



Child & Youth Protection Policy

“And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for (that person) to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!”
Matthew 18:5-7, NIV

First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Michigan, supports an active ministry for children and young people. In this document are specific policies to make sure we “nurture and shelter those in need.” These policies implement our commitment to prevent and not tolerate abuse. We desire to ensure each person within our church can continue to develop a healthy, spiritual, and fulfilled life within our church without the unwanted intrusion of abuse.

These policies and procedures pertain to screening/selection, supervision, training, and education of childcare providers, as well as reporting responsibilities and responses to allegations of abuse.

Our goals stated herein include:

1. Protecting all children and youth in our programs from all forms of abuse, especially sexual abuse.
2. Protecting the integrity of our ministry as we do the work of our Lord.

This policy covers all sponsored programs of Jackson First Presbyterian Church (JFPC). It does not cover the activities of groups renting the building. JFPC strongly encourages groups using the building, particularly ones focused on children and youth to have their own stated child & youth protection policies. The policy is implemented and administered by the Spiritual Formation Committee(SFC). The Pastor or Head of Staff and/or Director of Spiritual Formation (DSF) will sit as ex-officio members providing leadership.

The Session, through the Discipleship Development Committee, will ensure that there is an annual review of all abuse policies, procedures, and requirements.

Definitions

Child: A child is defined as a person between the ages of 0-11.

Youth: A youth is defined as a person between the ages of 12-17.

Minor: A minor is defined as any child or youth 0-17 years old.

Child/Youth Worker: Any person (volunteer, paid staff, or contractor) who participates at any level in events or activities involving children or youth.

DSF: Director of Spiritual Formation.

SFC: Spiritual Formation.

Worker Screening & Selection Procedure

All persons working with children and youth during church programming will go through a screening procedure that includes an application, criminal background check for those 18 and older, and an interview. With the exclusion of any pastor that has gone through the background checks and screening of the Presbytery.

New screenings will take place annually prior to the beginning of the school year. The DSF or SFC(Spiritual Formation Committee) will conduct screening sessions during the year with any new staff or new volunteers.

1. Application

- a. All persons working with children (paid, volunteer, or contracted) must complete an application form to be submitted to the Head of Staff, Pastor or DSF.
- b. Applicants must be at least 4 years older than the oldest youth whom they are serving.
- c. The application will be reviewed by any two of the following: Pastor or Head of Staff, DSF, or members of the SFC
- d. The application is to remain part of confidential church records unless withdrawn by the individual prior to working with children.
- e. Applications are to be stored in a locked safe and access limited to the Pastor, the Chair of the SFC and DSF.

2. Background Check

- a. A criminal background check is to be made by the Pastor or Head of Staff, or DSF

3. Interview

- a. A personal interview of any new applicants (paid, volunteer, or contracted) should be conducted by two of any of the following: Pastor or Head of Staff, DSF, or members of the SFC.

4. Decision

- a. The final **decision** as to whether an application is accepted or rejected will be made by the Pastor or Head of Staff, DSF, and/or SFC.
- b. If the application is denied, the applicant may refute any information found during the screening process to the Pastor or DSF. They will also allow the individual the opportunity to withdraw the application on record.
- c. If an application is withdrawn, the Pastor or Head of Staff and the Chair of the SFC will notify the SFC that the application is withdrawn, and no additional information will be disclosed.

5. Continued Screening

- a. Once screened, each worker will have a background check each third year.

All approved Child/Youth Workers will read the JFPC Child Safety Policy and read, complete, and sign the application for Children's or Youth Ministries.

Supervision Procedures

Each program conducted or sponsored by JFPC that involves Minors is required to have and maintain operating procedures aimed at preventing and protecting children and youth from being abused.

All JFPC programs are created to provide an emotionally and physically safe environment for all participants involved. Proper supervision of Child/Youth Workers is necessary to avoid creating the opportunity for both child abuse and false accusations of child abuse to occur.

The following guidelines are observed when working with our children and youth.

1. **Child/Youth Workers shall:**

- a. respond to Minors with respect and consideration and treat all of them equally, regardless of race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information, uniformed service or veteran status or religious affiliation.
- b. act as a positive role model for Minors by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity.
- c. maintain appropriate boundaries when in positions of power with Minors.
- d. not give money or gifts to Minors, except within the context of a group gift given to all participants in the celebration of special events or recognitions.

2. **Age Requirements**

All Child/Youth Workers and volunteers must be a minimum of four years older than the age group they lead or supervise.

3. **Two-Adult Rule**

Two non-related adults must always be present in groups of Minors. The only exception is if an emergency situation deems this not immediately possible.

