

Children and Youth Safety Policy Overview
Memorial Presbyterian Church, St. Augustine, Florida

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Preface

Memorial Presbyterian Church takes seriously our scriptural and historical mandates to welcome and educate God's children. We recall that Jesus proclaimed, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:14). We thank all those who wish to aid our church and serve God in this important mandate. A significant part of the educational process is providing a safe place. We work hard to provide an environment for spiritual growth in a context of healthy, positive relationships with adults. We take seriously our responsibility to shield our students from emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Equally, we desire to protect our adults from accusations of abuse and to limit the exposure of the church to legal risk and liability.

When working with children and youth we need to be clear in thought, word and deed. Thus, creating a safe space for children and adults to gather for education and fellowship is about setting boundaries. Please do not regard these boundaries as restrictions. The boundaries are put in place to create freedom from fear and concern for our safety.

Memorial Presbyterian Church recognizes and appreciates the importance of our volunteer workers and we welcome all such participation in the work and ministry here at Memorial. In order to be good stewards, however, we must balance this desire with the need to ensure the safety of our children and youth both in the work of our volunteers and our staff.

The following document will explain the classifications of adult involvement with children and youth at Memorial Presbyterian Church, and lay the ground rules for appropriate behavior and situations in our educational life.

Part of building the body of Christ and educating that body is about creating and maintaining a safe place to gather in Christ's name.

1.0 In order to work with children and youth at Memorial Presbyterian Church you shall adhere to the following policies and procedures:

1.1 Paid Employees:

- A. Age 18 and Over: See MPC Employee Handbook
- B. Under Age 18: See MPC Employee Handbook

1.2 Volunteers: There are three categories of volunteers at Memorial with differing volunteer positions and levels of relationship with children and youth:

- A. Category A Volunteers are Youth Volunteers who have completed 6th grade and are under the age of 18 and are individuals volunteering in situations where there will be at least one adult volunteer present at all times. Category A Volunteers will not only abide by this policy, but are protected by the policy as well.
- B. Category B Volunteers are individuals volunteering in situations where there will be at least two or more volunteers present in the company of children or youth at all times, such as Youth Sunday School Teachers, Vacation Bible School volunteers, nursery volunteers and others.
- C. Category C Volunteers are individuals volunteering in a position that may include the following situations: Any overnight activity with children or youth (i.e. chaperoning trips, conferences or retreats), any potential one-on-one activity with a child (e.g. counseling, tutoring), and a position that involves driving or transporting children or youth. This includes, youth group leaders, confirmation teachers and parent chaperones.

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1.3 All Volunteers and Memorial Presbyterian Church exist in a mutual at-will relationship. If at any time either party deems the relationship unsafe, unhealthy or unnecessary, a meeting may be scheduled with a program director. After the meeting, the relationship can be terminated by either party.

1.4 Memorial Presbyterian Church will adhere to the following staff/volunteer to child ratio:

Age of Child	On Campus Ratio Staff/Volunteer: Child	Off Campus Ratio Staff/Volunteer: Child
Birth to Age 1	1:4	N/A
Age 2 – K	1:8	1:6
1 st – 5 th Grade	1:8	1:6
6 th – 12 th Grade	1:10	1:8

2.0 Rules for conducting safe activity for children and youth during onsite activities.

2.1 Children and youth activities and classes shall take place in rooms that have windows. If a room does not have a window in the door, the door shall be left open.

2.2 Classroom doors without a window shall be locked while the room is occupied.

2.3 Children enrolled in Presbyterian Day School and youth ministries programs shall have either two adults present per group or classroom, or one adult if the door has a glass opening. If not, the door shall remain open. Category A or B volunteers shall never be alone with children or youth.

2.4 Volunteers shall not intentionally spend time one-on-one with children or youth in a private setting. In the event that a child or youth is left with one volunteer, that child or youth and volunteer shall move to a public place until others arrive or until child or youth is picked up. By public place, this policy means an area both visibly and audibly open to the public.

2.5 Volunteers supervising children needing to use the restroom shall use the following procedures:

- A. Send pairs of children of the same gender to use the restroom in the case of children in grades 1 through 5.
- B. If is not possible or with younger children and the door shall be left open.

3.0 Rules for conducting safe activity for children and youth during offsite activities.

3.1 In the case of Memorial children and youth participating in an activity organized by an outside church or group, we shall abide by the safety policy of the organizing group so long as it is consistent with the guiding principles of this policy.

