

FAIRVIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
CHILD SAFETY POLICY

SCOPE

This policy applies to all individuals, paid or volunteer, who participate in programs or activities, sponsored by Fairview Presbyterian Church (FPCA), that involve children. This includes all sponsored activities both on and off campus.

PURPOSE OF POLICY

The officers, staff, and members of FPCA are committed to maintaining a safe environment in which children of all ages are protected from sexual/physical abuse and neglect at church sponsored events. Our desire is to provide an atmosphere of love and care where these young ones can learn and grow in Christ. This policy does not constitute a contract between the church and its workers or the church and any other party. It is merely a statement of policy and general guideline which FPCA will seek to follow. FPCA makes no guarantee to any party that all aspects of this policy will be followed in any given situation. FPCA is not responsible for the individual acts of any worker and/or volunteer.

GENERAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 1) FPCA is subject to South Carolina law regarding the protection of children and the reporting of suspected child abuse in any form.
- 2) FPCA will endeavor to protect children by:
 - Ensuring that volunteers and staff members are known to ministry leaders.
 - Maintaining high standards of screening.
 - Requiring interviews of any potential workers.
 - Creating opportunities for training.
 - Preventing opportunities for abuse to occur.

SCREENING

FPCA will implement safety measures to require the following:

- 1) Potential volunteers are required to be a member of FPCA for at least six months prior to serving with children. Exceptions may be made for spouses of members on a case by case basis.
- 2) All potential staff members and any potential volunteers, 18 years of age and older, involved in the care of children must complete our Nursery/Child Worker Application Form. This application asks questions related to criminal history and includes a request for personal references. Once completed, the application is to be submitted to the Nursery/Children Leader. Those actively involved with children at the time this policy is implemented are exempt from completing the application, but are required to submit to the background screening outlined in this policy. References will be contacted and FPCA may contact others as circumstances dictate.

- 3) STUDENT HELPERS (grades 6-12) Youth volunteers will not be required to undergo a background check or formal training through Protect My Ministry, but will receive approval and training from the ministry or department they will be volunteering in before serving in any church sponsored programs. Youth volunteers will always serve under the direct supervision of approved volunteers or staff and should not be left alone with a child.
- 4) A national, criminal background screening will be performed on all staff members and any volunteers desiring to work with children.
 - Background screening will be conducted by Protect My Ministry, an independent, fee-based service. Oversight of the screening process will be performed by the Nursery/Children Leader.
 - Background screening will be completed/updated every two years.
 - If information is reported within the background screening which is a potential cause of concern, the Nursery/Children Leader will discuss the situation with the individual and provide the findings to the Session.
 - The Session will be responsible for making decisions on individuals with alerts noted on their background screening results. Adults who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse are not permitted to work with children of any age.
- 5) All staff members and any volunteers desiring to work with children will receive a copy of this policy. They will be asked to sign a statement that they have read, understood and agree to abide by this policy.
- 6) Information obtained during the screening process will be kept confidential. Access will be limited to the Nursery/Children Leader and the Session.

TRAINING

Training for staff members and volunteers working with children will be both general and specific to different areas in which they may serve.

Training is segregated into two categories: prerequisite and ongoing training

1. Prerequisite Training:
 - Online training will be provided through Protect My Ministry for individuals 18 years and older. This training is required to be completed one time, prior to the start of volunteering or within 30 days after beginning employment, whichever is applicable.
 - Once this training has been completed, volunteers are able to begin working with children.
2. Ongoing Training:
 - FPCA will provide an all-day training for staff members and volunteers once every two years.
 - Additional or more frequent training will be provided when necessary.

NOTE: A checklist will be utilized to ensure that all of the required steps noted under “Screening” and “Training” have been completed.

SUPERVISION

1. Individuals involved in the custody and care of children must observe the “two person rule” This rule prohibits one-on-one interaction between a staff member/screened volunteer and a child in secluded or isolated areas. The “Deacon of the week” will maintain a presence in the nursery/children's church area to monitor and become that second person when necessary and will remain in the area until all children are dismissed.
2. A parent must accompany any child who is attending children's church for the first time to provide needed information for the teaching staff.
3. All rooms used by adults and minors together should be accessible (unlocked doors) and have open visibility thru a window in the door or the door left wide open.
4. Ministry leaders and designated individuals will observe and periodically make unannounced visits to classrooms and other meeting places where children are present with screened volunteers and/or staff.
5. Parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity involving their child.
6. Children in nursery through 4th grade will follow check in/check out procedures. Children may only be released to one of their own parents or to those to whom the parents have given permission.
7. If assisting children with the bathroom, screened volunteers should not enter the bathroom with one child alone, but rather another adult or child should be present.
8. No staff member or screened volunteer is ever to administer corporal punishment under any circumstances.
9. No staff member or screened volunteer is ever to be in a car with only one child. There should always be another adult or group of children present.
10. We acknowledge that as our children get older, there is valuable discipleship and interaction that can take place during one-on-one meetings. For this reason, screened volunteers may meet with a child in a public area with the permission of a parent.
11. In instances of counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate staff member may meet individually with a child with the knowledge of at least one other staff member. At any counseling session with children, the door of the room used must remain open, unless there is a glass window in the door that gives a clear view of the room.

