



# Children and Youth Protection Policy

*As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct." 1 Peter 1:15*

## **PURPOSE**

This policy serves to create guidelines for appropriate behavior for staff and volunteers at Pinnacle Presbyterian Church ("PPC" or "Pinnacle") and to help students, staff, and families understand how staff and volunteers interact with children and youth.

Churches have long relied on volunteers to fulfill their calls to serve – not because of reward or remuneration, but out of love and obedience in a personal relationship to God.

Pinnacle Presbyterian Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for children and adults who participate in our ministries, missions, and activities. By implementing the practices below, our purpose is to protect children and adults from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteer workers. This policy will periodically be reviewed and revised by the Session of Pinnacle Presbyterian Church.

*"And Jesus took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...'"* adapted from Mark 9:36-37

Our desire at Pinnacle is to draw people of all ages to Jesus. This includes even the youngest children who attend activities at our church. We take our responsibility to care for children very seriously.

It is important for those who work with children to see themselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide quality care and instruction in the ministries and programs of our church. The following practices are designed to protect and promote healthy faith-formation for every child and adult.

## **DEFINITIONS**

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Child or children</b>            | For purposes of this policy, the terms child or children include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years and those that turn 18 during the program year.  |
| <b>Worker</b>                       | The term "worker" includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children. "Staff" refers to paid, titled, professional workers with accountability to the Session through Pinnacle's Head of Staff. Unpaid volunteers are accountable to the Staff responsible for their area of volunteer service. |
| <b>Children &amp; Youth Classes</b> | Activities that are designed for participation by children and youth and that are officially sanctioned by PPC. This does not include any activities of Pinnacle Presbyterian Preschool.   |

### **Programming Ratios**

All Children & Youth Classes will be supervised by workers. The goal is to have two non-related workers in each program at all times. Brief exceptions to this policy may be required by program needs; i.e. when breaking into small groups.

Children & Youth Classes will do all we can to follow the “Rule of Three”: no worker should be alone with a student at any time and a group should include at least three people (e.g. one worker with two children or two workers with one child).

### **Open Classrooms**

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a transparent glass into the classroom from a public space. Doors must never be locked while persons are inside the room, except when required due to safety concerns. Staff training will take place annually to ensure protocols for emergencies are understood.

### **Children & Youth Class Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

Children should be signed into and out of each Children & Youth Class by their adult parent/guardian with the Children's & Youth Ministry Team prior to the beginning and at the end of programming. Teachers and nursery workers will ensure that children stay in their classroom area and do not roam. At times, where age-appropriate, children may be dismissed at the end of programming and allowed to reunite with their parents/guardians on their own.

### **Registration for all Students**

In order to participate in Children & Youth Classes, families must complete registration forms annually for staff to have the most up-to-date information. It is imperative that Pinnacle has updated contact information, medical details, and needs for all participants. Family photos will also be collected, where possible.

### **Restroom Guidelines**

Parents and guardians are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to attending Children & Youth Classes. During class time, children through-2<sup>nd</sup> grade will be supervised by a worker as they walk to the nearest restroom. Workers may take a child to the bathroom alone only if the door to the restroom remains open. The worker will check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the child inside.

If any child requires assistance, the worker must leave the restroom door open, and leave the stall door open, as they assist the child and inform the 2<sup>nd</sup> worker, if possible. Otherwise, the worker will remain outside the door and escort the child back to the classroom. If a student requires a non-gender-designated single restroom, workers will direct them.

### **Special Needs**

If due to developmental or physical disabilities, any child requires special assistance, that need should be made known to staff and a suitable plan for assistance put in place.

### **Sick Child**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all children at Pinnacle. Parents are encouraged to keep children at home if they are sick. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye infections or contagious skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill may be separated from other children in which case the parent or guardian may be contacted to request that the child be picked up immediately.

