

## Safe Child Policy, Sixth Presbyterian Church

Adopted March 20, 2013

Revised March 18, 2015

Revised April 25, 2018

Revised August 29, 2021

### *Rationale*

When we baptize a child we promise “to guide and nurture this child, by word and deed with love and prayer, encouraging him or her to know and follow Christ and to become a faithful member of Christ’s church.” In keeping with this often-repeated promise, we seek adult leadership that is able to provide healthy, safe and nurturing relationships, and to create an environment in which those relationships can flourish. Sixth Presbyterian Church will make responsible efforts to assure that persons placed in positions of responsibility for children (infants – grade 5) and youth (grades 6-12) of the church will be trained to carry out their duties in accordance with our Christian commitment and with the law. Our Safe Child Policy codifies our commitment to providing a safe, nurturing, Christian environment by making every responsible effort to protect children and youth from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

### *Sixth-Month Rule*

All volunteers working with children and youth must have been members of Sixth Presbyterian Church for at least six months OR have been regular participants in church activities for one year. Persons not meeting this requirement may serve as a volunteer when paired with those who do.

### *Two Leader Rule*

Every class and activity for children and youth must be supervised by two leaders. One leader may work alone with a group if there is visual access to the room and other adults are in the vicinity. At least one leader must be over 18 years of age and a staff person or member of the congregation or volunteer who has completed safe child training and the screening process described below. It is preferable that a leader be at least 5 years older than the young people being supervised. The second leader may be between the ages of 14-18, and must also have completed safe child training.

### *Background Checks*

**STAFF** Background checks are required for all full-time and part-time paid employees of the church over the age of 14. A copy of their Pennsylvania Criminal Record and Pennsylvania Child Abuse History, and FBI fingerprint federal criminal history clearances will be kept confidentially in the church office. Sixth Presbyterian Church will reimburse employees for clearance expenses.

**VOLUNTEERS** Background checks are required for all adult volunteers who work with children and youth on a regular basis. A copy of their Pennsylvania Criminal Record, Pennsylvania Child Abuse History, and FBI fingerprint federal criminal history clearances will be kept confidentially in the church office. Sixth Presbyterian Church will reimburse volunteers for clearance expenses.

Volunteers and church employees are required to obtain clearances in accordance with current Pennsylvania child abuse laws. All clearances for employees and volunteers are required to be updated every 36 months in accordance with current Pennsylvania child abuse laws.

#### *Bathroom Breaks*

When leaders are working with young children (up to age 6) in classrooms without integral bathrooms, they shall accompany a child to the bathroom down the hall. Unless the child requires assistance in an open stall, the leader should wait for the child outside the bathroom.

#### *Touch and Talk*

Common expressions of affection (e.g. hugs, pats on the back) or physical caretaking (e.g. diaper changing, helping small children in the restroom) are appropriate within a caring community. Our words are important, too, and should demonstrate caring, acceptance, and respect of each child. If a child or youth indicates that they don't want to be touched the adult will stop.

#### *Reporting Procedures*

All adult volunteers and staff who work with children and youth are mandatory reporters. If one suspects or witnesses an abusive incident, mandated reporters must first make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) or by calling 1-800-932-0313. A report must also be made to the Pastor or Clerk of Session. For more information or questions concerning mandated reporting please visit <http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/>.

#### *Medical Information*

The Christian Education committee will keep a confidential list of medical conditions (allergies, asthma, etc.) of which leaders should be aware. Parents or legal guardians will be asked for this information during Sunday school registration and on permission forms for off campus or overnight activities.

#### *Off-Campus and Overnight Activities*

Off-campus and overnight activities require permission in advance from a custodial parent or legal guardian. Children may participate in Sunday school, extended session, vacation bible school, or other church ministry activities held outside of the building and in our immediate neighborhood with verbal permission from the custodial parent or legal guardian who is bringing them to church. These activities include playing outside, walks around the neighborhood, or participating in neighborhood activities such as Squirrel Hill clean-up day. Leaders will follow the Two Leader Rule. For overnight activities, a minimum of one adult with clearances of each gender is required, regardless of the number of youth participating, and there will be one adult for every eight youth.

#### *Virtual Gatherings*

Video conferencing with children and youth should be from church accounts rather than personal accounts. All virtual hosts will be instructed on how to use video conferencing as part of their volunteer training if they plan to use video conferencing with their small groups. Parents will be notified and provided links of the conference and give permission for their child or youth to participate. All links for virtual gatherings will be provided privately via email and

will not be posted on a public platform. Virtual gatherings should follow the two-leader rule established in this policy. When a parent or guardian is available in the house of a participating student, their presence in the room with the student can count toward the two-adult rule. If two adults are not possible, the meeting will be recorded and saved to the ministry's Zoom account. When possible, a waiting room and other available security measures within the platform will be employed to ensure internet safety.

#### *One-to-One Interaction with Youth*

We recognize that meeting the emotional needs of youth may occasionally require staff members, leaders, and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff Members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual youth at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed.

#### *Transportation*

Staff members and volunteers may provide transportation for children youth only with permission from a custodial parent or legal guardian. Children and youth should be transported directly to their destination with no unauthorized stops to a nonpublic location. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving youth, unless in an emergency.

#### *Parental Contact*

Parents who leave children or youth in the care of our staff members, leaders and church volunteers during church services, church events or activities will be contacted if their children or youth becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem. Leaders are required to have parental contact information on-hand during times they are supervising youth off campus.

#### *Permission Form and Liability Waiver*

Custodial parents of children and youth will be required to complete Sixth Presbyterian's Children and Youth's Universal Permission Form and Liability waiver for any ministry trips or activities deemed necessary by the Session of Sixth Presbyterian Church or professional staff.

#### *Review*

This policy will be reviewed by the Christian Education Committee on an annual basis. Any changes to the policy will be approved by the session.

#### *Awareness*

This policy will be available to members of the congregation and posted on the Sixth Presbyterian Church website.

#### *Training*

All volunteers and staff who work with children or youth are required to attend an initial training session to orient them to this policy and its reporting requirements. Annual training will be offered to keep volunteers up to-date on any changes to the policy.

#### *Signature Form*

All who work with children and youth on a regular basis will sign a form indicating their commitment to supporting this policy. A record of all who have signed the form will be kept in the church office.