4. **Ratios**

- a. The adult-to-child ratio for all Child-related events/activities is 2:10.
- b. The adult-to-Youth ratio for all Youth-related events/activities is 2:17.
- c. Parents who stay for the activity but have not gone through the application/background check/interview process do not count towards the ratio.

5. **Restrooms**

Young children (10 and under) are escorted down to the restrooms by an adult. With the exterior door open to the restroom, children may privately use the individual stalls. The Child/Youth Worker should be able to hear and see the children after they exit their private stalls. Children DO NOT share a stall; nor do adults help clean a child and/or pull up their clothes. **We encourage parents to take their children to the restroom prior to coming into class.**

6. Supervision will be maintained before and after all activities until all children are in the custody of their parent/guardian. Minors are not permitted to be in the church or on church property without parental supervision prior to or following a scheduled event.

7. **Transportation**

- a. Written parental permission is required for activities that take place off the church property and require transportation by the church. Typically, parents participate and provide transportation.
- b. Any persons providing transportation to minors during a church activity must have gone through the application/background check/interview process.
- c. The two adult rule applies in vehicles as well.

- d. All adult drivers at Child/Youth events must have proper licensure and insurance on file with the organizing Entity. All vehicles used must have seat belts for the driver and each passenger. No Minor under eighty-five pounds may sit in the front seat of any vehicle.
 - e. All drivers transporting Minors must be over the age of twenty-five and must be informed that if their vehicle is used, their insurance would be primary if an accident occurs.
 - f. No Minor may be a driver at any event or activity.
8. **Nursery**
Children in the nursery shall only be released to their approved family members unless written or verbal permission has been obtained from the approved family members.
9. **Photos**
Child/Youth Workers are not permitted to take photographs of Minors under their care and share them in any way, including on the internet, without the written permission of a parent or guardian of the Minor.
10. **Social Media**
Child/Youth Workers shall not have private, conversations with Minors via text message, Facebook message, Facebook “friending” or any other social media platform. Social Media communication could occur with Minor and their parent or guardian. If a Minor sends a friend request or message to a Child/Youth Worker, the Child/Youth Worker should not respond and should notify the Minor’s parent/guardian.
11. **Visibility**
- a. Child/Youth Workers should position themselves in a classroom so that they may be easily seen and observed. If the Child/Youth Workers and Minors are working in a room without a window to see in, the door should remain open at all times.
 - b. Child/Youth Workers should avoid one-on-one meetings with a child when another adult cannot see what is taking place. One-on-one meetings will not take place behind closed doors.
12. Under no circumstance should any Child/Youth Worker discipline a child or youth by physically striking them.
13. There shall be no intimate touching of a child or the clothing covering the immediate areas of those parts of the body. Children can sit next to an adult, but NOT on their lap. Note: the touching of a child as required for hygienic care i.e. changing a diaper, is permitted.
14. **Reporting Abuse**
- a. All Child/Youth Workers will be expected to familiarize themselves with the signs of abuse/neglect in children. This will be done through informational seminars, informal training and written information available in the Child Safety Policy Binder. This will be coordinated by the DSF & the SFC.
 - b. Any suspicious or inappropriate behavior between a Child/Youth Worker and child or youth will be reported immediately to the DSF. The worker shall be put on immediate leave of absence until an investigation can be completed.
 - c. Any sexual misconduct or child abuse of any nature will be reported to the pastor and the local authorities for investigation. As a church, we are mandated reporters, required by law to report sexual misconduct. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

These rules are in place to protect our children and youth from the risk of sexual misconduct and abuse.

Code of Conduct

Child/Youth Workers shall:

1. respond to Minors with respect and consideration and treat all of them equally, regardless of race/ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, creed, protected disability status, citizenship status, genetic information, uniformed service or veteran status or religious affiliation.
2. act as a positive role model for Minors and Adults by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity.
3. maintain appropriate boundaries when in positions of power with Minors.
4. not give money or gifts to Minors, except within the context of a group gift given to all participants in the celebration of special events or recognitions.

All Child/Youth Workers who are responsible to supervise Minors must also abide by a code of conduct that emphasizes the following prohibited behaviors. Some of these prohibited behaviors include but are not restricted to:

1. Display of sexual affection toward a Minor.
2. Use of profanity or off-color jokes.
3. Discussion of sexual encounters with or around Minors or in any way involving Minors in personal problems or issues.
4. Dating or becoming “romantically” involved with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
5. Using or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the presence of Minors.
6. Possessing sexually oriented materials—including printed or online pornography—on church property or property being utilized for a church event.
7. Having secrets with Minors.
8. Staring at or commenting on the bodies of Minors.
9. Engaging in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with Minors.
10. Working one-on-one with Minors in a private setting.
11. Abusing Minors in anyway, including (but not limited to) the following:
 - a. Physical abuse: hit, spank, shake, slap, unnecessarily restraint.
 - b. Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, or curse.
 - c. Sexual abuse: inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented conversations.
 - d. Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, act cruelly.
 - e. Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter.
 - f. Permit Minors to engage in the following: hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, ridicule, humiliation, or sexual activity.

