

# **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH POLICIES**

## **Statement on the Purpose and Procedure Safeguarding the Well Being of Children and Youth**

Approved by the Session – March 20, 2011  
Amended by the Session – February 16, 2014  
Amended by Session – October 21, 2018  
Amended by Session – February 16, 2020  
Contacts updated – November 10, 2024

The members of First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth (“First Pres”) are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth<sup>1</sup> participating in the activities and programs of First Pres. This commitment includes the protection of all children and youth from any form of abuse or harassment whether physical, mental, or sexual. During each baptism of an infant, child, or adult into this covenant of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in the spirit of Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual’s relationship with the household of God.

In our pledge to sustain one another in the Gospel of Christ, we also undertake the responsibility to preserve the integrity of each person within our house of faith.

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth, that every reasonable effort should be made so that no child or youth shall be subjected to the preventable risk of any form of abuse or harassment by First Pres employees, teachers, sponsors, chaperones, or volunteers while on First Pres property or while engaged in First Pres activities or programs at any location. The standards implemented in this Statement of Purpose and Procedure seek to uphold that commitment to the safety of the children and youth of First Pres, whether members or guests. Therefore, all First Pres activities and programs, regardless of location, involving children or youth, will be subject to the following policy:

- Two adults shall lead all activities involving children or youth.
- In the rare circumstance when two adults will not be present, adults will be sure to leave doors open in classrooms, notify another adult in the building that they are with children and youth, and in the case of meeting for one on one mentoring conversations, such conversations will take place in a public place (ex. Starbucks, Chili’s, gathering areas in the First Pres building, etc.)
- No person will serve as a teacher, sponsor, chaperone, or volunteer leader of children or youth activities until the following criteria have been met:
  - the person has been a member of First Pres for a minimum of six (6) months or the Administrator has recommended a waiver of the membership requirement based upon the ability of church member or church staff member to vouch for the person’s character. (Adults who are attending a children or youth event as a parent, guardian, family member or observer, and not exercising leadership in the event, will be considered a participant and not leader; and therefore, will not undergo security background checks. For example: Early Education Center class parties, Children’s Musical

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<sup>1</sup> As used herein, the terms “child,” “children,” and “youth” refer to all persons under 18 years of age, or until graduation from high school.

performances, Youth activities, returning college students visiting a youth group meeting, etc.)

- The person has watched the First Pres Volunteer Training Video (verified by an online signature). This training shall be repeated every two years.
- The person has completed Abuse Prevention training and passed a quiz upon completion. This training shall be repeated every two years.
- The person has completed an online application for a background check to be performed. The volunteer applicant shall provide personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background.
- No staff will be employed without successful completion of security and reference checks per the Personnel Policy and procedures. This background check shall be conducted prior to employment and by the Church Administrator and re-checked on a bi-annual basis.
  - Program Staff who lead children or youth activities will be required to complete the Abuse Prevention training and pass a quiz upon completion. This training shall be repeated every two years.
  - EEC Staff will be required to complete the state required Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect training and pass a test upon completion. This training will happen on an annual basis. For EEC staff who are church members volunteering with children or youth activities, this EEC training will complete their abuse prevention training requirement for volunteering.
- For off-campus trips, the appropriate ratio of adult sponsors to children/youth participants for the host organization (i.e. camp, conference center, mission organization, etc.) will be honored. The number of adult sponsors must correspond to the gender numbers in the group. For trips created by our staff (i.e. Family Mission Trip, Youth Ski Trip, etc.), ordinarily the minimum ratio will be 1:5 (1 adult sponsor per 5 children or youth), keeping in mind that the age group and the nature of the trip will be taken into account. In consultation with staff and appropriate committees of the church, the policy Administrator will make final decisions on appropriate trip ratios for adults to children/youth.

### **Criminal Background Check Process**

While the criminal background check process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children and youth outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements, will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Security background checks for persons 18 and older, including a search for potential criminal history, including but not limited to, the National Sex Offender Database, will be conducted by a staff person designated by the Head of Staff as the “Administrator” and his or her staff. The results of the security background checks initially will be reviewed by the Administrator. After this initial review, if the Administrator determines that further review should be made, the results of the security background check will be shared with the Head of Staff.

Without the written permission of the volunteer involved, the results of the security background check will be disclosed only to the Head of Staff and other staff the Head of Staff deems necessary for pastoral care and/or ministry oversight.

Security background checks will be automatically updated every two (2) years. Whether disclosed voluntarily, or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any children or youth activity or program:

Any indictment alleging the offense of, or any conviction for: (i) murder; (ii) rape; (iii) aggravated assault; (iv) certain crimes related to the possession, use, or sale of drugs or controlled substances; (v) sexual abuse; (vi) sexual assault, (vii) aggravated sexual assault; (viii) injury to a child; (ix) incest; (x) indecency with a child; (xi) inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; (xii) possession or promotion of child pornography; (xiii) the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; (xiv) employment harmful to children; or (xv) abandonment or endangerment of a child, or any indictment alleging the offense of any of the items listed will result automatically in the suspension of the volunteer in activities with children or youth until the matter is resolved.

All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Head of Staff, the Administrator, and other First Pres staff with oversight responsibilities for children and youth ministries as the Head of Staff deems appropriate. These persons will be responsible for determining whether such conviction or charges will disqualify a volunteer from participation in any child or youth activity.

