

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

First Presbyterian Church
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At Batavia First Presbyterian Church (BFPC), we believe that children are a sacred trust from God, and their safety, well-being, and spiritual development are paramount. We are committed to providing a safe, secure, and nurturing environment free from all forms of abuse and neglect. This policy outlines our commitment and procedures to ensure the protection of all minors participating in our programs and activities.

Section I: Scope and Definitions

This **Child Protection Policy** applies to all programs, events, and activities involving children and/or youth (referred to as **minors**) conducted or sponsored by FPC, both on and off church premises.

Definitions for the purpose of this policy:

- **Minor:** Anyone under the age of 18. This includes children and youth.
- **Volunteer:** Any person who works with minors in an unpaid capacity.
- **Staff:** Any person employed by BFPC who works with minors.
- **BFPC Programs/Activities:** Includes all Christian Education activities, youth groups, choirs, worship services, meetings, and any other activity or program sponsored by BFPC.
- **Child Abuse:** Any non-accidental injury; any sexual activity or sexual exploitation; or any neglectful treatment or maltreatment that harms the health, welfare, or safety of a minor. This includes:
 - **Physical Abuse:** Causing deliberate and intentional bodily harm to a minor.
 - **Emotional Abuse:** Verbal and/or nonverbal emotional cruelty to a minor. This sends a message to the victim that they are worthless, bad, unloved, and/or undeserving of love and care.
 - **Neglect:** Endangering a minor's health, welfare, and safety through negligence. This includes but is not limited to withholding adequate food, medical care, affection, affirmation, clothing, shelter, hygiene, or education.
 - **Sexual Abuse:** Any sexual contact between an adult and a minor, or between an older and/or more powerful minor and a younger minor. Sexual abuse may include, but is not limited to: fondling, intercourse, incest, inappropriate touching, exposure to pornography, sexual advances, or comments of a sexual nature.
- **Inappropriate Touch:** Any touch that makes those touching, being touched, or observing the interaction uncomfortable. (See Addendum One: Appropriate Touch Policies).

Section II: Adult Boundaries and Expectations

All adults (staff and volunteers) interacting with minors in FPC programs and activities are responsible for maintaining appropriate boundaries and professional conduct at all times.

- 1. Zero Tolerance for Abuse: Abuse of children in any form will not be tolerated.**
- 2. Professional Conduct:** Adults are expected to behave professionally and appropriately at all times, imposing limits and maintaining clear boundaries in interpersonal relationships with minors.
- 3. Avoid Being Alone with Minors:** Adults **must avoid being alone with one minor** in a private setting (e.g., classroom, vehicle, isolated area) where they are not visible to other adults.
- 4. Referrals for Counseling:** Requests for counseling from minors should be referred to the Pastor or to qualified mental health professionals. Staff and volunteers should not attempt to provide counseling.
- 5. Reporting Concerns:** Any problem or suspected issue regarding minors, including potential policy violations or suspected child abuse, **must be reported immediately.** (See Section V: Reporting Procedures).

Section III: Prevention Guidelines and Best Practices

To best protect minors, volunteers, and staff involved in FPC activities, the following guidelines will be implemented for all programs:

- 1. Prohibition Due to Prior Abuse:** No adult who has been found in a civil, criminal, or church proceeding to have committed child abuse (sexual, physical, or emotional abuse) or neglect, or by any child protective agency, shall serve as a volunteer or be employed in any church-sponsored activity where minors are present.
- 2. Prohibition Due to Pending Allegations:** No volunteer or prospective volunteer is allowed to work with minors if they are the subject of a formal complaint or other legal pleading (civil, criminal, church, or administrative proceeding) involving allegations of child abuse or neglect. This prohibition will remain in effect until the complaint is fully resolved. All volunteers/prospective volunteers must disclose any such formal complaints immediately upon application or discovery.
- 3. Policy Acknowledgment:** All persons who volunteer or are employed to work with minors **must read, understand, and sign an acknowledgment of this Child Protection Policy** and the Sexual Misconduct Policy.
- 4. Two-Adult Rule (Two-Deep Leadership):** Whenever possible, there will be at least two unrelated, **screened adults** present in any classroom, vehicle, or situation where minors are present. If this is not immediately

possible (e.g., unexpected ratio changes), an adult should ensure visibility or maintain an open door until a second adult is present.

