

August 13, 2025

Presbytery of San Francisco

Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety, otherwise known as our “child protection policy.”

## POLICY STATEMENT AND PURPOSE

It is the policy of the Presbytery of San Francisco that everyone, in particular all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, who participates in our programs and ministries or uses our facilities will be cared for with compassion and will be safe.

As a caring Christian community of Presbyterian congregations, we are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and for all employees and volunteers working with them within the life of our Presbytery and the lives of our congregations, as well as for organizations that use our facilities.

The intention of the Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety is to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse in any form, to respond to allegations appropriately, and to ensure that those working with them are not exposed to false or unwarranted charges of abuse.

## APPLICABILITY

The Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety applies to all employees and volunteers of the Presbytery of San Francisco, all of whom must abide by the Standards of Conduct as outlined below. An individual may be terminated from employment and/or volunteer service for failure to observe and abide by this Policy. This action may be taken regardless of the outcome of any investigation if it is determined that the Policy has not been followed.

The Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety applies to all children and youth who attend any function sponsored by The Presbytery of San Francisco.

## DEFINITIONS

- Child – a person age 0-11
- Youth – a person age 12-17
- Child Abuse is violence, mistreatment or neglect that a child or youth may experience while in the care of someone they either trust or depend on, such as a parent, sibling, other relative, caregiver, guardian or other adult in a position of trust.
- Child Abuse includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - Physical Abuse – Includes physical injury, or threat of physical injury, inflicted by other than accidental means on a child, or intentionally injuring a child.
  - Physical Neglect – The refusal to provide care necessary to the health of a child, or the abandonment of a child, in one's care.
  - Sexual Abuse – The commission or permitting of any act of sexual assault or any sexual exploitation upon a child.

- Sexual Exploitation – Includes unwelcome touching, even casual touching, unwelcome hugs, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo, unwelcome visual contact for the purpose of personal gain or profit.
- Psychological Abuse – A pattern of behavior by a caretaker that impairs a child's emotional and/or psychological development. This may include constant criticism, threats, rejection, intimidation or humiliation, acts intended to produce fear or guilt, withholding of love and support, isolation, and witnessing of domestic violence.
- Exploitation – forcing or coercing a child into performing activities that are beyond the child's capabilities, or which are illegal or degrading, including sexual exploitation
- Exploitation includes the manipulation of a child by an adult through a relationship of trust for the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, including sexual exploitation, as well as suggestive images or videos between an adult and a child, as deemed inappropriate by any reasonable adult.
- Vulnerable Adult – a person 18 and over who, because of age, disability, or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to that person.
- Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult is a misuse of power and a violation of trust and includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - Psychological Abuse – The attempt to dehumanize or intimidate.
  - Financial Abuse – The use of their money or property in a dishonest or illegal manner.
  - Physical Abuse – Including any act of violence inflicting pain, injury or mental distress (including sexual abuse).
  - Abandonment or Isolation.
  - Abduction.
  - Deprivation of Goods or Services that are necessary to avoid physical harm or mental suffering.
- Reasonable Suspicion/Reasonable Cause to Suspect – Includes actions that cause a reasonable person to entertain a suspicion, based upon facts and drawing on their training and experience, to suspect abuse or neglect.
- Employee – an individual who is hired or called to work for the Presbytery of San Francisco for salary or wages.
- Volunteer – an individual who provides services to the Presbytery of San Francisco without monetary remuneration.

## STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

- ABUSE – The abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable adult, as defined above, is strictly prohibited.
- HARASSMENT, BULLYING – Harassment or bullying of anyone is strictly prohibited. All behavior, including any written, verbal, or physical, that adversely affects the ability of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to participate in or benefit

from the programs of the Presbytery of San Francisco is prohibited. Harassment or bullying of anyone based on their actual or perceived age, race, skin color, ethnic identity, national origin, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual expression, religion, cognitive ability, socioeconomic status, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited. Any such behavior should be immediately reported to the Executive Presbyter, unless the Executive Presbyter is responsible for the alleged abuse, in which case the abuse should be reported to the Sated Clerk.

