

Policies For Safeguarding



Our Children & Youth

STATE COLLEGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

132 WEST BEAVER AVENUE

STATE COLLEGE, PA 16801

(814) 238-2422

1st edition: Session Approved: November 9, 2003

2nd edition: Session Approved: 2013

3rd edition: Session Approved: May 10, 2015

4th edition: Session Approved: August 20, 2023

5th edition: Session Approved: September 15, 2024

State College Presbyterian Church

Policy for Safeguarding Our Children and Youth

State College Presbyterian Church has an exciting, vibrant, and growing ministry to children and youth. We want every child and young person to enjoy a wide range of activities and events in a safe and secure environment.

We believe that our church is to be a place where children and youth are cared for, taught love and respect by example through their years with us, and encouraged to follow in the footsteps of Christ in serving and caring for others.

Our goal, in response to Biblical mandates and societal needs, is to maintain a safe, secure, and nurturing place, where children may grow, and where employee and volunteer teachers and leaders are equipped to minister to the needs of children and youth. As a church, it is our religious, moral, and ethical obligation to take steps to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect in any form.

The 2013 Safeguarding Our Children and Youth Policy Committee

Bob Igo
Tom King, ex-officio
Diana Malcom
Zack Maser
Cheryl Price
Deannine Shipman
Laura Steager
Kim Hunziker

I. CONTENTS

- I. Contents..... 3
- II. General Policy Statement 4
- III. Theological Affirmations 5
- IV. Definitions 6
- V. General Policies..... 7
 - 1. Staffing, Screening, and Volunteer Recruitment 7
 - 2. Training 8
 - 3. Guidelines for Supervision 8
 - 4. Discipline 9
 - 5. Emergencies..... 9
 - 6. Specific Age Group Concerns 10
- VI. Social Networking – Internet Safety 11
- VII. Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse..... 12
 - 1. Mandatory Reporting Law 12
 - 2. Procedures 12
 - 3. Investigation of Complaints 12
 - 4. Counseling for Victims and Families 12

II. GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of State College Presbyterian Church that all staff, member and non-member volunteers and all other persons who work with children and/or youth through State College Presbyterian Church are to maintain the integrity of ministerial, employment, and volunteer relationships at all times and in all places. Child sexual abuse or any other form of child abuse is not only a violation of the principles set forth in Scripture but also of these relationships. Child abuse and sexual abuse of children or adults in any form are never permissible and will not be tolerated.

The Session of State College Presbyterian Church adopts this policy for the following purposes:

1. To set and enforce standards of ethical behavior consistent with Scripture.
2. To define a procedure by which volunteers that work with children and/or youth are recruited and supervised.
3. To maintain a safe environment.
4. To provide procedures for inquiry and response to allegations of abuse to children and/or youth.
5. To demonstrate pastoral concern for the victims and those accused of abuse to children and/or youth.
6. To help protect children and/or youth from physical and sexual abuse, and, at the same time, insulate State College Presbyterian Church from charges of negligent hiring or negligent supervision of its children and/or youth workers.
7. It is *not* the intent of these policies to protect the good name of the church or its members.



III. THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS

We believe that all children and youth are important, for they are God's gift to us, given for our care and love. We should always strive to provide a healthy, safe, clean, loving place in which children and youth can thrive and ultimately know that they are loved by God through us.



We believe that we are called to love one another and to be the family of God.

Obeying the word of our Lord Jesus, and confident of his promises, we baptize those whom God has called. In baptism God claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God. God frees us from sin and death, uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. Each time a child is baptized in our congregation, we make a promise, a commitment to the child, the parents, and to God. We promise as members of the Church of Jesus Christ, to guide and nurture the child by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging him/her to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of the church.

[Adapted from baptismal vows of Presbyterian Church (USA).]

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12: 30,31

Scripture also tells us to:

- value the worth of all children and youth, helping them to develop healthy self-esteem and identity (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:14)
- value the diversity that God has created (Genesis 1:31; Galatians 3:28)
- stand against injustice and oppression (Micah 6:8)

IV. DEFINITIONS

1. **Adult:** anyone 18 years of age or older.
2. **Apprentice (1st Year):** any adult who does not meet the standard of a mature adult and is volunteering for their first year in any program. They must be at least 3 years older than the oldest child/youth in that program and/or 3 grades ahead of the oldest child/youth in the program.
3. **Child Abuse:** the term child abuse shall mean the following: Federal legislation provides guidance to States by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that define child abuse and neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g), as amended by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:
 - "Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation"; or
 - "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."

