

## **Protecting Children in Trinity Presbyterian Church**

Trinity Presbyterian Church  
Montgomery, Alabama

### **General Purpose Statement**

Trinity Presbyterian Church desires to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the following practices, our goal is to protect the children of Trinity Presbyterian Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

### **Background**

Protecting children at church involves two large areas of concern. The first is prevention which includes such things as having proper policies in place and worker screening. The second major area is proper supervision.

Both areas are important because there is no profile of a predator on children. A predator may be any age or socio-economic group, male or female. An offender may be an adult, a youth or another child. Child molesters may be situational (opportunistic) with very few victims, or they may be predatory having many victims. The situational offenders rarely show up on background checks. Even the predators often do not show up on background checks, because they manipulate victims not to tell. Therefore, we must be attentive in our supervision of children, and we must be attuned to the signs and marks of abuse.

### **Definitions**

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years including participants in our youth programs.

### **Screening of Volunteer Workers**

All persons over the age of eighteen (18) years who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

#### **1. Six Month Rule**

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with children until s/he has been a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This does not apply to staff members. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children. This rule may be waived by special action of the Session.

#### **2. Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete Trinity's written application form. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, and disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be stored at Trinity Presbyterian Church on a need-to-know basis.

### **3. Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of a ministry or personal nature as opposed to employer or family references, preferably from churches or organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be stored at Trinity Presbyterian Church on a need-to-know basis.

### **4. Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all workers with children. Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form, allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children. What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Executive Minister or Administration Ministry on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonestly, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. The background check authorization form and results will be stored at Trinity Presbyterian Church on a need-to-know basis.

### **Training of Volunteer Workers**

All persons over the age of eighteen (18) years who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be trained. This training includes the following:

1. Read and acknowledge understanding of this statement of policy
2. Basic first aid treatment
3. Recognizing and reporting signs of abuse
4. Appropriate guidelines for contact with children

### **Supervising of Volunteer Workers**

All activities with children should be supervised as follows:

#### **1. Two Adult Rule**

Church staff members responsible for the ministry area will always attempt to maintain a good ratio of adult supervision to the number of children present. It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some children's classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, the Open Door Policy (below) will apply. We do not allow a child to be alone with an unrelated adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation. *Married Couples must be accompanied by an unrelated adult or teenage helper. In the instance that a third volunteer is unavailable, married couples will function as a single adult teacher and follow Open Door Policy.*

## 2. **Open Door Policy**

On rare occasions (when only one adult is present with a group of children) classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

## 3. **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) by an adult or another child that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical Abuse** – any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, bullying, and biting.
- **Emotional Abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual Abuse** – any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. It may be violent or non-violent and includes behaviors that involve touching aspects and non-touching aspects.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of their essential needs, such as food, water, shelter, and medical care.

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Trinity Presbyterian Church becomes aware of suspected child abuse of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to a member of the church staff for further action including report to authorities as mandated by Alabama state law. All Trinity Church Staff and Volunteers are mandatory reporters under Alabama state law.

In addition to the above precautions, security cameras are placed throughout the Church campus.

### **Teenage Workers**

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters or classroom helpers (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers:

- Teenage workers must be at least age 13
- Teenage workers will be screened as specified above
- Teenage workers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left along with children except in an emergency.
- Trinity Presbyterian Church recognizes the importance of children below age 13 being allowed to participate in service at the Church. When a child below age 13 wishes to serve as a volunteer in any given classroom they will be allowed pending approval of Executive Minister or Administration Ministry. This child will be under direct supervision of an adult and their presences will not fulfill the two-adult requirement.

### **Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

For children below grade 1, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian. Should any need arise the parent or guardian will be promptly contacted. Only parents included on the child's registration form (completed at the beginning of the year and updated as needed) may pick up the child. In the event that another individual is attempting to pick up the child, the Church Staff will be contacted. The Staff will be responsible for releasing the child, but only have speaking with and gaining explicit permission from the parent or guardian who signed the child in on that day.

### **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at Trinity Presbyterian Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting in the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

### **Medications Policy**

It is the policy of Trinity Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by the parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) or children with a medication regimen that intersects with church activities. Parents of such children should address their situation with the Executive Minister or other Staff to develop a plan of action.

### **Appropriate Contact**

Because Trinity Presbyterian Church is committed to protecting children in its care, all volunteers are expected to maintain appropriate contact with children. Words of affirmation, pats on the head and shoulder are generally suitable in the church setting. However, inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are expressly forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should be immediately reported to Church staff or leadership. Volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a volunteer must be reported immediately to Church staff or leadership.

### **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of Trinity Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There will be no spanking, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Church staff if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

### **Restroom Guidelines**

Children should utilize a classroom bathroom, if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available children five years of age and younger should utilize the following procedure. Workers should escort children to the bathroom monitor who will check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, then allow the children inside. The bathroom monitor will remain outside the bathroom door and then escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the bathroom monitor will open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the bathroom monitor should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child. For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

### **Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, bruises, workers will provide first aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's 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, medical professionals and the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

### **Emergencies**

In the case of an emergency (medical, fire, severe weather, power loss, violence, etc.), the Church staff and Deacons are trained to follow the Church's Emergency Action Plan. Volunteers in charge of children should remain with the children to guide them through the Emergency procedures.