



# Protection Policy for Minors & Vulnerable Adults First Christian Church, Coralville, Iowa

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## I. Purpose

As a community of faith, First Christian Church is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and secure environment for all to worship, learn and work together. By implementing the practices in this document, our goal is to specifically protect children and vulnerable adults from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting those who work with these populations from false accusations. It is understood that we will review and adjust this policy as needed for the safety and welfare of children, vulnerable adults, and ministry workers.

## II. Definitions

Ministry refers to programs and activities hosted by First Christian Church.

A minor is anyone under the age of 18 (also referred to as child, children, or youth throughout policy)

A parent or guardian is the legal parent or legal guardian for a minor or vulnerable adult.

A vulnerable adult is anyone aged 18 or over who is or may need community care services because of mental or other disability, age, or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

A worker includes all paid and unpaid persons who have direct supervision of minors and/or vulnerable adults in ministry at First Christian Church.

An adult worker is defined as an individual age eighteen or older, who has completed all screening and training requirements outlined in this document.

A teenage worker is defined as an individual age 12-17, who has completed all screening and training requirements outlined in this document.

## III. Child Protection Team

This policy includes the creation and maintenance of a Child Protection Team. This team should include the Associate Pastor and a minimum of 2 additional members with special knowledge, training, or interest in the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. These additional members will be approved by the executive committee and may serve up to two consecutive 3-year terms. The Senior Pastor will be an ex officio member of the team. The Child Protection Team will review this policy annually and maintain responsibilities as stated in this policy.

## IV. Screening of Workers

Those who have an interest in working in ministry programs and activities for minors and/or vulnerable adults will be screened as follows:

## **A. Six Month Rule**

All persons 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 minors or vulnerable adults.

An exception to the six-month requirement applies for nursery workers and other paid staff positions that involve direct supervision of children or vulnerable adults. This requirement is waived as the hiring process includes necessary screenings, required background checks, reference checks, and an interview. Additional safeguards, such as close supervision and ongoing training, are also included as part of the hiring and onboarding process.

## **B. Application Form**

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

## **C. Background Checks**

All applicants must undergo criminal history and sexual offender registry checks. If the results take too long to arrive, it may be allowed for the applicant to start working, but they must be supervised by an adult worker until the checks are completed and reviewed. These reports will be repeated every two years.

Written permission to conduct a background check shall be obtained from each applicant prior to executing the check. If an individual declines authorization for background checks, they will be unable to work with children and/or vulnerable adults.

In addition, applicants who may be transporting children and/or vulnerable adults for church sponsored activities will have a **motor vehicle report**. They will also be asked to supply a copy of their driver's license for file. These reports will be repeated every 2 years.

Forms and results will be maintained in confidence at First Christian Church.

## **D. Teenage Workers**

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. Teenagers serving in these roles are still considered youth participants. When they are given additional responsibilities, they will be provided with appropriate guidelines, training, and supervision.

The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least 12 years of age.
- Screening will include an application, interview and references.
- Teenage workers aged 16-17 may work together with children who are age 12 and younger, with the indirect supervision of an adult worker (this means an adult worker is available on the premises).
- Teenage workers who are aged 12-15 must work with the direct supervision of an adult worker (this means an adult worker is present and has the teenage worker and minors within eyesight).
- Teenage workers must be at least four years older than the oldest youth under their supervision (this means an adult worker is present and has the teenage worker and minors within eyesight).
- Teenage workers will be trained for their role in programs and on program policies about appropriate and inappropriate interactions. This training should include the following information:
  1. Review of this policy.
  2. Appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions.
  3. Two Worker/Three Person Rule.
  4. Assuring teenage workers know who to report to if they have questions on guidelines in this document, behavior management or other situations.

## **V. Selection of Workers**

Once an applicant has submitted all required materials—including a worker application, background check, motor vehicle report (if applicable), and any other relevant documentation—their materials will be reviewed by either the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor, along with a designated member of the Child Protection Team.

