

**FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)  
MADISONVILLE, KENTUCKY**

**CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

*Developed, May, 2016*

*“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ~ Mark 10:13-16.*

**Policy Purpose**

First Christian Church (FCC) is committed to providing a church environment that is a safe place for children and youth and that will protect them from any abuse when they are involved in church-related activities. FCC adopts these policies and procedures not only to maximize safety and prevent child abuse from occurring within its church community, but also to guide and protect volunteers and employees from unwarranted allegations of child abuse.

**Terms and Definitions**

**Child Abuse** – An act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he or she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens harm to a child’s physical or mental health or welfare. Types of abuse may include physical abuse, including physical injury or threat of injury; physical neglect, such as failure to provide necessary care to a child; sexual abuse; mental abuse or neglect; emotional abuse; and spiritual abuse. Child abuse includes, but is not limited to:

**Neglect of Basic Needs** – A form of abuse. Denial of food, water, cleanliness, clothing, and sleep are not appropriate means of discipline.

**Physical Abuse** – Any physical force applied by an adult or older youth in a position of care or authority to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Physical force (hitting, spanking, shaking, shoving, etc.) is not to be used by leaders in our programs.

**Sexual Abuse** – Any sexual contact or sexual interaction between a child (under the age of eighteen years) and an adult; any use of a child for the sexual simulation of an adult, a third person, or the child; any risque’ jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome casual touch, unwelcome and inappropriate hugs and kisses, and sexually suggestive pictures between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult. Even if a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, out of ignorance, innocence, or fear does not resist, it is still abuse.

**Emotional Abuse** – Inappropriately belittling, hateful, or angry words and/or actions directed toward a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Discipline by humiliation is

also emotional abuse.

**Spiritual Abuse** – Using religious references to shame or by guilt to motivate a child into a particular action or behavior.

**Employee** – Any person who works for salary or wages at FCC.

**Volunteer** – Any person not employed by FCC who, at any time during the year, teaches, supervises, or helps with children and youth activities, or is in the presence of children or youth. These activities include, but not limited to, Sunday School and Worship Enrichment, Nursery, Childcare, Children & Youth Choirs, Summer Camps and Conferences, Children and Youth mission trips, and Scouting.

## **Security**

We take precautions to protect your information. When you submit sensitive information to FCC, your information is protected.

Wherever we collect sensitive information pertaining to your identity, that information is encrypted and transmitted to us in a secure manner.

If you feel that we are not abiding by this privacy policy, you should contact us immediately.

## **Screening**

**Staff** – Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at FCC will follow current employment policies, screening, and procedures.

**Volunteers: Background Requirements** – Volunteers working with youth or children of the church in any volunteer ministry will be required to provide, complete, and undergo the following:

- An Employment and Volunteer Ministry Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes; (Appendix A)
- A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction for child abuse or sexual misconduct; (Appendix B)
- Prior to becoming a volunteer, FCC will obtain a background check for that individual. Every three years, FCC will perform National criminal database searches and National sex offender registry searches on existing volunteers, and each volunteer shall be required to execute any documents that FCC might request for such purpose. Any individual who has lived outside Kentucky in the last five years may be subject to additional state court search.
- Each new volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FCC

Child and Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms. (Appendix B)

- Each new volunteer will be provided orientation and training on child abuse, including its recognition and prevention, as well as on the terms and conditions of this policy.

Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding related to an allegation of child abuse or neglect MAY NOT work with children and youth at FCC. Refusal to complete the Volunteer Application process or a conviction for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with children and youth: drug-related activity, pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or abuse of a minor.

Leaders of other groups of children or youth (e.g., Girl Scout and Boy Scout Leaders) who use FCC's facilities will also be required to read the Policy and sign the Volunteer Acknowledgement Statement. (Appendix B)

## **General Procedures**

### **Supervision: Two-Leader/Open-Door Policy**

Whenever possible, any adult who is present in a church sponsored activity for children or youth should be accompanied by another adult. FCC employees and volunteers should not, during an FCC program, be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others.

In order to avoid situations where an individual is alone in a room with children, all children's and youth activities should be supervised by at least two adult leaders. Whenever possible, these adults should be unrelated. The presence of two leaders is to protect children and youth against situations in which abuse might occur, and to protect leaders against false allegations of abuse or neglect.

Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children or youth are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom.

In the event that two leaders cannot be present in the room, such that one leader is alone in a room with one or more children or youth, a door or half-door from the room must be left open. The leader should not position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing in the hallway cannot see him or her.

Furthermore, at any counseling session with children or youth, the door or half-door of the room used must remain open for the entire session. The session should be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

Each classroom for children and youth should ideally have a door with an observation window or a half-door, such that the upper half may be kept open. If it does not, and two leaders are not present in the room, then the door must remain open at all times.

**Ratios** – The recommended adult/volunteer-to-child/youth ratio, based on best practices, is 1:6, gender balance is recommended. For overnight trips, the ratio is 1:4, although 1:6 is permissible. Teacher/caregiver-to-child ratios in our schools are mandated by state childcare laws.

**Parent/Guardian Consent** – Children and youth must obtain parental or guardian permission for involvement in church sponsored activities or programs that involve travel away from the church's physical facilities.

**“Six Month” Rule for Volunteers** – A volunteer must be a member of FCC, or have regularly attended FCC for six months, before working with youth or children. This requirement does not apply to paid staff or volunteers involved in activities in which their own children are present. The Christian Education Committee or the Children or Youth Minister shall have the authority to waive this six-month rule upon request, where appropriate.

**Age Appropriate Groups** – Children and Youth shall be grouped by the following ages or grades:

- Infants to 24 Months
- Pre-K and Kindergarten
- Kindergarten
- 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grades
- 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Grades
- Chi Rho, Middle School, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades
- CYF, High School, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12 Grades

**Policy Review** – The provisions of this Policy shall be reviewed annually by the Christian Education Committee. Proposed changes to the Policy will be brought to the attention of the Board for its input, if any, prior to any such changes by the Christian Education Committee becoming final. The Christian Education Committee shall report periodically to the Board and recommend any changes deemed appropriate.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Staff and volunteers are required to adhere to the FCC Child Protection Policy Guidelines in all their interactions with children and youth.
2. Staff and volunteers will respect children's rights not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or that disregard their right to say no.
3. Staff and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment or by failing to provide the necessities of care.
4. Physical restraint is used only in situations necessary to protect the child, other children, or staff from harm.
5. While supervising children and youth participating in FCC programs, staff and volunteers should know where participants are at all times.
6. Restroom supervision: Whenever possible, volunteers will make sure any restroom used is not occupied by any suspicious or unknown individual before allowing children and youth to use the facilities. Always send children in pairs with a volunteer. The staff or volunteer will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff or volunteer (not being alone with a child). Staff and volunteers shall strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible.
7. Diapering and potty training should be done primarily by staff members/paid caregivers. Volunteers may be asked to help in certain situations and should follow posted nursery guidelines when performing diapering.
8. Staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical and emotional state of children. Any signs of injury or possible child abuse must be reported according to the FCC Child Protection Policy.
9. Staff and volunteers shall not be alone with children or youth without parental permission.
10. Under no circumstances should volunteers release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian.
11. Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
12. Being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
13. Possessing or using concealed weapons or firearms while working or volunteering with children or youth is prohibited.
14. Smoking or use of tobacco *in the presence of* children, youth, or parents while working or volunteering is prohibited.
15. Staff and volunteers should not release children to any adult or family member, including older siblings, other than the child's parent/guardian unless prior verbal permission has been obtained from the parent.
16. Profanity, inappropriate jokes and media, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, youth, or parents are prohibited.
17. Staff and volunteers will be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children and youth.

