

**First Presbyterian Church - Dallas
Child Protection Policy**

Revised March, 2007

**Statement of Purpose and Procedures for Safeguarding
The Well-being of Children, Youth and Adults**

The members of First Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas (“FPC-Dallas”) believe that we are called by God to create a safe haven for all children and youth*. For those called to work with children and youth, established guidelines and procedures are put in place for the mutual benefit of both the adults, the children and the youth in their care. During each Baptism and reception of each person into this covenant community of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in the spirit of Jesus Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual’s relationship with the household of God. Therefore, the members of this Church are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth as they participate in its activities and programs.

FPC-Dallas’s Child Protection Policy (the “Policy”) seeks to prevent any form of endangerment, abuse or harassment, whether physical, mental or sexual, by any employee, teacher or volunteer. This Policy supplements the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA and is applicable while engaged in Church sponsored activities or programs on or off Church property, or as a result of relationships and access to children and youth developed through Church programs. We will not stand in judgment of a person accused of committing an act of abuse and assure that anyone so accused can expect due process, our prayers, our compassion and our acceptance as a human being. However, we will not condone or accept the alleged behavior.

When and where does the Policy apply?

The Policy applies in all situations where children or youth are present on the premises of FPC-Dallas, or during any event or activity sponsored by FPC-Dallas, regardless of the location of the event or activity.

The Policy applies to ALL children’s department and youth department activities, ALL children’s choir and youth choir activities and ALL community ministries activities.

The Policy applies to ALL activities of the FPC- Dallas Day Care Center.

The Policy applies to ALL joint venture or cooperative programs involving visiting church groups which utilize the premises of FPC-Dallas as a part of their events or activities. This includes summer visitors from other churches, Boy Scout or Girl Scout troops that use the FPC-Dallas facilities, or any other group, or organization no matter what affiliation it might have with the Church which utilizes the facilities of FPC-Dallas as a part of its events or activities.

* *Those children who have not reached 18 years of age*

The Policy applies to the annual FPC-Dallas all-Church retreat at Mo Ranch and any other FPC-Dallas sponsored, or FPC-Dallas organized events which occurs away from the actual physical location of the FPC-Dallas premises.

The Policy applies to ALL visiting youth groups. Before visiting youth groups will be allowed to utilize the facilities or premises of FPC-Dallas, a copy of the Policy and the appropriate volunteer information forms will be provided in a timely fashion to the leader of the visiting group. Before the visiting group's activity or program begins, the leader of the visiting group shall provide written confirmation to the Pastor's Administrative Assistant of FPC-Dallas that the group has received and reviewed a copy of the Policy and that the appropriate Volunteer Information forms have been submitted to the Pastor's Administrative Assistant.

Therefore, all of our Church activities and programs, regardless of location involving children and youth, will seek to uphold our commitment to the sanctity of the children and youth of FPC-Dallas, whether members or guests, and will be subject to the following policy:

The Two Adult Rule

The two adult rule is at the core of the Policy. In all instances where children or youth are a part of the program, event or activity, adult supervision should be provided by at least two adults. The intent of the two adult rule is to avoid situations in which a individual child is isolated with an individual adult. During any group activities involving children or youth, each supervising adult should always be within visual contact of at least one other supervising adult.

The two adult rule is so fundamental that any event or activity of FPC-Dallas is subject to cancellation or rescheduling if two adults are not available to supervise the event. Programs or activities at FPC-Dallas that do not include adequate adult volunteer support to comply with the two adult rule are subject to cancellation.

Any adult volunteer who knowingly violates the two adult rule will be suspended from serving as a volunteer in children and youth activities.

If only two adult supervisors are involved in a children's or youth activity, it is preferred, but not mandatory, that the two adult supervisors be unrelated to one another

It is preferred, but not mandatory, that two adults be present in each vehicle during the transportation of youth or children to and from events or activities. If, however, only one youth or child is present in the vehicle, two adults MUST be in the vehicle. The ONLY permissible exception to the rule that one adult and one child or youth are not permitted to drive in a vehicle alone is if the driver is an adult Church member who has been given express written or verbal consent from the parent of a youth or child Church member to drive alone with that youth or child.

