER* is Abusing or Neglecting a Child

Who do you contact?

If you suspect an ordained staff member of abuse or neglect immediately contact the executive presbyter of Great Rivers Presbytery (Charles Spencer, 1-800-537-8592, cspencer@greatriverspby.org) and notify the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). For suspected ordained staff members there are two parallel investigations that will take place: civil and church. DCFS, the civil authorities, and an investigating committee of the Presbytery, the church authorities, will both work with you as they investigate the matter further. These are separate investigations but both will involve formulating an official written accusation. Charges can be filed by both civil and church authorities and, even if civil charges are dropped, church charges may stand and vice versa.

What happens to the ordained staff member?

Once an accusation is made the ordained staff member will be removed from his/her duties and placed on paid leave until said accusation has been thoroughly investigated. If the accusation proves to be unfounded, the ordained staff member may return to his/her work, including work with children. If the accusation proves to be founded in any way, the Session will dissolve the relationship between the ordained staff member and First Presbyterian Church. This will be facilitated by representatives of Great Rivers Presbytery.

When will the Session know?

If an ordained staff member is accused of child abuse and/or neglect, the executive presbyter will immediately contact the Session and inform them of the accusation.

What If An ELDER, DEACON or PASTOR Suspects Abuse or Neglect of a Child

Must you report your suspicions?

Under our church's *Book of Order* (church law) sections G-6.0204 (pastors), G-6.0304 (elders), and G-6.0402 (deacons), respectively **mandate** that these three ordained groups within the church report any suspicions of abuse or neglect. The exact language is as follows:

A [minister of the Word and Sacrament/elder/deacon] shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge, gained in the course of service to the church, of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of privileged communication; or (2) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

While church law mandates elders, deacons, and pastors to report suspicions, civil law only mandates pastors. An elder or deacon may, however, be mandated due to their profession.

Who do you contact?

If you suspect a church volunteer of abuse or neglect immediately contact a pastor (Clifford Hayes, 217-528-4311, cliff@first-pres-church.org or Shannon Yost, 217-528-4311, shannon@first-pres-church.org) and notify the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS). If needed, a pastor will help you in this notification. DCFS will then work with you as they investigate the matter further. This very well might involve formulating an official written accusation.

Who is a Mandated Reporter?

Pastors

Pastors are required by law, both civil and church, to report any suspicions they have about child abuse or neglect.

Elders and Deacons

Elders and Deacons are not required by *civil* law to report any suspicions they have about child abuse or neglect. They are, however, required to report under *church* law (see previous page).

Church Members

Church Members are not required to report any suspicions they have about child abuse or neglect simply by being church members. Some members are required by law to report due to their occupations (doctors, teachers, etc).

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