

The Presbyterian Church in Burlington Safe Child Program

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them. -Mark 10: 13-16 (NRSV)

Children are a gift from God, made in God's image. Church leaders of children's and youth programs are responsible for providing examples of God's loving care to God's children. Leaders' Christian behavior, when caring for children and youth, should reflect the values and expectations of the church community. All leaders must follow the rules and guidelines of the church at all events, thereby providing appropriate supervision of children and youth.

Purpose of the Safe Child Program

The Safe Child Program's goal is to ensure that The Presbyterian Church in Burlington provides a safe place for all children and youth to be nurtured in Christian faith.

The Safe Child Program also provides guidance on how to respond to an allegation of child abuse, being sensitive to the needs of the child and the accused in a manner befitting a Christian community.

Responsibilities

- The ultimate responsibility for the Safe Child Program resides with the Session. Session will annually review and approve all adults who will work with children and youth. The official list of approved adults is kept as part of the Session minutes.
- The Christian Education Committee will review the functioning and effectiveness of the Safe Child Program annually, including the CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) policy, and will recommend changes to Session.
- Teachers and others from the congregation have the right and obligation to request changes or clarifications in specific aspects of the Safe Child Program. Requests should be made to the CE Committee.
- The CE Committee will inform the congregation about the Safe Child Program in the annual report.
- The C.E. Committee will collect registration forms for every child at the beginning of each school year and on new attendees as deemed appropriate. The form will ask

parents to give The Presbyterian Church in Burlington permission to teach their children in the ways of Christian living. The information obtained will include but not be limited to: allergies, date of birth, school grade level, health concerns, behavioral issues, and other information the parents would like the teachers to know. Parents will be informed of our Safe Child Policy and asked how they would like to receive a copy of it. The collected registration forms will be kept in the office.

- The C.E. Committee will conduct Safe Child Program training performed by properly qualified people and assure that feedback on its contents is welcome from the participants. The C.E. Committee will maintain a list of all participants having completed training along with signed and dated forms from the participants attesting that they have read, understood, and will abide by the Safe Child Program.
- It is recommended that the pastor give an annual sermon on the importance of children and our responsibility to protect them from harm.

Screening

Screening must be completed for paid staff and volunteers working with children and youth.

Screening Committee

A Screening Committee will carefully select adults to work with children and youth and maintain all records in a confidential manner. The committee is a subcommittee of the CE Committee which monitors the ongoing screening process and writes the church's CORI policy. Members of the Screening Committee will be approved by Session annually and their names will be recorded in the Session minutes. The Screening Committee will include a representative from C.E., the Cori Administrator, and a third member. Once the Screening Committee has screened a candidate, the candidate's name will be forwarded to the Session for approval.

The following positions in the church will be subject to the screening policies and procedures:

1. Minister
2. Student minister
3. Choir Director (if responsible for leading a children's or youth choir)
4. Church schoolteachers and assistants
5. Youth group leaders
6. Nursery volunteers
7. Children's or youth music leaders
8. Drivers of children or youth
9. Others as deemed appropriate

Screening includes the following components:

1. Review of an application form to work with children (completed forms will be kept in the church office)
2. A personal interview
3. Reference checks
4. A criminal records check (CORI)
5. In addition, paid staff working with children will undergo a background check including national criminal records check and sex offender registry. This screening will be the responsibility of the Personnel Committee.
6. Determination that the candidate has been an active participant in our congregation for at minimum six months

Exceptions to this screening policy may be made at the discretion of Session or CE to cover short-term involvement in children's activities. In these cases, new volunteers will be paired with a fully screened/approved adult.

CORI Policy

Refusal to undergo a CORI check (or, if required, a background check) will automatically disqualify a person from working with children or youth, but NOT from participating in any other church activity.

The Church's CORI Administrator will process CORIs and background checks. Only the CORI administrator will see the CORI results. In the event of results showing criminal history, the applicant will be told immediately. If the applicant is a paid employee, the CORI Administrator will inform the Personnel Chair. The applicant will be given a copy of the church's CORI policy, a copy of the report(s) of criminal history and the source of same. They will be given the opportunity to dispute the accuracy of the reports. Results of CORI or background checks that are considered by the applicant to be in error will be promptly resubmitted.

The CORI Administrator will keep a list of the CORI applicants with the date the results were received, but will shred any papers which include Social Security Numbers or other sensitive personal information.

CORIs and background checks will be repeated **at least every three years**.

Automatic Disqualification of an Applicant (Safe Child Policy)

The following are the kinds of documented criminal **convictions** that would automatically disqualify a person from working with children or youth in the church:

- Any crime in which a child was a victim
- Any crime in which violence was threatened or perpetrated against another human
- Any crime in which there was public exposure

- Any crime involving sexual misconduct
- Any crime involving physical abuse or neglect
- Any crime in which a firearm or other potentially lethal weapon was involved

DUIs/DWIs and transporting children

A conviction for driving under the influence or while intoxicated with alcohol or drugs disqualifies a church volunteer from transporting children. If the person has applied to work with children and there are no other criminal convictions, they may work with children but may not transport them.

