

Child Protection Policies for the United Presbyterian Church of Blairsville

Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Youth

The United Presbyterian Church of Blairsville welcomes everyone and is committed to helping individuals and families grow in faith. We recognize that Christian service is a necessary and fulfilling part of each person's faith journey and offers many different ministry opportunities. Among these are opportunities to serve with the children and youth of the church. As much as possible, we want everyone who feels called to be able to serve in ministry with our children and youth.

We also recognize that the church is not immune from the painful reality of child abuse. We understand the devastating damage done to a child's growth when abused within a church setting. As a church, we must take intentional measures to protect our children.

This policy is designed to provide safety and openness: to provide protection for our children while maintaining an atmosphere that welcomes all seekers. By providing many avenues of service with varying levels of supervisory responsibilities and screening requirements, we are striving to meet the spiritual needs of all congregational members. By developing and implementing safety procedures and precautions, we are trying to ensure safe spiritual growth and development of our children.

This policy:

- Establishes a procedure for reducing the risk of child abuse which is consistent with scripture, the principles of the United Presbyterian Church and civil law;
- Establishes minimum guidelines for educating our members and staff about child abuse through training;
- Establishes a procedure for reporting and responding to allegations of abuse
- Ensures that the church is taking reasonable steps to assure a caring, loving, open environment where everyone can worship, study, serve, and continue his/her spiritual journey.

This comprehensive plan presents procedures for Screening, Supervision, and Response.

These procedures are the minimum necessary precautions for protecting children. We will endeavor to monitor updates and recommendations by the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church and may modify these procedures.

DEFINITIONS:

"Adult": a person 18 years of age or older or out of high school.

"Child": any person under the age of 18 or still in high school (it is important to note that this includes those persons who are normally designated as "Youth" at our church).

"Staff Person": any person employed by the United Presbyterian Church of Blairsville.

"Volunteer": any person assisting staff in the opportunities presented by the church for children and youth. This would include Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School helpers, and Mission Trip Leaders.

"The Two-Adult Rule": a standard that requires that at any Children's Activity there will be at least two UNRELATED adults present. Two related people may serve together, but a third person should

be present as well. This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms.

"Children's Activity": any activity or program sponsored by the church in which children are under the supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

"Visitor": A parent or guardian who accompanies a child participating in a children's program. A visitor is not counted in the Two-Adult rule.

"We": United Presbyterian Church of Blairsville .

"Child abuse": as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law means any of the following: "(1) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age. (2) Any act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. (3i) Any recent act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. (4) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.

SCREENING PROCEDURES

Careful screening is one way to reduce the abuse of children. We recognize that screening of staff and volunteers is a morally complex and controversial issue. We have chosen to require screening of staff and volunteers who have significant control over how programs are run and volunteers participating in "high risk" activities (for example, chaperoning overnight events).

The appropriate Session Committee will provide a list of volunteers. The decision to screen is based on criteria inherent to the position and is not based on the personal qualities of the volunteer. In all cases, screening must be accompanied by careful application of safe operating procedures.

Parents and guardians are always welcome to accompany their children in all children's activities. These persons will be considered "visitors" and all persons, including visitors, who have direct and indirect contact with children, shall be required to provide standard contact information on the "Volunteer Application".

All staff persons and all volunteers will be required to complete a Volunteer Application and the appropriate clearances, including: PA Child Abuse History Clearance Form (CY 113 3/95); PA State Police Request for Criminal Record Check (SP 4-641/97); and FBI Criminal Background Check.

We reserve the option to repeat background checks of persons after 5 or more years of service or a break in service of more than one year.

The Personnel Committee is responsible for reviewing and following up on each criminal and child abuse clearance. These forms will be maintained in a locked file in the church office along with other application materials.

OPERATIONAL/SUPERVISION PROCEDURES

The second step to providing a holy place of safety for children is conscientious and intentional supervision. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children and to protect persons from unwarranted accusations. These are minimum standards. Each children's activity may adopt more stringent standards as necessary.

Training is a requirement for all staff and volunteers working with children. Training is to include an annual orientation for all Session members that includes knowledge and information about this policy. Training will be given to staff and volunteers on the policies and how to identify and report child abuse.

Minimum supervisory standards include the "Two-Adult Rule." The "Two-Adult Rule" standard not only helps provide a safe and loving environment for the children, it also provides volunteers with more encouragement, creativity, and flexibility. The only exceptions to this are: A regularly scheduled church school class on Sunday mornings may be conducted by one worker, provided the room has an unobstructed window or other opening, permitting those outside the room to see inside or the door remains open during the class or session.

Parents expect their children to be in their classrooms during Sunday School or the church's facilities during youth activities. Parents must be informed of all activities of any youth outside of the Church building. Due to insurance concerns, our responsibilities, and the orderly function of the church program, Sunday School Classes, and all other groups involving anyone the age of 18 and under, are not to leave the building without approval. Approval requires: a written notification given to Session 3 weeks prior to the trip; approval by Session; written permission slips from each parent turned in a week prior to event; arrangements made for those not permitted to go on the trip, visitors, or latecomers; and, a letter sent to each parent explaining the trip in detail.

RESPONSE PLAN

Once an incident of child abuse occurs or an allegation is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The person who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately by calling the PA Child Abuse Line or 911. The pastor will be notified immediately.

If the allegation is against a staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a church children's activity, the staff or volunteer will contact the PA Child Abuse Line or 911, and the pastor. The pastor will also contact the Child's guardian(s) immediately. A response will be coordinated with legal advice and presbytery's assistance. If a pastor is accused, the presbytery executive should be contacted immediately.

Persons who are the objects of the report shall refrain from all children's activities until the incident report is resolved. Pastors will take responsibility for informing the person they are to be removed from children's activities and inform them of steps to be taken in the investigation. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously.

The Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful. In addition, pastoral support will be available to ALL persons involved with the incident as indicated.