



First Presbyterian Church of Marietta Abuse Prevention Policy

Purpose

This policy establishes how First Presbyterian Church of Marietta (FPC) will prevent the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children and youth by its employees. First Presbyterian Church of Marietta seeks to create a welcoming and nurturing environment and has zero tolerance for those whose actions may jeopardize the safety, health or innocence of a minor.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse: Because it takes many forms, abuse can be broken down into the following subtypes, all of which are prohibited within the scope of this policy:

- Physical abuse: Injury inflicted on a child or youth
- Sexual abuse: Contact or activity of a sexual nature with a child by an adult, adolescent, or older child.
- Emotional abuse: Mental or emotional injury inflicted on a child or youth by the actions of an adult
- Neglect: Failure to provide adequate care for a child or youth
- Economic abuse: Deliberate misuse of the money or belongings of a child or youth.

Child: A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12.

Youth: A youth is defined as anyone between 12 and 18 years of age.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Personnel Screenings

Safeguards in the hiring process will be used to eliminate from consideration any candidates who display characteristics that could classify them at a high risk for violating this policy. The required screenings and background information will depend on the position and level of involvement with children and youth.

For those who regularly work with or around children or youth

Candidates for positions that involve regular interaction with children or youth will be screened and selected using the following:

- Standard First Presbyterian Church of Marietta Consent Form that includes signed authorization to perform necessary background checks.
- Criminal background checks in all states where the candidate has lived in the past seven years.
- Sexual offender registry checks in all states where the candidate has lived for the last seven years.
- Driving records and any applicable certification if the position requires transportation of children.
- In-person interview of the candidate
- If hired, criminal and sexual offender registry checks will be conducted every five years for those who regularly work with children or youth.

For those who occasionally work with children or youth:

Candidates for positions that involve occasional contact with children or youth will be screened and selected using the following:

- Standard First Presbyterian Church of Marietta Consent Form that includes signed authorization to perform necessary background checks.
- In-person interview with the candidate.
- Driving records and any applicable certification if the position requires the transportation of children.

All information collected about a candidate will be reviewed and used to determine if they are appropriate for the respective position. If hired, all information collected during the hiring process will be included in the employee's personnel file, which will be maintained over the course of their employment with First Presbyterian Church of Marietta.

Personnel screenings are required regardless of current employment status with First Presbyterian Church of Marietta. First Presbyterian Church of Marietta employees seeking to transfer into a position that involves working with children or youth must undergo the same review process as new hires.

Structural Guidelines for Programs

All First Presbyterian Church of Marietta programs are designed to encourage safe interaction between employees and children or youth. The following guidelines are meant to keep established safeguards effective:

- Programs for children and youth must have an established adult to child ratio.
- Employees are restricted from being alone with a child or youth where they cannot be easily observed by others.
- Employees are not allowed to implement new activities or programs for children without First Presbyterian Church of Marietta consent. Request for new activities or programs should be submitted to the corresponding Council for approval by Session.
- Written permission must be obtained from a parent or guardian before any employee transports a child or youth in the name of First Presbyterian Church of Marietta.
- Any child under the age of 18 in the care of First Presbyterian Church of Marietta will only be released to a parent, legal guardian or a person designated by a parent or legal guardian.

General Conduct

To provide a safe and healthy environment for both mind and body, the following guidelines are meant to guide First Presbyterian Church of Marietta employees and volunteers during their interactions with children and youth. These guidelines do not and cannot outline every situation that may be encountered while on the job, requiring employees to act with a certain degree of personal discretion. Because a certain action is not prohibited in this section does not mean it is acceptable behavior. First Presbyterian Church of Marietta reserves the right to take disciplinary action against employees whose actions are found to be inappropriate regardless of whether they appear in this section:

