

Grace Presbyterian Church Child and Youth Protection Policy

Adopted by Session: 05/16/2017

Introduction: We all want Grace Presbyterian Church to be a safe place full of love, hope, and trust. The occurrence of child abuse, however, exists in all social settings, including churches. This mandates the establishment of policies and procedures to prevent abusers from access to children. These will include policies of prevention and of response, as well as those policies that will protect our church, its leaders and volunteers, and its members. These policy and procedure statements, are considered the child and youth protection policy (the Policy) required by G-3.0106 in the *Book of Order*.

Scope: This policy applies to any person working with or having any interaction with children in any activity sponsored by Grace Presbyterian Church. This includes but is not limited to ministers, teachers, volunteer workers, music directors, and office staff, as well as youth who may be volunteering in a leadership role with younger children, those persons being members or non-members of the church. The [current version](#) of the document entitled “Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Sexual Misconduct Policy and its Procedures”, adopted by the 205th General Assembly (1993), is hereby incorporated by reference as the **basic guideline** for the policy of this church. It is intended as guidance for churches and if properly implemented can be used by church members, church officers, employees, and volunteers, as well as accusers of misconduct or those accused. Nothing in this Policy changes or modifies the responsibilities of individuals considered to be “mandated reporters” pursuant to California Penal Code §§ 11160 et seq. and §§ 11164 et seq.

Definitions:

Child: A child is defined as any individual less than eighteen (18) years of age.

Child Abuse: Sexual abuse or exploitation as listed by incident in 11165.1; neglect; willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment; any physical injury inflicted other than by accidental means. See Also Exhibit 1.

Mandated Reporter: Mandated reporters are individuals who are mandated by California law to report known or suspected child maltreatment. Mandated reporters are required by the state of California to report any known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff’s department). The positions of the church considered to be Mandated Reporters are a) Pastor, b) Children’s Ministry Director, and c) Youth Ministry Director.

SMRT: The Presbytery of Riverside Sexual Misconduct Response Team, who publishes the Presbytery of Riverside Sexual Misconduct Prevention Policy. All Mandated Reporters are required to be well informed of the Policy and the required training, which can be found on the [SMRT web page here](#).

Reasonable Suspicion: Subjective criteria referring to a belief or opinion, based on facts or circumstances, sufficient for a prudent person of reasonable knowledge, skill and experience to want to inquire further, take protective action, or report to civil or ecclesiastical authorities.

Rules of Discipline: That part of the PCUSA *Book of Order*, which describes the direction, guidance, control, and nurture to be used when a church member is suspected of actions outside the Constitution of the Church. The church's disciplinary process is not a substitute for the secular judicial system, but to do what the secular judicial system cannot do to safeguard the members of the church.

Congregational Covenant to Protect the Children of the Church:

In keeping with the Covenant of Baptism, Grace Presbyterian Church is committed to nurturing children who attend the church or participate in our Children's programs. We understand that children cannot grow in the faith and wisdom of Christ when they are frightened, distrustful, anxious, or depressed. They cannot learn to love and trust God when those who represent God to them are unloving and untrustworthy. We promise to provide our children the structure, education, policies, and procedures necessary to keep them safe from harm and abuse. In that context, we will screen and train volunteers, and require that they abide by the policies of our church. We will ensure that all volunteers have been eligible to serve as a volunteer according to the Volunteer Policy prior to the initiation of their assignments.

Volunteer Policy:

Volunteers who work with children must: a) be screened according to church procedures; b) be members of Grace Presbyterian Church or have been attending for at least 6 months prior to the initiation of their assignments, or be a non-member parent of a child participating in a Grace program (such as VBS), or c) have an explicit waiver by Session. All volunteers must be at least 3 years older than the children or youth they are supervising.

Training Policy:

All paid staff and volunteers must be trained on complying with this program, as well as reading and signing the Protection of Children Covenant and Training Acknowledgement upon entering the program and annually thereafter (Exhibit 2). All persons considered Mandated Reporters are required to attend Presbytery of Riverside required training as directed by the Presbytery, and are encouraged to participate in the State of California Mandated Reporter Training (<http://mandatedreporter.ca.com>) at least every 3 years. The Elder/Chair of the Christian Education Committee and the Clerk of Session are encouraged to participate in the State training as well.