Approval requires agreement between both reviewers. If a consensus cannot be reached, or if additional input is deemed necessary, the applicant's materials will be referred to the full Child Protection Team for further review and a final decision.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with minors and/or vulnerable adults will be determined by the Child Protection Team on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the surrounding circumstances and within the following parameters:

- Where a criminal record exists, consideration will be given to: seriousness of the crime; statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors; length of time since the last offense; pattern of criminal activity; and activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.
- Conviction for the following crimes are considered barriers to work with children and vulnerable adults: violent crimes; sexual assault; sexual abuse or neglect of a minor or dependent adult. The status or relevance of other crimes will be considered individually.
- Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form can be a disqualifying event.

- Following the review, each reviewer shall sign and date one of the following statements that becomes part of the applicant's file:
  - “We have reviewed the application of [Applicant X] and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant would be acceptable for the position.” -OR-
  - “We have reviewed the application of [Applicant X] and determined, based on the information we had available at this time, the applicant is not acceptable for the position.”

## **VI. Training of Workers**

First Christian Church will provide training on this policy, best practices and how to recognize and report signs of abuse to new workers. Each worker must complete child protection training prior to working with youth and/or vulnerable adults. This training will be provided online, in written form, in-person, and/or hybrid utilizing various tools as needed.

Training will include the following:

- Review of the current version of this protection policy.
- Appropriate and inappropriate physical and verbal interactions.
- Two Workers/Three Person Rule.
- Definitions of child abuse, signs of child abuse, and requirements for reporting.
- Procedures for reporting allegations and concerns pertaining to youth protection issues.

Workers shall repeat this training every two years. The Child Protection Team may offer or mandate additional training for workers at any time.

## **VII. Guidelines for Workers**

The following guidelines outline specific expectations of workers. They will also help workers to make good decisions when working with minors and vulnerable adults. If you have questions or are unsure about something, talk to a member of the Child Protection Team.

### **A. Respectful Conduct**

All workers must commit to interacting with minors and vulnerable adults of all genders in a respectful, sensitive, and appropriate manner.

Minors and vulnerable adults are to be treated with dignity and fairness at all times, without discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socioeconomic status.

Workers should also be conscientious of how their actions may appear to others and strive to avoid any behavior that could be misinterpreted as misconduct. Maintaining appropriate boundaries helps preserve parent/guardian trust and protects minors, vulnerable adults, and workers from mistaken allegations.

## **B. Two-Worker / Three-Person Rule**

A minimum of two unrelated workers should be present to supervise each activity involving minors and/or vulnerable adults. When it is not possible to comply with the two-worker rule, the worker should follow the rule of having at least three individuals always present. We do not allow a minor to be alone with a worker on our premises or in church sponsored activities.

If one on one conversation is necessary, they must be held in areas that are in full view of others (such as fellowship hall or the back of the sanctuary). If there is a situation of counseling, the meeting must be conducted in view of others (ie. a window in the door, or a door left open).

## **C. Physical Contact**

First Christian Church is committed to providing a safe, caring environment for both children and adults. Physical affection, when appropriate, can play a positive role in a young person's emotional and social development and may be suitable within the context of a church community.

Workers must always be sensitive to individual boundaries of program participants and other workers. The preferences of any person not to be touched must be honored without question.

Additionally, workers share the responsibility of protecting others from inappropriate or unwanted physical contact. This includes intervening or reporting when observing questionable behavior between others, whether between children, between adults, or between a child and an adult.

Below are examples of both appropriate and inappropriate physical contact. The list provided is not exhaustive. Additionally, please note that some interactions are considered appropriate with certain ages and inappropriate with others.

### ***Appropriate Physical Interactions:***

Side hugs; pats on the shoulder or back; handshakes, high-fives and fist-bumps; thumbs up; touching hands, shoulders, and arms; arms around shoulders; holding hands (with young children in escorting situations)

### ***Inappropriate Physical Interactions:***

Full-frontal hugs; kisses; showing affection in an isolated area; lap sitting (with youth above age 5); wrestling; piggyback rides; tickling; any type of massage given by or to a youth; any form of affection that is unwanted; gestures relating to physique or body development; touching bottom, chest, or genital areas; staring at youth and vulnerable adults' bodies.