Additionally, any volunteer who has had a child removed from their home by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services will not be allowed to serve in any leadership role involving children or youth until the issue is resolved. The Moderator and Administrator will determine whether or not, upon resolution, the volunteer may serve in a leadership role as a volunteer with children and youth.

If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history record transcript, he or she must follow the procedure to review personal criminal history records, which includes forwarding fingerprints and the applicable fee to the Texas Department of Public Safety. If it is determined that the record is indeed the applicant's own criminal record, a letter should be written to the Texas Department of Public Safety detailing the information which the applicant believes to be incorrect or misleading. The Texas Department of Public Safety will then determine whether or not an error has been made. This letter should be addressed to:

Texas Department of Public Safety  
Error Resolution Department  
P.O. Box 15999  
Austin, Texas 78761-5999

### **Reporting Violation of Policy**

In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all children and youth, the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of First Pres must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected activity of abuse or harassment shall be directed to the Director of Children and Family Ministries or the Associate Pastor(s) assigned to the Christian Nurture Committees. If these individuals are not readily available, then the matter should be reported to the Head of Staff or the Administrator. Should the activity of concern involve the Director of Children and Family Ministries, or any Associate Pastor of the Church, the matter should be reported to the Church Administrator of First Pres. Should the activity

of concern involve the Head of Staff and/or Moderator of the Session, then the matter should be reported to the Committee on Ministry of Grace Presbytery.<sup>2</sup>

In the event anyone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this Policy, that person will be asked to complete an Incident Report. The Incident Report Form can be found online at [www.fpcf.org](http://www.fpcf.org) or in the office of the Director of Children and Family Ministries. Anyone who should witness such an occurrence should consider the following recommendations as to how such a situation should be handled to insure the security of the child or youth involved and to protect against physical, emotional or psychological injury, to all persons involved.

- REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY.
- DO NOT LEAVE THE CHILD, CHILDREN, OR YOUTH ALONE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT.
- DO NOT PERSONALLY CONFRONT THE ALLEGED OR ACCUSED VIOLATOR OF THE POLICY.
- ALLOW THE ADMINISTRATOR, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRIES, ASSOCIATE PASTORS, OR HEAD OF STAFF TO PROVIDE YOU WITH INSTRUCTIONS FOR REPORTING OF THE INCIDENT TO THE PARENTS OR GUARDIAN.
- THE MODERATOR OF THE SESSION, OR THEIR DESIGNEE, WILL BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH.

In the event a child or youth reports abusive conduct, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child should contact the designated person and should complete an Incident Report. Under this circumstance, the Incident Report should include the specific words first spoken by the child or youth concerning the incident. All reported details of the child's or youth's first conversation with an adult should be recorded verbatim in the Incident Report. The incident should otherwise be treated and reported as set forth above.

The following acts or omissions are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any First Pres activity or program. Such acts or omissions should be immediately reported:

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child or youth.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a child or youth.

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<sup>2</sup> Attached to the Volunteer Information Form is a list of the names, addresses and daytime/nighttime phone numbers for the persons to contact to notify of a violation of this Policy.

- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child, children or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of First Pres.
- Emotional or psychological mistreatment of a child, children or youth, including verbal abuse.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of First Pres.
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
- The consumption of or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a children's or youth function of First Pres.

Any violation of this Policy on the part of any member of the staff, employee, member or volunteer will result in immediate dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of First Pres. In the case of staff members and employees, any violation of this Policy may result in termination. In accordance with the laws of the State of Texas, any and all reports of abuse will be immediately forwarded to the appropriate authorities. Compliance with the reporting aspects of this Policy does not complete the obligation you may have to report the incident to the Fort Worth Police Department or Child Protective Services.

#### ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBILITY TO REPORT TO SESSION

The Administrator shall report to the session on an annual basis and include a list of currently screened volunteers and information about the vendor being used for training and background checks.

This form is available at [www.fpcf.org](http://www.fpcf.org) and in the office of the Director of Children and Family Ministries.

**INCIDENT REPORT**

*(Use back of form or additional paper as necessary)*

Date of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Reporter: \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) of Child(ren)/Youth involved: \_\_\_\_\_

Age(s) of Child(ren)/Youth:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Quote the Child's/Youth's first words verbatim: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe the Child's/Youth's demeanor/appearance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe what happened: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What action did you take?  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Has the incident been resolved?      If not, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Names of witnesses and signatures of witnesses (if possible):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Report submitted to: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Incident Reporting Contacts in order of Reporting

In the event of an incident, report to the policy Administrator:

Director of Children & Family Ministries

Ann Nielsen

817-335-1231 (day time)

214-316-5869 (evening)

If the Director of Children & Family Ministries is not readily available, then report to:

Associate Pastor for Youth

Rev. Dr. Joshua Stewart

817-335-1231 (day time)

817-454-7699 (evening)

If the incident involves a Pastor, then report to:

Pastor/Head of Staff

Brian Coulter

817-335-1231 (day time)

817-709-5773 (evening)

If the incident involves the Pastor, then report to:

Chair of the Committee on Ministry of Grace Presbytery

Call Grace Presbytery at 214-637-6324 for contact name and number

End of Statement on the Purpose and Procedure Safeguarding the  
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