

# Handbook on Abuse Prevention for Children, Youth, & At-risk Adults

*Approved by Session August 19, 2009*

ST. ANDREW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
300 W. Oak St.  
Denton, TX. 76201

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# Introduction

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church has adopted the Child, Youth, and At-risk Adult Abuse Prevention policy which is outlined in this handbook. The implementation of this policy is not the result of an incident but from a mandate from Grace Presbytery and our insurance carrier. The policy requires that all adults and youth who volunteer and work with children, youth, and at-risk adults must complete a Volunteer Information form and provide the necessary information to perform a background check.

Please understand that the intent of this policy is not to place an undue burden on our wonderful volunteers but rather to ensure that all who enter the doors of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church can feel confident that they are entering a safe and nurturing environment. For all the volunteers who have submitted the necessary paperwork for the background checks and attended the training, thank you. For those of you who have not had the opportunity to complete the necessary background check paperwork and read this handbook, we would ask that you do so as soon as possible.

The St. Andrew Office Manager is the Administrator for this policy. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact her.

Thank you for your cooperation,  
Bill Turner, Moderator, Personnel Committee  
March 26, 2010

# Volunteers, Parents, Employees, & Staff

*We are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of children, youth, and at-risk adults at St. Andrew. The Personnel committee, with the full approval of the Session of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, has provided the Volunteer Information form, found at the back of this Handbook, for you to complete and give to the Administrator. Reading this Handbook will also inform you on the process to follow should reporting an incident ever become necessary.*

*If you are a first-time volunteer at St. Andrew, or if you have not yet completed the Volunteer Information form, please complete the form and give it to the Administrator in the church office. The Administrator will submit the information provided for a background check and file your personal information in a locked filing cabinet. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements, will be considered confidential.*

*If you have questions or concerns about the policy, please contact the moderator of the Personnel committee.*

## **Terms Defined**

The terms “child,” “children,” and “youth” refer to persons under 18 year of age and “at-risk adult” refers to all persons over 18 who may be vulnerable while receiving ministry through specific programs of the church including, but not limited to, Stephen Ministry and Grief Recovery programs.

This policy addresses the preventable risk of any form of abuse or harassment, whether physical, mental, or sexual, by any of the employees, teachers, members, parents, or volunteers of this church while on church property or while engaged in church activities or programs. However, we believe that any person who has been accused of committing an act of abuse can expect due process, our prayers, and acceptance as a human being.

## **Conditions for Programs & Activities for Children, Youth, and At-risk Adults**

All church activities and programs involving children, youth, and at-risk adults, regardless of location, will be subject to the following conditions:

1. Whenever feasible, two adults will be assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth.
2. Teachers, parents, volunteers, employees, and staff members will complete a Volunteer Information form so that the Administrator of the policy may submit a background check.
3. This church will not tolerate or accept any act or omission described in the section Prohibited Acts (see below).
4. Upon accusation, the accused is entitled to prompt and fair disposition of such serious charges and to receive due process of law including the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.
5. Any violation of this policy shall be reported using a Suspected Abuse Incident Report form and following the procedures outlined below.

# Volunteers, Parents, Employees, & Staff continued

## **Background Checks Required**

The background and reference checks will be submitted and the results will be reviewed by the Administrator. After initial review, if the Administrator determines that further review should be made, the Administrator will consult with the Head of Staff (Senior Pastor). The Administrator and Head of Staff may consult with the appropriate program staff if they determine that additional review is required.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or as a result of the background check, the following will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any children or youth activity or program or ministry to at-risk adults:

Any indictment alleging the offense of, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child; possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child.

All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Administrator. If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history transcript, he or she may appeal through the Texas Department of Public Safety or other appropriate governmental agency.

## **Prohibited Acts**

The following acts are prohibited under this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any church activity or program. Any observation or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to the Administrator, Head of Staff, or appropriate program staff after the safety of the child, children, youth, or at-risk adult involved has been assured.

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct toward a child, youth, or at-risk adult;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child, youth, or at-risk adult;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child, youth, or at-risk adult;
- Physical neglect of a child, children, youth, or at-risk adult, including failure to provide adequate supervision during church activities or programs;
- Causing mental or emotional injury to a child, children, youth, or at-risk adult;
- Possessing obscene or pornographic materials at any function of the church;
- Possessing, advocating the use of, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in children's or youth function or while engaging in ministry with at-risk adults at the church.