This definition of child abuse and neglect refers specifically to parents and other caregivers. A "child" under this definition generally means a person who is younger than age 18 or who is not an emancipated minor.

4. **LIT:** Leader In Training – a youth working with our children and youth programs under the supervision of a mature adult(s). Must be at least 3 years older than the oldest child/youth in that program and/or 3 grades ahead of the oldest child/youth in the program.
5. **Mandated Reporter:** "an individual, paid or unpaid, who, on a regular basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child."
6. **Mature Adult:** anyone 25 years of age or older.
7. **Minor:** anyone under 18 years of age or a program participant who has not graduated from high school.
 - a. **Children:** up to 5th Grade
 - b. **Youth:** 6th Grade – 12th Grade
8. **Paid program staff:** includes the following: The Pastor, Associate Pastors, Director of Education and Program, Director of Youth Ministry, Director of Music & Worship, Stay and Play Director, Stay and Play staff, and part-time caregivers for Nursery/Toddler Rooms.
9. **Sexual Misconduct:** by any person shall include, but not be limited to, any contact or interaction between a person who is a minor and an adult, when the minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or third party. The behavior may or may not involve touching. It includes but is not limited to offensive, obscene, or suggestive language or conduct;



unacceptable visual contact; and touching or fondling which is injurious to the physical or emotional health of the minor. Sexual behavior between a minor and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the minor. The upper age limit for a minor is that set by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

10. **Supervisor:** either a volunteer or paid staff person who is responsible for a program and the persons who lead/teach in the programs.
11. **Volunteer:** a person who works in any program without pay.

V. GENERAL POLICIES

1. **Staffing, Screening, and Volunteer Recruitment**
 - A. All paid part-time and full-time employees of SCPC must have a PA Child Abuse History Clearance and Criminal Record Check on file with Personnel. Those who have lived in PA for less than 10 years will be required to get a Federal Criminal History Clearance (fingerprinting).
 - B. All volunteers are recruited/called based on their interests, gifts, and abilities to work with children and youth in the church. Persons may volunteer or be called, with final approval being made by the appropriate board or Unit of Session.
 - C. All Volunteers, regardless of the age level they work with, are required to fill out a volunteer application form and have the necessary clearances.
 1. Volunteer application requirements are as follows:
 - i. Volunteers must have been in good standing with the congregation for six months before they are eligible to volunteer with children's and youth programs.
 - ii. Any adult volunteer who has not been active in SCPC for two years before the time of application must have two references that are not family members.
 2. All Volunteers are required to fill out the following clearances on file at the church:
 - i. Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP)
 - ii. Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services.
 - iii. Additionally, a fingerprint-based federal criminal history (FBI) submitted through the Pennsylvania State Police or its authorized agent is not required if: if the volunteer has been a PA resident continuously for the past 10 years.
 - iv. Volunteers who are not required to obtain the FBI Clearance because they are applying for an unpaid volunteer position and have been a continuous resident of PA for the past 10 years. Fill out and sign an Act 153 Volunteer Affidavit (attached to the application form)
 - D. In situations where there is a need for additional volunteers for anything that is NOT regularly scheduled, the person does not need to have clearances but will be supervised by someone with clearances. This enables us to have people fill in as needed, allowing the Spirit to move someone to assist us and to have substitutes in classrooms, at LOGOS, and 98youth

programs. If an individual has volunteered two times for any children and youth events in this manner, that person must have their volunteer clearances before they can volunteer with children or youth again.

2. **Training**

- A. Paid staff who work with children and youth are required to attend Mandated Reporter Training once every 5 years. Everyone who volunteers is considered a Mandated Reporter and training is *suggested for all*, but not required for volunteers.
- B. Persons required to attend a SCPC Safe Church Training: All officers of the church, paid church staff, workers with children and youth whether the workers are paid, volunteer, part-time, full-time, or clergy, and leaders of children and youth *non-church groups* who use the facilities on a regular basis (i.e. Boy Scout Leaders).
- C. Each year there will be at least four trainings offered for the Fall and two for the Spring. Individual programs may have additional required trainings specific to their programs.
- D. The training team will be composed of paid program staff, pastors, and additional identified members. Instructional materials will be revised each time the policies are updated.
- E. All supervisors and paid employees must ensure that all volunteers and employees in their program attend an “in-person” safe church training.
- F. Youth will be informed of policies specific to their age group.
- G. The entire church population will be informed via adult education, etc.