- Employees and volunteers will treat all children and youth with respect and consideration. Treatment must be fair and equal, and must not be based on sex, race, religion, sexual orientation or economic or social status. All effort must be made to avoid favoritism, or the appearance of favoritism.
- While representing First Presbyterian Church of Marietta, employees and volunteers must not possess, distribute, use or allow others to use any alcohol or drugs.
- Employees and volunteers must not use harsh or inappropriate language, degrading punishment or any type of restraining device in the name of behavior management.
- Employees and volunteers must not participate in or allow others to engage in any form of hazing.
- Employees and volunteers must not have sexual contact with children or youth.
- Employees and volunteers must not dress, undress, shower or bathe with or in the presence of children or youth.
- Employees and volunteers must not use physical punishment in any form. The only time physical force is allowed to be used against a child or youth is when their actions are placing others at immediate risk for serious harm.
- Employees and volunteers are prohibited from sharing sleeping locations with children or youth. This includes beds, tents, hotel rooms and other similar areas. Employees and volunteers can sleep in open areas with children or youth if the area is large enough for the employees to have their own defined sleeping areas and other employees or volunteers are also present.
- Employees and volunteers must not discuss their own sexual history, preferences or fantasies nor their use of illicit or pornographic materials while in the company of children or youth.
- Employees and volunteers are not allowed to possess any sexually oriented materials (books, magazines, videos, clothing) when conducting business in the name of First Presbyterian Church of Marietta.
- Employee and volunteer one on one interaction with a child or youth is prohibited.

If, for any reason, an employee or volunteer feels there is a need to make an exception to these guidelines, they must discuss it with their supervisor, FPC staff representative, Pastor, or Administrator for review. A written report on the discussion and resolution will be completed and placed in the employee or volunteer file.

Reporting Protocol and Response by Church Workers to Allegation of Abuse

Some issues are important to consider when deciding whether there is “reasonable articulable suspicion” and whether to report an incident of/as suspected abuse or neglect.

Ask yourself the following:

- Did you observe harm to a child?

- What has the child communicated? Do not ask leading questions.
- Is the information consistent with what you observed?
- Have there been past incidents which may have been suspicious in retrospect?

All employees or volunteers who have cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected must immediately (immediately means as soon as possible but in all cases within 24 hours) report directly to DFCS in one of the following manners:

- Call Centralized Intake at 1-855-GACHILD/1-855-422-4453
- Fax to 229-317-9663
- Email to cpsintake@dhs.ga.gov

A call to 911 may be in order for more egregious known incidents.

All information regarding abuse or neglect is confidential except for the investigating agencies.

All employees must also report any incident to their direct supervisor or in their direct supervisor's absence a member of the ministerial staff along with completing the Incident/Abuse Reporting Form (attached) within 24 hours.

The Incident/Abuse Reporting Form is available in the Officer's Mailroom.

All completed Incident/Abuse Reporting Forms must be submitted to the employees' direct supervisor and are kept confidential and will be kept for a minimum of 5 years.

After notification to DFCS, it is expected that all employees and volunteers will cooperate fully with DFCS, law enforcement and any other investigatory agency.

Training

All Personnel:

- After successful verification of a background check at time of hire, all personnel are required to complete and pass the advanced online child protection training lessons.

All Volunteers:

- After successful verification of a background check, volunteers with a supervisory role of children are required to complete and pass the advanced online child protection training lessons.
- After successful verification of a background check, volunteers who will not have supervisory roles are required to complete and pass the basic online child protection lessons.

All personnel and volunteers are required to complete training every two years. All training is offered in person or online and may be completed at home or at the church.

Off-site Contact

Research shows many cases of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. Allowing contact outside of regularly scheduled activities may put employees, volunteers, minors, and our organization at increased risk.

This organization prohibits one on one interactions between employees and volunteers with minors

outside of regularly scheduled program activities.