18. Staff and volunteer adult and youth leaders shall wear appropriate dress when volunteering with children and/or youth.
19. Movies used in all church settings shall meet the voluntary movie rating system guidelines established by the Motion Picture Association of America for age-appropriate content.
20. Staff and volunteers may not date or be romantically involved with program participants or church members who are younger than 18 years of age.
21. Staff and volunteers are required to read, sign, and adhere to all policies related to identifying, documenting, and reporting child abuse and will attend training sessions on the subject.
22. Staff and volunteers working with children or youth must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
23. Staff and volunteers are required to report any concerns or suspicions regarding their observations of any individual's interaction with a child. Except for concerns related to alleged or potential abuse, which require specific immediate reports, these concerns may be reported to the individual. If the concerns are not alleviated by a change in the individual's behavior, a second report must be made to the Youth or Children's Minister.
24. If it is necessary for an adult to take a child or youth home after an event, all staff and volunteers shall abide by safe driving laws when transporting children or youth. Driving record history shall be obtained on all youth leaders and volunteers. An effort should be made to contact the family and inform them of the situation before transporting the child or youth. It is always advisable for leaders to give parents advance notice and full information regarding the event in which their child or youth will be participating.
25. In the event that a one-on-one child/youth to adult scenario arises, i.e., unexpected transportation needs, pastor's class mentoring, or otherwise, parent permission should be granted in writing or by phone when possible. It is preferred to have mentors and mentees meet in pairs or to meet in public places.

## **Reporting**

**Reporting Incidents** – Any individual who observes or becomes aware of any alleged or potential incident of child abuse must, as soon as possible, report the matter to the staff member in charge of the program, the Chair of Christian Education, or the Pastor. Because of the importance of proper reporting, pastors, employees, and persons highly visible to church members and visitors should understand the terms of the policy and be ready to help direct any such reports or allegations to the appropriate persons.

**Investigation** – Upon receipt of a report or allegation of child abuse at FCC, the Chair of Christian Education shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and appropriate procedures are followed as required by Kentucky law. The process will include documenting all steps undertaken in handling the investigation, and a Report of Suspected Child Abuse Form shall be completed.

**Confidentiality** – All investigations shall be conducted in as confidential a manner as is compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.

**Parental Notification** – If an incident has occurred on church property or during a church-sponsored event, the parents of any minor involved in any allegation of abuse shall be immediately notified.

**Potential Responses** – Upon any report of potential or alleged child abuse by an employee or volunteer of FCC, any individual accused of such conduct may be temporarily relieved of any duties involving youth or children pending an appropriate investigation.

## **Off-Site Trips & Events**

**Permission Forms** – Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two-adult rule must be followed throughout the trip with any foreseeable exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances may one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.

**Ratios** – The required adult to child/youth ratio for chaperones for any ministry with children or youth shall be 1:6. Gender balance is preferred. For overnight trips, an adult to child/youth ratio for chaperones of 1:4 is preferred, although 1:6 is permissible. Gender balance is required. Children shall always be grouped according to predetermined age and grade levels as are outlined on page 5 of this document.

### **Rooming Arrangements**

- Rooming arrangements should provide for children and youth of the same sex to room together and adults of the same sex to room together.
- When possible, adults' rooms shall be next to youth rooms and youth may be checked on during the night.
- Ordinarily, adults should not share rooms with children. An individual minor may share a room with an individual adult if the two are related (parent/child), or if written permission has been granted prior to the event by a parent or guardian.
- In situations where one large sleeping area is provided, two adults of the same sex shall accompany children or youth of the same sex.

### **Medical**

- Each child, youth, adult volunteer, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Each minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.
- Whenever possible, all activities with children and youth shall have a staff or volunteer adult leader with current certification first aid/CPR training.

- Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-site events. These forms will be kept on the event site for the duration of the event.
- First Aid supplies will be available on the event site. All workers will be informed of the location of First Aid supplies/equipment and shall have access to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.
- A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency, or injury.

#### **Driving Rules/Travel**

- All drivers of children and youth shall be over 21 years of age.
- When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-leader rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event and leaders are not available for every vehicle, keeping the other vehicle in sight at regular intervals is an acceptable substitution for the two-leader rule.
- Travel arrangements for off-campus events will be coordinated through the church.
- All adult drivers of children and youth will be screened through a driving history search. A valid driver's license will be required.
- All vehicles should remain parked throughout the duration of the activity except for transporting children and obtaining supplies.
- Seat belts will be provided for all passengers.

### **How can children be at risk in a "safe" place like church?**

There may be several reasons children can be at risk even in "safe" places like a church. The following factors may contribute to the risk in a church setting:

- Ready access to children
- Institutional surprise: "We're good people."
- Many churches have historically failed to prosecute
- Fewer external barriers than other youth-serving organizations
- Challenges coordinating child protection strategies.