5. **Age Differential:** Any adult volunteer supervising youth should be at least **five years older** than the oldest youth they are supervising.
6. **Open Door / Plain View Policy:**
 - a. All windows in rooms used for children's and youth programming shall remain unobstructed (except when used as dressing rooms).
 - b. Doors to rooms where minors are present will remain open if the door has no window, or if privacy is not required for a specific activity (e.g., a quiet time, or a special sensory activity).
 - c. One-on-one conversations or counseling sessions with minors shall be conducted with the door to the room open, in a public area, or with another adult present nearby.
7. **Restroom Policy:** (See Addendum Two for full details). Workers should ensure children's privacy while assisting to and from the restroom. Workers should not enter a stall with a child or enter restrooms of the opposite sex. When possible, two adults should be present if a worker must enter the restroom. If not possible, more than one child should be present.
8. **Appropriate Touching:** (See Addendum One: Appropriate Touch Policies).
9. **Covenant for Off-Site Events:** For one-time events such as youth retreats, work camps, and mission trips, a written covenant will be created and signed by participants, parents/guardians, and accompanying leaders. This covenant will clearly state expected behaviors and unacceptable behaviors for both adults and youth, how transgressions will be addressed, and to whom reports will be directed.
10. **Overnight Accommodations:** Each overnight event will have at least three leaders. There must be at least one adult of each gender present at overnight events involving both male and female youth. Sleeping arrangements must ensure appropriate supervision and privacy for all minors, with adults sleeping in separate rooms or designated areas from minors.
11. **Permission Forms:** Parental or legal guardian permission forms, including permission for emergency medical treatment, shall be securely maintained on-site during church events and shall remain with the person transporting and/or accompanying the youth on any off-site event, retreat, or overnight event. Copies of these forms shall also be securely located in the church office during the event/retreat.
12. **Parent/Guardian Information for Off-Site Events:** Information shall be given to the parent(s) or guardian(s) prior to any off-site event stating the time and location of departure and pick-up time, and any available phone numbers to contact the group leaders.
13. **Transportation:**

- a. All transportation of minors (typically youth) must be provided by a currently approved FPC staff member, screened volunteers, or a parent approved by the appropriate program staff.
- b. Any driver must present a valid driver's license and proof of auto insurance for the vehicle operated.
- c. Each child must wear a seat belt.
- d. Adults should avoid driving alone with one child (other than their own child); however, if such driving is necessary, parents and/or another staff member should be informed of the travel plan beforehand.

14. **Emergency Procedures & Code of Ethics:** All volunteers and staff must be familiar with and follow the Volunteer Emergency Procedures Handout and Volunteer Code of Ethics, which complement this policy.

Section IV: Screening and Training

FPC is committed to thorough screening and ongoing training for all individuals working with minors.

1. **Application Packet:** All persons who volunteer or are employed to work with minors shall complete an application packet that includes:
 - a. A completed application form.
 - b. Provision of references.
 - c. Disclosure of all criminal convictions.
2. **Background Checks:** Screening (including a computerized criminal background check) is required for **all** staff and volunteers who have direct and regular supervision of minors. This includes, but is not limited to, nursery attendants, choir directors, and leaders of children's programs, youth groups, Vacation Bible School (VBS), and youth activities. Background checks will be conducted at least every 5 years.
3. **Training:** All successful applicants who work with minors shall attend a mandatory seminar designed to explain and implement this Child Protection Policy and the Sexual Misconduct Policy. Upon completion of that training, they shall sign a form stating their understanding of the policy and their commitment to abide by it. Training will be refreshed at least every 5 years.
4. **Supervised Volunteers:** Individuals who work with children in a more limited capacity and *under the immediate and constant supervision of a screened volunteer or staff member* are not required to undergo a full background check. This category includes, but is not limited to, nursery substitutes/assistants, choir parents, parent volunteers for one-off events, and teen helpers. **Non-screened volunteers are still bound by all other requirements of this policy, including the Adult Boundaries and Guidelines sections.**

Section V: Reporting Procedures

The safety of minors is paramount. Any suspicion or disclosure of abuse must be taken seriously and reported immediately.