Additional Procedures

- A child/parent identification procedure will be used for nursery and other early childhood programs.

- Ordinarily no person will be recommended to the Session as a teacher or volunteer leader of children or youth activities until such person has been an active member of FPC-Dallas for six (6) months (unless otherwise approved in advance by the Session), and has completed a Volunteer or Employee Information Form (Appendix A and B). In addition, a security background check and reference checks are required. An individual who has transferred active membership from another Church and can provide acceptable references from that church, has a completed Volunteer Information Form and can pass a criminal background check is also eligible for consideration as a teacher or volunteer.
- This Church will not tolerate or accept any act or omission as specifically described in the Prohibited Acts. (see pp. 4-5).
- Any violation of the Policy shall be reported in accordance with Reporting Violation of Policy, (see pp. 5-6).
- In accordance with the constitution of the PCUSA, the Session of FPC-Dallas shall designate an Investigating Committee consisting of “no more than five but no less than three members and may include members from another governing body, if appropriate, in accordance with D-10.0104 (D-10.0201a).” The session “shall not appoint members of the session as members of the investigating committee (D-10.0200).” The Investigating Committee should be comprised of persons who understand the issues of confidentiality and include among others a spokesperson to the media, an attorney and others who will safeguard the well-being of both the alleged victim and the accused.
- An accused is entitled to prompt and fair disposition of such serious charges and to receive due process of law, including the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.
- It is the policy and practice of FPC-Dallas to follow all laws and regulations of the Texas Family Code designed for the protection of children and youth and of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church USA.

Volunteer/Employee Information Form

Employees, teachers of children and youth, and volunteers for children and youth activities or programs of FPC-Dallas will be required to complete a Volunteer or Employee Information Form (Appendix A or B) providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform criminal security background checks and reference checks on each individual. While this process understandably intrudes 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 and reference checks or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be considered confidential.

Security background checks for volunteers and employees 18 years old and older will be conducted by the Administrative Assistant to the Pastor, who will be “Administrator” through the appropriate local agency as shown on Appendix C. Additionally, character references will be checked by a the Administrative Assistant to the Pastor or a person designated by the Education and Fellowship Committee, the Community Ministries Committee or the Session. A Reference Form (Appendix D) is to be used for these character references.

The written results of the security background and reference checks initially will be reviewed by the Administrator. If after this initial review, the Administrator determines that further review should be made, the Administrator will consult with the Head of Staff or Vice Moderator, as may be appropriate. For the Employee Information Forms, the Personnel Committee will also review the written results.

The results of the security background check, and the results of the reference check will not be disclosed to anyone other than the Administrator, the Head of Staff or Vice Moderator (and the Personnel Committee for the Employee Information Forms) without the expressed written permission of the employee or volunteer for children and youth activities (except as may be required by law).

The Administrator will maintain a locked storage cabinet in the church for all Volunteer Information Forms and the results of all record checks. The Employee Information Forms and results of all record checks will be maintained in a locked storage cabinet in the Church's accountants' office. The results of the security background checks will be destroyed periodically as required by the guidelines mandated by the appropriate local agency. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify an employee or volunteer from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any children or youth activity or program:

Any indictment, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child, incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child.

All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Administrator and the Moderator of the Session or Vice Moderator if necessary to determine whether such convictions or charges will disqualify an employee or volunteer from participation in any child or youth activity. If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history record transcript, he or she may appeal through the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The Employee Information Form shall be completed by all church employees prior to the start-date of their employment. All volunteers shall complete the Volunteer Information Form when they seek to participate in the programs and activities involving the children and youth of the church. The Security background checks of all employees, teachers and volunteers who continuously work with children and youth in the programs and activities of the church, will be updated every year by the means approved in this policy.

Once each year, a designated person shall conduct an orientation session about the procedures for safeguarding the well-being of the children and youth of the church for all employees, teachers and volunteers who will be working with children and youth.