3.2 In the case where supervision of our children and youth cannot abide by this policy, one of the following steps shall be taken to ensure the safety of Memorial children and youth.

- A. In a foreseen event, the appropriate ministry team shall approve of lodging and supervision that will occur during the activity and inform the parents.

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B. In an unforeseen event, program staff shall inform parents of all participants affected by circumstances that did not allow for full compliance with this policy.

3.3 Memorial Presbyterian Church will adhere to the following staff/volunteer to child ratio. See paragraph 1.4

4.0 Transportation of children or youth for off-site church activities.

4.1 Any vehicle driven by an adult volunteer travelling with children or youth during church activities shall have a minimum of two children or youth.

4.2 Use of vehicles owned by staff, parents, guardians or volunteers, or vehicles rented for the purpose of transporting children or youth during church activities shall abide by the following:

- A. The volunteer driver of the vehicle shall be in compliance with section 1 of this policy.
- B. The driver shall be age 21 or older if driving their own vehicle. If driving a church-rented vehicle, the driver shall be at least age 25.

4.3 Use of any passenger vehicle with legal occupancy of more than 8 persons shall abide by the policy found in section 4.2 of this policy, as well as these additional qualifications:

- A. The driver shall have successfully completed a vehicle and driving orientation presented by MPC's Maintenance Supervisor.
- B. The driver shall pass a driver license background check—see Business Administrator.

4.4 Rental buses/charter buses.

A. In the event the church charters a vehicle and driver, the driver shall not be considered as an adult volunteer of Memorial Presbyterian Church.

5.0 Risk management and reporting of accidents and injuries resulting from accidents.

5.1 While this policy exists to create a safe environment for children and youth, the staff of Memorial Presbyterian Church recognizes that accidents do occur. In the event of an accident, the following procedures shall be followed:

- A. A written Accident/Incident Report shall be completed for an accident that occurs while participating in a church activity.
- B. The Accident/Incident Report shall be given to the staff person in charge of that ministry, who shall then provide it to the Church Business Administrator and to the Senior Pastor. These three shall review the report and decide the appropriate response to the accident, including the notification of the church's insurance carrier, if deemed necessary.

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6.0 Risk management and reporting of incidents.

6.1 How To Report Suspicion Of Child Abuse Or Neglect

If anyone has reason to suspect a child has been or is being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, the following policies and procedures shall be followed:

- A. By law, the person suspecting abuse shall immediately notify the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) by either calling 1-800-962-2873 or reporting it online at <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>. Failure to report suspected child abuse may result in a third-degree felony as well as financial penalties imposed by the State of Florida. Additionally, MPC takes the prevention of child abuse very seriously and if found guilty by the State of Florida for not reporting it, this could result in the termination of your employment with MPC.
- B. Within 24 hours of reporting your concerns to the state, you are required to notify the Pastor, Business Administrator or Presbyterian Day School Director and fill out an incident report.
- C. This information will be held in strict confidence and will be forwarded to our designated response team to fully investigate the reported incident.

6.2 In the event that the Department of Child and Family Services has been called, the Accident/Incident Report and all other relevant documentation shall be secured in the Business Administrator's office.

6.3 Memorial Presbyterian Church shall rely on the expertise of the investigators of the Department of Child and Family Services.

6.4 Memorial Presbyterian Church, in order to balance the rights of the victim and the accused, shall determine, in consultation with the Business Administrator, the Senior Pastor, the Chair of the Personnel Ministry and one other pastor, whether it is necessary to suspend the accused person pending the resolution of the investigation.

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7.0 Training

Training for Volunteers Serving Children & Youth

1. Letter of Introduction from The Christian Education Ministry.
2. Introduction
 - a) Why the concern?
 - b) What are we doing?
3. Definition and signs of abuse
 - a) Sexual
 - b) Physical
 - c) Emotional
4. How to report suspected abuse
5. Referral for more information
 - a) Staff
 - b) Policy

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Dear Volunteer,

Memorial Presbyterian Church is blessed with the gift of many children and youth. The Mission of the Church is to enable persons of all ages to be inspired by the Word of God to learn and grow in Christian faith and traditions, participate in the community of faith and respond to God's love as demonstrated in Jesus Christ by modeling His life and working towards His Kingdom in the world.

