

Protection Policy for the First Presbyterian Church of Westminster Youth Ministry

Adult Volunteer Form

This policy is applicable to all individuals having direct contact with the youth of First Presbyterian Church including but not limited to staff, volunteers, chaperones, drivers and parents of FPC youth and friends. All volunteers must complete a yearly Volunteer Application form which is subject to review and approval. When necessary for specific responsibilities or overnight events, a volunteer may be requested to submit to a background check.

Guidelines

Adults involved in First Presbyterian Church youth ministry activities and events must assume the full burden for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate physical boundaries in all youth ministry relationships.

- **Two-Adult Rule** – Two or more adults are to be present during any First Presbyterian Church sponsored youth activity. If one-on-one interactions between adults and youth are unavoidable or absolutely necessary, the interaction should occur in an area that is visible to others and with the knowledge of another adult. No youth assistants will have the sole responsibility for, or be alone with, any youth. Where application of this rule is not possible or practical (ie. Emergencies, or small events with the paid youth or church staff and parental permission) a “roaming adult” should be utilized. Youth activities that cannot meet requirements of the **two-adult rule**, will be cancelled.
- **Proportional Adult Coverage/Supervision** – It is recommended that there be a minimum of 1 adult per 10 youth for high school level activities, 1 adult per 7 youth for middle school age activities. Per the two-adult rule, no activity will have less than two adults, preferably one male and one female if mixed gender youth are participating.
- **Off-site Activities** – It is preferable that one or more of the accompanying adults be parents/guardians of participants.

Transport

All youth must ride in vehicles driven by authorized adults who must:

- Be at least 25 years old
- Have a valid driver’s license, qualified for the vehicle being operated
- Complete the Volunteer Driver Application form for personally owned vehicle and/or rental vehicles and provide requested proof of insurance documentation.
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a youth other than his/her/their own child. Therefore, no fewer than three persons, one of them an adult, should occupy a vehicle traveling to/from an activity.
- Ensure vehicles are not filled beyond capacity for their use, that seat belts are always secured and that occupants behave.
- Must understand emergency contact procedures and maintain contact with the person in charge (e.g. cell phone)
- Obey all traffic laws for the state driven in and practice safe driving habits.

The exception to this would be small, local activities where youth with driver’s licenses choose to drive themselves to the activity.

Overnight Events

- Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is a clean, safe environment provided for sleeping, showering, bathing, dressing and all other aspects of being away for a period of time. Adults must always respect the privacy of youth and each other. Likewise, youth must respect the privacy of adults and each other.
- When the youth group includes both males and females, and stays overnight, both male and female adults must be present. (This also applies to overnight stays at First Presbyterian Church).
- Only First Presbyterian Church youth ministry participants, youth and adults, are allowed to stay in the same accommodations. However, during mission trips or retreats, space may be shared with participants from other churches.
- Sleeping areas and access to bathrooms facilities should be segregated between males and females. Every sleeping unit, no matter the type, should have either two adults of the same gender as the youth, or no adults assigned to it. In the rarest of cases when only one adult is available, the sleeping unit must have at least two youth of the same gender as the adult. Adults are not allowed to share a bed with a youth unless it is their own child. If absolutely necessary, beds may be shared by youth of the same gender. If separate bathroom facilities are not available, times for male and female and youth/adults use should be scheduled and posted.
- When one room is used for sleeping, youth and adults or the opposite gender will sleep an appropriate distance apart as determined by the adult in charge.
- Both youth and adults shall wear appropriate sleeping apparel.
- In booking hotel rooms, reservation should be made, if possible, with all rooms on the same floor or location in the hotel. Adjacent rooms allow for enhanced supervision and safety and will be requested if possible.
- No youth(s) should be allowed to leave the premises without authorized and appropriate adult supervision.
- Curfews must be established and adhered to by all participants.