3. **Guidelines for Supervision**

A. Ratios:

- 1. Two-person rule: Two adults should be present at all times when children and/or youth are present for each function and in each room or area involving children’s and youth’s activities. This is intended to protect children and youth and prevent adults from encountering a situation where they could be wrongfully accused. The presence of a designated adult supervisor who moves in and out of rooms, and monitors the hallways at all times during any function involving children or youth may be counted as one of the adults for purposes of this rule.
- 2. Leader to Child: SCPC encourages the following ratios to be followed in all programs involving children and youth:

Infant:	8 children/2 adults
2-3's:	12 children/2 adults
4-5's:	20 children/2 adults
K-5th Gr:	25 children/2 adults
6th-12th Gr:	30 youth/2 adults
- 3. Other: If for some reason these ratios are not possible, the supervisor must be contacted and should frequent the room. If the activity or program that is being planned is active in nature, it is recommended that additional leadership be present for a safer, more enriching experience.

4. Youth Leader Team: The leadership team must be made up of at least 70% mature, experienced (non-apprentice) leaders. Apprentice Leaders and LIT's must always be paired with mature adult leaders. Together they may lead a program or small group. An apprentice should never be left to lead a group on his/her own.
 - B. Only employees or volunteers, parents, or individuals designated by parents, are allowed in the classroom(s) unless given prior approval by the Supervisor.
 - C. Visual Supervision:
 1. Children infants through third grade need visual supervision at all times.
 2. 2. When children K-3rd grade are taken to the bathrooms, the adults wait outside the bathroom, unless children request assistance.
 - D. Each church program should have a policy regarding authorized **pick up procedures**.
4. **Discipline**
- A. No physical punishment (*i.e. slapping, spanking, or jerking a child*) shall be used with any child or youth in our care. Some children and youth may need to take a break to calm down, while others may need a reminder touch on the shoulder to pay attention.
 - B. Leaders should be responsible for the comfort of all those participating and should respond to behaviors that make others uncomfortable or feel unsafe.
 - C. If a child or youth's behavior becomes disruptive, the teacher or leaders should inform the parents and then follow up with the program staff member responsible.
 - D. Apprentice Leaders and LIT's shall take discipline problems to a mature adult program leader.
5. **Emergencies**
- A. Health and Safety
 1. Church School Evacuation Plan
The first and only responsibility of teachers, leaders, and caregivers is to see that all children, youth, and adults are moved safely to the *State College Municipal Building*. All persons in the church building will meet there and wait for further instructions. Children are to stay with their teachers until parents arrive. Some rooms for younger children are equipped with blankets in case of evacuation during the winter months. Take these instead of searching for coats.
 2. If there is a fire or other emergency, immediately pull the alarm system (located in the hall) and evacuate the class.
**Fire Extinguishers are located in each kitchen and on the wall beside the elevator on each floor.*
 3. Leaders must have with them a list of all students present in the classroom, another reason why taking roll is so important. Check to make sure ALL children have arrived safely at the *Municipal Building*.
 4. Tornado

In case of a tornado warning, all classes should go to the lowest level of the church building to sit on the floor in the main hallway, away from any windows.

Evacuation Routes are posted in each room.

- B. First Aid Kits
 - 1. Will be found in these locations: the main kitchen, the storage closet in the back of the Sanctuary, the Christian Education Resource room, room numbers 100, 101, 102, 103, 203, the LOGOS closet, and the Stay and Play Resource Room.
 - 2. Must be taken on overnight trips.
 - C. Incident Report Forms must be completed for any incident that requires First Aid and/or medical attention. The forms may be found in the filing cabinet in the church office.
6. **Specific Age Group Concerns**
- A. Counseling Children and Youth

When counseling children or youth, the employee or volunteer must notify another adult who is a leader in the program or a staff person as to where the counseling will take place. The door to any room where counseling is conducted should remain open. If possible, the employee or volunteer should speak to a child or youth in a public area, but out of public hearing (i.e., a corner of a classroom filled with other children or youth).
 - B. Off-Site Event Guidelines