It is through the commitment and efforts of you and others like you that Memorial Presbyterian Church is able to offer a ministry of love aimed at accomplishing this mission. An effective ministry to children requires a safe environment in which learning and spiritual growth can occur. Children have the right to know that they can participate in church activities without fear of emotional harm at the hands of teachers, leaders and church volunteers to whom they have been entrusted. Additionally, parents are able to participate freely in ministries that address their needs when they know that their children are being well cared for.

Thank you for your commitment to nurture others in Jesus Christ and for your willingness to take the first step to insure a safe environment by reading this handbook.

As Co-Workers in Christ
The Christian Education Ministry

**The word "child" or "children" applies to any person under the age of eighteen (18).

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Why must our church be concerned with child abuse?

Child abuse is widespread. Most child abuse takes place in the context of an ongoing relationship. Less than 20% of child abuse is committed by a stranger to the child. Child abuse is often committed by an adult who misuses his or her authority over children.

Churches and church-affiliated institutions have not been immune to such tragedies and, in fact, churches have become more vulnerable as service organizations in the public sector have implemented contact policies and are screening their volunteers more carefully. For centuries the church has been a safe place, a sanctuary, a place of healing. Churches are traditionally a community of trust and generally have been uneducated about the facts of child abuse. Without the safeguards of screening procedures and guidelines for supervision, churches are ripe for victimization. Our church is joining the growing number of churches who have implemented policies and procedures for the education of staff, members and volunteers as to the problem of child abuse, as well as for the prevention of child abuse in our church and for the protection of our congregation.

When sexual abuse takes place within the church, the fallout can be considerable. A child's life is forever altered, families are sometimes shattered and the congregation sometimes becomes disillusioned. In addition to broken lives, the ministry of the church frequently suffers and the costs due to litigation often impose a severe burden on the finances of the church.

As if the concerns raised above were not enough, there are some people who wrongfully raise allegations of child abuse against the church. These false allegations may be raised for vengeful or financial reasons. For this reason, it is wise for a church to educate its volunteers and staff in how to maintain a safe environment for its children. By doing so, the church will reduce its risk of falling victim to false allegations of child abuse.

What is Memorial Presbyterian Church doing about the problem?

Memorial Presbyterian Church has developed a set of guidelines which seeks to insure a safe environment for children. Through screening, supervision and the education of its staff and volunteers in the nursery, church school, preschool, youth groups and other church ministries, we hope to prevent the risk of child abuse from every taking place in our midst.

Child sexual abuse is any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual gratification of another person. It may be violent or non-violent, touching or non-touching.

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Types of sexual abuse that involve touching include:

- fondling
- oral, genital and/or anal penetration
- intercourse

Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:

- verbal comments of a sexual nature
- pornographic videos, photographs or literature
- obscene telephone calls
- exhibitionism
- allowing children to witness sexual activity

What are some of the signs that a child may exhibit if he or she is being sexually abused?

Some physical signs:

- lacerations or bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain or injury to the private areas
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

Some behavioral signs:

- anxiety when approaching the locations where the abuse occurs
- nervous or hostile behavior towards adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” of sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities or friends

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Some verbal signs:

- “I don’t like (a particular individual)
- “(An individual) does things to me when we’re alone
- “I don’t like to be alone with (a particular individual)
- “(A particular individual) touched me

What is child physical abuse?

Physical abuse is any physical contact against a child with intent to cause injury. It includes:

- punching
- shoving
- beating
- kicking
- biting
- burning
- or otherwise physically harming a child

What is child emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse is often the most difficult form of abuse to identify. It can include:

- scapegoat
- belittling
- rejecting
- confinement
- yelling

What should I do if I suspect an incident of abuse?

If a child first comes to you, be sure to take him/her seriously. Do not deny the problem. Stay calm and listen. Give emotional support by reminding him/her that he/she is not at fault for what another person has done and that he/she was right in telling you about the problem.

If you notice or suspect abuse, report the incident to a church staff member immediately. The church staff member with your assistance will complete an Incident Report Form.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions or concerns about this training or our children and youth safety procedures, please feel free to speak to the Director of Children & Youth Ministry or the Presbyterian Day School Director.

The Memorial Presbyterian Church Child and Youth Safety Policy is available to anyone on request from the Church office.