1. **On-Site Person in Charge:** For each event involving minors, the Pastor will be informed of the designated on-site person in charge.
2. **Reporting Accidental Injuries:**
 - a. If an accidental injury to a minor occurs during any FPC event, the injured minor's parents/legal guardians shall be contacted immediately or as soon as possible.
 - b. The on-site person in charge of the event and an FPC staff member must also be informed.
 - c. An Incident Report must be completed by the supervising adult within 24 hours. The report must be submitted to the Pastor, who will forward a copy to the church's insurance agent. The report will be placed on file and available to the parent/guardian upon request.
3. **Reporting Suspected Child Abuse:**
 - a. **Abuse of children and youth in any form will not be tolerated.**
 - b. Any problem or suspected issue regarding minors (including any form of suspected child abuse or neglect) **must be reported immediately to civil authorities (Child Protective Services or law enforcement).**
 - c. **Reporting to Civil Authorities is Paramount:** It is the primary responsibility of anyone who suspects abuse to report directly to the appropriate civil authorities. **Do not delay reporting to investigate on your own.**
 - d. **Reporting to Church Leadership:** After reporting to civil authorities, the suspected incident must also be reported to the Pastor and/or the Clerk of Session.
 - e. **Presbytery Notification:** In accordance with denominational guidelines, the Presbytery will also be informed.
 - f. **Denominational Mandate (Book of Order G-4.0302):** "Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church and its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge 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 a confidential communication as defined in Book of Order G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse."
 - g. **Parent/Guardian Notification (Suspected Abuse):** If an incident occurs during an FPC event in which child abuse is suspected, the

affected child's parents/legal guardians shall be contacted immediately or as soon as possible, *after* civil authorities have been notified and advised on appropriate communication.

- h. **Support for Survivors:** FPC commits to providing support and resources to survivors of abuse, ensuring a safe and compassionate environment for healing.

Section VI: Outside Groups and Individuals

Groups or individuals renting or using the facilities of FPC who are not affiliated with the church are generally not included in this policy, but they **must provide proof of their own insurance coverage**. If a group renting or using the church facilities is serving minors, they **must also submit a copy of their child protection or sexual abuse prevention policy** to FPC prior to their use of the facilities.

Addendum One: Appropriate Touch Policies

1. **Nurturing Touch:** Nurturing and affirming touch (e.g., on faces, hands, shoulders, heads) is important for developing sound relationships with minors. However, **never touch a minor in an area that would normally be covered by a bathing suit**.
2. **Unacceptable Actions:** The following actions are strictly prohibited:
 - a. Verbal abuse, rough handling, shoving, hair pulling, shaking, slapping, spanking, biting, pinching, hitting.
 - b. Requiring a minor to do anything that is demeaning to their character (hazing).
 - c. Requiring a minor to say anything that is demeaning to their character.
3. **Avoid Tickling:** Volunteers and staff should **never tickle minors** as it can be overstimulating and may be perceived as or lead to more inappropriate touching.
4. **Physical Proximity:** Volunteers and staff should **never allow a minor to stand between their legs when seated**. Gently guide the minor to your side. You may still speak eye-to-eye and comfort the minor or talk quietly with them at your side when necessary.
5. **Lap Sitting:** Holding minors on your lap is not appropriate.
6. **Visibility:** All activities and practices should be scheduled so that all minors are within your view at all times.
7. **Kissing:** **Never kiss a minor on their lips. Never let a minor kiss you on the lips.**

Addendum Two: Additional Guidelines for Workers

1. **Reporting Accusations:** If anything happens that you believe may put you at risk of accusation by anyone, **do not keep this a secret**. You must immediately contact the Pastor and/or the Clerk of Session.
2. **First Aid:** First Aid should be administered as gently and respectfully as possible. Always ask for assistance from another adult if the child needs to be moved or if the injury requires more involved care. An Incident Report must be completed for any injury.
3. **Bathroom Policy:**
 - a. It is often necessary for workers to assist young children to the restroom. Minor's privacy should be maintained.
 - b. Workers should observe nursery guidelines when changing diapers in our classes for minors aged three years and under. Workers should wear gloves and should make use of diaper changing stations. **A minor's diapers should be changed by and in the presence of at least two approved workers (youth workers should not change diapers).**
 - c. If a minor is in an age group that requires them to be checked in/out of class (typically 3rd grade and under), then that minor should be escorted to the bathroom.
 - d. The worker should remain outside the bathroom door and should not enter a stall with a minor. Workers must not enter restrooms of the opposite sex.
 - e. The worker's primary responsibility is ensuring that the minor has a safe trip to and from the restroom facility in a timely manner.
4. Two adults should be present if a worker must enter the restroom to assist a minor (e.g., if a minor needs help with clothing, or cannot reach the sink).
5. **Volunteer Emergency Procedures Handout and Volunteer Code of Ethics:** All procedures as outlined in these supplementary documents should be followed at all times.