

# First Presbyterian Church

## CHILD, YOUTH, AND WORKER PROTECTION POLICY

Approved by the Session  
February 24, 2021

*The First Presbyterian Church of Aiken Child, Youth, and Worker Protection Policy is our congregational guidelines. Our First Presbyterian Church of Aiken Preschool has a policy that complies with standards from the Department of Social Services.*

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## **First Presbyterian Church** **CHILD, YOUTH, AND WORKER PROTECTION POLICY**

### **A Vision for Children and the Church**

*“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. Mark 10:14-16*

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 the 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.**

Adopted by the 205th General Assembly, 1993



## Policy Purpose

First Presbyterian Church, Aiken (FPCA) is committed to providing a safe place for all children, youth, and adults who attend any activity or ministry. Recognizing trust is fundamental to the well-being of the Christian community, FPCA adopts these policies and procedures not only to maximize safety and prevent child abuse from occurring within its church community, but also to guide and protect volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse. FPCA covenants to educate everyone concerning FPCA protection procedures and, as God's people, to nurture, love, and care for children, youth and adults to experience God's kingdom in a safe place.

## Terms and Definitions

“Good touch” is important to each of us. Children do not grow and thrive without the good touch of others. Touch was important to Jesus as he healed people and comforted them. Our Christian tradition shares love with each other through hugs, placing an arm around another's shoulder or squeezing a hand to say, “You are loved.”

It is imperative that the Christian community not lose the importance of “good touch.” We need to continue to express Christian love in appropriate ways with children. To a child who is upset, a warm hug and kind word can be most comforting. In the midst of our caution, let us not forget that good touch is just that – *good!*

In this policy the following definitions will apply:

1. **Child or Youth:** Any person under the age of 18 and considered a minor under the law.
2. **Special Needs Person:** Any adult or child requiring direct adult supervision as a result of mental or physical limitations.
3. **Adult:** Any person age 18 and over.
4. **Child abuse and neglect:** Physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect of a child by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's welfare.
  - **Physical abuse:** Maltreatment, which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.
  - **Emotional abuse:** Maltreatment, which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including, but not limited to, belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child's performance, and isolation from normal social activities.
  - **Sexual abuse:** Maltreatment, which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including, but not limited to, physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and non-physical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).
  - **Neglect:** Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and supervision.



5. **Employee:** Any person earning salary or wages at FPCA who work with children or youth at any church-sponsored activity.
6. **Volunteer:** Any non-compensated individual who works with children or youth at any church-sponsored activity.
7. **FPCA Pastoral Staff:** Any person with pastoral or programmatic responsibilities employed by First Presbyterian Church, Aiken, SC
8. **Church-sponsored Activity:** Includes any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational event generated or organized by FPCA, whether on-campus or off-campus.
9. **Mandated reporter:** The South Carolina Mandated Reporter law identifies certain categories of people required to report child abuse and/or neglect. The same law encourages all people to report child abuse and/or neglect. The Mandated Reporter law is S.C. Code section 63-7-310 (<https://law.justia.com/codes/south-carolina/2019/title-63/chapter-7/section-63-7-310/>)

A mandated reporter is required to report when the reporter has reason to believe a child may be or has been abused and/or neglected. The report must be made to either the South Carolina Department of Social Services (S.C.DSS) or a law enforcement officer. (<https://dss.sc.gov/abuseneglect/report-child-abuse-and-neglect/>; 1-888-227-3487)

## Application and Screening for Volunteers and Employees

### **Volunteers:**

Volunteers working with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity, will be required to:

1. Satisfy a six-month waiting period during which the volunteer shall serve alongside an already approved adult;
  - a. Purposeful Education Leadership may waive the six-month waiting period for volunteers in circumstances of a viable need.
2. Complete an *FPCA Children and Youth Worker Application* form and sign the worker's pledge;
3. Have background checks completed; such checks include references, a criminal background and sexual offender search, both statewide and national;
4. Attend orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

### **Youth Volunteers:**

Youth members of the church family who are under the age of 18 may volunteer to work with minors under adult supervision. Referred to as "youth aides", these members are wonderful church resources in many situations. To volunteer the youth aides must:

1. Be at least 13 years old and a member of an FPCA family;
2. Be at least three years older than the minors with whom they are interacting; and
3. Complete the *FPCA Youth Volunteer Application* form.
4. In compliance with the FPCA Nursery Policy, youth aides must be at least 16 years of age to work with infants and toddlers.