Requalification as a driver requires a clean CORI for the five preceding years and evidence of graduation from an alcohol or substance abuse treatment program.

Training

Adults who work with children or youth will be required to participate in Safe Child Program training. The Screening Committee, Response Team, CE Committee and Session will also be trained. All such leaders should undergo training at least **every three years**. Other interested people may take the training as they desire. All who attend training will sign a form stating they have read the Safe Child Program, understand it, and will abide by it.

Training should coincide with officer training or the start of the church school year.

Training should include but is not limited to:

1. An overview of the Safe Child Program with its goals and procedures
2. Guidance for common situations involving child contact
3. How to recognize a case of child abuse or neglect, within or outside the church
4. Responsibilities of mandated reporters
5. How to respond to an alleged case of child abuse or neglect
6. Support that all who work with children or youth may enlist or expect
7. Dealing with visiting adults in classes
8. Standards of behavior between adults and children and youth

Classroom teachers will review the **Children's Code of Conduct** (Appendix B) with their classes annually.

Safe Child Guidance for Working with Children

Personal Conduct

It is expected that adults and youth aides will conduct themselves in a loving Christian manner. Teachers, chaperones, and youth aides shall not drink alcohol, smoke or use recreational drugs when in charge of children or youth.

Two Leader Rule

Two adults or one adult and a youth aide will be present for all group activities, both in person and virtually, involving children or youth. At least one adult must be screened and trained. The CE committee has the responsibility of annually finding teachers and assistants for each class, as well as substitute teachers in sufficient number to maintain the "two leader rule." The CE committee will provide teachers with contact information for the current list of teachers, assistants and substitute teachers, and the names of anyone willing to leave the sanctuary to be a second leader in a class at the last minute. Teachers will coordinate coverage with each other and the assistants to maintain the two leader rule. Any activity or class lacking two leaders should be cancelled.

Discipline

Class order will be kept by discipline that is fair and sensitive to the group or child. No child will be disciplined in a physically or verbally abusive manner. If the situation warrants, a disruptive child's parents may be contacted for help.

Bathroom Use

If at all possible children should conduct bathroom activities by themselves. If bathroom activities require assistance, two leaders can accompany a single child or group of children. If two accompanying leaders are not possible, one will be acceptable if that leader informs the other leader prior to the trip.

Diapering should be performed in the presence of two leaders.

Food

No food will be given to any child without the prior permission of that child's parents due to unknown food allergies the child may have.

Pickup

At the conclusion of a class or event each child in grade two or younger is to be released only to that child's own parent or to a previously designated alternate adult.

Permission Slips

Parents, prior to any overnight or off-site activity in which the parents are not present, will fill out permission slips. The form will include who is in charge of the group, the purpose of the activity, where they are going, the length of the activity and the expected return time.

Emergency contact information will be included along with information such as allergies, medications, etc. Permission slips will be kept on file.

In the event of retreats or other off-site activities in which children would be under the care of non-screened people, at least one screened person should be present in all activities.

Photo Waiver

Photos/videos of children/youth shall not be posted on social media or websites without written consent of youth and parent/guardian. Children shall not be identified by name on social media or websites.

Transportation

Anyone transporting children or youths must meet the following criteria:

1. Possesses a valid driver's license
2. Meets requirements of the state law for driving others
3. Has adequate car insurance (adequate means the state mandated minimum)
4. Those with a history of DUI/DWI must have re-qualified per screening criteria (page 4)

Response Plan

Introduction

We believe it is the church's responsibility to ensure the children of the church are cared for in a safe manner. Everyone associated with the church and particularly those who work with children or youth should do all they can to prevent abuse or neglect, but the church needs to be prepared to respond if a case should occur. Reporting and response procedures are critical components of our Safe Child Program.

The Presbyterian Church in Burlington's Response Plan is based upon the following underlying principles:

- All allegations are to be taken seriously and must be made in writing.
- Situations must be handled quickly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- Respect must be shown for alleged victims and alleged abusers. Pastoral care should be made available to all.
- The alleged victim should not be held responsible.
- Full cooperation must be given to civil and insurance authorities if appropriate.

Reporting Responsibilities

Any adult who interacts with children or youth is obligated to report any alleged incident of abuse or neglect. According to Massachusetts law, "clergy members, including ordained or licensed leaders of any church or religious body, persons performing official duties on behalf of a church or religious body, or persons employed by a religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel a child on a regular basis..." are defined as mandated reporters.

In summary, all adults who are acting in the name of the church, or who are responsible for the governance of the church, are mandated reporters.

Reportable Incident

The determination of what constitutes a reportable incident will be made based upon information provided in training. Once someone believes that an incident of abuse or neglect has occurred, he/she should report it to the Response Team or the DCF. The appropriate form (**Appendix A**) must be completed and submitted to any member of the Response Team by the accuser or a representative of the alleged victim.

Any individual, at any time, may report an incident directly to DCF or to the Response Team.

