

CHILD, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION POLICY

Adopted by Session June 26, 2025

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

At Erin Presbyterian Church of Knoxville, we take seriously our moral and legal responsibility to provide a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and support for those who work with them. This is an expression of our faith as we seek to proclaim the good news that we know in Jesus Christ and work for Him: in our church and beyond.

The Session, staff, and members of Erin are committed to maintaining a safe environment in which children, youth, and vulnerable adults are protected from inappropriate treatment of any kind. Our intent is to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults in all church programs; to educate all staff and volunteer workers concerning pertinent child, youth, and vulnerable adult protection issues; and to protect staff and volunteers, as well as the church, from potential allegations of abuse and neglect.

This policy, as indicated in the definitions below, aims to address issues of abuse and neglect. We acknowledge that other concerns within a program, such as curricular content, behavior, and personal conflict may arise from time to time. While not explicitly addressed in this policy, these concerns are important, and we encourage open communication about issue that may arise, so that it may be handled in a pastorally sensitive manner.

Protection Policy includes:

- Selection of staff, teachers, volunteers, and others involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
- Orientation and training of these individuals;
- Supervision of these individuals;
- Monitoring the policy and procedures to ensure compliance;
- Procedures for reporting and responding to allegations.

We recognize that children, youth, and vulnerable adults are entrusted to the care of adults in church programs and activities, both on and away from church property and also in programs operated by others on church property. Children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be free to participate in these programs and activities without intimidation, coercion, or abuse of any type. This policy is applicable to all persons under the church's supervision, including, but not limited to, church members, visitors, compensated staff, and volunteers.

We recognize that awareness and prevention are the essence of safety. Workers are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse and neglect of children, youth, and vulnerable adults and to awareness and prevention of the same.

We recognize that adults working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults give much of their time and energy to our programs. This policy is designed to minimize the potential for false accusations or misunderstandings.

In the event of an accusation or incident, support will be given to all parties and will include ministering to all persons involved and their families. The highest possible confidentiality shall be observed at all times.

Definitions:

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child", "children", "youth" include all persons under the age of 18. "Vulnerable adults" include those above 18 years of age, who do not have the cognitive or physical capacity to give consent.

Throughout this document "Inappropriate Treatment" shall refer collectively to the following:

- Physical abuse: any physical injury which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burning, and biting.
- Emotional abuse: emotional injury when a participant is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse: any sexual activity between a child, youth, or vulnerable adult and an adult; or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect: depriving a participant of essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, safety, and medical care.

For purposes of this policy, the following terms apply to persons working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults:

- Staff: the comprehensive term used to cover individuals who are hired or contracted to work for the church for salary or wages.
- Volunteer: the term used for those persons who provide services for the church, including its governing bodies and entities and members, and receive no benefits or compensation.
- Workers: Staff and volunteers as defined above.

GUIDELINES FOR WORKERS

Guidelines for Selection and Training

The following guidelines apply to all persons who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults at Erin:

1. Only volunteers who have been members, or participating non-members, of Erin for at least six months are eligible to work with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Exceptions must receive Session approval.
2. Volunteers and staff with frequent direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and those who chaperone over-night events must complete periodic training about child safety and are subject to a personal interview with the program director and a criminal background check (including a nationwide records search and a review of state offender registries). These records are considered confidential church property and are not to be released to any other party except on a need-to-know basis with the approval of the Leader of Family Ministries, Pastor, or the Chair of the Personnel Team
3. Adults who have been convicted of an offense involving a child, youth, or vulnerable adult will not be accepted to work or volunteer in any church-sponsored activity for those populations.
4. The following additional procedures should be followed with staff who work with children/youth/vulnerable adults:
 - a. The staff person must complete a screening application which will ask about any past volunteer involvement and employment history, including any previous responsibilities in working with children/youth/vulnerable adults and a list of references.
 - b. The staff person's supervisor will interview them, and essentially the same questions will be posed to each person.
 - c. Reference checks and criminal background checks of individuals will be conducted as stated above.

Guidelines for Performance of Duties

1. Workers are expected to avoid, to the extent possible, any situation in which they would be alone or out of sight of others with a single child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
2. At least two adults, over the age of 18, (and more if circumstances demand) must be available before, during, and after an event, until all children/youth/vulnerable adults are in the care of their parents, guardians, or authorized responsible caregivers.
3. Additionally, it is expected that in any off-campus activities, including out of town or overnight trips, that there be a least one (1) adult per every six (6) children/youth/vulnerable adults. Male and female workers will be selected based on the gender composition of the group.
4. Normally, only adults aged 25 or older will be allowed to drive vehicles in which children, youth, and vulnerable adults are passengers. The exception to this is when a staff

member is under 25 years old and is responsible for group transportation. All drivers must adhere to church guidelines, whether it is a church-owned, rented or personal vehicle. Exceptions must receive Session approval.