Prohibited Acts

The following acts are prohibited by this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any FPC - Dallas activity or program, whether on or off Church premises. Any observation or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to at least one of the following: Head of Staff, Vice Moderator, Chair of Education and Fellowship, and appropriate staff: either Director of Children Ministry or Director of Youth after the safety of the child, children or youth involved has been assured.

- Any observation or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child, youth or adult.
- 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 adult and a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Infliction of physical and or verbal 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 the church.
- Mental or emotional injury to a child, children or youth.
- Presence or possession of obscene, pornographic or sexually graphic materials at any function of the church, with the exception of sex education materials approved by the Church. Possession, consumption or being under the influence of alcohol or any prohibited substance while leading or participating in a children's or youth function sponsored by FPC - Dallas regardless of the location.
- The use of alcohol or tobacco by an adult volunteer during a youth or children's event or activity is strictly prohibited.

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 FPC-Dallas must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstances, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected prohibited act or procedural violation involving a child or youth, regardless of the program or the person involved in the incident, shall be reported immediately to at least one of the following: the Head of Staff, Vice Moderator, Chair of Education and Fellowship, and appropriate staff: either Director of Children Ministry or Director of Youth, in extenuating circumstances, Grace Presbytery's General Presbyter. If there are any questions about reporting, contact Child Protective Services or the local Police Department (see Appendix E - Legal Requirements for Reporting Abuse or Neglect of a Child).

This reporting of violations must be made by any staff member or volunteer who receives information regarding a suspected violation of this policy.

In the event anyone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this Policy, that person will be asked to complete an Incident Report (Appendix F). Anyone who witnesses 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. The following are the steps to take in case of any occurrence of a violation of the Policy:

- **REPORT THE INCIDENT IMMEDIATELY TO THE CHURCH PASTORAL STAFF, ADMINISTRATOR OR LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENT AND/OR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES.**
- **DO NOT LEAVE THE CHILD, CHILDREN OR YOUTH ALONE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT. PERSONALLY SECURE THEIR SAFETY.**
- **DO NOT PERSONALLY CONFRONT THE ALLEGED OR ACCUSED VIOLATOR OF THE POLICY.**
- **COMPLETE A WRITTEN INCIDENT REPORT IMMEDIATELY, RECORDED VERBATIM.**
- **THE HEAD OF STAFF OR THE VICE MODERATOR OF THE SESSION WILL BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL COMMUNICATIONS ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH.**

In the event a child or youth reports abusive conduct while engaged in a Church sponsored activity or involving the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of the church, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child should contact the designated persons as previously listed and complete an Incident Report. Record verbatim in the Incident Report the specific words first spoken by the child or youth and the conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.

As required by Texas law, all reports of abuse will be forwarded in a timely manner to the appropriate child protection and law enforcement authorities. Such reporting must be accomplished in addition to complying with this Child Protection Policy.

Failure to report a Prohibited Act in a timely manner to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of the Child Protection Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the Church.

Procedure for Responding to an Alleged Violation

Allegations involving members and officers of the church are subject to the process outlined in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (Specifically “The Rules of Discipline” in the

Book of Order.) Furthermore, all employees and non-members who work with children and youth are subject to same.

The process includes:

- the formation by the Session of an Investigating Committee (D-10.0200)
- informing the accused of the investigative process and their rights

Consequences for Violation of Policy

Any person accused of committing a Prohibited Act (see pp. 4-5), whether a staff member, employee, member or volunteer, will immediately be suspended from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the Church. Such suspension shall continue during any investigation by the church, law enforcement or child protection agencies.

Any person found to have committed a Prohibited Act (see pp. 4-5), shall be prohibited from future participation in all children's and youth activities and programs of FPC-Dallas. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

When the allegations involve a member of the clergy, the provisions of Grace Presbytery's "Guidelines for Responding to Allegations of Clergy Sexual Misconduct" will be put into operation and the guidance of the Church's discipline found in the Book of Order will be followed.

Procedural violations and non-compliance with this policy will be addressed by the staff, committees, and/or Session of the church on a case by case basis, in order to enforce this policy meant to safeguard the well-being of children, youth and adults.