

Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety

at First Presbyterian Church, Stockton, CA

Policy Statement and Purpose

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church of Stockton, that *all* persons, and in particular all children, youth and vulnerable adults, who participate in our programs and ministries and/or use our facilities will be cared for with compassion and will be safe.

As a caring Christian community, we of First Presbyterian Church of Stockton (FPCS) are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth and adults and for all volunteers and employees working with them in the congregational life of FPCS. The intention of this policy is to protect children, youth and adults from abuse in any form and to ensure that those working with them are not exposed to false or unwarranted charges of abuse.

Additionally, organizations using the facilities of FPCS shall provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, vulnerable adults and those who work with them. They must sign and abide by this policy or provide proof that their organization has a similar policy in place and provide a signed copy.

Definitions

- **Child or youth** - a person who is under eighteen years of age.
- **Child abuse** - violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adolescent may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver, guardian or other adult in a position of trust. Abuse may take place in any environment in which a child and adult interact.

Child abuse includes the following:

- o The actual infliction, the threat to inflict or create (or the permitting of another to inflict or threaten to inflict or create) a physical or mental injury upon a child, by other than accidental means, or the creation of a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental function.
 - o The refusal to provide care necessary to the health of a child, or the abandonment of a child in one's care.
 - o The commission or permitting of any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child, including risqué jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome casual touch, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs.
 - o Manipulation of a child by an adult through a relationship of trust for the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, including sexually suggestive pictures between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult.
- **Vulnerable adult**- a person who, because of his/her age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to him/her.
 - **Abuse of the elderly or elder abuse** - a misuse of power and a violation of trust. It may be psychological abuse, attempting to dehumanize or intimidate older adults; financial abuse, using their money or property in a dishonest manner; or physical abuse which includes any acts of violence inflicting pain, injury or mental distress.

- **Harassment** - may be verbal, visual, or physical, including suggestive remarks and gestures, or other unwanted attention which is emotionally demeaning or exploitive.
- **Mutual Consent** - is never possible when one party is in a leadership position and the other party is a participant, an employee, a member or a child.
- **Mandated Reporters** - a legal category which includes clergy and clerks of session according to California state law. However, the PCUSA *Book of Order* adds Elders and Deacons as Mandated Reporters who are legally required to report incidents of abuse.
- **Employee** - an individual who is hired or called to work for FPCS for salary or wages.
- **Volunteer** - an individual who provides services to FPCS without monetary remuneration.
- **Teacher / Leader** - a volunteer or employee who:
 - is at least 18 years of age,
 - devotes significant portions of his/her time and energy in faithful church service,
 - has been cleared by FPCS to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults, *and*
 - has gone through orientation and training in order to hold a ministry position, (e.g. Sunday School teacher; youth leader; Deacon)

Standards of Conduct

- No employee or volunteer shall engage in any act of child or adult abuse or harassment.
- No employee or volunteer shall touch, interact with, or otherwise communicate with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating, emotionally demeaning, or exploitive.
- Common expressions of affection and affirmation (including hugs and pats on the back) or physical care (including diaper changes and first aid) are appropriate in this and in any other community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, however, that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed on another individual.
- Employees and volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults are tasked with guarding the physical and emotional safety of those in their care and with being alert for signs of each individual's well being.
- No employee or volunteer shall use corporal punishment on an individual associated with any program or activity conducted by FPCS.
- To the maximum extent practicable, there shall be visual access into each room in which activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are being conducted.
- To the maximum extent practicable, employees and volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall work in unrelated pairs, with two or more adults present at all activities.
- If an unaccompanied employee or volunteer meets with a single child, youth, or vulnerable adult to conduct a private discussion, that meeting shall be held at FPCS when the church is open for scheduled group activities or shall be held in a public place. In no case shall an unaccompanied employee or volunteer meet with a single child, youth or vulnerable adult at FPCS unless there is at least one other employee or volunteer in the building. This employee or volunteer must be aware of the time and location of the private meeting, although the identity of the vulnerable individual may remain confidential.

- On any church-sponsored activity for which FPCS arranges transportation, one employee or volunteer may transport children as long as there are two or more children in the vehicle. Children will be picked up and dropped off as a group at FPCS or at other designated locations. Exceptions to this clause may be made in the case of emergencies or with written permission of a parent or guardian.