Bullying

First Presbyterian Church of Marietta will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one minor by another minor. In addition, First Presbyterian Church of Marietta will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:

- *Physical bullying* – when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as by hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
- *Verbal bullying* – when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
- *Nonverbal or relational bullying* – when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
- *Cyberbullying* – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
 - o Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - o Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
 - o Pretending to be someone else to make that person look bad.
 - o Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
 - o Hazing – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
 - o Sexualized bullying – when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language or innuendos.

Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all minors, employees and volunteers.

Electronic Communication

In recent years, electronic communication and social media platforms have become increasingly popular. While these tools provide many benefits, they also present the potential for inappropriate behavior, increased access to vulnerable minors, and privacy violations. Employees, volunteers, and minors participating in this organization's programs, events, and activities shall adhere to the following Social Media Code of Conduct:

1. Do not engage in behavior or comments that are, or could be construed by any observer to be, harsh, abusive, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
2. Do not engage in personal attacks, sexually oriented conversations, or discussions about sexual activity.
3. Be a positive role model by exhibiting professionalism in all interactions; portray an attitude of

- respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, tact, and maturity.
4. Only program/ministry-related messaging may be communicated electronically between employees and volunteers of the organization and minors, parents, and guardians. Such communication should generally occur during standard business hours.
 5. Employees and volunteers are prohibited from sending private messages to minors and/or replying to private messages from a minor. If a minor attempts to privately communicate with an employee or volunteer electronically, their supervisor must be notified immediately.
 6. Personal social networking profiles and/or blogs of employees and volunteers shall be private and not shared with minors.
 7. Employees and volunteers may not engage in electronic communication or social media contact with other family members or friends of minors.
 8. Never reveal sensitive or confidential information, including identifiable details or photos of a minor without written consent from their parent or legal guardian.
 9. Employees and volunteers may not post or share on their personal social media accounts any tagged photographs or videos of minors participating in the organization's programs.
 10. Employees and volunteers may not post or share inappropriate photos or comments on photos of minors.
 11. Do not make pornography in any form available to minors participating in First Presbyterian Church of Marietta programs, events, and activities or assist minors in any way in gaining access to pornography.
 12. Employees and volunteers may not create web pages on behalf of First Presbyterian Church of Marietta unless they have prior approval to do so and may not misrepresent their work with first Presbyterian Church of Marietta or First Presbyterian Church of Marietta itself.
 13. Employees and volunteers engaging in social media and online communication become a public figure associated with First Presbyterian Church of Marietta and are responsible to help protect FPC and its minors. Always act in a professional and constructive manner and use sound judgement before posting or sharing content.
 14. Rather than personally defend FPC's reputation, employees and volunteers should notify their direct supervisor, Pastor, or Administrator of a negative comment or online representation or if any member of the media contacts them about any matter related to FPC.
 15. Employees and volunteers must adhere to uniform standards of electronic communication and social media use as outlined in any applicable FPC policies and procedures.
 16. This Code of Conduct and associated policies and procedures shall be provided to parents/guardians of minors. It shall also be available on First Presbyterian Church of Marietta's website for public view.
 17. Minors and Parents/guardians may request in writing that a minor is not to be contacted through any form of electronic communication or social media by an employee or volunteer of FPC.

Acknowledgment of Electronic Communication and Social Media Code of Conduct

I have received a copy, read, and voluntarily agree to comply with First Presbyterian Church of Marietta Electronic Communication and Social Media Code of Conduct. I understand that failure to comply with these policies may result in my removal from this organization.

Name (Please Print): _____

Program or Ministry Area: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Name (if applicable): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Employee Agreement

If you have any uncertainty or questions regarding the content of this policy, you are required to consult your supervisor. This should be done prior to signing and agreeing to the First Presbyterian Church of Marietta Abuse Prevention Policy.

I have read and understand First Presbyterian Church of Marietta's Abuse Prevention Policy and agree to abide by its terms and conditions throughout the course of my employment. I understand that my failure to follow the terms of this policy could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Employee
Signature _____ Date _____

Supervisor
Signature _____ Date _____