REPORTING

1. South Carolina law requires that certain professionals report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. These individuals are known as “Mandated Reporters.” Mandated Reporters of child abuse or neglect in South Carolina include, but are not limited to physicians, nurses, dentists, emergency medical services personnel, mental health or allied health professionals, teachers, counselors, principals, school attendance officers, childcare worker, foster parents, police or law enforcement officers, undertakers, funeral home directors or their employees, film processors, computer technicians, judges, and clergy (subject to laws governing privileged communication).

2. Suspected, Reported, Discovered—With reference to child abuse, child sexual abuse or neglect, a report must be made to the proper authorities when a Mandated Reporter has “reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect. A decision to report must be based upon a reasonable belief that a child has been or may be abused or neglected. Thus, Mandated Reporters need not have conclusive proof that a child has been abused or neglected prior to reporting abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.
3. While not every individual is a Mandated Reporter, the law encourages all persons to report, and the moral imperative to protect children extends to all situations where abuse is suspected, reported or discovered.
4. The safety of our children is the responsibility of all staff members and screened volunteers who work with children. Both staff members and screened volunteers are responsible to report all suspected, reported or discovered cases of child abuse, including injury suspected to have been occurred as a result of corporal punishment. Failure to do so endangers children and in some cases is a violation of South Carolina law.
5. In the event of suspected, reported, or discovered child abuse, the following course of action shall be taken:

A. LISTEN

- Compassionately---the child has potentially been hurt to a great degree.
- Carefully---inform the person that you may write down things in order to remember and attempt to record as much of the victim's actual words as is possible.
- Specifically---the role at this point is not of investigator. Focus on the following questions for an initial report of the known facts:
 - a. Who—child's name, age, date of birth, address, present location, names and ages of siblings, parent's name and address, reason(s) for concern, any known history of violence in the home, the alleged name of the perpetrator if known.
 - b. What---what happened to the child? Do not ask leading questions. Rather, restate what the child is saying and then say things like, “tell me more about that”.
 - c. Where---where did the alleged abuse occur?

B. THINK

- Does the information you have received lead you to suspect that abuse has or may happen? Remember, you are not required to have conclusive proof! The law states that you must only “have a reason to suspect.” If so a report must be made.
- If in doubt, review the story with the Nursery/Children Leader or contact the Department of Social Services (DSS) Child Abuse Hotline (864-467-7750) or law enforcement, as appropriate.

C. SPEAK

- Do not make commitments or promises to the victim.
- Do communicate hope and continued care for them.
- Do communicate that you have to report the abuse.

- D. DO
 - Immediately notify the Nursery/Children Leader and the Pastor/Session.
 - Promptly complete a written report of information received regarding the incident and provide it to the Nursery/Children Leader and the Pastor/Session within 24 hours.
 - If the alleged perpetrator is a parent, guardian or person acting as a parent, report to DSS (864-467-7750). If the alleged perpetrator is any other person, inform local law enforcement (864-467-5280).
 - If you have any questions before calling to report, please contact the Pastor/Session. Otherwise advise the Nursery/Children Leader and the Pastor/Session of action taken.

E. RESPONSE

- The care and safety of the victim is our first priority. We will not confront the accused without the approval of the local child protection service or law enforcement authorities.
- We will not prejudge any person accused, but we will take any allegation of child abuse seriously and will reach out in love and support to the victim and the victim's family.
- We will fully cooperate with any authorities investigating an allegation of child abuse.
- We will treat the accused with dignity and respect. If the accused is a screened volunteer, that person will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties during the investigation. If cleared by the authorities, the individual may resume regular ministry service upon approval of the Session. If the accused is a staff member of FPCA, the individual will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties; however compensation will be maintained during the investigation process. The staff member may return to work once cleared by authorities.
- With consent of the Session, the pastor will be the official spokesperson of FPCA. All inquiries or requests for information from the media, attorneys or any other parties shall be referred to the official spokesperson. No third party other than the official spokesperson is to release any information regarding any alleged incident of child abuse without the express approval of the official spokesperson.
- All communications by the official spokesperson to the media, congregation, and the public will protect the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. All efforts in responding to the alleged incident of child abuse shall be documented by the official spokesperson and maintained in a secure and confidential file.