**Employee:**

All employees are required to submit to all background checks in addition to regular employment application and reference checks.

**Screening Process:**

The staff person who recruits/supervises a volunteer or employee working with children or youth is responsible for receiving a completed application before the volunteer or employee begins his/her duties. This application and the results of background screening shall be kept confidential by authorized church staff.

Any candidate for volunteer service or employee who has a past conviction or pending proceeding related to an allegation of a crime against a child or youth, or a violent crime against another adult, shall not provide service in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth, or special needs persons.

Those who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse can be forgiven for and cleansed of their sin. However, sin does have consequences and while such persons may serve in certain other areas of ministry at FPCA, they will be prohibited from serving in the children, youth, and special needs ministries.

**Standards of Behavior Guidelines**

Attention shall be given to ensure children, youth and special adults involved in our programs feel welcome and safe and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. In order to carry out our mission of protecting the children, youth and special needs adults entrusted to our care, we commit ourselves to the following guidelines:

- Church-sponsored activities and programs will be supervised by volunteers and employees who are at least 18 years of age.
- Two Adult Rule: Two unrelated adults shall be present and supervising children and youth at all times. This requirement applies to every church-sponsored activity and applies in each classroom, vehicle or other enclosed area. In the event that two adults cannot be present in the room, classroom doors should be left open and adult supervisors in adjacent rooms should be alerted to help with monitoring the situation in said room.
- Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteers. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom.
- Rule of Three: In cases of unforeseen circumstances or exigencies when the Two Adult Rule cannot be implemented, at least three individuals, one of whom must be an adult, shall be present at every church function and in each classroom, vehicle or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth and special needs adults.
- Limited exception to Two Adult Rule or to Rule of Three: It is recognized that certain counseling and ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two unrelated adults and the general guidelines for supervision should not restrict situations where individual counsel and guidance is necessary. Should one-on-one spiritual counseling be conducted by anyone other than the Pastors, the supervisor of the person intending to conduct the counseling



must be notified in advance. In this case, the door must be left open or the window of the door shall remain uncovered.

- Restroom Use: When using the restroom, children under the age of 10 will be accompanied by an adult to and from the restroom. Before the child enters the restroom, the adult will enter to ensure it is safe. If a child under the age of 10 requires assistance in the restroom, an adult of the same sex will assist the minor in the restroom with the door propped open so a second adult can visually monitor the assisting adult.
- Organized events on- or off-site of FPCA shall be staffed by current best practice ratio recommendations based on the age of the children and youth participating in the activities. Overnight events that are attended by children or youth of both genders must be chaperoned by adults of both genders.
- A positive approach to discipline shall be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits shall be established.
- Adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for and appearances of abuse and are to uphold appropriate and faithful communication exchanges while at church or in relation to all church participants and activities. Adults are to refrain from using explicit language, the exchange of sexual imagery or sexually explicit discussion, the promotion of illegal activities (i.e. drug use, underage drinking) and all other inappropriate material use in images, social media posts, shared videos, comments or remarks on other's posts. This requirement extends to Phone (voice and text), Social Networking (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), email, and ALL other forms of electronic communication. All communications, photos, comments or replies via electronic methods should be appropriate to share publicly.
- Electronic communications between adults and youth take place using a public platform such as Facebook group page, GroupMe group message, etc. When a public platform is not appropriate or possible, electronic communications (such as emails, texts or direct messages via online platforms) should employ the two-to-one rule: 2 youth to 1 adult or 2 adults to 1 youth.
- Training and education for electronic communication usage between adults and youth will happen at least annually, during all training opportunities, to clarify open communication. Additionally, volunteers, staff, parents and youth will have an opportunity to practice these procedures during their training to understand the importance of two-to-one communication.
- If an adult employee or volunteer feels they have been inappropriately contacted by a youth, they are to report the incident in writing (email is acceptable) to the supervising staff member and the Senior Pastor. If a minor feels they have been inappropriately contacted by an adult, they are to share this information with a trusted adult, parent, Pastor or Staff member.

