

First Christian Church — Decatur, GA
Child Protection Guidelines
August 25, 2006

First Christian Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment to promote the religious and social development of children and youth, and will strive to prevent the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of minors. In our quest to provide a healthy environment where children and youth are safe, and believing that the key to conducting safe programs lies in the quality of adult leadership, these guidelines for volunteers and staff working with children or youth are to be followed.

Effective Timeline of Guidelines

While it is the desire and intention of First Christian Church that these Guidelines be implemented and followed by members staff and volunteers of the congregation as soon as possible following their adoption, certain aspects of these Guidelines will, out of necessity, require a period of transition from previous church practices, or additional actions or effort by members and staff for their effective and meaningful implementation. In recognition of this, the staff, members and volunteers of the congregation are asked to adhere to these Guidelines where reasonably possible throughout a transition period of five months (August 1st, 2006). However full compliance with these Guidelines by all church staff, members and volunteers will be required without exception following the transition period.

Purpose

- To promote a safe and secure environment for the children and youth of our faith community
- To train and support volunteers to achieve that goal
- To supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth with **TWO ADULTS**, ages 21 or older.
- To ensure compliance by the church and its staff and volunteers with all laws, rules and regulations.

Staff and Volunteer Guidelines

The key to child abuse prevention in any organization is its staff - both employees and volunteers. Careful selection, adequate training and sufficient supervision reduces the likelihood of abuse or neglect. Our goal is to recruit the best people possible to work with children and youth.

In that effort, all volunteers, Church staff, nursery staff, Sunday School teachers and youth sponsors must:

- Complete the church's volunteer Information Form
- Acknowledge (with signature) receipt and understanding of these Guidelines
- Acknowledge (with signature) and understanding of the church's Code of Ethics (attached).
Attend training programs prescribed by the church
- Give written permission to the church for it to conduct a mandatory background check for volunteer, staff, teachers, or sponsors, in the church's discretion through the Personnel Committee.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or as a result of a Criminal Background Check or other background check, any of the following will automatically disqualify an applicant from any staff or volunteer position working with children or youth:

- History of alleged sexual abuse of children or voyeurism
- Conviction for any crime in which a felony or a crime where children were involved.
- History of any violent or sexually exploitive behavior, whether involving children or another adult
- Any other charges or convictions for other crimes not listed above, unless waived in writing by the church's Personnel committee or Moderator:
 - The urgency of and circumstances surrounding the conduct in question.
 - The age of the individual at the time of the offense.
 - The probability that an individual will continue the type of behavior in question.
 - The individual's commitment to rehabilitation and to changing the behavior in question.
 - Whether any recurrence of the conduct has occurred.

The basis(es) upon which an individual may be denied a voluntary or paid position with the church may or may not need to be disclosed by the church to that individual.

- Any person with a dispute concerning information that appears on his/her criminal history record should first address the issue with the Moderator or senior minister. An investigation may, in the discretion of the church, minister, or that individual be conducted to determine the facts. This may involve submitting fingerprints to verify that the record is or is not the applicant's own criminal record.
- Confidentiality / record storage: All records obtained as a result of the Criminal Background Check will be treated as confidential, therefore accessibility to applicant information will be limited to the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister will view all reports electronically using encrypted-secured websites. If for any reason any paper work exists upon viewing applicants information it will be shredded immediately by the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister may request counsel from the Regional Minister, the Moderator of the Church, Chair of Personnel Ministry and then the members of the Personnel Ministry if necessary legal counsel as authorized by the church board. The church shall be entitled to disclose and use such information in its discretion in any legal proceeding between the church and such individual or if such information is part of the public record.

Expectations for Training for Child and Youth Workers

- Workers that have otherwise been cleared for hiring by the church or to volunteer for the church should attend an initial training session to be conducted by or for the church in its discretion before beginning work with children or youth on behalf of the church. This training session will include a review of these guidelines and other information deemed relevant by the church. In the event that a worker is unable to attend a scheduled training session and that session cannot be made up at another time, he/she should view the training video, if available, prescribed by the church and meet individually with the program director.
- Approved workers should make every effort to attend additional training events or appropriate program workshops when offered.
- All workers will receive a copy of this First Christian Church, Decatur, GA Child Protection Guidelines and must acknowledge in writing that he or she attended the training session and received a copy of these Guidelines

Program Guidelines

The church will strive to provide age appropriate programming for children and youth that is designed to promote religious and social growth, while providing for the physical and emotional safety of the participants.

Classroom and event guidelines

- In order to plan age appropriate activities, the church will place children according to their school grade. (There is room for some flexibility on an individual basis where pre-school children are concerned.)
- Two adults, ages 21 or older, will be assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth.
- A minister, education director, education chairperson or recognized leader of the church where practicable will make periodic “spot checks”. This method will be in general use but especially if it is necessary to have only one adult present with a group.
- If private conversation is required, the youth and adult may move out of earshot of others, but not out of sight.
 - Adult leaders are expected to model Christian behavior.
 - Adult leaders will not use bad or abusive language.
 - Actions by adult leaders should be non-threatening, safe, gentle, kind, and should not make child/youth uncomfortable.
 - Topical discussions should be appropriate to curriculum selected or approved by the church and to the setting and age of the children/youth.
 - Adult leaders will respect the privacy of children and youth (particularly in overnight situations where changing clothes and showering are necessary). The reverse should also be true.