## **D. Verbal Interactions**

Workers and youth are expected to always use respectful and appropriate language.

Workers must never speak to minors or vulnerable adults in a manner that is, or could be perceived as, harsh, threatening, shaming, intimidating, or disrespectful. All communication should reflect kindness, patience, and encouragement.

Verbal abuse, bullying, or disrespectful language—whether from workers or youth—will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Additionally, workers are responsible for promptly addressing and stopping any inappropriate verbal exchanges they witness or are part of.

Below are examples of both appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions. Please note this list is not exhaustive.

***Appropriate Verbal Interactions:***

Positive reinforcement; appropriate jokes; positive encouragement and affirmations; communicating healthy boundaries; providing clear guidance and expectations; giving instructions; offering helpful feedback; validating feelings; verbal support and guidance.

***Inappropriate Verbal Interactions***

Name-calling; mocking; shaming; belittling; derogatory remarks; yelling in anger; harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate others; telling secrets; cursing; sexually themed jokes or content; discussing personal problems or adult issues; commenting on another's body, physique or development.

**E. Off-site Contact**

Many instances of organizational abuse occur off-site and outside of regularly scheduled activities. Because interactions in these settings may carry increased risk for both workers and participants, workers must exercise heightened awareness and caution.

Any contact with youth or vulnerable adults outside of official church programs must be approached with care and always include prior permission from the participant's parent or guardian.

Examples of both appropriate and inappropriate outside contact are provided below, though this list is not exhaustive. When in doubt about the appropriateness of a specific activity or interaction, workers should consult the Child Protection Team for guidance.

***Appropriate Outside Contact***

Taking groups of youths on an outing; attending sporting activities with groups of youths; attending functions at a youth's home with parents present

***Inappropriate Outside Contact***

Taking one youth on an outing without the parents' written permission; visiting one youth in the youth's home without a parent present; entertaining one youth in the home of a worker; one youth spending the night with workers.

**F. Electronic Communication**

First Christian Church is committed to fostering healthy, supportive, and safe relationships between workers and minors, and this includes communication that happens electronically. 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. This section addresses electronic forms of communication, including email, texting, phone, and video calls (e.g., Zoom), and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat).

Electronic communication must always be transparent, respectful, and appropriate. Workers are expected to exercise caution and sound judgment in all online interactions. The following

guidelines are designed to promote safe and appropriate digital interactions while also maintaining appropriate boundaries:

- Regularly review your privacy settings on social media accounts. Be mindful that personal posts may be visible to youth connected to the ministry.
- While workers may respond to ‘friend’ or ‘follow’ requests from minors, they should not initiate such requests.
- Whenever possible, use communication methods visible to others, such as public comments rather than private messages.
- You may share ministry-related content but must not post identifiable information about minors (e.g., names, faces, locations) without consent from a parent or guardian.
- Avoid sending or responding to messages late at night or early in the morning unless there is an emergency or safety concern.
- Keep transcripts of all electronic communications (text, email, messaging, etc.) for at least 90 days and be prepared to share them with ministry leaders or parents/guardians upon request.
- Any Zoom or video call between a worker and a minor must be recorded and stored for a minimum of 90 days.
- All electronic communication must align with the expectations and guidelines in this policy, just as they would in face-to-face ministry settings.
- If a worker becomes aware of suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior through electronic communication or online platforms, they are required to report it immediately in accordance with section XIII. Reporting Suspected Misconduct or Abuse.
- While group communication is preferred for general announcements, direct messages may be necessary for purposes such as event reminders, ministry participation invitations, follow up or wellness check-ins. In such cases, best practice is to obtain prior permission from a parent or guardian before initiating communication, and when possible, to include another ministry worker or the parent/guardian on communications.

Below are examples of both appropriate and inappropriate electronic communication. Please note this list is not exhaustive:

### ***Appropriate Electronic Communication***

Sending and replying to emails and text messages from youths while also copying in a worker or parent/guardian; posting supportive comments on social media; waiting until the morning to respond to a message received late at night; sending messages in a group text that includes other youth and ministry workers.