### **Procedures and Use of Facilities for Programs**

To ensure the safety of those participating in church sponsored activities, participants, or their parents, will check-in with emergency contact numbers for each event. Adult supervisors will remain after an event to provide the Two Adult Rule until all participants are in the custody of parents or guardians.

Medical information and permission forms must be completed for any child or youth participating in events. Forms shall be updated annually for youth participants and as needed for children participating in off-site activities. Additional permission forms may be required by the sponsoring activity and must also be completed as needed.



Once activities are underway, exterior doors are to be locked. (This excludes Sunday morning Worship and Vacation Bible School.) Exterior doors are never to be propped open or left unlocked without an adult monitoring the door.

## **Education, Training and Maintenance of the Policy**

- Annual training of *FPCA's Child, Youth and Worker Protection Policy* is required for:
  - Employees of the church;
  - Volunteers who work with children and youth under 18;
  - Elders and Deacons.
- Training will be completed by the staff supervisor.
- Information about the *Child, Youth and Worker Protection Policy* shall be available in the church office and included in each new member packet.
- Education Ministry will communicate annually with the entire congregation regarding the Protection Policy at the beginning of the Fall program year.
- Education Ministry will review this policy on an annual basis to propose changes or amendments that allow the policy to function most efficiently.
- All employees and volunteers will be required to update their application every three years.

## **Reporting Procedures**

As set forth in #8 under Terms and Definitions section above, mandated reporters are required to report child abuse and/or neglect to either the S.C.DSS or law enforcement. Mandated reporters have a legal duty, enforceable by criminal penalty, to report all incidents of child abuse and/or neglect. South Carolina law provides protections for mandated reporters and other persons who report child abuse and/or neglect.

Reason to believe that a child may be or has been abused and/or neglected may be established by what a reporter has observed and by information a reporter has received. A report based on the reasonable belief that a child has been abused and/or neglected does not require proof or investigation by the reporter. The reporter's duty is to report what has been observed and what information the reporter has received. Professionals will take further action, as necessary, including conducting a complete investigation should that be required.

Because we believe children and youth are our most important concern, FPCA has adopted the following guidelines for reporting suspected abuse:

1. Upon observing or suspecting abuse, the caregiver shall immediately do the following:
  - a. Make sure the child's safety and comfort are secured;
  - b. Make sure the suspected abuser is safely away from the children.
2. After reporting the abuse as required by the South Carolina Mandated Reporter law, promptly inform the Senior Pastor or Director of Purposeful Education.



## Response of FPCA:

FPCA's primary function in responding to allegations of sexual abuse or neglect are to attempt to provide pastoral care to all who are affected, to attempt to ensure the safety and protection of persons who have been or may be harmed, to seek healing by providing pastoral care and other needed assistance to all who are affected, and, to the extent possible, to respect the privacy and rights of the parties involved and the confidentiality of communications.

If FPCA receives an allegation of child abuse or neglect, the pastors will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, FPCA will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that FPCA takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

If an alleged abuser contacts the church officials about a complaint, they should be referred to the Pastor. If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the Pastor. Only the Pastor or his/her designee shall make comments about the allegation.

## Responsibilities of the FPCA Pastoral Staff:

In accordance with the Church's position that child abuse and neglect shall not be tolerated, the pastoral staff shall do the following:

1. Take all allegations of child abuse and/or neglect seriously.
2. Document all efforts at handling the incident.
3. If a report has not already been made by an FPCA mandated reporter, report to the S.C.DSS. (<https://dss.sc.gov/abuse/neglect/report-child-abuse-and-neglect/>; 1-888-227-3487)
4. Report the incident immediately to the church insurance company and attorney.
5. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
6. Notify the parents or guardians.
7. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or special needs person is secured.
8. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support will help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
9. Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a caregiver, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished.
10. Use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.



