



TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Children and Youth Protection Policy

Approved by Session – [March, 2021]
(this Policy should be reviewed every 3 years)

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Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Mark 10:14

Mission and Purpose

MISSION Trinity Presbyterian Church (“Trinity” or “TPC”) believes that God has called us to create a safe haven for all persons in our care, to empower them through faith and trust, and to protect the powerless. As a result, Trinity makes the following commitments:

- **Commitment to Members.** Trinity is committed to its members of every age. During the baptism of each person into our community of faith, Trinity pledges to uphold, teach, and strengthen that person in Jesus Christ and to support that person’s relationship with the Body of Christ.
- **Commitment to Children and Youth.** Trinity is especially committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all young people participating in Trinity’s activities, including those who are developmentally, mentally, or physically disabled, regardless of age.
- **Commitment to Staff and Volunteers.** Trinity is committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all persons involved in the care and nurture of young people. Trinity recognizes that certain people have gifts for teaching, growing, and developing young people and wants to encourage them to use these gifts. At the same time, however, the church places certain criteria on those adults who choose to serve in this capacity.

PURPOSE The purpose of this Policy is to protect young people from neglect, abuse, or harassment, whether physical, mental, sexual, or verbal, while on Trinity’s property or while engaged in Trinity-sponsored activities or programs. Additionally we are called to stand not in judgment, but in compassion for each other. 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 child of God.

Who is Covered by the Policy?

This Policy applies to all minor children, ages 0-17. The terms “Students”, “Children”, “Youths” and “Young People” may be used interchangeably, and apply to all minors involved in any programs, ministries, schools, daycare and sports leagues of Trinity Presbyterian Church.

All Trinity employees and volunteers participating in any children and youth programs of TPC must comply with this Policy, including but not limited to:

- Nurseries and child care
- Sunday school classes
- Children and youth fellowship programs
- Children and youth choirs
- Trinity sponsored retreats, mission trips, etc.
- Vacation bible school
- TPP
- Youth leaders
- Trinity sponsored athletic leagues or teams
- Confirmation partners

Outside groups using TPC facilities which have direct supervision of children and youth (such as Boy Scouts, Girl School or TELC) will be expected to acknowledge in writing that they have adopted and follow their own policies, governance and insurance. Given the nature of the outside groups that use TPC facilities, Trinity will not perform background checks, seek personal or professional references, or review employment records. Leaders of outside groups will be expected to conduct their own due diligence and will be invited to attend TPC's frequently scheduled training classes.

Overview of Four Safety Steps

All staff members and volunteers working with youth must complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placement begins.

STEP ONE: Training

Abusive behavior of any kind, by staff members or volunteers, is forbidden. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to a supervisor or a member of Trinity Leadership. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip Trinity staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, Trinity requires all staff members and volunteers to complete sexual abuse awareness online training and quizzes through MinistrySafe®. This training will be renewed every two (2) years. Additional in-person training may be offered during each church calendar year.

STEP TWO: Screening

Staff members and volunteers working or serving with children are required to complete Trinity's Screening Process, which includes:

- Face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- References checked (employees only)
- Before being eligible to serve in positions interacting with children or youth, volunteers must either (1) be a member at Trinity for six (6) months, (2) have demonstrated attendance in worship and programs, (3) have references checked, or (4) have prior relationship with more than one staff member.

STEP THREE: Policies

Staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this policy manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements. Volunteers who have not been active in a full church program year may be asked to review this manual and sign the last page acknowledgement again.

STEP FOUR: Background Check

Trinity requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or youth activities or programming undergo a criminal background check annually. Depending upon position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required. Background check expenses will be borne by the respective organization or ministry.

Enforcement Generally

ABUSE TOLERANCE

Trinity has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at Trinity to act in the best interest of children in every program.

In the event that any staff member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behavior (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is that individual's responsibility to immediately report these observations to his or her immediate supervisor, the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries, or the Senior Pastor.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Trinity staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Trinity policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor and the Personnel Committee of the Session.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor, the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries, or the Senior Pastor.

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Trinity is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services, or another appropriate agency.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers must report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries or the Senior Pastor. In the case of a report to a supervisor or to the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries (or any other pastor or staff at Trinity), then the Senior Pastor should also be notified.

TRINITY CHURCH POLICY IS TO REPORT ALL SUSPICIONS OR ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE, REGARDLESS OF STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS.

