

The Presbyterian Church Child/Youth Protection Policy

The Presbyterian Church wants to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities, including the Preschool Learning Center. The policy is intended to protect our children and youth from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our volunteers and staff from false accusations.

Selection of Volunteers

All persons who want to work or who are working with children and/or youth must complete an application of basic information about previous experience with children/youth, previous church affiliation, references, as well as any previous criminal convictions. References will be checked prior to new volunteers beginning their service.

1. **Six Month Rule:** Volunteers shall be known to the community, ideally as a member of the church, for a minimum of six months prior to working with children or youth. Exceptions to this may be made by professional staff, along with input from the Christian Education Ministry and/or Session as needed. Adults who are scheduled to chaperone events along with professional staff overnight, on or off premises, must be current members of the church (see also Leadership Requirements for Trips and Outings).

2. **Criminal Background Check:** Volunteers wanting to work with our children and youth will sign an authorization form allowing The Presbyterian Church to request a criminal background check. The authorization form and background check results will be maintained in confidence in a locked administrative file at The Presbyterian Church. When a background check indicates a volunteer ineligible to work with children or youth, a meeting will be held with that individual and pastoral staff to explain the reasoning. At all times the privacy of individuals will be maintained. Background checks will be repeated every three years, or sooner if there is a change of address or circumstance.

3. **Training Requirement:** All staff and volunteers shall attend one training session to learn about our policy and the scope and nature of the problem of child abuse. Attending training will be done prior to beginning work as a volunteer. Volunteers will participate in a workshop every three years. In addition, all those in ordered ministry (Elders, Deacons) will be trained as part of their Officer Training. Training opportunities will be available a minimum of three times during the year and all who are required to attend will receive information about attendance. A list of trained and screened individuals will be maintained in the office and reported to Session on a regular basis.

4. **Two Adult Rule:** At least two adults (with at least one over age 21) should be present at all times at all in-house church functions involving children and youth. A ratio of no fewer than 2 adults to every 20 children should be maintained for proper supervision. If, in a particular classroom only one adult teacher is present, the doors to the classroom shall remain open. At least one adult in the room shall be screened and trained. Thus if an additional adult is needed, a teacher or staff member has some discretion to invite a parent to help, however, the helper is never to be left alone with the group.

Staff shall visit each room randomly, to offer support and be a second adult as needed.

Doors shall never be locked if a person or persons are inside a classroom, program room or activity room.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at The Presbyterian Church, including the Preschool Learning Center, becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, they shall report immediately to professional staff, including the Pastor who will ensure authorities are notified as required by state law.

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

1. A report will be made to the staff supervisor of the program area, as well as the Pastor.
2. The parent of the child or youth will be notified.
3. Kentucky requirements and laws regarding mandatory reporting will be followed.
4. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will not be permitted to work with children pending an investigation.
5. The church's insurance company will be notified.
6. The church will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation by state or local authorities, the Session or its designee may investigate the circumstances of the incident in consultation with legal counsel.
7. Any person who engages in abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children and youth.
8. Our pastor will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. In the event the Pastor is alleged to be involved, the Clerk of Session or the Church Attorney shall be the designated spokesperson. All other persons shall refrain from speaking to the media.
9. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
10. As secrecy is destructive, a meeting of the congregation will be held to provide information. The privacy of individuals involved shall be maintained, and all information provided shall be guided by legal counsel, as well as what may be allowed during an ongoing investigation.
11. In the event that an allegation is made against a staff member, the following contacts shall be made (in addition to reporting to the state as required): for a member of the staff, a report is to be made to the Pastor, Clerk of Session, and the Chair of the Personnel Ministry. If the allegation is against the Pastor, a report shall be made to the Clerk of Session, the Chair of the Personnel Ministry and the Presbytery. If an allegation is against a Certified staff member, a report must also be made to the Presbytery.

LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR TRIPS AND OUTINGS

1. **Two-deep leadership:**

Adult leaders assisting staff for off-site trips/outings shall be members of The Presbyterian Church. A parent of a participating youth who is not a member may be approved to come as an additional chaperone but must submit an application and background check as above (non-members shall pay for the background check). One of the leaders must be at least 21 years of age or older. Coed overnight activities require male and female leaders. For scheduled meetings in public places (such as Wednesday night fellowship at Spencer's) the presence of community members in a public space allows that one adult (generally a staff member) to be present with youth. Offsite or overnight trips shall maintain a minimum ratio of one adult per six youth.

2. **Transportation to and from planned youth outings:**

- A. Meet for departure at a designated location and time.
- B. Prearrange a schedule for periodic checkpoint stops as a group.
- C. Plan a daily destination point.

A common departure site and a daily destination point are a must.

If two adults cannot be provided for each vehicle, the minimum required is one adult and two or more youth members-*never one on one*.

3. **Safety rule of four:** No fewer than four individuals (always with the minimum of two approved adults) go on any outing or campout. If an accident occurs, one person stays with the injured, and two go for help. Additional adult leadership requirements must reflect an awareness of such factors as size and skill level of the group, anticipated environmental conditions, and overall degree of challenge.

4. **Male and female leaders must have separate sleeping facilities.**

Married couples may share the same quarters if appropriate facilities are available.

5. **Male and female youth participants shall not share the same sleeping area** such as a tent, dorm room, or cabin.

6. **Adult leaders should not share a bed or sleeping bag with youth.** There may be some occasions where it is permissible to share sleeping quarters with youth such as a larger cabin, lodge, or hotel room with separate beds.

The only exception is if the leader is the parent or guardian of the youth.

7. **When staying in tents, no child or youth may share a tent with an adult** unless the adult is his/her parent or guardian.

8. **If separate shower and toilet facilities are not available, separate times for male and female use should be scheduled and posted for showers.** The buddy system **shall** be used for these facilities by having one person wait outside the entrance, or provide Occupied and Unoccupied signs and/or inside door latches. Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of youth members in situations where youth are changing clothes or taking showers, and intrude only to the extent that health and safety require. Adults also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.