## FPCA Child, Youth, and Worker Protection Policy Commonly Asked Questions

### **Is a criminal background check really necessary?**

Sadly, the culture in which we live dictates we must take drastic preventive measures to protect the children and youth whose care we've been entrusted with. Furthermore, there are litigation issues: A church that hasn't performed background checks faces the risk of catastrophic financial penalties in the event that an allegation of abuse within the church leads to a conviction or out-of-court settlement.

### **Who needs to submit an *FPCA Children's and Youth Workers Application* form?**

Any church employee or volunteer who will have direct contact with any child or youth (less than 18 years of age), either on or off the church campus, during any church-related ministries.

### **Once I complete and sign these forms, to whom do I give them?**

Give your completed forms to the Director of Purposeful Education or the church staff person who asked for your participation.

### **I'm concerned about confidentiality and privacy issues. Who will see my application and more importantly, who will see the results of my background check?**

Only those listed above, along with our church's administrative support staff, will see your application. All information will be kept in a secured filing cabinet in the church office.

### **I am not presently involved in any church volunteer work that involves young people. Should I submit an application and give permission for a background check?**

As our church continues to grow, so do our children and youth discipleship ministries. Because the addition of programs to minister to these young people is ongoing, the demand for volunteers is always on the increase. Even though you may not be currently involved in such a ministry, it's a good idea to go ahead and submit your forms now. In the event that you do volunteer work at some point in the future, we'll already have your forms and background check on file.

### **What is a "US Criminal Record Indicator" database search?**

The US Criminal Record Indicator is the most comprehensive and current search available in the United States. The US Criminal Record Indicator database search examines the Department of Public Safety, Department of Corrections, Administrative Office of the Courts, Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and/or the Department of Criminal Justice files and records, and other applicable government agencies where available. Currently this search includes information from 39 states plus multiple online county records.

### **Why do I have to list my Social Security Number (SSN)?**

A couple of reasons. The first is your SSN is the primary key for all databases affiliated with a background check. The second reason is your SSN is used to verify the following crucial information:

- whether the SSN is validly issued;
- to whom SSN belongs;
- in which year and state the SSN was issued;
- the current and other known or previous addresses for that SSN.



The SSN Verification process can reveal the number belongs to another individual, has more than one name associated with it (i.e., produces other aliases) including maiden and divorced names, is associated with fraud, is not a validly issued SSN, belongs to a deceased person, produces additional addresses not stated by the application/request form, or if the individual has other SSN's. Anyone can give a false identification by using another person's Social Security number. This search ensures that the individual is who they say they are. The Social Security search is provided in the Basic Search along with the National Criminal Indicator search.

**What criteria from the background check will determine whether or not someone is approved for volunteer work? Who makes that decision?**

The background check will cite felony and misdemeanor convictions listed in the National Criminal Database Search. The most obvious reason that someone is denied the opportunity to do volunteer work in our church is any prior conviction pertaining to an offense against a child. It's quite unlikely, though, that a person with such a conviction would even submit an application.

Misdemeanor convictions, and even some felony convictions, would have little or no negative impact in determining a person's worthiness as a church volunteer. To put it another way, the only determining factor in evaluating someone's criminal record is the likelihood of him or her posing a threat to our young people.

In the event a felony conviction turns up on the report, Pastor and Director of Purposeful Education will decide whether or not to approve the volunteer for work with children or youth.

**Some final thoughts...**

Please know the intent of the background check is to protect the young people in our church... period. Its purpose is *not* to cause you personal embarrassment by dredging up past mistakes or wrong choices. Regrettably, it's impossible to implement a viable screening plan without a bit of scrutiny into some personal background information.

Throughout the entire process of developing the *Child, Youth, and Worker Protection Policy* for our church, a tremendous amount of concern and sensitivity has been shown in regard to matters of confidentiality. Much effort has been put into implementing screening procedures that limit the number of people who have visible access to private information. Please know that as the screening process evolves over the next several years, your pastoral staff and elders will remain committed to the task of administering screening procedures with utmost regard to your privacy.