WHEN IN DOUBT, REPORT!

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in any activities involving children or youths at Trinity. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective Services, or another appropriate agency.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, youths or vulnerable populations at Trinity. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from Trinity.

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE TO REPORT

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Volunteers who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children or youth at Trinity, and may constitute a misdemeanor under O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(h) (2007).

RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE

Trinity Leadership will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs. Any report must be promptly reported to the Senior Pastor. When a policy violation has been reported, the Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries will make all communications on behalf of Trinity. Church communications will include, when necessary, reporting the incident to appropriate legal authorities in accordance with Georgia law. The Senior Pastor will notify, when appropriate, the Director of Finance and Administration, who will in turn notify Trinity's insurance carrier and counsel.

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(g) (2007), and the PC(USA) Book of Order Section G-4.0302, ministerial staff shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication; or (2) even if revealed in the context of confidential communications, he or she reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

After reporting an incident to the Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries, the reporter has a reasonable expectation that the pastor will act in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5 (2007), and in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(c)(2) (2007), and is discharged of further reporting responsibility. However, should the reporter obtain clear and convincing evidence that no report has been made, nothing herein shall be deemed to supersede the reporting obligations created by O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5 (2007), and PC (USA) Book of Order Section G-4.0302.

Staff Monitoring Plan

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff member and volunteer interactions with children and youth.

1. **Each supervisor** conducts regular unscheduled observations of programs.
2. **The Associate Pastor for Family Ministries** conducts periodic performance evaluations that include items that address participation in risk management training and adherence to risk management procedures.
3. **The Associate Pastor for Family Ministries** conducts an unscheduled observation at least once each month for programs that occur weekly.
4. **The Senior Pastor** conducts regular unscheduled observations of children's and youth ministries, programs and choirs.
5. **The Senior Pastor** meets with Associate Pastor for Family Ministries and with the Director of Music and Fine Arts at least quarterly to discuss all children's and youth ministries and choirs, including safety training and procedures.
6. **The Associate Pastor for Family Ministries** meets with the leaders of youth ministry and children's ministry, as well as TPP, at least once monthly to discuss all children's and youth ministries, including safety training and procedures.
7. **Members of the Personnel Committee** meets with the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries, once each year to discuss all children's and youth ministries and choirs, including safety training and procedures.

Children and Youth Safety Policies

BUILDING SAFETY

The Associate Pastor for Family Ministries will be responsible for ensuring that the children's and youth programs area is monitored during Sunday classes or programming. This will include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers and students.

No child will ever be left unattended or unsupervised during children's and youth programs or meetings. Staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: If a child or youth desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or volunteer after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.)

After every programming event, staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Any two students together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area.

ADULT TO CHILD RATIO

Trinity is committed to providing adequate supervision in all children's and youth activities and programs. Accordingly, the following ratios will be observed for all activities and programs:

For groups up to and including 10 students, there will be at least 1 staff member or volunteer supervising (preferably 2). For groups ranging from 11 to 29 students, there will be at least 2 staff members or volunteers supervising. For groups larger than 30 students, there will be at least 3 staff members or volunteers supervising.

If a worker is out of ratio it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify supervisory staff responsible for the program or event. The responsible supervisory staff member will make diligent effort to immediately bring staff member/volunteer to student ratios into compliance with this policy.

DISCIPLINE

It is the policy of Trinity that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of children or students. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction or inappropriate behaviors by children or youths. If a child is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff/volunteers, that child will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the child's parent will be contacted to pick up the child. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff members will verbally redirect students involved and will try to avoid physical intervention. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries.

RESTROOM SUPERVISION

When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open. Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms. Children should be verbally assisted where possible. If physical assistance is necessary, another staff member or volunteer should be present. School age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. Children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom. If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

INTOXICANTS

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any church facility, while traveling with children or

youths, or while working with or supervising students. Care should also be exercised while taking any prescription or other medications. Should a staff member or volunteer feel intoxicated, impaired, or ill, she or he is to immediately notify the other staff and volunteers.

NUDITY

Staff and volunteers should never be nude in the presence of students in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member or volunteer leading the event will communicate a plan to the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS

Trinity recognizes that meeting the emotional needs of children or youths may occasionally require staff member and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff Members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines when interacting with students.

