

Third Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy



We live in a society where accidental injury and child abuse (including physical, sexual and emotional abuse) are unfortunate realities. Third Presbyterian Church seeks to implement preventive measures and policies that will foster a safe and secure environment. Our intent is to observe the following policies to the fullest extent in an attempt to ward off potential dangers.

It is our sincere prayer that this policy provides an atmosphere of care, safety and spiritual development that protects and supports children. This policy was approved by the Session on July 13, 2008. It applies to any programs involving children and/or youth conducted or sponsored by Third Presbyterian Church.

Adult Boundaries

- Adults are responsible for imposing limits and maintaining appropriate boundaries in interpersonal relationships with children. For purposes of this policy, a "child" is defined as anyone under the age of 18. A "youth" is defined as any child in grades 7-12.
- Abuse of children in any form will not be tolerated. Any problem or suspected issue regarding youth or children should be reported to a staff member immediately. (See Reporting requirements in Paragraph 15.)
- Whenever a question arises about where to draw appropriate interpersonal boundaries, remember that it is the adult's responsibility to behave professionally and appropriately at all times, even when serving as a volunteer.
- Adults should avoid being alone with one child in a private setting.
- Youth in need of counseling should be referred to appropriately trained clergy or mental health professionals.

Guidelines

In order to best protect children, volunteers and staff who are ministering in the church programs, Third Church will implement the following guidelines for all programs:

- 1) **Ban on working with children if adult has prior record of abusing children.** No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (whether sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional abuse), or who has been the subject of a "founded" report of child abuse or neglect by any child protective agency, shall serve as a volunteer for any church-sponsored activity where children are present. Convictions for other criminal conduct may or may not disqualify an applicant from volunteering to work with children at Third Church. All criminal

convictions must be disclosed by applicants seeking to work with children at Third Church. (See Paragraph 14 below.)

- 2) **Ban on working with children if volunteer / prospective volunteer is accused of abusing or neglecting children.** No volunteer / prospective volunteer is allowed to work with children if the volunteer / prospective volunteer is the subject of a complaint or other legal pleading, filed in a civil, criminal, or administrative proceeding, involving allegations of child abuse or neglect. This ban will last until the complaint is resolved. All volunteers / prospective volunteers must disclose to the Head of Staff if they are the subject of any formal complaint of child abuse or neglect as described above. This disclosure must be made at the time of application, if charges are then pending, or immediately after such charges are made.
- 3) **Read and Understand the Procedures for Volunteers** in Third Church's Ministry and Missions Statement. All volunteers will read this document and the Teacher/Advisor information form.
- 4) **Six Month Rule**-Anyone volunteering to work with children and youth must have been a consistently attending participant in the church community for at least six months.
- 5) **Two-Deep Leadership**-Whenever possible, there will be two leaders present in any classroom, vehicle or situation where there are children or youth present. One of these individuals must be a person over the age of 21. Youth between the ages of 14 and 21 may volunteer in classrooms when a second person, over the age of 21, is present. In an instance where there is only one adult in a vehicle, there must also be more than one child or youth. Parental permission must be given in a situation when the aforementioned is not possible.
- 6) **Five Years Older Rule**- Any volunteer working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth they are supervising. Teen helpers (youth in grades 7 - 12 assisting a teacher in Sunday school) are also subject to the five year rule.
- 7) **Random Program Checks and Open Door/Plain View Policy**- Programs can be checked by any one at any time. Windows shall not be obstructed during children's and youth programming (except for when classrooms are used as dressing rooms) and doors will remain open if there is no window.
- 8) **Restroom Policy**-Adults should allow children capable of using restroom facilities to use them with privacy, offering assistance only when needed. Children under the age of 5 should be assisted by adults when necessary with others (parent volunteer, teacher, another child, etc.) in earshot and view.

