

SAFE CHILD POLICY

Adopted by the Session of Sixth Presbyterian Church on March 20, 2013
last updated June 2024

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.

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 are not required to obtain the FBI fingerprint federal criminal history clearance if their position is unpaid and have been a Pennsylvania resident continuously for the past 10 years. Volunteers must submit in writing a statement affirming residency and that they have not been convicted of an offense under §6344.

All clearances for employees and volunteers are required to be updated every 36 months in accordance with current Pennsylvania child abuse laws. Please see the “How to Obtain Clearances” section at the end of this policy.

Source: <http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/>

SIX-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.

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. Individual Training may also be obtained by meeting with the Director of Christian Education.

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.

MANDATORY REPORTING: All adults – employee or volunteer - who work with children or youth at Sixth are subject to the Pennsylvania State Law for Mandatory Reporting of the suspected abuse of a child under age 18. The report must be made directly by the individual who suspects that abuse has occurred. 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 or by calling 1-800-932-0313. A report must also be made to the Director of Christian Education, Pastor or Clerk of Session.

MANDATORY REPORTER TRAINING: In 2015, PA Law expanded the definition of mandatory reporter to include all “paid or unpaid individuals who, as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity, or service, accepts responsibility for a child” and “An individual supervised or managed by a person listed (including licensed practitioner in any health-related field under the jurisdiction of the Department of State or Department of Health, school employee, clergy, medical examiner, coroner, funeral director, child-care worker, social service agency worker, law enforcement official, emergency medical provider, etc.) who has direct contact with children.” With this broadened definition of mandatory reporting, we must together share responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and youth and for reporting incidents of abuse or neglect.

To this end:

1. All staff and volunteers who work directly with or encounter children and youth through the course of their service are required to complete free Mandatory Reporter Training and present the certificate of completion to the church.
2. This training may be obtained through several approved sources. A complete list of Department of Human Services approved providers can be found on their website <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov> at the link entitled, “Training for Mandated Reporters.”
3. Each person is only required to complete this training once and will only be required to update their test if any of the statutes or standards change, unless updated training is required for their professional licensure or credentialing.

CHILDCARE: Childcare is available at Sixth Church for public worship services on Sunday morning and during Sunday School classes by approved and trained childcare providers.

2. Childcare can be arranged by request for Sixth Church meetings, programs, or events. Childcare must always be coordinated at least one week in advance of the program or event. This can be coordinated through the Director of Christian Education.

OUTSIDE GROUPS: All persons seeking to use any space at Sixth Presbyterian Church (internal or external) must reserve space through the church office and approved by the Session of the church or its designee. Groups or persons are to only utilize the space that has been approved for their use.

While using space at Sixth Presbyterian Church

- A. Unauthorized persons may not observe any classes or programs offered to children or youth.
- B. Unauthorized persons may not be present in a “kid zone” while ministries offered to children are in progress (ie bathrooms reserved for children’s use).

Outside groups must either provide childcare for their events by a qualified individual who fulfills the clearance requirements set forth in Sixth’s child safety policy or by hiring Sixth childcare staff. This must be prearranged through the Director of Christian Education. Children may never be left unattended in any room of the church, nor may they be left with an unapproved childcare provider.

TWO LEADER RULE: Every class, activity, or event for children and youth should 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 meets the safety training and clearance requirements outlined in this policy. 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. The “Rule of Three” shall be observed during all classes, activities, and events. This means that there must always be three people present – either two adults and one child/youth or two children/youth and one adult.

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.

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 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.

COMMUNICATION: Every effort should be made to contact the parent/guardian of a child or youth directly as a conduit for communication with their child. Parents may indicate the ways in which Sixth staff or volunteers can contact their children on the space provided on the Sixth Presbyterian Children and Youth Registration form. Parents may grant staff permission to contact students in grades 6-12 through Social Media channels. Staff may not have communication with any youth in grades 5 or below on social media or text messaging. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to use group pages and messages to communicate as much as possible. When private messages are sent through email, texting or social media, staff and volunteers must maintain the "rule of three" – including at least one other person in the communication – either another youth or an adult.

As many staff and volunteers are members of Sixth Church and engaged in friendships with the families of children as part of our congregational life together, it is understood that volunteers may interact with children and youth outside of the parameters of their role as a volunteer. However, all those interactions must be approved by the child's parent/caregiver. Sixth Church claims no responsibility for the actions of a volunteer who interacts with a child or youth outside of the realm of their volunteer position, supervised by the Staff of Sixth Church.

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.

ROLE OF THE PARENT/GUARDIAN OR CAREGIVERS: During much of our life together as a community, children and youth will be under the direct supervision of their parent or caregiver. We acknowledge that it is the primary responsibility of a parent/guardian or caregiver to ensure the safety of the child or youth in their care while at Sixth Church. As such, parents/guardians and caregivers are required to:

- Provide direct supervision of their children for all worship services and public events (church dinners, picnics, etc.), as well as anytime their family is at church but not participating in a program offered specifically to children and youth (i.e. meetings).
- Accompany children and youth under the age of 12 to Sunday school classes, worship, rest rooms or anywhere in the building.
- Ensure the Sixth Presbyterian Children and Youth Registration is fully completed for child or youth participating in Sixth programs.

ROLE OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH: We recognize that while the burden of responsibility for ensuring the safety of children and youth at Sixth rests with the adults caring for them, the words and actions of children and youth contribute to the safety of our space and ministries – both for individuals and for the larger community. Children and youth participating in Sixth programs – or programs hosted at Sixth by an outside group – are expected to adhere to the following rules and safety guidelines. Failure to do so could result in the temporary or permanent dismissal from Sixth or Sixth sponsored programs.

Behavior to choose:

1. Stay with parent/caregiver or with the class or group in which they are participating at Sixth.
2. Stay in assigned areas.
3. Keep hands and feet to self.
4. Respect the privacy of others – in person, and when using technology or social media.

5. Care for shared and personal space and property.
6. Use kind words.
7. Follow instructions of staff, program leaders, parent/guardian.

Behavior to avoid:

1. Physical altercations.
2. Use of drugs or alcohol.
3. Possession or use of weapons.
4. Sexual Assault (including but not limited to rape, groping/unwanted touch, invading physical privacy of another).
5. Use of language that is threatening or derogatory.
6. Words or actions that express a pattern of bullying.
7. Willful destruction of property.
8. Behavior and attitude of non-participation that compromises the well-being of the group.
9. Leaving the group without permission.

Finally, safety includes the physical and emotional health of all participants. A child or youth will be asked to remain at home if they have a contagious illness or a need for behavioral support that our staff or volunteers are not skilled to adequately address. Sixth staff and volunteers are committed to collaborating with families to establish appropriate support that will allow the safe full inclusion of all students.

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.

HOW TO OBTAIN CLEARANCES:

To complete the Pennsylvania Criminal Record check go to: <https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp> and click on “new history check”. The report is immediately available on-line and can be printed directly from the site. A credit card or debit card is required.

To complete the Pennsylvania Child Abuse History clearance go to: The Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance can be submitted and paid for online through the Child Welfare Information Solution (CWIS) self-service portal, www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis.

To complete the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Background Check go to: The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services is utilizing the vendor IDEMIA to process fingerprint-based FBI criminal background checks. The fingerprint -based background check is a

multiple step process. For more information and to begin the registration process, go to www.identogo.com and click on the Digital Fingerprinting tab. You will be asked to enter a service code to begin your registration. The service code for paid child care providers is 1KG738. You will then register online and schedule an appointment at a fingerprinting location to complete the process. For additional help contact the IndentGo at 855-845-7434