Allegations of Abuse

- Any person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child/youth/vulnerable adult is being abused or may be in need of protection must report the suspicion to a protective agency or police.
- Any individual who has a reasonable suspicion of abuse toward a child/youth/vulnerable adult shall promptly report the suspicion to the Minister or the Clerk of Session. If a report of abuse is made to a teacher/leader, then that volunteer would tell the Minister and together they would inform the appropriate authorities.
- If the alleged offender is an employee, a report shall be made to the Clerk of Session.
- In any case of alleged abuse, the Minister or the Clerk of Session shall keep proper written documentation of the allegations and proceedings.
- The Minister and/or the Clerk of Session shall be responsible for maintaining contact with the police and with the family of the alleged victim and for determining further actions in consultation with the Session.
- The Minister or the Clerk of Session shall speak on behalf of the Session in the event of an allegation that requires speaking to the congregation and/or the community.
- First Presbyterian Church of Stockton will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigation of any suspicion of child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse.

Implementation

- A copy of this policy and the Covenant of Care shall be provided to each employee and to each volunteer participating in any program or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- Each employee shall submit to FPCS a signed copy of the Covenant of Care and shall submit to a background check and fingerprinting as a condition of employment.
- Each applicant for employment shall submit to FPCS a signed copy of the Covenant of Care as part of his or her application for employment and shall be willing to submit to a background check as a condition of employment.
- An individual who seeks to be a volunteer in any program or activity involving children, youth or vulnerable adults shall submit to FPCS a signed copy of the Covenant of Care and shall be willing to submit to a background check as a condition of volunteer service.
- An applicant who is a minor shall have the Covenant of Care co-signed by a parent or guardian.
- Organizations using the facilities of FPCS shall either show proof of a comparable policy or agree to abide by FPCS's *Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety*.

Administration

- The Personnel Committee shall administer this policy under the authority of Session.
- All documentation associated with the policy (including applications, background checks, and documentation associated with allegations of child abuse or misconduct) shall be strictly confidential and shall be kept secure by the VST Team.
- The Volunteer Support Team shall be responsible for the conduct of appropriate clearances on employees, applicants for employment and volunteers participating in programs or activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. The clearance process shall allow applicants the opportunity to correct or respond to information obtained from the background check. For purposes of the initial implementation of this policy, the VST Team shall determine with Session approval the manner in which initial clearances shall be conducted.
- Each employee and each volunteer who works with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be requested to annually review this policy and sign the Covenant of Care.

Congregational Awareness

- The congregation shall be informed of this policy and shall be reminded of this policy annually with an announcement during worship.
- This policy and the Covenant of Care shall be made available on the FPCS website.
- Information regarding this policy and the Covenant of Care shall be published annually in the July issue of *The Window* newsletter.
- A copy of this policy and the Covenant of Care shall be provided to each participant in church membership classes.
- A review of this policy shall be included in all training and information sessions for:
 - Elders;
 - Deacons;
 - Sunday School Teachers;
 - Nursery Care Volunteers;
 - Leaders of Children's and Youth groups;
 - Leaders of Children's Choirs and Youth Choirs; and
 - Employees
- Copies of this policy shall be placed in the church office.

Training Workshops

Training Workshops will be several times a year or as needed. Please contact Gretchen Loudon, our Safe Church Coordinator (209-466-5818) for further information on upcoming Safe Church workshops.

Attachment

- Covenant of Care

The Covenant of Care

First Presbyterian Church of Stockton, Stockton, CA

As an expression of the high and holy duty that Christ has offered to me as a leader, teacher, or helper to children, youth or vulnerable adults:

- *I promise, in all my relationships with children, youth or vulnerable adults, to follow appropriate action as defined by my training orientation;*
- *I promise to refrain from inappropriate physical contact;*
- *I promise to use appropriate language;*
- *I promise to show no bias based on gender, ethnic background, skin color, intelligence, age, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status;*
- *I promise that I will not harass others;*
- *I promise to respect confidentiality and privacy, unless a child, youth or vulnerable adult is in danger, then I will report as required to the Pastor, Clerk of Session, a child protection agency or the police.*
- *I have read and agree to abide by First Presbyterian Church of Stockton's*
Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witnessed by: _____ Date: _____
(Head of Staff, Clerk of Session or other authorized person)