Exceptional Situations

- Only under the rarest and most unusual circumstances should an adult be alone in a car, room, or other accommodation with a youth. This might include a case where a youth is ill or in a true medical emergency. In this case, the adult should make every effort to enlist the help of another youth or adult to be present and assist. However, the welfare of the youth takes precedence and whatever action is necessary and appropriate must be taken.
- If there is a unique need for an adult to talk with a youth in private, the adult should choose a quiet place that is in plain, public view. Examples of this may include open areas around the church (courtyards or hotel lobbies if on a trip), short walks down a sidewalk, a restaurant or other location where people are present in the area. Prior to this, whenever possible, the adult leader should be notified and agree with the need for a private talk. Parents of the youth should be notified as well for transparency and to avoid any allegation or accusation of inappropriate conduct.

Reporting

- Any person, adult or youth, must be ready to safeguard and protect the trust and safety of children and youth. Anyone who has “reason to believe” or evidence that a child/youth is a victim of abuse or neglect has a duty to report. This duty to report is not limited to events or activities at or sponsored by First Presbyterian Church, or under the supervision of First Presbyterian Church. A failure to report can be considered a criminal offense and potentially subject to civil liability.

- First Presbyterian Church understands that appropriate government agencies must respond and investigate reports of abuse/neglect of a child/youth. First Presbyterian Church will at all times fully cooperate with such governmental agencies, and in no way attempt to interfere or obstruct such agencies or their investigations.
- If anyone is unsure whether an incident or condition should be reported, they should feel free to discuss the circumstances with the Youth Director or Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. If an incident or event is reported directly to a governmental agency, please notify the youth leader and/or Pastor as soon as possible after the report.

Counseling

Youth Ministry volunteers are not professional counselors.

This occasionally poses a significant boundary issue when working with young people. As they begin to trust the Youth Ministry staff they may begin to confide in them. Problems arise when a young person confides in a volunteer, expecting them to maintain confidentiality. Unfortunately, not all counseling issues can remain confidential. Youth Ministry volunteers must report immediately to the Youth Director if:

- A young person is being sexually abused.
- A young person is threatening to hurt him/herself (suicide, cutting, etc.).
- A young person is threatening to hurt someone else (homicide, revenge, etc.).
- A young person reveals a personal crisis/endangerment (pregnancy, drug abuse additions, criminal activity, etc.).

If any of these situations arise, the Youth Director will take the appropriate course of action, including the consulting of authorities and /or parents or pursuing professional counseling options. The Youth Director may include the Pastor who is available to give counsel and guidance on any issues or concerns that arise. Adult volunteers should always keep in mind the Two-Adult Rule.

Because we are dealing with minors, we will use discretion as to who will be involved in various issues. We desire to build trust with our young people, however, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. For this reason, every adult involved with the Youth Ministry of First Presbyterian must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior. All adults must diligently avoid any conduct that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no actual misconduct takes place.

Appropriate Displays of Affection

Use of appropriate physical contact in a public setting to show support, encouragement and healthy affection toward youth who are receptive to this form of emotional expression is acceptable. However, adults must exercise good judgement and never force any physical contact on any youth. Examples of appropriate display of affection may include”

- Holding hands during prayers
- Side hugs
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Handshakes
- High-fives, hand slaps and fist bumps
- Verbal praise
- Arms around shoulders

- Pats on the shoulder/back

Inappropriate Displays of Affection

- Any form of sexual contact or contact perceived as stimulating
- Intimate kissing
- Initiating full frontal hugs or “bear hugs”
- Massages
- Lying down or sleeping besides youth
- Tickling or wrestling
- Touching or hugging from behind
- Showing affection in isolated/inappropriate areas such as bedrooms, closets, restricted or private rooms
- Comments that relate to physique or body development
- Patting on the thigh, knee or leg
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Piggyback rides

Remember, even appropriate displays of affection may make some young people uncomfortable.

Appropriate Discipline

- Adults will employ only positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourages, builds self-esteem, self-control and self-direction. Examples of positive discipline include:
- Use praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior
- Reminding youth of behavior expectations by using clear, positive statements
- Redirecting behavior using positive statements
- Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate for the youth’s age and development.

Harsh, cruel, insulting or unusual treatment under the guise of discipline is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

I have read the Protection Policy for The First Presbyterian Church of Westminster Youth Ministry and agree to abide by the conditions listed within. I understand that failure to abide the policy may affect my ability to serve as volunteer with the First Presbyterian Youth Ministry.

Printed name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Youth Director: _____ Date: _____