

First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck
Safe Church Policy: Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy
Working Group: Bonnie Benkard, Lulu Huber, Marybeth Ruddy
Adopted March 2019, Revised December 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. As followers of Jesus, we understand that children, youth, and vulnerable adults are inherently valuable members of Christ's community. Within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and on each other.

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of everyone in our church. We are committed to maintaining a safe environment in which children, youth, and vulnerable adults are protected from abuse. Our intent is to:

1. Protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults (hereafter referred to as **vulnerable individuals**) in all church programs.
2. Educate all staff and volunteers concerning pertinent issues.
3. Protect staff, volunteers, and the church itself, from potential allegations of abuse and neglect with regard to the treatment of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
4. Establish appropriate ways of responding to alleged, reported, or suspected incidents of abuse.
5. Be in a compassionate ministry with all affected persons—the alleged victim, the alleged victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the church family.

III. DEFINITIONS

Adult - Persons aged eighteen years and older.

Child or Children - Persons from birth through fifth grade.

Child, youth, or vulnerable adult abuse - Any act or failure to act that results in the physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional mistreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. <https://www.nj.gov/dcf/reporting/defining/>

Church Programs - Any gatherings that arise in the context of worship, education, child care, fellowship, administration, pastoral, mission, recreation, generated or organized by the First

Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck.

Misuse of technology - Use of technology that results in the harassing or abusing of a child/youth. This includes using technology to send suggestive messages and images to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

Neglect - Failure to provide proper supervision for a child or adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, or medical care although financially able or assisted to do so.

<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/reporting/defining/>

New Jersey Department of Children and Families (NJDCF) - In New Jersey anyone who learns about or suspects a case of child abuse or neglect is required to report the situation to this agency at 1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873).

Safe Church Committee (SCC) A group made up of one Elder, one Deacon, one Member and the Pastor, who are appointed by the Session to oversee the implementation of and compliance with the Safe Church Policy and procedures.

Staff - All persons who are employees of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck. **Sexual**

Abuse - As defined as in the Book of Order: "Sexual abuse of another person is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to (1) any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without the mental capacity to consent; or (2) any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position." (Book of Order, D-10.0401c).

Volunteers - Any persons who, for no compensation, oversee children, youth and vulnerable adults in connection with church programs.

Vulnerable Adult - Any person eighteen years old or older without the developmental or cognitive capacity to consent.

Vulnerable Individual - A child, youth or vulnerable adult.

Youth - Persons from sixth grade through and including age seventeen, as well as any youth who turns eighteen during the school year, i.e., September through August.

IV. SCREENING AND TRAINING

Staff and volunteers who may have direct contact with vulnerable individuals must comply with screening and training requirements.

1. Screening will include a criminal background check. A recent screen (within three years) may be acceptable.
 - a. When individuals fail to pass the screening criteria for working with minors, the pastor acting as head of staff will be informed. That pastor will make sure that key staff members are informed that such persons are not approved to have any contact with minors involved in church programs and activities.
 - b. The pastor, acting as head of staff, will keep the confidential copies of criminal background checks in an appropriately secure file.
 - c. Volunteers currently employed by a public school district may forego a background check by showing a recent (within 2 months) pay stub from their

employer.

2. Staff and volunteers who may have direct contact with vulnerable individuals are required to read and follow the Safe Church Policy. Before beginning work on behalf of the church, staff and volunteers will complete an application, sign an agreement stating that they have read the Safe Church Policy document and agree to follow the stated procedures. The signed agreement will be kept on file with background check information.
3. All staff hired beginning November 1, 2020 will be required to complete FBI fingerprinting via an agency approved by church insurers.
4. Volunteers under age 18 will not be subject to background checks, but must sign the agreement and complete required training.
5. Volunteers and staff will complete training as set forth by SCC and provided by the church within the first month of beginning work on behalf of the church.
6. Background checks and training for volunteers will be renewed at least every three years.
7. A Safe Church Policy training coordinator will be designated by the Safe Church Committee and approved by the Session.

V. POLICY OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW

The entire FPCDN community must work together to ensure the safety of our vulnerable individuals. Ministers, staff, session, parents, the Safe Church Committee, and the Personnel Committee all need to contribute.

1. **The Safe Church Committee:** SCC will oversee the implementation and compliance of the Safe Church Policy procedures:
 - a. Implementing a confidential screening process for volunteers and staff, and making sure that anyone involved in the screening process receives the training and support necessary to handle screening information in a confidential, legal, and ethical manner.
 - b. Working with ministers, volunteers, staff, and the Personnel Committee to introduce and implement the Safe Church Policy and relevant procedures.
 - c. Reporting to the session on its actions whenever the SCC has met.
 - d. Reviewing and recommending updates to the Safe Church Policy at five year intervals (years ending in 0 or 5).
2. **Ministers** (Teaching Elders) are governed by the Book of Order (PCUSA) and any specific policy of the presbytery.
3. **Session:** The session will be responsible for ensuring that the Safe Church Policy is being implemented.:
 - a. The session will appoint a committee for the purpose of overseeing the Safe Church Policy and responding to and investigating allegations of child abuse or sexual misconduct occurring during FPCDN programs.
 - i. The committee shall be comprised of one Elder, one Deacon, one member, and

the Pastor.