# Reporting a Violation

*The staff, employees, teachers, parents, and volunteers are responsible for reporting any questionable circumstances, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected abusive behavior or harassment shall be directed to the Administrator, Head of Staff, or the appropriate program staff, or in extenuating circumstances, Grace Presbytery's Executive Presbyter.*

*In the event that someone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this policy, that person will be asked to complete a written Suspected Abuse Incident Report, a copy of which can be found at the end of this Handbook. Anyone who witnesses such an occurrence should consider the following in handling an incident to insure the security of the child, youth, or at-risk adult involved and to protect against physical, emotional, or psychological injury to all persons involved.*

## Steps to Take if a Violation of the Policy Occurs

### Observation of a Violation

1. Personally secure the safety of the child, children, youth, or at-risk adult. Do not leave the child, children, youth, or at-risk adult alone to report the incident.
2. Report the incident immediately upon securing the safety of the child, children, youth, or at-risk adult.
3. Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of the policy.
4. Allow the designated person to provide you with instructions for reporting the incident to the parents or guardian.
5. The Head of Staff or the designated person on the Response Team will be solely responsible for all communication on behalf of the church.

### Report of a Violation by the Victim

In the event a child, youth, or at-risk adult reports abusive conduct while engaged in a church-sponsored activity or involving the staff, employees, teachers, parents, or volunteers of the church, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child, youth, or at-risk adult should:

1. Listen; don't show panic or shock.
2. Tell them you believe them.
3. Reassure them that they acted correctly in telling you and that the abuse is not their fault.
4. Determine how to keep the victim safe and protected.
5. Contact the Administrator, Head of Staff, or program staff person and complete a written Suspected Abuse Incident report. Record verbatim in the report the specific words first spoken by the child, youth or at-risk adult and the conduct and demeanor observed as the report is made.

# Reporting a Violation continued

## Consequences of Violation

Any person accused of committing a Prohibited Act, whether a staff member, employee, member, parent or volunteer, will immediately be suspended from participation in all children's and youth activities and programs of the church and all ministries to at-risk adults of the church. Such suspension shall continue during any investigation by the church or law enforcement or child protection agencies.

Any person found to have committed a Prohibited Act shall be barred from future participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church and ministries to at-risk adults of the church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

As required by Texas law, all reports of abuse of children or youth will be forwarded to the appropriate child protection and law enforcement authorities. Such reporting must be accomplished in addition to complying with this child protection policy.

Failure to report in a timely manner a Prohibited Act to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of this policy. This shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church and all ministries to at-risk adults of the church.

## Helpful Information on Abuse

### *Characteristics of Abusers*

- Highly manipulative
- Unable to meet intimacy needs appropriately
- Has power over the victim
- Has successfully abused before
- May have been a victim of abuse when young

### *Why Don't Victims Tell?*

- Didn't know it was wrong or illegal
- Didn't know who to tell
- Told and weren't believed
- Ashamed (guilt feelings)
- Frightened (threats by abuser to harm victim or victim's family members)

# Implementing a Response to Reported Abuse

*St. Andrew Presbyterian Church will respond to a reported incident of alleged or suspected abuse whether of a child, youth, or at-risk adult, in an effort to protect the victim and any individuals involved in the incident. It is NOT the policy of the Church to prove that the alleged or suspected abuse has or has not occurred, as this is the responsibility of the proper legal authorities. The Church will strive to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the alleged victim and the accused.*

*The Response Team shall be a permanent committee of church members, who shall serve a two-year term in rotating classes of two persons each, with the Administrator as a permanent member.*

## **Session Responsibility**

Appoint or delegate annually the formation of a Response Team, consisting of the following individuals.

- Administrator of the Policy
- An attorney experienced or trained in criminal law and the provisions of the Penal Code and Family Code of the State of Texas as they relate to child abuse and the reporting thereof
- A person capable of providing support for the alleged victim
- A person capable of providing support for the alleged abuser
- A parent of a youth or child

## **Administrator Responsibility**

- Notify the Response Team and convene an action meeting immediately.
- Notify the Director of the affected ministry area immediately.
- Inform the parents of the alleged victim and respond to their questions and concerns.

## **Response Team Responsibility**

Upon being informed that an Incident Report has been submitted, the Response Team shall:

- Assure that the accused person has been removed and suspended from duties involving the children/youth/at-risk adults pending external and internal investigations.
- Notify the appropriate legal or state authorities by telephone.
- Prepare a written report and send one copy to the appropriate State agency and give a copy to the Head of Staff.
- Review the alleged incident and recommend appropriate action, if any.

The Response Team will develop a plan of action to include the following:

- Notify the insurance carrier of the incident immediately and comply with its investigation, if any.
- Cooperate with legal and state authorities in their investigations, if any.
- Prepare a written statement for the Head of Staff to respond to media inquiries.
- Provide assistance to the alleged victim and his/her family in obtaining counseling or referral to mental health professions if needed.
- Provide assistance to the alleged abuser and his/her family in obtaining counseling or referral to mental health professions if needed.
- Inform the affected volunteer(s) and paid staff members of the need for confidentiality.
- Consider and respond to the concerns of other parents.