Parents or guardians and participating youth shall be given information ahead of time about programs, activities, leaders, chaperones, dates, times, cost, method of transportation, purpose of the scheduled trip or activity, and other details whenever possible.
 - C. Overnight Activities
 - 1. Adult leaders must be present at a ratio of 1:8 for each gender. Leaders 18-24 years of age must be working with a Mature Adult Leader.
 - 2. Each participant must have turned in a completed parental permission form.
 - 3. Completed Medical Release and Information forms must be taken on overnight events.
 - 4. Adults must be on the same level of the building with youth at all times, according to ratios defined in III.4. A.
 - 5. At least two adult leaders are to be awake while youth are awake. (One must be a mature adult leader.)
 - 6. Private sleeping areas must be utilized by each gender, with at least two leaders of the same gender in each area. If for some reason these arrangements are not possible, the supervisor must ensure that safe sleeping arrangements are provided.
 - D. Transportation
 - 1. All drivers must complete an SCPC Driver volunteer/application form.
 - 2. All drivers must be Mature Adults. If there is a special situation where a driver is only an Adult Leader, written permission must be obtained from Session and/or Head of Staff and from parents.

3. At no time should a child or youth be alone in a vehicle with one employee or volunteer, unless parent/guardian permission is given in writing or verbally.
4. All children and youth who will be transported by employees and/or volunteers must return a completed parental written permission form.
5. Safety belts must be worn by all passengers and drivers.

VI. SOCIAL NETWORKING – INTERNET SAFETY

The Internet and social media are evolving tools that offer great promise for developing and deepening ministries but also pose significant safety challenges.

A. All church adult leaders (adult Leaders throughout this section refers to all Clergy, staff, committee members, and volunteers) should only initiate an electronic private communication in any form (email, text, phone, social media, video conference, or other means) to a child or youth member with a second adult leader in the conversation.

B. Adult leaders should avoid interacting with child or youth social media profiles. Adult leaders should be cognizant of how social media privacy settings can create functionally private communication, even on platforms that appear to be open forums to the public. Adult leaders should avoid such situations.

C. If a child or youth member initiates a private electronic conversation with an adult leader, the adult leader will inform the child or youth member that it is the church's policy to include a second adult in the conversation. That adult leader shall then do what is necessary to include a second adult in the conversation.

D. Adult leaders can only be in a social media group with a child or youth member if it has at least one other adult leader in it. In a group where there are multiple adult leaders, all leaders must be able to see all member communication.

E. Adult leaders should use all privacy settings applicable to shield children and youth from any inappropriate content that may exist in the adult leader's social media presence.

F. Adult leaders, clergy, and staff must communicate respectfully and appropriately with children and youth members. Leaders, children, and youth will continually be trained and reminded about what is appropriate and inappropriate content to be placed and displayed online. Adult leaders should address any online content that details inappropriate behavior during a church-sponsored event.

G. Adult leaders should inform children and youth that electronic communication is not confidential and is subject to mandated reporter guidelines.



VII. REPORTING OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

1. Mandatory Reporting Law

Effective January 1, 2015, **mandatory reporters** now include, paid or unpaid, who, on a regular basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child. This means any individual who meets this definition and includes all clergy, staff, and volunteers.

2. Procedures

1. If any person suspects that any form of child abuse has occurred, that person shall report the incident immediately to **Child Line: 1-800-932-0313** or report online immediately @ <http://lookoutforchildabuse.org/reporting/legal-forms/cy-47-online/>.
2. The reporter is responsible to complete a confidential report of suspected child abuse (form CY-47) as directed by ChildLine. This report shall be made as soon as possible but no more than (48) forty-eight hours from the time the initial report was made.
3. The reporting party should inform the Pastor, paid program staff, and/or the Clerk of Session as soon as possible.
4. All child abuse allegations shall be confidential, except as to carry out the requirements of these **Policies for Safeguarding Children and Youth** and to comply with reporting requirements under Pennsylvania law and the Church's insurance carriers.
5. The Church shall maintain all records regarding allegations of child abuse. All records will be securely stored at SCPC confidentially, by the designated staff member.

3. Investigation of Complaints

1. When suspected child abuse is reported, the Church will not conduct a separate investigation but will await the completion of the law enforcement investigation.
2. The Pastor and/or other appropriate staff will cooperate as needed with the agency conducting the investigation.
3. The Pastor &/or the Personnel Unit be will consulted on whether or not the accused employee or volunteer will or will not be permitted to work or volunteer with children or youth in any Church-sponsored function, during the investigation.

4. Counseling for Victims and Families

1. The Pastor or other appropriate representative of the Church should offer to arrange any pastoral counseling for the victim and his/her family. If the victim and his/her family choose counseling outside of the Church, the involved Pastor should provide information about qualified professionals to the victim and his/her family. If the victim and his/her family have financial concerns regarding the ability to pay a professional, the involved Pastor should provide a list of professionals who set fees based on a client's ability to pay.