### ***Inappropriate Electronic Communication***

Harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, degrading, or humiliating comments; sexually oriented conversations; posting pictures of organization participants on social media sites without permission; posting inappropriate comments on pictures; requesting to friend or follow participants on social networking sites.



## **G. Personal Conduct**

Workers must not use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while supervising or interacting with minors or vulnerable adults.

Adult workers are prohibited from dating, pursuing romantic relationships with, or engaging in any form of sexual behavior with minors.

Teenage workers may not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with minors they supervise or lead. Peer relationships between teens of similar age are permissible, but must not interfere with supervision or safety of participants, or the purpose or trust of the program.

Additionally, all workers must be mindful of how their actions may be perceived by others. They are expected to always maintain appropriate boundaries and take intentional steps to avoid even the appearance of misconduct.

## **VIII. Bullying**

First Christian Church will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one youth or vulnerable adult by another youth or vulnerable adult. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying will not be permitted, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.

## **IX. Overnight Activities**

At least two workers will be present for overnight activities. The preferred arrangement is two adults per room and one person per bed. If there is a situation that requires a different arrangement, the event supervisor will discuss the options with the parents/guardians and/or the youth. Attention will be paid to location, setting and the sleeping/showering arrangements available to allow for the comfort and safety of all participants.

## **X. Transportation**

When minors are transported as part of a ministry, all drivers must have completed both a criminal background check and motor vehicle report. Copies of a valid driver's license and proof of insurance are also required. Parent approval is required for minors driven by drivers under the age of 21.

1. When possible, there will be at least three people present in any vehicle. When this is not possible, consent of parent or guardian must be obtained and an Incident Report Form filled out.
2. All occupants of a personal vehicle must use a seat belt and proper child safety restraints.
3. If transportation is not offered as part of the ministry, workers should be cautious about taking responsibility for transporting children or vulnerable adults and should recognize that they do that on their own, not as an official representative of First Christian Church.

4. This policy shall not hinder adult volunteers or employees from providing transportation in a medical emergency. The adult shall make a reasonable attempt to contact a parent or guardian prior to providing such transportation.
5. When transporting youth, all State and Federal Laws must be followed.

## **XI. Discipline Policy**

Throughout all disciplinary procedures, the workers at First Christian Church shall always demonstrate care, even though inappropriate behavior cannot be tolerated. Workers should consult another trained worker or the Child Protection Team if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Below are guidelines for discipline

- Take a proactive approach to discipline by using positive reinforcement of desirable behavior.
- Never manage inappropriate behavior with physical or verbal punishment, by answering in kind, or with sarcasm.
- Manage inappropriate behavior by:
  - Using age appropriate strategies which may include distraction and reminders.
  - Informing the youth when behavior is unacceptable, making sure that they understand the reasons why certain behaviors are expected.
  - If the unacceptable behavior persists or recurs, removing the child from the situation, so they may calm down or regroup.
  - Advising them that they may be referred to another adult if the behavior does not improve and/or that their parent/guardian will be notified.
  - If behavior becomes dangerous to others, the youth should be immediately taken out of the environment and another supervising adult should be consulted/informed. An Incident Report Form should be filled out and parents/guardians should be notified and may be asked to take the youth home.
- Repeated incidents may result in a suspension from activities.

## **XII. Social Media, Electronic Communication & Online Ministry**

All guidelines in this policy apply to face-to-face ministries as well as online ministries and electronic communication. This includes but is not limited to screening/training of workers, verbal interactions, bullying and discipline policy, and reporting of suspected misconduct or abuse.

### **A. 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.

## B. Electronic Communication

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. There may be times when it is preferable for a worker to communicate directly with a minor in a ministry program. These communications may include ministry event invitations, reminders or follow-up, specific inquiries about opportunities to participate in ministry, or for a wellness check-in. Best practice is to include another worker or a parent on the communication, and to obtain parent/guardian permission before texting or private messaging a minor. Please see section VII. Guidelines for Workers, F. Electronic Communication for further guidance.