Individual Meetings

Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual student at a time when others are present and where interactions can be observed. Private one-on-one conversations should not occur behind closed doors, but rather in public space – for example, in the corner of a large space with other staff members or volunteers present in the larger space.

Pastoral Counseling

It is not a violation of this Policy for any Pastor to talk with a child privately when the child has requested a private meeting and the Pastor informs another staff member about the meeting before, and if not possible, as soon as possible thereafter, about the meeting. Any such meeting should also not occur behind closed doors, but rather in public space, or with open door or window – for example, with line of sight to other adults at all times.

TRANSPORTATION

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of students:

1. Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport. If circumstances require that only one child is in a vehicle (i.e. the last child to be dropped at home), then the staff member or volunteer driving should call another staff member or volunteer (hands-free) and stay on the phone until the child is dropped off.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.

3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving Trinity vans, or vehicles owned or rented by Trinity, except as set forth above or in the case of an emergency.
4. No drivers under age 25 may drive Trinity-owned or rented vehicles. All drivers will provide proof of current insurance coverage, and notify Trinity of any changes to his/her driving record or insurance coverage.

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents whose student is participating in Trinity's children's or youth activities and programs will be contacted if their child becomes severely ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in such activities or programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with children's or youth activities and programs will be required to comply with Trinity's Screening Process.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Trinity is committed to protecting children and youths in its care. To this end, Trinity has implemented a 'physical contact policy' that promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our children's and youth ministries and programs. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in these ministries or programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and students are important for child development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection must be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries or the Senior Pastor.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other students or student staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted as such when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff or volunteers in the children's and youth ministries and programs must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force any physical contact, touch or affection upon a reluctant child. A student's preference not to be touched must be respected.

7. Student staff and volunteers are responsible for using their reasonable efforts to protect students under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries or the Senior Pastor.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any student in the program. However, it is expected that from time to time Youth ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will occur in group settings or individual interactions under the guidelines set forth above, and will convey the church's views on these topics.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from possessing (or transmitting to any child) any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, pictures, films, etc.) on Trinity property or in the presence of children or youths, including those in electronic form.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

It is anticipated that certain Youth ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff members and volunteers (i.e. lock-ins, mission trips, ski trips, etc.). In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. A single student should not be alone in a sleeping arrangement with a staff member or volunteer.
2. All adult leaders must have previously completed Trinity's screening and training process.
3. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing to and approved by the Associate Pastor for Family Ministries prior to the activity.
4. As long as any students are awake, one trip leader must be awake and monitoring students to ensure safe behavior.
5. Leaders should check with parents and use good judgment regarding PG or PG-13 movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
6. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn; both tops and bottoms.
7. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both boys and girls, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by student leaders of the same gender.

8. Staff members and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff members and volunteers should never physically touch a student.
9. Whenever possible, staff members or volunteers will sleep in the same room (but not same bed) as students, or in an adjoining room with the door between the rooms kept open.
10. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff member, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a “one-person-to-one bag or blanket” rule will be observed.

TOBACCO

Trinity requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products or “vaping” in Trinity facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, and during Trinity activities or programs, including travel. Trinity is a tobacco-free facility.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and students should be positive and uplifting. Trinity staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of students.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of students.

NOTE: The next 2 pages are duplicate acknowledgment forms. The staff member or volunteer should sign both pages. The 1st page stays attached with this Policy and should be retained by the staff member/volunteer. The 2nd page should be retained by Trinity.

Policies and Procedures
Statement of Acknowledgment and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of Trinity's Children and Youth Protection Policy and understand the importance of the matters set forth within the policy manual. I agree to follow and abide by these policies and procedures during service at Trinity.

Further, I understand that the manual may be modified at any time, and that any policies and procedures may be amended, revised, or eliminated at any time by Trinity.

I also acknowledge that I have reviewed and agree to fulfill the duties listed in the manual.

I further acknowledge and understand that the policies and procedures contained in this policy manual in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between Trinity and me. If I am applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no compensation for hours worked.

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new policies and procedures that are created and distributed as well as policies and procedures that are changed or deleted.

I hereby acknowledge receipt of Trinity's Children and Youth Protection Policy.

Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

[This page is to remain attached to the Staff Member or Volunteer's copy]

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Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

[This page is to be signed, detached and delivered to Trinity]