- CELL PHONE USE – The use of cell phones or electronic devices by Presbytery of San Francisco employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors while supervising children and youth is limited to usage directly connected to that supervision and activity.
- OPEN DOOR POLICY – Presbytery of San Francisco employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are prohibited from placing themselves in a situation in which they might be alone with a single child or youth and cannot be observed or monitored by other adults. When adults supervise children and youth, they should space themselves in a way so that other adults can see them. To the maximum extent practicable, there shall be visual access into each room in which activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are being conducted. When adults meet with youth, the meeting should take place in a public place, such as a coffee shop.
- TWO-ADULT POLICY – At least two adults must be present during interaction with children and youth, and it is preferred that the two adults are unrelated.
- COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ADULTS, INCLUDING YOUTH ADVISORS, AND YOUTH
  - All official communications such as calendars, event announcements, sign-ups etc., shall be emailed to both youth and parents and posted on the Presbytery of San Francisco website.
  - Youth may choose to share their email address, home address, or phone number with the whole youth group or choose to keep this information private. If they choose to keep the information private and someone wants to make contact, a member of the Presbytery staff or a designated adult volunteer will act as a go-between and offer to connect the youth. (For example, the Associate Pastor will write to the youth: “Dear Carrie, we missed you at the meeting today, and Bob wanted to ask you about your soccer game coming up. His phone number is 510/555-1234 and you can text him if you want or have me pass a message back to him.”)
  - When a youth advisor has cause to email a youth directly, a copy should be sent both to a parent and the Associate Pastor.
  - Youth and youth advisors may connect on social media; however, keeping power dynamics in mind, the adult should allow the youth to initiate the connections. (For example: First, a youth may “friend” or “follow” an adult, and then the adult may respond by “friending” or “following” back, if desired, but not the other way around.)

- Any communications between youth and Presbytery staff and volunteers, including youth advisors, on social media should take place in public comments or in a group message that is moderated by more than one adult.
- Text messaging and phone conversations between youth and youth advisors should be kept to a minimum, for example, to communicate or confirm meeting location or times.
- In addition to the two-adult policy (see above, at least two adults must be present during interaction between adults and youth), youth themselves shall practice the “rule of three,” meaning that a youth shall always be in the company of two other youth.
- Any form of pastoral or mentoring counseling being provided to children or youth by Presbytery of San Francisco adults, including youth advisors, should not occur in isolation; it should occur in person in a public location, such as a coffee shop. If the child or youth specifically requests a discussion to occur in a more private location, a room with a glass door in a location where other adults are present should be used.
- If a meeting is arranged for a youth and an adult, including a youth advisor, the adult must communicate with the youth's parents/guardians informing them of the place and time for the meeting.
- Disappearing messaging services should not be used for individual communications. The use of services such as SnapChat should be limited to the “My Story” feature, which is a public presence.
- **SUPERVISION AND RATIOS** – Presbytery of San Francisco employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall not leave a child or youth alone during any Presbytery-sponsored event or activity. The ratio of adults to children or youth must be 2:10 on trips and retreats and 2:14 for on-site activities. For overnight trips of mixed genders, adult supervisors must include male and female chaperones.
- **TRANSPORTATION** – All Presbytery-sponsored events for which the Presbytery arranges transportation shall abide by the policies above. All drivers shall be over the age of 25. The transport of children and youth may be excluded from the two-adult rule, i.e. there may be one adult in each car; all other rules still apply.
- **INAPPROPRIATE OR UNWELCOME TOUCHING** – Inappropriate or unwelcome touching is strictly prohibited. San Francisco Presbytery employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall respect the rights of children and youth not to be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. Presbytery employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall respect the right of children and youth to say “no” to any touching. Adults shall discourage children or youth from touching others in an unwelcome manner.
- **PROFANITY, INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE OR SEXUAL JOKES** of any kind are prohibited when supervising, teaching or leading children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- **ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS** – It is strictly prohibited for Presbytery employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors to pursue or continue romantic relationships with any child, youth, or vulnerable adult who is a participant in Presbytery-sponsored activities.

- BATHROOM – Adults may not accompany a child into a bathroom stall. Diaper changes must be performed by a Presbytery employee (not volunteer) and only with the direct or implied permission of the parent (e.g. parent has left a diaper bag saying you may need it).
- RELEASE FROM ACTIVITIES – Presbytery employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors shall release children and youth directly to their parents or guardians (or another adult as directed by the parent or guardian) following all Presbytery sponsored events.
- DRUG, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO USE – While working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, Presbytery employees, and volunteers are prohibited from using, possessing, or offering cigarettes (including e- cigarettes), alcohol or illegal drugs to children, youth or vulnerable adults. Presbytery employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are prohibited from being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while supervising children, youth or vulnerable adults, nor shall they be impaired by legally prescribed drugs while supervising, teaching or leading children, youth or vulnerable adults. Smoking or use of tobacco products (e-cigarettes) while supervising, teaching or leading children, youth or vulnerable adults is also prohibited.
- CORPORAL PUNISHMENT – Presbytery employees, volunteers, teachers, and youth advisors are prohibited from using corporal punishment on any child, youth, or vulnerable adult who is associated with any program or activity conducted by the Presbytery of San Francisco. Physical restraint may only be used when absolutely necessary to protect someone from harm.
- WEAPONS – Firearms, weapons, and explosive devices of any kind are prohibited on Presbytery property or at Presbytery-sponsored events.
- GAMES – Games selected for use with children and youth of the Presbytery must always adhere to the following guidelines, whether the games are held on or off the property of the Presbytery of San Francisco.
  - Games must be designed to include everyone; modifications shall be made so that children and youth of all abilities can participate. When games include food, the food must be something that all participants can eat.
  - When going out of one's "comfort zone," there must be no pressure to participate. This shall be clearly stated by the adult leaders before introducing the game. For example:
    - Messy games (such as having a partner feed a person while blindfolded) are optional; participants must volunteer and are not pressured to participate.
    - Games involving physical touching more than hand-in-hand, or hand-on- shoulder, including any kind of challenge course in which everyone must work together while touching, are to be prefaced with an explanation that all participants can participate at the level at which they are comfortable.
    - Scary games and games played in the dark must have a clearly defined place to go if someone chooses to opt out of the game.