## C. Online Ministry

Ministries such as Faith Formation 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 to be present. In circumstances 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 at least 90 days.
- Measures will be taken to enhance security of meetings including meeting links not available publicly and waiting rooms enabled when available.

## XIII. Reporting Suspected Misconduct or Abuse

Workers are required to immediately report all suspected abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults as well as suspected abuse or misconduct by other workers—whether the incident occurs at church or elsewhere.

In cases where a worker observes abuse, notices signs of abuse or receives a disclosure of abuse:

- If it is the opinion of the worker that anyone is in immediate danger, **call 911 immediately.**
- The worker who observed the abuse, signs of abuse or received the disclosure of abuse must report the concern directly to the Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178. This phone number is to be called to report both suspected child abuse and dependent adult abuse.
  - The worker is encouraged to receive guidance and support from the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, or a member of the Child Protection Team before and during the reporting process, as long as it does not cause delay in making the report.
- A report must also be made to the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, or a member of the Child Protection Team. A verbal report may be made initially, but an Incident Report Form must also be completed and submitted.

In cases where an observed or suspected violation of this policy occurs but no person is directly harmed:

- Concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of employees, volunteers, adults, or youth should be reported to the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, or a member of the Child Protection Team.
- Any observed or suspected violation of this policy must also be documented using an Incident Report Form and submitted to the Child Protection Team.

First Christian Church will fully cooperate with all external authorities in the investigation of alleged abuse. Workers are expected to fully participate in any investigation—whether conducted by law enforcement, child protection services, or internal organizational representatives.

All reports of suspected abuse or misconduct will be treated confidentially, subject to disclosure as required by church policy or applicable law. In all cases, the safety of minors, vulnerable adults, and program participants are the highest priority.

## **XIV. Responding to Suspected Misconduct or Abuse**

When an allegation of misconduct, abuse, or a violation of this policy occurs involving a volunteer or staff worker of First Christian Church, the following internal processes will be followed:

Upon receiving an allegation of misconduct or abuse involving a worker:

- The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor or a member of the Child Protection Team will oversee the immediate removal of the accused from ministry programs involving minors or vulnerable adults.
- The accused will be notified that they are prohibited from participating in ministry activities with these groups until further notice from the Child Protection Team.
- The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor or a designated member of the Child Protection Team will notify the Executive Committee that an allegation has been reported and is under review.

The Child Protection Team will conduct a review, including:

- Gathering relevant information such as witness statements and supporting documentation (e.g., emails, text messages, video footage).
- Offering the accused an opportunity to provide a written account of the incident.

After reviewing all available information, the Child Protection Team will:

- Prepare a written report summarizing its findings and outlining a recommendation regarding the accused's future participation in church programs and activities.
- Submit the report to the Executive Committee for review and final action.
- Share the determination with the accused individual and relevant ministry leaders, ensuring appropriate communication and next steps.

## **XV.Parent/Guardian Permission Forms**

Parent/guardian permission forms will be required for all minors 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.

## **XVI.Illness Policy**

If a youth becomes ill at church and needs to go home, the parent or guardian will be notified. In emergency situations, if parents or guardians cannot be located, medical attention will be provided at a medical facility.

Youth with fever, vomiting, or diarrhea should not attend or return to church until they are symptom free for 24 hours.

Parents or guardians of youth with later diagnosed communicable or contagious diseases are asked to notify the church immediately.

It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to make sure the permission forms including medical information and allergies are up to date.

## **XVII.Accidental Injuries**

In the event that a minor or vulnerable adult is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once appropriate medical attention has been received, an incident report will be completed.

## **XVIII.Release of Children**

It is encouraged for each ministry group to 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 six (6) years old should be accompanied by a worker when moving from ministry to ministry. Children aged 6 and older may be released on their own to move to another area of the church at the worker's discretion (e.g. moving from worship to faith formation).
- When releasing children from the building 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.

## **XIX. 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 minors and vulnerable adults.

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