

Child Protection Policy

First Christian Church, Coralville, Iowa

Current Version Approved December 13, 2022

Purpose

First Christian Church of Coralville, Iowa seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect children from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting staff and volunteers from false accusations. It is understood that we will review and adjust this policy as needed for the safety and welfare of children and ministry workers.

Definitions

For purposes of this document, the terms “child,” “children” and “minor” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes all paid and unpaid persons who have direct supervision of children. The terms “parent” and “guardian” apply to a child’s legal parent or legal guardian.

Child Protection Team

This policy includes the creation and maintenance of a Child Protection Team. This team should include the Minister with Children, Youth & Families and a minimum of 2 additional members with special knowledge, training, or interest in the protection of children in ministry, who will be selected by the executive committee and will serve alternating 2-year terms. The Senior Pastor will be an ex officio member of the team. This team shall review this policy annually and maintain responsibilities as stated in this policy.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

1) Six Month Rule

All workers must be members or participants of First Christian Church for at least six months before being considered for any volunteer position involving the direct supervision of children. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

On rare occasion, a participant of less than 6 months may be suitable to work in ministry with our children. In this case, the Child Protection Team should be notified in writing of the following information: who has been invited into leadership, for what ministry and duration, relationship to other members and qualifications they possess for that role. If the team has questions, they can ask for a face-to-face meeting. Once approved, the worker will be screened and is expected to follow all guidelines set forth in this policy.

2) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by the Child Protection Team. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at First Christian Church.

3) **Criminal Background Check**

A Criminal History Background Check will be obtained on all workers as defined above. This will include a search of the National Sex Offender Database. Any volunteer who may be transporting children for church sponsored activities will also have a motor vehicle report and will supply a copy of their driver's license. These reports will be repeated every 2 years.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, they will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Child Protection Team on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form can be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence at First Christian Church.

4) **Training**

First Christian Church will provide training on this Child Protection Policy, best practices and how to recognize and report signs of abuse to new workers. Workers shall repeat this training every two years. The Child Protection Team may offer or mandate additional training for workers at any time.

5) **Teenage Workers**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for workers (paid or unpaid) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities.

The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least 12 years of age
- Screening will include an application, interview and references.
- Teenagers who are age 16-17 may work together with children who are elementary age and younger, with the indirect supervision of an adult.
- Teenagers who are age 12-15 must work with the direct supervision of an adult.
- Teenagers may assist with groups of children who are at least 2 age groups below them. Specifically, high school students may work with children age infant through upper elementary and middle school students may work with children in lower elementary and younger.

6) **People Outside of First Christian Church**

From time to time, people from outside First Christian Church (members' friends, family, guest speakers, community members, etc.) may be invited into leadership or to share information or an experience with our children. Depending on this person's role and whether they will be directly supervising children, the Child Protection Team will decide which screening procedures are required and must approve their participation.

Guidelines for Workers

- **Two Worker Rule:** It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated workers will be in attendance when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. In circumstances where there is only one worker present during a ministry, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be a minimum of two students with the worker.

A **triad rule** can be a helpful reminder of this guideline: a minimum of 2 workers and 1 child, or 1 worker and 2 children must be present in meetings or ministries. We do not allow a child to be alone with one worker on our premises or in church sponsored activities unless in a counseling situation. This has three purposes: it provides for more than one worker to help ensure appropriate levels of supervision, it protects workers from unfounded allegations, and it lessens the possibility of one worker having undue influence over young people.

- **Open Door Policy:** All activities and interactions should be open door. This means, when possible, that the doors to the room where an activity is taking place should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it that allows a person to view the room's activities. If one on one conversation is necessary, we suggest that they be held in areas that are in full view of others (such as fellowship hall or the back of the sanctuary).
- **Overnight Activities:** At least two workers will supervise overnight activities. The gender identity of participating children will be considered in the selection of chaperones, ensuring supervision of all participants. Attention will be paid to location, setting and the sleeping/showering arrangements available to allow for the comfort and safety of all participants.
- **Transportation:** When children are transported as part of a ministry, drivers should have completed both a criminal background check and motor vehicle report. Permission slips from parents/guardians should be in the vehicle with the drivers. When transporting children, there should be a minimum of 3 persons in a vehicle to assure that a child and a worker are not alone together. If transportation is not offered as part of the ministry, workers should be cautious about taking responsibility for transporting children and should recognize that they do that on their own, not as an official representative of First Christian Church.
- **Language:** It is expected that workers and children will use language that is respectful and appropriate at all times. It is the responsibility of workers to stop any inappropriate verbal exchanges. This includes name calling, cussing, yelling at another, mocking, humiliating, degrading or threatening. Both workers and children are not allowed to treat others in ways that are verbally abusive or disrespectful.

- **Touching:** We understand that hugs and other forms of appropriate physical affection between workers and children are important to a child's development and are generally suitable in a church setting. Workers need to be mindful that physical affection be appropriate to the child's age and allow children to initiate any touching, so that it is a response to a child's need rather than the needs of a worker. Everyone's (child or worker) preference to not be touched should be respected. Workers are responsible to protect other workers as well as children from inappropriate or unwanted touching by others.
- **Dating or Sexual Involvement:** No adult worker is to date a minor or be romantically or sexually involved with a minor. Any worker with prior incidents of sexual misconduct may not be a children's worker.
- **Avoid Appearance of Misconduct:** Workers should be conscientious of how things appear and work hard to avoid the appearance of misconduct. This will help maintain parental confidence and avoid mistaken allegations.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of First Christian Church to prohibit corporal punishment. There will be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other means of inflicting pain on children. This is true even if parents/guardians have suggested such punishment as well as when a worker is dealing with his or her own children. Workers should consult another trained worker or the ministry leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Workers are asked to take a proactive approach to discipline by using positive reinforcement of desirable behavior. Other approaches should be age appropriate and may include distraction, reminders, removal from a situation so a child may calm down and regroup, notification of parent/guardian and as a last resort, suspension from activities.

