

First Presbyterian Church of Petaluma's
Children and Youth Safety Policies and Procedures for Volunteers
Frequently Asked Questions - 2008

Why is the church going through all this trouble?

The heart-breaking stories of the abuse of children and youth in schools, youth organizations and even in churches are often in the newspapers and television news. It should be emphasized that our concern is prevention; we are not currently aware of any suspected misconduct.

Furthermore, our church adopted the following bylaw to our church constitution:

As a faith community, First Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe and secure place where all children, youth and adults are nurtured and protected as they explore and grow in their faith in God. Nurture and protection thrive in a supportive community of acceptance, openness and trust. Abuse and harassment are contrary to Christian community. Therefore, First Presbyterian Church will maintain policies and procedures that will direct the reporting, investigation and intervention for issues of child abuse, harassment and sexual harassment. The Session will review these procedures annually to see that policies correspond to changes in both the civil law and the congregational organization.

What is asked of volunteers who work with children or youth?

- Adult and Youth Volunteers must read our Children and Youth Safety Policies and Procedures and sign the related Acknowledgement Form.
- Adult and Youth Volunteers who wish to work with children/youth must complete a volunteer application (available in the office or online).
- Adult and Youth Volunteers must provide three references.
- Adult Volunteers must agree to FPC performing a violent criminal/sexual misconduct record check (consent to be obtained on volunteer application).

Volunteers must work in pairs when working with children and youth according to policy guidelines.

Who do these policies apply to?

All volunteers who wish to work with children or youth, or who work on the campus when children or youth are present.

Why don't these policies apply to paid church staff?

The church has even more stringent policies and procedures for reference and background checks of all current and new staff.

How can I get these documents and forms?

All the forms and documents mentioned above are available in the church office and online. Go to our Forms Page: <http://www.petalumafirst.com/resources/forms.shtml>

When will the church implement these policies?

Implementation of our new policies and procedures began September 1, 2005.

What are the references and background checks on adult volunteers looking for?

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We are looking for any violent criminal violation, sexual misconduct and driving convictions
Any other information that is discovered during the process will not be recorded or
communicated to anyone.

What are the references on youth volunteers looking for?
Indications that a youth should not be allowed to volunteer to work with children and youth.

Who will have access to the information that comes from the references and background checks?

FPC's Church Office Coordinator will make all required reference and background checks.
The Coordinator will then notify the responsible elder or staff member in writing whether it is
permissible to use the volunteer or not. The Coordinator will also document all pertinent
check results in a secure database. Only the Pastor, the Office Coordinator, and the
Personnel Committee Chair will have access to this information.

What will be done if a prospective volunteer has a violation (a "positive check")?

That volunteer will not be allowed to work with children or youth or to work in any part of the
church campus where children are present. The Pastor and Personnel Committee Chair will
be informed of a positive check(s). Together, the Pastor and PC Chair will communicate the
findings to the applicant in a meeting and allow the applicant the opportunity to provide
additional information.

Are there other procedures to protect children and youth besides reference and background checks?

Yes. Volunteers must work in pairs when working with children and/or youth according to
policy guidelines. The policies and procedures provide guidelines to ensure safety for
children, youth and volunteers.

What should someone do if they suspect a volunteer has been involved in sexual misconduct?

Any incident of **suspected sexual abuse of a minor**, by a person covered by this policy is a
criminal offense and should be IMMEDIATELY reported to Child Protective Services, local
law enforcement, and/or the district attorney. Suspected (non-criminal) **sexual misconduct**
should be reported immediately to the pastor or chair of the Personnel Committee. The first
person to learn of alleged sexual misconduct must take the allegations seriously and
confidentially. This person shall complete the Report of Suspected Sexual Misconduct. The
report shall immediately be delivered to and called to the attention of the clerk of session or
the Stated Clerk of the presbytery.

Who is responsible to ensure that all church ministries are following these policies and procedures?

Sitting Session Elders and Church staff are jointly responsible for implementing these
policies. The Personnel Committee will periodically review compliance with this policy and
take action to assure compliance. Results of this review will be reported to Session annually.