Training Content:

Training for staff and volunteers will include, as a minimum:

- Definitions of Child Abuse
- Church policies defined in this document
- Identifying signs of Child Abuse
- Proper conduct of youth events
- Prevention of Child Abuse
- Volunteer reporting procedures

Screening Applicants Having Interaction with Children

Screening Policy: *Any person who may be working with children shall be appropriately screened utilizing the California Live Scan for Volunteers and other means as deemed appropriate. After screening, they will be trained in the recognition of (Exhibit 1) and*

prevention of child abuse and in the reporting procedures should they suspect abuse. The following procedure is to be used for anyone who will have direct interaction with children.

Procedures for Screening Applicants Having Interaction with Children:

1. All applicants should complete an **Application to Work With Children/Youth at Grace Presbyterian Church** whether the position is for pay or on a volunteer basis.
2. The authorized reviewer (Chair or Elder of Session's Christian Education Committee, Chair of the Personnel Committee, Pastor, Children's Ministry Director or Youth Director) shall contact one or more of the references, as appropriate, evaluating the suitability of the applicant for working with children. The reference should be asked if he/she has any reservations concerning the applicant. All discrepancies between statements made by the applicant and former employer (reference) should be discussed with the applicant.
3. At the time a position is offered, the applicant will be asked for a Live Scan, where a complete set of fingerprints is obtained and/or other specific screening information. Those with a criminal and especially a sexual abuse record might be reluctant to provide this and back out of the employment process at this time.
4. Check arrest and conviction records.
5. If any doubts have been raised regarding the applicant's suitability, the reviewer should discuss the applicant with the entire Child Safety Committee. Issues which may lead to disqualification include, but are not limited to, prior history of abusive or inappropriate behavior with minors, history of abuse in his/her own childhood, and/or a history of violent behavior.
6. All application documents should be kept for at least seven (7) years. They shall be confidential. No copies shall be made except as necessary for legal proceedings involving the applicant and regard to the Statement of Release section of the application form.
7. All paid and volunteer employees shall participate in an **annual mandatory training session** concerning child abuse and church safety policies and procedures. This session shall be available to all who are interested or affected. A copy of those policies, procedures, and rules will be provided to every applicant. They will be held responsible for knowing and understanding these documents and should seek guidance on any issue they do not completely understand.

Interaction With Children **Policy:**

Any person who may be working with children shall adhere to the Rules of Interaction with Children. They are designed to prevent conduct that may be seen as sexual misconduct, child abuse, or any other inappropriate activities. They also help to protect our staff and volunteers from potentially damaging and unfounded accusations.

Rules of Interaction With Children:

1. In all authorized situations involving children through the 12th grade, no fewer than two (2) screened, preferably non-related adults and of the same gender, shall be present:
 - a. When accompanying younger children to, and if necessary, into the restroom;
 - b. Whenever there is a need to check under clothing (such as an injury) or change a younger child's clothing;
 - c. When reprimanding or disciplining a child.
2. Avoid private or "secret" meetings with children. Team up with another adult.
3. Always obtain written parental permission for activities off campus. The two (2) adult rule still applies.
4. Avoid excessive familiarity. Keep physical contact to a minimum. No kissing.

5. Keep the group together. Release younger children to their parent or to someone their parent has expressly identified. Be aware of child custody problems. Release the child only to designated parent.
6. Report all suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior to the church staff member supervising your work, who will up-channel the report to a member of the Child Safety Committee. Do not investigate the accuracy of the report yourself.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Policy: *All allegations shall be promptly investigated and appropriate action promptly taken.*

Respect and compassion for all concerned shall be maintained at all times. Every effort shall be made to maintain the privacy and dignity of all parties involved. There shall be no denial or admission that an incident has occurred before the investigation is completed. If a mandated reporter has a "reasonable suspicion" of abuse, they shall contact authorities and file a report.

