

WATERTOWN FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

General Purpose Statement

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

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years old. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in child care, Sunday School, overnight activities involving minors, counseling of minors, or one-on-one mentoring of minors.

Selection of Workers

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

a. Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the WFPC office.

b. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his or her suitability for the position.

c. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicant’s references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the WFPC office.

d. Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteers as defined below.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing WFPC to run the check through the Synod of the Northeast. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, he or she will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Personnel Committee or the Pastor (Head of Staff) on a case-by-case basis in light of all surrounding circumstances. Generally, 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 also will be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the WFPC office.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any supervised activity unless in a counseling situation.

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:

- a. Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burning, biting, kicking, choking, or breaking bones.
- b. Emotional abuse – emotional injury when a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, bullying, and persistent teasing.
- c. Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- d. Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at a WFPC event becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his or her care, this should be reported immediately to the Pastor (Head of Staff) for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at a WFPC event or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse of misconduct immediately will be placed on leave from working with children, pending an investigation, and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and WFPC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. WFPC will cooperate fully with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations immediately will be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. Our Pastor (Head of Staff) will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the church. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is found guilty of an alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from his or her position working with children or youth.

Additional Provisions Regarding Child Protection

Open Door Policy

Classroom and Child Care doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors never should be locked while persons are inside a room.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- a. Must be at least age 13.
- b. Must be screened as specified above.
- c. Must be under the supervision of an adult and never must be left alone with children.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all the children at our activities. 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:

- a. Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours,
- b. Green or yellow runny nose,
- c. Eye or skin infections, and/or
- d. Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of WFPC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the 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 adult leader to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of WFPC 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 with the Pastor (Head of Staff) if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

For the protection of all, workers never should be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Transportation

When transportation is provided by the church for out-of-town events, written permission must be given by the parent or guardian. It is recommended that two qualified adults be present in each vehicle. Adults will oversee compliance with all seat-belt and other child-safety laws. Mexico Mission trips will include notarized guardianship for all youth under age 18.

Accidental Injuries to Children

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

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) 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.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent or guardian will be summoned immediately in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

WFPC will provide training on this Child Protection Policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are encouraged to attend these training events. The Associate Pastor of WFPC will oversee this training, which will include online resources.

Implementation and Updates

This policy will be implemented under the direction of the Associate Pastor of WFPC. Any changes or updates to this policy must be reviewed and approved by the Christian Education Committee and then by the Session.

Appendix 1

It is the goal of the First Presbyterian Church of Watertown to be a model for others by establishing and maintaining a best practice that looks after the wellbeing of our youth and those who work with them. We are aware that there may be situations where it may not be possible to follow this policy to standards that it sets. In those circumstances we recommend that notice be given to parents and that permission is given and received. In addition, in situations where this policy is not able to be followed exactly, it is recommended that effort be placed making sure that the safety of youth, volunteers, and workers is prioritized.