- Hiding games such as “Sardines” are inherently risky because of the way people scatter and hide. Therefore, these games can only be played if they are:
  - Supervised by randomly roaming adults;
  - Given clear spatial boundaries (e.g. “inside only,” “these rooms only”); and,
  - Prefaced by a speech reminding all participants that their behavior during the game must be appropriate at all times. (A reminder such as “no kissing, tickling, inappropriate touching, or torturing your fellow players” is helpful.)
- Certain games, such as “Truth or Dare” or “Cards Against Humanity,” are popular BECAUSE they push people to say or do things that they would otherwise considered inappropriate, and/or pressure people to take actions that they may not feel comfortable doing; therefore, these games are not appropriate for use with the children and youth of the Presbytery at any time.
- **PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS** – It is the policy of the Presbytery of San Francisco that no adult who has a conviction record relating to a sex crime or any violent crime shall be permitted to work or volunteer in a position in which there is direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. To this end, criminal background checks are performed by Presbytery Staff on all teachers and adult advisors who have direct access to children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- **NOTIFICATION** – Presbytery of San Francisco employees, teachers, volunteers, and youth advisors are required to make a timely report to an Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk of circumstances that might, under the policy, affect their ability to work with children and youth (e.g., criminal investigation or arrest in a case relating to any sex crime or violent crime).
- **REPORTING OF ABUSE OR SUSPECTED ABUSE: WHO SHOULD REPORT**  
 The State of California has designated certain professions and people who occupy certain positions, including clergy, and Clerks of Session, as Mandated Reporters. (See California Penal Code §11165.7) Mandated Reporters are required to immediately report to the Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline or other appropriate agency in the County where the alleged abuse has taken place any knowledge of the abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, any reasonable suspicion that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is or has been abused, or any suspicion that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is at the risk of abuse. (See California Penal Code §11166) Mandated Reporters shall not incur civil or criminal liability unless it can be proven that the Mandated Reporter has knowingly made a false report. (See California Penal Code §11172)
- In addition, the Presbyterian Church (USA) requires any elder, deacon, commissioned lay pastor, or certified Christian educator who has any knowledge of the abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, or any knowledge that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is at risk of abuse to immediately report that

information first, to the Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline or other appropriate agency in the county where the alleged abuse occurred, and second, to an Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. (see the Book of Order, G-4.0302.)

- Furthermore, the Presbytery of San Francisco encourages anyone who has observed the abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is or has been abused, or may be in need of protection from abuse to immediately report the observation or suspicion first, to the Social Services Agency or other appropriate agency in the county where the alleged abuse occurred, and second, to an Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of San Francisco.
- Any report to a County Social Services Agency must be made by the individual who originally made the observation of abuse or who has the suspicion of abuse. The report cannot be made second-hand. However, if an individual would like support while making a report to one of the agencies, a Presbytery Executive or the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery can serve as a supportive witness. In this case, however, only the reporting individual can make the call to the county Social Services Agency or other appropriate agency.

#### MAKING A REPORT OF ABUSE OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

- When making a report to a County Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline, the individual should complete the Child Abuse Reporting Form (Appendix B) or the Report of Suspected Adult/Elder Abuse (Appendix C) and submit it electronically or by fax to the appropriate agency.
  - The individual who makes the report should keep a copy as a record of the report.
  - There should be no delay in making the report; the report should be made even if some of the information is not known to the reporting individual.
- When considering whether or not to report the observation or suspicion, individuals should review the Definitions of “Child Abuse” and “Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult” above. If the individual is unclear if the observation or suspicion falls under these definitions, the individual should call the County Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline or other appropriate agency or consult with a Presbytery Executive or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
- Any report of abuse or suspected abuse must be kept under strict confidentiality and must never be discussed with anyone other than the County Social Services Agency or a Presbytery Executive or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery . If discussed with the Presbytery Executive or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, all information revealed to her/him/them in the course of providing care is confidential.
  - Specifically, the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Order states that “in the exercise of pastoral care, ministers of the Word and Sacrament, shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing care and all information relating to the exercise of such care.... A minister of the Word and Sacrament or a commissioned lay pastor may reveal confidential

information when she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of imminent bodily harm to any person.” (See the Book of Order, G-4.0301)

