

First Presbyterian Church in Brookline

Child Safety Policy

August 2008

Purpose and scope

First Presbyterian Church in Brookline seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices in this policy, our goal is to protect the children and youth of First Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while also protecting our staff and volunteers of false accusations.

Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Selection of Workers

Employees and all volunteers who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

Six month rule: No one will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until he or she has been involved with First Presbyterian Church in Brookline for a minimum of six (6) months.

Written application: All persons—paid or unpaid—seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form we will supply. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, and disclosure of any previous criminal convictions.

Personal interview: Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview will be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

Reference checks: Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants’ references will be checked. These references should be from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past, rather than family or friends.

Criminal background check: A Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) criminal background check is required for all employees (including volunteers) who work with children. All applicants will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. Individuals who decline to sign the authorization form will not be allowed to work with children. The Session will review the CORI report and determine on a case-by-case basis whether applicants will be allowed to work with children. In general, convictions for an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency, and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The application, record of reference checks, and interview notes will be kept in confidence at the church, along with documentation of the receipt of the CORI report. The CORI report will be kept for 30 days and then destroyed. Applicants will be allowed to review their CORI report at the church, but not to make or keep a copy.

Those who volunteer occasionally must go through the entire volunteer screening process. There are no exceptions to this rule.

Teenagers under the age of 18 wanting to serve as employees in any capacity with activities, studies, or programs for preschoolers or children will need to complete an employment application. Teenagers under the age of 18 are exempt from a criminal background check.

Files

Employees and volunteers who are engaged to work with minors will be photographed, and the picture will be kept in the person's employment file. Photographs will be updated biannually or as necessary.

The church will maintain a file for each worker, including their application paperwork, their photograph, and any other documents that have to do with their work with children.

Training

All who work with children will receive training on working with children and keeping children safe. Employees and volunteers will be given the legal definition of child abuse and neglect in writing, as well as the policy of the church on reporting child abuse and sexual misconduct. New employees and volunteers will be required to attend training and to sign a statement that they have received and understood statements of their responsibilities in keeping children safe.

Two adult rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers 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 in a counseling situation.

In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a minister meeting privately with a minor, or the two adult rule shall apply in that instance. Parents may grant prior permission to cover a particular time period (e.g., a semester) for their child to receive counseling from a particular minister.

Doors and windows

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.

Parents welcome

Parents are welcome to drop in unannounced during any activity that involves children. Session members will also visit classrooms unannounced.

Sick child policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at First Presbyterian Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

If our workers observe signs of illness, we will ask you to come get them and take them home.

Medications policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church in Brookline not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions, such as asthma or severe allergic reactions. Parents of such children should address their situation with the elder responsible for discipleship to develop a plan of action.

Discipline policy

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church in Brookline not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult the elder responsible for discipleship if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom and diapering policy

Workers will never take a child to the bathroom alone. Children over five (5) will be allowed to go to the bathroom alone. If a child five (5) years old or younger needs to use the restroom, the entire class will be escorted to the restroom area by more than one adult. The worker will check to make sure the restroom is empty, then allow children inside. Workers will remain outside bathroom stalls. If a child needs assistance, restroom doors will remain open while an adult helps the child.

Parents are strongly encouraged to have their child visit the restroom prior to class.

It is the policy of First Presbyterian Church in Brookline NOT to change diapers of children who use them. Diapering will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian. If a child needs a diaper change during class, the parent will be asked to change the child.

Accidental injuries to children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, and incident report will be completed and kept on file at the church.

Transportation safety

When the First Presbyterian Church in Brookline provides transportation of youth to an event, it shall also provide a chauffeur licensed to drive in Massachusetts.

Special events for youth

When the First Presbyterian Church in Brookline organizes an event for youth, it shall obtain prior permission from each participant's parents or guardians, allowing the minor participation in the special activities.

As a condition to participation, each parent or guardian shall complete a release of the First Presbyterian Church in Brookline from liability, resulting from its activities in sponsoring the event.

Each participant in a special event must provide his or her name and address, any health condition or medications taken, and the phone number of his or her parent and guardian in addition to his or her parent's permission to participate in the event.

All parents providing permission are to be contacted prior to holding the event and their consent confirmed.

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 nonaccidental physical injury to a child, 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 contact between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult or of a third party; includes activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.

Allegations of child abuse will be taken very seriously and will be responded to as described in the Sexual Misconduct policy. Allegations of physical or emotional abuse will be handled in the same way as sexual misconduct allegations.

The duty to report child abuse

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, and deacons are required to report child abuse. Any knowledge of abuse to a child will be reported as follows.

Protocol for Notifying Civil Authorities of Abuse or Sexual Misconduct

When knowledge of abuse or sexual misconduct posing harm or the risk of harm is revealed, ministers of the word and sacrament, elders, and deacons of the First Presbyterian Church in Brookline shall follow this protocol in reporting to civil authorities.

Identity of the Abuser or Perpetrator Is Not Known

If the identity of the abuser or perpetrator is not known, the minister, elder, or deacon shall initiate a civil complaint to the Brookline Police Department.

Abuser Is Parent or Legal Guardian of the Abused

When the minister, elder, or deacon has knowledge of the identity of the purported abuser or perpetrator and the purported abuser or perpetrator is a parent or legal guardian, he or she shall initiate a civil complaint to the Massachusetts Department of Human Services.

Abuser Is Not a Parent or Legal Guardian of the Abused

When the minister, deacon, or elder has knowledge of the identity of the purported abuser or perpetrator and the purported abuser or perpetrator is not a parent or legal guardian, he or she shall initiate a civil complaint to the Brookline Police Department.

Determination of Criminality of Sexual Misconduct

The Session shall report harm or the risk of harm of abuse and sexual misconduct to civil authorities immediately and without a prior investigation of the credibility of witnesses or the criminality of conduct contained in the allegations. The Session shall proceed to the extent possible in its Procedure Preliminary to a Disciplinary Case, *Book of Order*, D-10.0101, separately from the investigations and proceedings of civil authorities.