Procedures:

1. A **Child Safety Committee** shall be formed consisting of the Pastor (or his/her designee), the Elder of the Christian Education Committee, the Elder of the Personnel Committee, and the Director for Youth Ministry or Directory for Children's Ministry as appropriate. Any allegation should be promptly reported to a member of this Committee. (If the accused is a member of the Child Safety Committee, then that person will make a statement to the committee and then be excused.) The Committee shall meet within twelve (12) hours of the time that the report is made, and make a written record of the meeting and the results. The Committee shall confirm the veracity of the report. All members must agree the "suspicion" is in error and does not warrant reporting to the child abuse authorities to have the matter dropped. If any one member believes the "suspicion" warrants a report, a report shall be filed with the authorities. It is understood that the allegedly abused child or his/her guardians have the right to notify the child abuse authorities at any time.
2. The accused shall be immediately relieved of all duties involving direct contact with children. If the accusation is found to be totally without merit, the accused may once again be eligible to work with children. All efforts should be made to explain and/or eliminate all possible misunderstandings.
3. Filing a **Report to the Authorities:**
 - a) The Riverside County child abuse authorities shall be contacted immediately by phone at 800-442-4918, followed by a written report using form [SS 8572, Suspected Child Abuse Report \(found here\)](#), within 36 hours.
 - b) The Grace Presbyterian Church insurance carrier shall be notified.
 - c) The Session shall be notified that an incident has occurred. The names of the accused, the accuser, and the alleged victim shall not be revealed. The Session shall not make any references concerning the incident to other church members or the public.
 - d) The Pastor or his/her designee shall be the sole Grace Presbyterian Church spokesperson to the media. Privacy of all concerned shall be maintained.
 - e) The Presbytery Leader/Stated Clerk (909-881-1595 mailbox 1) shall be informed of the incident.
 - f) If the accused is a member of the congregation, determine what procedures under the Rules of Discipline are in order.

Recognition of Child Abuse

Child Abuse and/or Child Neglect Can Be Any of the Following:

- A physical injury inflicted on a child by another person other than by accidental means.
- The sexual abuse, assault, or exploitation of a child.
- The negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a person responsible for the child's welfare under circumstances indicating harm or threatened harm to the child's health or welfare. This is whether the harm or threatened harm is from acts or omissions on the part of the responsible person.
- The willful harming or endangerment of the person or health of a child, any cruel or inhumane corporal punishment or any injury resulting in a traumatic condition.

Warning Signs of Emotional Abuse in Children

- Excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong.
- Shows extremes in behavior (extremely compliant or extremely demanding; extremely passive or extremely aggressive).
- Doesn't seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver.
- Acts either inappropriately adult-like (taking care of other children) or inappropriately infantile (rocking, thumb-sucking, throwing tantrums).

Warning Signs of Physical Abuse in Children

- Frequent injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts.
- Is always watchful and "on alert" as if waiting for something bad to happen.
- Injuries appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt.
- Shies away from touch, flinches at sudden movements, or seems afraid to go home.
- Wears inappropriate clothing to cover up injuries, such as long-sleeved shirts on hot days.

Warning Signs of Neglect in Children

- Clothes are ill-fitting, filthy, or inappropriate for the weather.
- Hygiene is consistently bad (unbathed, matted and unwashed hair, noticeable body odor).
- Untreated illnesses and physical injuries.
- Is frequently unsupervised or left alone or allowed to play in unsafe situations and environments.
- Is frequently late or missing from school.

Warning Signs of Sexual Abuse in Children

- Trouble walking or sitting.
- Displays knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to his or her age, or even seductive behavior.
- Makes strong efforts to avoid a specific person, without an obvious reason.
- Doesn't want to change clothes in front of others or participate in physical activities.
- A sexually transmitted disease (STD) or pregnancy, especially under the age of fourteen.
- Runs away from home.

Protection of Children Covenant And Training Acknowledgement

Grace Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. In the spirit of the **Congregational Covenant to Protect the Children of the Church**,

- I hereby volunteer and agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth,
- I have read and have been trained on and understand the rules and procedures required of me in the Reduction of Risk of Child Abuse Program of Grace Presbyterian Church,
- I will observe the “Two Adult Rule” at all times,
- I will participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment, and
- I will promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the church staff member who supervises my work.

_____ I am: under 18 _____ 18 or older _____
Printed Name of Applicant

_____ _____
Signature of Applicant Date