5. Adults are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential of abuse of children/youth/vulnerable adults and to avoid appearance of same. They should not hesitate to caution others if they observe activities or behavior which are or might appear to be inappropriate.
6. Workers/volunteers who observe questionable or inappropriate behavior of any kind affecting children/youth/vulnerable adults must report it immediately to an appropriate staff member. This applies to the behavior of children/youth/vulnerable adults as well as to the behavior of workers.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Erin Presbyterian Church for workers to promote the safety and well-being of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults engaged in church activities. Erin also promotes respectful, positive support of the social-emotional development of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Workers shall not administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There shall be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the appropriate staff person for the program if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. Workers should refrain from yelling and should speak calmly to participants and endeavor to redirect uncooperative behaviors.

Orientation and Training of Workers

Before they begin working with children/youth/vulnerable adults, Erin will provide workers with an orientation and training, including a review of the Protection Policy. Erin will strive to provide opportunities for ongoing training for workers. Completion of orientation and ongoing training is the responsibility of the worker and the staff person overseeing the worker. Completion of the training will be documented on the applicable forms and retained in the appropriate files.

Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Inappropriate Treatment of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult

1. The procedures set forth below shall be carried out in the event of an allegation of inappropriate treatment of a minor or vulnerable adult, as previously defined in this policy.
2. The person who suspects or witnesses inappropriate treatment of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall report the incident immediately to the staff or chairperson of the division with responsibility for the program or activity (hereafter referred to as the

"Chairperson"). Confidentiality of all persons will be safeguarded to the extent reasonably possible.

3. Within twenty-four hours of the incident, the person who suspects or witnesses the inappropriate treatment shall document in writing all known facts and circumstances regarding the incident and shall deliver to the Chairperson, written documentation of the inappropriate treatment.
4. The Chairperson shall notify the pastor or designee within twenty-four hours of the incident.
5. Erin will follow all State of Tennessee reporting requirements for [suspected child abuse or neglect](#), and will adhere to the guidelines below as officials carry out their investigation and make decisions in the matter. If concerns do not rise to the level of needing to be reported to state authorities, the program director or Chairperson will investigate the complaint and will carry out appropriate steps for safety and security. Erin will always choose to report, if there is any question of whether the area of concern falls into the definition of abuse or neglect.
6. The person who suspects or witnesses abuse or neglect of a minor shall report it to either the Department of Children's Services, County Juvenile Court, or law enforcement with jurisdiction within twenty-four hours of the incident. Incident/allegations that occur outside Tennessee will be reported within twenty-four hours to law enforcement with jurisdiction for that location. If circumstances warrant, law enforcement should be called immediately.
7. The church will be supportive of the individuals who, in good faith, make reports of reasonable suspected cases of abuse. All reports will be taken seriously but not judged prematurely.
8. In the case of a reported offense, an in-depth investigation will be carried out by the appropriate state authorities, rather than by church personnel.
9. Contact with and notice to the parents/guardians of the suspected victim regarding the alleged inappropriate treatment shall be dealt with solely by the appropriate public investigating authority and not by church personnel. If the parents/guardians are members of the Erin community, ongoing pastoral care will continue.
10. The safety and security of the child/youth/vulnerable adult must be safeguarded at all times.
11. The pastor or designee will make an appropriate report to the liability insurer, and the appropriate governing bodies in the denomination and appropriate legal counsel.
12. Persons accused must be treated with dignity and will be given support. Depending on the circumstances of the allegations, such persons may be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, until the investigation is completed, and appropriate actions determined.

13. The pastor or designee will be the sole spokesperson for the Church regarding media inquiries.
14. Any report of inappropriate treatment involving an ordained minister shall be made to the accused minister's presbytery. The presbytery's designee shall be responsible for following procedures set forth in this section and all practices established by the Presbytery.

Distribution of Policy:

The session will take appropriate steps to inform members, employees, and volunteers of the church's protection policy and procedures. Copies of this policy will be made available to all church members through the church website.

All session members, employees and volunteers will be given a copy of church's policies and procedures and will be asked to conduct themselves in accordance with the policy and procedures.

This policy will be made available to persons who make allegations relevant to this document.

All Session members, pastors, and church employees will participate in training on the subject of child and vulnerable adult protection at least once every three years.

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