Social Media, Electronic Communication & Online Ministry

Organizational Use: Websites, electronic communication and social media are tools used by the church. It is the practice of First Christian Church to secure signed permission forms for pictures/video of minors to be used by the church on the website, on social media, in the weekly newsletter and other church publications. If we do not have parent/guardian permission, we will not use pictures/videos on official church media.

Personal Use: We ask that our workers exercise caution when communicating electronically. This includes text messages, phone calls, video calls or meetings, email and accounts on social media. Below are several areas of consideration:

- Check your privacy settings and keep in mind that everything you post personally could be visible to others, including children in our ministry.
- Use discretion when connecting with minors on social media. Best practice is to respond to requests, but do not seek out minors on social media.
- Responding or commenting in a format that is visible to third parties is preferable to private messaging. (see "Electronic Communication" below).
- Feel welcome to post about ministry experiences or events—but do not share faces, names or other identifying information of minors unless you have permission from a parent/guardian.

Electronic Communication: We wish to facilitate healthy relationships and safe communications between workers and minors. Healthy and safe relationships can include communication both within and outside of ministry programs. There are many ways to communicate safely; this section seeks to address electronic communication such as text messages, phone calls, video calls or meetings, email and accounts on social media.

Information such as activity and event announcements will most commonly be shared in a group format, with a staff or ministry worker emailing or texting a group of minors. However, there may be times when it is preferable for a worker to communicate with one-on-one with a minor in a ministry program. These communications may include event reminders or follow-up, specific inquiries about opportunities to participate in ministry, as well as pastoral care check-ins, such as “How are you doing?” In general, it is best practice is to obtain parent/guardian permission before texting or private messaging a minor.

Recognizing that electronic communication is an important way that relationships are built and maintained, we wish to allow this communication between workers and minors with safeguards in place. Therefore, communicating electronically with minors, workers are asked to observe the following guidelines:

- Maintain boundaries: Do not respond to or send messages late at night or early in the morning, except in circumstances where it is suspected that the minor may be in danger or there is an emergency.
- Keep all transcripts of messages for at least 90 days and be prepared to share them with ministry leaders and parent/guardians.
- Meetings between a worker and minor occurring on Zoom (or other video platforms), should be recorded and maintained for at least 90 days.
- Assure the guidelines set forth in this policy are followed as they apply to both in-person and electronic communications with minors.
- If you learn about possible abuse from an online platform or via electronic communication, reporting applies (see Reporting Suspected Misconduct or Abuse).

Online Ministry: Ministries with minors, such as Sunday School and youth groups, may include opportunities to learn and connect in online settings. When participating in or facilitating ministries occurring online, the following guidelines should be followed to ensure safety of all participants:

- Online meetings will be planned with two workers who are screened and trained to be present. In a circumstance where it is not possible for two workers to be present, there should be at least two children participating in the meeting. Should a situation arise where only one child and one worker are present, the worker may choose to postpone the meeting to another time, the minor participant may choose to opt out, or the meeting may continue as scheduled. If the meeting continues, it should be recorded, with the recording being maintained for least 90 days.
- Measures will be taken to enhance security of meetings including meeting links shared via email or private message and not available publicly and waiting rooms will be enabled when available.

- All guidelines in this policy apply to online ministries including but not limited to training/screening of workers, respectful language and discipline policy, and reporting of suspected misconduct or abuse.

Release of Children

It is encouraged that each ministry group have a clear system for the drop off and pick up of children that is communicated with both workers and parents/guardians. A few guidelines are set here in this policy:

- Nursery aged children will be released only to the person who brought them or to another who is recognized and authorized to pick them up. If there is any question, parents/guardians should be contacted before release.
- Within the church building, children under five years old should be accompanied by a worker when moving from ministry to ministry. Older children can be released on their own to move to another area of the church (for example: moving from Sunday school to worship).
- When releasing children from the buildings to return home, they should be released to the person who dropped them off or another who is recognized and authorized. If children arrive without adult supervision, they are understood to be responsible for themselves and can be released without an adult.

Parent/Guardian Permission Forms

Parent/guardian permission forms will be required for all children participating in First Christian Church sponsored activities. These forms will be required to be updated on an annual basis at the beginning of the school year. Activities that require overnight stays or that involve transportation may require additional permission forms.

Reporting Suspected Misconduct or Abuse

Workers are asked to immediately report any suspected misconduct by other workers or abuse of children (whether it takes place at church or not) to the pastor or ministry leader. If a report to the child abuse hotline (1-800-362-2178) is necessary as mandated by Iowa Law, the worker who witnessed the signs of abuse/abuse or received the information will make the call. Workers need to understand that the church considers all who work with children to be mandatory reporters when it comes to suspected abuse or neglect.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.

2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Non-Discrimination of Workers and Children

It is the commitment of First Christian Church to not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or socioeconomic status either in the selection of workers or in the treatment and participation of children.

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