

First Presbyterian Church of Sussex Children and Youth Protection Policy

General Practice Statement

The First Presbyterian Church of Sussex seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. For scripture reminds us: *Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 10:13-15) By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of our church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The terms “worker” and “volunteer” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children.

Selection of Workers

We seek to encourage all who engage with our children to model Christian characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Galatians 5:22-23*).

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs must be 18 or older and will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1. Six-Month Rule

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with our congregation for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership, membership, and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

2. Personal Interview

A face-to-face interview will be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

3. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two references for the applicant will be checked. These references should preferably be from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past or non-family members who can speak to the person’s suitability to work with children.

Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees of the church—at the First Presbyterian Church of Sussex, we have only one “employee”, and this is our pastor. He/she receives a background check from the Presbytery of Newton.

Adults who will be working with youth on any continuing basis (Sunday School teachers, youth group advisors) will be required to have a background check, as recommended by the Presbytery of Newton.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two adults (preferably unrelated) will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless parents give written consent in the form of a waiver.

Social Media and Technology

No child's image or information will be posted on our church's social media without parent's approval. All our church social media will be maintained by individuals who have been authorized by the Session.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters, paid or volunteer, who are themselves under age 18—to assist in caring for children during programs, worship, or church activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 12.
- Must be interviewed (by designated Session member or Pastor).
- Must be under the supervision of an adult or in a space easily observable by parents of children.

Training

All adults responsible for supervising children will receive a copy of our child protection policy, signify they agree to abide by these policies, and will be required to participate in a church- or Presbytery-sponsored training; or when that is not feasible, an online training course addressing child abuse prevention at <http://www.insuranceboard.org>.

Who is responsible for reporting suspected child abuse in New Jersey?

In New Jersey, ANY person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected has a legal responsibility to report it to the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously. Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse or neglect according to the law or to comply with the provisions of the law is a disorderly person and subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 or up to six months imprisonment, or both.

How do I report child abuse in new Jersey?

Call New Jersey's child Abuse/Neglect Hotline at 1-877-NJABUSE (652-2873) (TTY/TDD use 1-800-835-5510). They are available and will respond 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. **If a child is in immediate danger, you should call 911.**

Do callers have immunity from civil or criminal liability?

Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of child abuse or neglect or testifies in a child abuse hearing resulting from such a report is immune from any criminal or civil liability as a result of such action. Calls can be placed to the hotline anonymously.

What happens when I call the Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline?

The hotline is answered by trained caseworkers who know how to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect. This caseworker may ask you about:

- **Who:** The child and parent/caregiver's name, age, and address and the name of the alleged perpetrator and that person's relationship to the child.
- **What:** Type and frequency of alleged abuse/neglect, current or previous injuries to the child, and what caused you to become concerned.
- **When:** when the alleged abuse/neglect occurred and when you learned of it.
- **Where:** Where the incident occurred, where the child is now, and whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.
- **How:** How urgent the need is for intervention, and whether there is a likelihood of imminent danger for the child.

What happens after I make the call?

When a report indicates that a child may be at risk, the Division of Youth and Family Services will promptly investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours of receipt of the report.