- ii. The members may serve under authorization of the session without term limits.
- b. The SCC will report to the session at least once a year, and whenever the SCC has met.
- c. Ensuring, through the SCC and Personnel Committee, that all elders, deacons, staff, and volunteers have received and read these policies and signed the Safe Church agreement.
- d. Providing the funds and resources necessary for carrying out the Safe Church policy.

4. **Personnel Committee:** The Personnel committee will work with the Safe Church Committee to make sure the policy's procedures affecting church staff members are implemented. Specifically, the Personnel Committee will be responsible for:

- a. Ensuring that all employment practices comply with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act regarding fair employment practices.
- b. Conducting reference checks and coordinating background checks on all current and potential employees (including independent contractors) to be re-submitted at **three** year intervals.
- c. Ensuring that all staff have signed the Safe Church agreement.

VI. PROCEDURES AND EXPECTATIONS

Staff and volunteers are expected to do everything they can to provide a safe environment: 1.

No One-to-one: When possible, there will be two adults present with any children.

However, based on the rule used in schools, when only one supervising adult is present, there must be at least two youth or children old enough to provide reliable witness in the group.

- 2. **Open Door Policy:** Each room set aside for children or youth shall have a door with a window in it. Otherwise, the door shall be left open.
- 3. **Overnight Trips:** At co-ed overnight events, trips, or retreats there shall be at least one adult of each gender present.
- 4. **Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedure:** Persons (generally the parent or guardian) responsible for children who are Infant through Pre-K will sign in their child and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. No child should ever be left unattended.
- 5. **Privacy:** Volunteers and staff may not share information verbally or in writing about vulnerable individuals with anyone other than parents or guardians of the individual.
- 6. **Restrooms:** Vulnerable individuals will be sent to restrooms in pairs.
- 7. **Transportation:** Transportation may be provided only with permission by the parent or guardian. Adults will oversee compliance with all seat-belt and other child safety laws.
- 8. **Technology:** Volunteers should not have any technological contact with a vulnerable individual that does not include (cc) the individual's legal guardian or is on an open public

medium, such as a church website or other social media program (i.e. a comment on Instagram).

VII. REPORTING AND RESPONSE

1. Any person who suspects, believes, or witnesses the inappropriate treatment of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult at a church activity shall report the incident to a member of the SCC and complete an incident report.
2. The family of the child or youth shall be notified immediately of the alleged inappropriate treatment.
3. If the pastor is the alleged abuser, an ecclesiastical report must be made to Paul LaMontagne, (609) 882-9521, the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of New Brunswick
4. No matter who the alleged abuser is, if there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect of a child or youth has occurred, the reporting person who suspects, believes or witnesses the inappropriate treatment of a child, youth or vulnerable adult shall contact the New Jersey Department of Children and Families at 1-877-NJABUSE (1-877-652-2873). If the possible victim is a vulnerable adult, the report should be to the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services at 1-800-792-9770.
5. If the alleged abuser is a member of the congregation, a report shall be made to the Clerk of Session, according to the provisions of D-10.0101 of the Book of Order. If the alleged abuser is a minister of the Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elder) in the PCUSA, a report shall be made to Paul LaMontagne, the Stated Clerk of the presbytery of membership according to the provisions of D-10.0101.
6. Once the Department of Children and Families has been contacted, the church's insurance carrier should also be notified.
7. The person accused of the inappropriate treatment shall be removed from any position involving contact with minors or vulnerable individuals until the completion of the formal investigation. All details of the investigation will remain confidential until a conclusion is reached. All investigations will afford reasonable due process as determined by the Session.

See: Safe Church Policy: Training and Best Practices for specific training requirements and standard procedures for implementing this policy.

First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck
Safe Church Policy: Training and Best Practices

Working Group: Bonnie Benkard, Lulu Huber, Marybeth Ruddy
March 2019

In order to implement the Safe Church Policy, church staff and volunteers must understand the expectations and standard procedures that help to ensure a safe environment for the children, youth and adults we serve as well as those who minister to them.