Information and Authorization

An authorization form (Permission Slip) must be completed by a parent or legal guardian and on file for each child or youth. Forms will include the following:

- Permission to participate in events on and away from church property
- Transportation release
- Medical information and release
- Photo release

Forms will be reviewed annually. Forms will be included in “New Member Packets” and available in each classroom

Guidelines for Drivers Transporting Children or Youth in Church Owned Vehicle

Transportation of youth for church activities must be provided by two approved licensed adults at least 21 years of age or older. All individuals who serve as an approved driver for children or youth must provide documentation or proof of:

- Being ages 21 years old or older, and currently licensed to operate an automobile and having been licensed to operate an automobile for at least one year.
- Meeting the minimum state required liability insurance coverage.
- The individual’s driver’s license and insurance card (copy will be kept on file).
- No convictions or charges during the preceding three years for driving under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance or committing reckless driving or wanton endangerment while driving (records will be checked through the Department of Public Safety).
- Using a safe, reliable and licensed motor vehicle.

- Shall use child restraint seats when transporting any children (as prescribed by law).
 Note: Drivers are to obey all traffic laws and are to make every reasonable effort to assure the safety of their passengers, including requiring that every passenger wear seat belts. Georgia law requires that every minor wear a seat belt. Each occupant will be expected to wear the seatbelt provided. Every reasonable effort will be made to insure that an approved adult driver is the provider of transportation for official church events, departing from the church. Drivers must be given a copy of the Code of Ethics and these Guidelines and sign an acknowledgment that they have read it and will comply.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Under laws of the State of Georgia, suspected child abuse is required to be reported. The church encourages all youth and child workers and members of the congregation to report suspected abuse to the proper legal authorities as soon as suspected. Additionally, all members are strongly encouraged to also notify the Senior Minister. Employees are required to notify the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister may assist any member or worker in reporting suspected child abuse to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

- All cases of suspected child abuse must be reported to the appropriate legal authorities
- Reports of suspected child abuse that may have occurred inside the church or on a church sponsored event are to be made as soon as possible to the Senior Minister.
- If a staff member or volunteer is reported, that person will no longer be considered an approved worker until the investigation has been concluded and the minister advises the director of the program that the individual may continue as an approved worker.
- Reports of abuse must never be disclosed to anyone other than the perpetrators or the authorities.

A Word About Appropriate Affectionate Behavior in the Christian Community:

It is widely known that “good touching” is important. Numerous studies have shown the importance of holding and touching for infants to survive. Likewise, children do not grow and thrive without the “good touches” of others. We have many examples in scripture where Jesus touched people to heal and to comfort. The Christian Community has a rich heritage of sharing a loving hug, an arm around the shoulder or a squeeze of the hand to say, “You are loved...I care about you”.

With good touching, the child feels as if someone has given to them or has shared with them rather than taken from them. Children should not be forced to kiss someone they do not wish to kiss. Nor do all children wish to be hugged by persons outside of their family. It is always wise to ask, “May I give you a hug?” By asking this question, the child is given the permission to refuse if he/she is uncomfortable.

It is important in our concern about child sexual abuse that the importance of good touching is not lost. We need to continue to express Christian love in appropriate ways with children. The healing, comforting, and affirming aspects of good touch should be emphasized.

First Christian Church
Code of Ethics for Staff and Volunteers Working with Children or Youth

Whether paid staff or volunteer, any person working with the children or youth of the church is a role model. While acting in this capacity the following Code of Ethics will apply.

1. Smoking or using tobacco products in the presence of children or youth is prohibited.
2. Using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or other controlled substances will not be tolerated.
3. Volunteers and/or staff shall not mistreat children or youth including, but not limited to:
 - A. physical: strike, spank, shake, slap,
 - B. verbal/mental: humiliate, degrade, threaten, or
 - C. sexual abuse: including inappropriate touching and exposure.
4. Volunteers and/or staff must treat children and youth of all races, religions, and cultures with respect and dignity.
5. Volunteers and/or staff must use positive techniques of guidance, including positive reinforcement and encouragement rather than comparison or criticism.
6. Volunteers and/or staff shall not use or tolerate profanity in the presence of the children or youth.
7. Volunteers and/or staff will refrain from inappropriate display of affection toward others in the presence of children, parents and other staff.
8. Volunteers and/or staff must be free of physical and psychological conditions that might adversely affect children's or youth's health, including, but not limited to contagious diseases.
9. Volunteers and/or staff will be a positive role model for youth and children by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courteousness, and maturity.
10. Volunteers and/or staff will be expected to act and react with Christian love and understanding in all situations.
11. Volunteers and/or staff will be expected to safeguard and hold confidential any information gained through administrative duties involving supervision of children, youth or volunteers and/or any other information identified being confidential.
12. Volunteers and/or staff will do everything in their power to avoid being put in a situation where they are alone with child or youth other than their own.
13. Georgia state law requires that all citizens report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child or a youth to age 18 to the Georgia Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, #.

HOW TO REPORT SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, you should call the state number listed above for the Department of Family and Children or the agency in the state in which the abuse occurred.

If you need to report suspected abuse in a state other than your own, please call:

Childhelp® USA National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-A-CHILD®
(1-8004224453)
TDD: 1-800-2-A-CHILD

Childhelp® USA is a non-profit agency which can provide reporting numbers, and has Hotline counselors who can provide referrals.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF DECATUR**

Printed Name

Signature

Date

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADDRESSING IMPROPER CONDUCT

Any suspicion, observation or experience of any conduct deemed improper should immediately be reported to the Senior Minister or the highest authority present (Moderator) for investigation and evaluation.

I understand that any violation of this code may be grounds for dismissal as a staff or volunteer leader/assistant working with children or youth.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Witness

Printed Name

Signature

Date