- 9) **Appropriate Touching**-Touch is an important way of communicating to others for praise, for a job well done, compassion, support etc. Volunteers should support each other and the children and youth in their care by using non-sexual touch. Use the Open Door/Plain View policy and Two-Deep leadership for such exchanges. Look for cues from others as to what they are comfortable with and ask permission if necessary. A good rule of thumb for adult leaders is to never initiate a hug and to always be the one to end the hug. Offer hugs when they are requested, but do not ever impose physical touching on the children in your group.
- 10) **Overnight Accommodations**-In the event of any overnights, boys and girls will sleep in separate quarters and use separate restroom facilities, unless under special circumstances. Male and female use will be posted plainly and monitored. Each overnight event will have at least two leaders. There must be at least one adult of each gender present at overnight events involving both male and female youth.
- 11) **Permission Forms**-Parental or legal guardian permission forms, including permission for emergency treatment, shall be securely maintained on site during church events and shall remain with the person transporting and/or accompanying the youth on any off-site event, retreat or overnight event. Copies of these forms shall also be securely located in the church office during the event/retreat.
- 12) **Information for Parent/Guardian**-Information shall be given to the parent(s) or guardian(s) prior to an off-site event stating the time and location of departure and pick-up time, and any available phone numbers to contact the group.
- 13) **Transportation**-All transportation of children (typically youth) must be provided by either a current Youth Advisor, program staff, or a parent approved by the appropriate program staff and any such driver must possess a valid driver's license and auto insurance for the vehicle operated. Each child must wear a seat belt. Adults should avoid driving alone with one child; however, if such driving is necessary, parents and/or another staff member should be informed.
- 14) **Education & Training**-All persons who volunteer to work with children shall complete an application packet that includes providing references; disclosing all criminal convictions; and consenting to a computerized background check. All successful applicants shall attend a seminar designed to explain and implement this policy, and upon completion of that training, shall sign a form stating their understanding of the policy and their commitment to abide by it.

15) **Reporting**

(a) **Accidental Injuries**

If an accidental injury to a child occurs during any Third Church event, the injured child's parents/legal guardians shall be contacted immediately or as soon as practicable. An adult volunteer or staff member must also be informed and that adult volunteer or staff member must complete an *Incident Report* within 24 hours. The report must be submitted to the appropriate staff person who will forward a copy to the appropriate church board or committee. The report will be placed on file and available to parent/guardian upon request.

(b) **Suspected Incidents of Child Abuse**

If an incident occurs during any Third Church event where child abuse is suspected, the affected child's parents/legal guardians shall be contacted immediately or as soon as practicable. In addition, the incident must be reported immediately, or as soon as practicable, to the program staff member designated to receive such reports. As of the date of the adoption of this policy, Rebecca D'Angelo-Veitch is the designated program staff member for such reports. In the event Ms. D'Angelo-Veitch is unavailable, the report shall be made to Chris Lenti. Should both Ms. D'Angelo-Veitch and Ms. Lenti be unavailable, the report shall be made to John Wilkinson.

- 16) **The Child Advocacy Team** will investigate all allegations and complaints involving violations of this policy and report its findings and recommendations to the Session and/or Personnel Committee, as appropriate, except that all allegations of sexual abuse will be handled pursuant to the Third Church Sexual Misconduct Policy.

DEFINITIONS

A child is anyone under the age of 18 years old. A youth is any child in grades 7-12.

A volunteer is a person who works with children in any unpaid capacity.

Third Presbyterian Church (Third Church) includes all Christian Education activities, youth groups, choirs, worship services, committee meetings, and any other activity or program sponsored by Third Church whether on or off the premises. Groups renting or using the facilities of Third Church who are not affiliated with the church are not included in this policy.

Program staff, staff or **pastoral staff** refer to staff who work specifically with the members of Third Presbyterian Church in programs including music, youth, Sunday school and worship and would include all pastors, the parish visitor, the Director and Associate Director of

Music, the Coordinator of Children's Ministries and Congregational Life and the Youth Coordinator.

Child abuse refers to any non-accidental injury; and sexual activity or sexual exploitation; or any neglectful treatment or maltreatment that harms the health, welfare or safety of a child. This includes the following types of abuse:

- **Physical abuse**-Causing deliberate and intentional bodily harm to a child.
- **Emotional Abuse**-Verbal and/or nonverbal emotional cruelty to a child. Emotional abuse sends a message to the victim that he/she is worthless, bad, unloved and/or undeserving of love and care.
- **Neglect**-Endangering a child's health, welfare and safety through negligence. This includes but is not limited to withholding food, medical care, affection, affirmation, clothing, shelter, hygiene or education.
- **Sexual Abuse**-Sexual contact between an adult and a child or an older and/or more powerful child and a child. Sexual abuse may include but is not limited to: fondling, intercourse, incest, inappropriate touching, the exploitation or exposure to pornography and/or prostitution, sexual advances or comments of a sexual nature.
- **Ritual Abuse**-Intentional abuse of a physical, sexual, or psychological nature inflicted on a child in a stylized way by a person (or multiple persons) with responsibility for the victim's welfare. Ritual abuse may include threats of cruelty to animals, and repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the victim or other persons related to the victim.

Child Advocacy Team consists of the Pastor, Coordinator of Children's Ministry, Coordinator of Youth Ministry, and the Clerk of Session. If an allegation or complaint is placed against a staff member, the chairperson of the Personnel Committee will also be involved. The Church's attorney will be consulted and brought on the team should the need arise.

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Inappropriate Touch is any touch that makes those touching, being touched or observing the interaction uncomfortable. (See Guidelines on appropriate touch above).