I. Requirements

There are three parts of preparing to work with members of our church community:

1. **Read the Safe Church Policy and the Safe Church and Best Practices (this document) and sign the covenant statement** indicating that you have read and understood both documents and you agree to follow the stated procedures.
2. **Complete online training modules** required for your role. All volunteers and staff are invited to complete additional training modules if desired:
 - a. Staff, Elders, and Deacons: Keeping Your Church Safe, Preventing Sexual Harassment: Employee Edition
 - b. Volunteers working with vulnerable individuals: Keeping Your Church Safe
3. **Pass a criminal background check.**
 - a. The Church will obtain a background check from a reliable third party at no cost to the staff or volunteer.
 - b. All information submitted or received will be kept confidential and be held by the pastor in a secure file.
 - c. A recent screening (within three years) may be acceptable, or proof that you are employed by an educational institution.
 - d. Volunteers under the age of 18 are not subject to background checks.

Volunteers and Staff will be required to renew their training and background check every **three** years based on the Safe Church Policy requirements at that time.

II. Procedures

To ensure that everyone understands the expectations and procedures that create a safe space we must follow some common-sense guidelines as stated in the Safe Church Policy:

1. **No One-to-one:** Ideally there will be two adults present with any children, however, based on the rule used in schools, when only one supervising adult is present, there must be at least two youth or children old enough to provide reliable witness in the group.
2. **Open Door Policy:** Each room set aside for children or youth shall have a door with a window in it. Otherwise, the door shall be left open.

3. **Overnight Trips:** At co-ed overnight events, trips, or retreats there shall be at least one adult of each gender present.
4. **Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedure:** Persons (generally the parent or guardian) responsible for children who are Infant through Pre-K will sign in their child and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. No child should ever be left unattended.
5. **Privacy:** Volunteers and staff may not share information verbally or in writing about vulnerable individuals with anyone other than parents or guardians of the individual.
6. **Restrooms:** Vulnerable individuals will be sent to restrooms in pairs.
7. **Transportation:** Transportation may be provided only with permission by the parent or guardian. Adults will oversee compliance with all seat-belt and other child safety laws.
8. **Technology:** Volunteers should not have any technological contact with a vulnerable individual that does not include (cc) the individual's legal guardian is on an open public medium, such as a church website or other social media program (i.e. a comment on Instagram).

III. Expectations

1. Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Physical contact with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults should be developmentally appropriate. Be aware of and sensitive to differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. The following guidelines are to be promoted for pure, genuine, and positive displays of God's love.
 - a. Hugs - Avoid initiating full contact, body-to-body hugs/kisses with a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult
 - b. Lap Sitting – Discourage lap sitting with young children, instead encourage them to sit beside you.
 - c. Casual touch - Gentle contact during activities may occur in the form of pats on the head, shoulders, arms, or hands.
2. Inappropriate Relationships and Communications with vulnerable individuals : At no time shall any adult working with vulnerable individuals pursue a dating, sexual, or romantic relationship with a vulnerable individual.
3. Discipline: Gentleness, respect, and understanding must guide all actions and words. Discipline will be carried out through instruction, correction, and positive reinforcement. Reinforce good and appropriate behavior with praise and thanks.
4. Inappropriate behavior is defined as any action that can cause harm or show disrespect to self, others, or the contents of the room. Upon observing inappropriate behavior:
 - a. Identify the inappropriate behavior and explain why it is inappropriate.
 - b. Suggest an alternative behavior.
 - c. If the behavior continues the parents or guardians of the vulnerable individual should be notified and consulted.

5. Alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and vaping are prohibited on church grounds and during any church program when children are present.

IV. Needs of Those Involved

1. All individuals involved in allegations of abuse or misconduct will be treated with compassion. This includes victims, non-victim accusers, and their families.
 - a. All individuals need to be heard and taken seriously.
 - b. Listen, but don't ask questions.
 - c. Offer reassurance without judgment of anyone involved.
 - d. Follow the church policy on reporting if necessary.
2. Any accused individual is presumed innocent until an investigation shows otherwise.
 - a. Appropriate consideration should be shown to the accused as well as to alleged victims and their families.
 - b. Confidentiality for the Victim and the Accused must be assured to the extent is possible while ensuring the safety and care of everyone involved.

V. Conclusion

Together we will strive, within reason, to provide a safe, welcoming church community for all of our members, visitors, and local community.

First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck

Covenant Statement

The congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a sanctuary for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

In keeping with the covenant of baptism, we have committed ourselves and our resources to the nurturing of our children and each other. We understand that no one can grow in faith and in wisdom when frightened, distrustful, anxious, or depressed. We cannot learn to love and trust God when those who represent God to them are unloving and untrustworthy. We promise that we will provide the structure, education, and the policies that will keep vulnerable individuals safe from harm and abuse. In that context, we will screen volunteers, train them, and ask that they abide by the policies of our church.

As a volunteer working with vulnerable individuals in this congregation, I agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment, and to report promptly abusive or inappropriate behavior to a member of the Safe Church Committee.

Signature of Applicant	Print Full Name	Date
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Signature of Clerk of Session	Print Full Name	Date
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