Guidelines for the Response Team

If a fully completed written report (**Appendix A**) is received by the Response Team, its default action should be to forward it to DCF and the insurance company unless the Response Team determines it is not a reportable incident. If DCF subsequently screens out the report or fails to follow up on the allegation in a timely manner, then the Response Team must follow up and make recommendations for actions.

The Response Team shall be appointed by Session and shall be comprised of three members from the following: Session, Deacons, Trustees and the general congregation. There shall be at least one male and one female on the Response Team. In addition, one person will be designated as an alternate. In the event the accused is a member of the Response Team, the alternate will replace the accused. In the event a conflict of interest or other non-routine situation occurs involving a team member, the alternate will take the place of that member.

Members of the Response Team will serve for one year, and on transition, at least one experienced member will continue on the committee for the following year. An exception is if the Response Team has an ongoing allegation in progress.

Duties of the Response Team

The Response Team's formal proceedings will include but not be limited to the following:

1. Meet within 24 hours after receiving a written Report of Unusual Occurrence (**Appendix A**). This meeting may be held by telephone conference.
2. If applicable, inform civil authorities and the insurance company. The Response Team must first inform the insurance company if a report is being referred to DCF and then inform the accused that the report is being filed with authorities.
3. Inform the minister that the Response Team has received a report and identify the individuals and circumstances involved.
4. Treat both the accused and the alleged victim with dignity and support.
5. The accused person should be automatically relieved of duties temporarily or removed from class participation until a resolution is found.
6. Inform all parties that pastoral counseling is available.

7. Make sure that the accused and accuser are advised regarding steps for instituting formal PC(USA) disciplinary processes.
8. The Response Team determines a timeline for action(s) and monitors implementation of actions.
9. If DCF decides to screen out the incident or the Response Team deems the incident is not reportable, then the Response Team will recommend action to the Session.
10. Document all activities and deliberations.

Response Team Consultations

The Response Team may confer with a pre-approved outside consultants, the DCF, or the insurance company lawyers for advice on actions. Confidentiality must be maintained when conferring with outside consultants. The insurance contact is our agent **Sharon Cross (800-554-2642)**, scross@churchmutual.com, or the claims department of Church Mutual (844-322-4662).

Possible actions of Response Team are listed, but are not limited to these

The Response Team may have several options to recommend as action:

- Inform the insurance company.
- Inform DCF.
- Inform the police.
- Broker a mutually acceptable resolution for incidents clearly not reportable to DCF.
- Refer a minister to Presbytery for disciplinary action via the Stated Clerk of Presbytery.
- Refer a church member to the Session Moderator for disciplinary action.
- Recommend counseling or pastoral care to all parties involved.
- Temporarily remove a person from a role involving child contact. Permanent removal may be recommended to Session.
- Temporarily remove a child or youth from a class or other activity.
- Permanent removal may be recommended to Session.

Response team record keeping

The Response Team will keep all records confidential, including detailed records of its actions and minutes of its deliberations and its conversations with the accuser, accused and other parties involved. No discussion of its activities shall be shared with anyone outside of the Response Team except the minister, nor shall anyone be provided with any of its records absent an order of the Court or appropriate civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Closed files shall be marked "Confidential" and be under the supervision of the Session.

Designated Church Spokesperson

The Minister shall be designated to speak to the press, community, or congregation if any allegations are made public. The Minister would make use of a prepared statement. It would stress that the church has a formal Safe Child Program with policies and procedures to cover

allegations of child abuse and neglect, and that the program is in place and the church is following the procedures. If the Minister is unable to be the spokesperson, then the responsibility falls to the Clerk of Session.

Church Governing Body

In the church, judicial responses to alleged abuse are relegated to the Session (in the case of church members) and the Presbytery (in the case of ministers), according to the Rules of Discipline in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II (The Book of Order). The Response Team should consult with the Session Moderator in the case of church members, and with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery in the case of ministers.

The Response Team can also pursue actions through documented procedures in the Book of Order, through the Clerk of Session or through the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

Response will vary according to the status of the accused. Church members and ministers are subject to inquiry and discipline under the Book of Order. The minister serving congregations is subject to oversight by the Presbytery.

3. Please give other information which you think might be helpful in establishing the cause of the alleged incident and/or the person responsible for it. Please provide the name(s) of the alleged perpetrator(s).

4. What action has been taken thus far by those involved?

Signature of Reporter _____ Date _____

Signature of Receiver _____ Date _____

5. Finding of the Response Team:

6. Action(s) recommended:

7. Follow up monitoring to ensure actions completed

Children's Code of Conduct

I am a child of God who loves and cares for me. I will treat others the way I would like to be treated.

I will listen quietly to what others have to say.

I will tell someone who cares about me if I am threatened or afraid.

I will share.

I will use church and other peoples' property carefully.

I will clean up my own mess.

I will keep my arms and legs to myself.

I will respect others' feelings and apologize if I hurt them.



Presbyterian Church in Burlington, MA