If a child/youth is injured, always send another responsible person to go for help or call 911. Phones are in the church office on the Upper Level and in the Nursery on the Lower Level. Using a nearby cell phone is preferable, if available. Do not ever leave an injured child/youth alone.

GOD Rules

These are the rules we use when we gather with kids and youth.

G = give the teacher your attention

O = only use kind words

D = don't be a space invader. Keep your hands, feet, and body to yourself. Keep all clothes on.

You must always be with an adult – teacher or parent – when you are at church. You may not run around the church unsupervised.

Reporting Abuse/Neglect Procedures

1. Child/Youth Workers are responsible to report any observations and/or suspicions of child abuse/neglect happening during church activities to the ~~DCE~~ **DSF or the pastor** immediately. **An incident report will be filed.**
2. **If the suspicious abuse/neglect occurred during church programming,** the ~~DCE~~ **DSF or the pastor** will immediately notify the parents or guardian of the minor.
3. If the decision is made to place/file a claim, **whomever witnesses the suspected abuse/neglect is** responsible and will place an immediate verbal report to Child Protective Services at (517) 780-7600.
4. **The DSF will notify the Pastor or Head of Staff and Chair of SFC.**
 - a. **If the alleged offender is the Pastor, the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery office will also be contacted. They shall be dealt with according to Church Discipline as indicated in the Presbytery policies and stated in the Book of Order.**
 - b. **If the alleged offender is in a leadership position in the church, i.e. Elder, Deacon, the Clerk of Session or the Chair of SFC the pastor will be notified. They shall be dealt with according to Church Discipline as indicated in the Presbytery policies and stated in the Book of Order.**
5. Immediate contact will be made with the insurance company, and denominational officials. Only the **church's attorney or an individual designated by the session** will make **any** public statement, after conferring with Session.
6. When the allegation of abuse is made, the alleged offender will be suspended from participating in related service roles in the church until the proper authorities (Child Protective Services and/or local law enforcement agencies) complete an investigation.
7. If the allegations are found to be false, suspension of service will be lifted.
8. If the alleged offender is a staff member or volunteer, and the allegations are true, the offender may face legal action and **will** be dealt with according to Church Discipline as stated in the Book of Order.
9. Any person bringing a report of abuse or assisting in investigating will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment, church membership or affiliation, or otherwise discriminated against or discharged.



Children/Youth Worker Application

We live in an age where sexual misconduct and child abuse is a reality in our society. The church must deal with this issue as a “good shepherd” by taking steps to protect the safety and well being of children in our care. Jackson First Presbyterian Church has implemented policies to help safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them.

This form must be completed by all positions (paid and volunteer) involving children and/or youth. This information is confidential and will not be disclosed to unauthorized persons.

This form will also be used to check criminal/court records.

A complete **Safety Policy for Children and Youth Ministry Manual** is in all classrooms, church office, Children/Youth Christian Educator office, and Resource Center.

All child/youth workers must agree and obey the guidelines that are provided in all church-approved activities and programs.



Jackson's First Presbyterian Church Child/Youth Worker Application

*As a Child/Youth Worker, do you agree to observe all guidelines and policies regarding working with children and youth at Jackson's First Presbyterian Church?

_____ (yes or no)

*Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense which is a sexual offense relating to children, or crime of violence? You will need to answer yes if you have entered into a plea agreement, including a deferred judgment arrangement, in connection with a criminal charge. If you have been convicted of such an offense, please attach a statement of explanation.

_____ (yes or no)

*Have you ever been disciplined or dismissed from employment or a volunteer position or do you have any investigation, review, or disciplinary action for sexual misconduct, violence or other misconduct involving children?

_____ (yes or no)

I understand and agree that it is critical to the mission and ministry of Jackson's First Presbyterian Church that all employees and volunteers conform to the highest standards of safety, interpersonal conduct, and sexual morality. I affirm that I will strictly comply with Jackson's First Presbyterian Church's children and youth ministry policies and procedures. My responses above are truthful and accurate.

Printed Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Signature: _____



Request for Criminal Background Records Check and Authorization

I hereby request and authorize the release of any information which pertains to any record of convictions contained in law enforcement files or in criminal files maintained on me, whether local, state, federal or military. I hereby release local, state, federal or military agencies from any liability resulting from such disclosure.

Print Name: _____

Print Maiden Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Driver's License Number: _____

Social Security #: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____