- The identity of the reporting individual is also protected by California law. (See California Penal Code §11167)
- If a report of abuse or suspected abuse is made, no investigation is to be conducted by anyone other than a County Social Services Agency, nor is any questioning of suspects or victims to be conducted by anyone other than a County Social Services Agency.
  - Neither the Presbytery as a whole nor members of its various standing committees shall be informed of a report of abuse or suspected abuse, or any information contained in the report, that is made to a County Social Services Agency by anyone other than the agency itself.
- If a report of abuse or suspected abuse is made by an individual to a Presbytery employee, a teacher or youth advisor, the employee, teacher or youth advisor shall encourage the individual to report the observation or suspicion to the Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline in the country where the suspected abuse took place.
- If the alleged offender is an employee of the Presbytery, the reporting individual shall report the observation of abuse or suspicion of abuse, first to the Alameda County Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline or the Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline, and, second, to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery. If the alleged offender is the Stated Clerk, the reporting individual shall report to an Executive Presbyter.
- Important Phone Numbers:
  - Alameda County Social Services Agency Child Abuse Hotline: (510) 259-1800
  - Adult Protective Services Elder Abuse Hotline: (510) 225-5277
  - Oakland City Police: (510) 777-3333 (non-emergency phone number)
  - Alameda County Sheriff: (510) 272-6878 (non-emergency phone number)
  - Contra Costa County child protection number (877) 881-1116
  - San Francisco County child protection number (800) 856-5553
  - San Mateo County child protection number (650) 802-7922 or (800) 632-4615

#### VIOLATIONS OF OTHER STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

- Minor violations of Standards of Conduct can be addressed in the moment, one-on-one, and/or dealt with by a Presbytery Executive or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
- Repeated or uncorrected violations of the Standards of Conduct, other than Child Abuse or the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults, should be immediately reported to a presbytery Executive or Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
- Presbytery Executives and/or the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery will address repeated or uncorrected violations of the Standards of Conduct, other than Child Abuse or the Abuse of Vulnerable Adults, taking action that may include, but not be limited to, investigating the incident, to documenting the incident, to warning the individual who has violated the Standards of Conduct, to removing the individual from contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

- The Presbytery Executives or the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery may inform appropriate committees of the Presbytery of the violations of the Standards of Conduct and may take appropriate action to ensure the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
  - However, as noted above, if a report has been made to a County Social Services Agency or other appropriate agency, neither the reporting individual nor the Presbytery staff may inform the Presbytery or its committees of the report or any information contained in the report.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- Each employee of the Presbytery shall receive a copy of this policy.
- As a condition of employment, each Presbytery employee shall sign the Covenant of Care and submit it to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
- Each volunteer, teacher, or youth advisor participating in any program or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of this policy.
- Each volunteer, teacher, or youth advisor participating in any program or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall sign the Covenant of Care and submit it to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, who will also sign the Covenant of Care.
- An applicant who is a minor shall have the Covenant of Care co-signed by a parent or guardian. Volunteers under 18 may not be placed in a leadership or co-leadership position.
- All Presbytery employees shall attend Safe Church Training.
- All volunteers, teachers, and youth advisors participating in any program or activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall attend Safe Church Training.

#### PRESBYTERY AWARENESS

- This Policy and the Covenant of Care shall be made available on the San Francisco Presbytery website.
- Information and a link to the web page containing this Policy and the Covenant of Care shall be published annually in the Presbytery's newsletter and promoted during presbytery meetings.
- A review of this Policy shall be included in all training and information sessions for Presbytery staff and volunteers.

#### TRAINING AND EDUCATION

- Safe Church training shall be developed and administered by the Presbytery of San Francisco
- Training should include:
  - Explanation on need for The Presbytery's Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety and the Policy for Covenant of Care.
  - Definitions and signs of child abuse and abuse of a vulnerable adult.
  - Standards of Conduct as outlined in this Policy.

- Who must report child abuse and the abuse of a vulnerable adult, and who should report.
- Requirements and procedures for reporting allegations or concerns regarding abuse.
- Dealing with violations of the Standards of Conduct, other than child abuse or the abuse of a vulnerable adult.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A – Covenant of Care

Appendix B – Child Abuse Reporting Form:

Appendix C – Report of Suspected Adult/Elder Abuse:

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/SOC341.pdf>

### Covenant of Care

- I promise to treat all children, youth, and vulnerable adults with dignity, respect, and compassion;
- I promise to do everything in my power to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
- I promise to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse in any form, and to report any abuse to the appropriate authorities, following the guidelines listed in the Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety; and,
- I have read and agree to abide by the Presbytery of San Francisco's Policy for Ensuring a Climate of Safety.

Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed by Date \_\_\_\_\_