### **Medications and Allergies**

As a general rule, workers at Pinnacle will not administer any kind of medications to the children under our care. However, exceptions to this policy may be granted when a child has a potentially life-threatening condition (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents/guardians of children with these conditions should discuss their situation with the workers who will be responsible for their child to develop a plan of action. Although Pinnacle will endeavor to ensure that staff will have regular training for CPR, First Aid, and Epi-pen administration, PPC is not able to guarantee its workers' ability to administer the requested aid. Workers are required to contact emergency services by dialing 911 in the event of any emergency involving a child. They will also complete an "incident report," to be kept on file as appropriate for later reference.

Parents/guardians are responsible for notifying workers of any known allergies or special needs. If none are indicated, workers may conclude there are no known allergies or special needs. Medical information for each child will be kept on file. For offsite events, a designated worker will have access to both insurance and medical information.

### **Accidental Injuries to Children**

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

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide simple first aid (simple bandage cover, 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.
2. For injuries requiring medical attention or treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned by an adult. If warranted by circumstances, emergency services will be contacted by dialing 911.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an *Incident Report* will be completed by the worker and the Superintendent.

### **Discipline**

Pinnacle does not tolerate violence or bullying. Additionally, members of staff and workers will not administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. If assistance is needed with disciplinary issues, workers will consult with the parent or guardian.

### **Appropriate Physical Contact**

Physical contact should be appropriate for the age and temperaments of each child. Touching should never be based on the needs or wishes of the adult. In a church setting, appropriate touching is as follows:

- Workers are encouraged to give children a high five, handshake, pat on the back, or use gentle touches to the shoulder, arms, and the upper back (including to provide behavior redirection) unless the child is uncomfortable with touch.
- A brief, casual side hug is only appropriate if the child initiated the hug.
- Touching between a worker and a child shall only occur in the presence of other adults.
- A youth or child's preference not to be touched will be respected by workers and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child contact.

### **Images of Children for Use by the Church**

At Pinnacle, we use photographs/videos as tools to bear testimony to the work God is doing in our Christian walk, to better communicate the church's missions and ministries, and to reach out to the greater community.

Therefore, photographs/videos are posted on church-administered social media platforms and printed in official church materials such as the newsletter, brochures, annual reports, and presentations.

Because our children's safety is of paramount importance, we adhere to the following:

- In order to ensure the privacy of individuals and children, we do not use photographs/videos with any identifying information (e.g., names, phone numbers, emails, addresses).
- When a child is clearly identifiable in a photograph/video, images will be shared if *permission* to share the image has been granted. Permission is assumed alongside Pinnacle's annual registration unless noted.
- Parents/guardians are free to tag their child's images on church-administered social media platforms. However, Pinnacle and our website and social media administrators will be held harmless to any claims arising from the use by others of said child's images.
- If parents/guardians wish to ensure that no images of their children are ever used, they can indicate this preference on a *Photograph & Video Media Release Form*.

### **Communication with Students**

We are committed to creating a safe environment in all aspects of ministry. This includes promoting a healthy environment for texting and other electronic communication between workers and children.

During the annual student registration, parents can elect to share a student's cell phone and/or email with Pinnacle for programming purposes.

In order to participate in certain Children & Youth Classes, children and workers must agree to the following:

- Student cell phones are allowed during "free time", but when programming starts, unless they are needed during the activity, they are encouraged to put them away. If students have pockets, we encourage them to be put in their pockets so they are out of sight.
- When using social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) to communicate regarding church ministries, parents, children, and workers must abide by the following guidelines:
  - Harassment and bullying are strictly forbidden. We encourage communication that builds-up, in the Spirit of Christ.
  - Making comments or sharing images that are sexually suggestive, disrespectful, or insensitive are also forbidden.
  - Photographic images or videos shared electronically through public ministry communication channels are not considered confidential.
  - Permission shall be obtained from a worker or the pastor before posting photos or personal information about others involved in ministry activities on any website or social media.

Both children and adults who violate these policies may lose electronic communications privileges or be expelled from the youth ministry program if deemed appropriate. Staff will notify a parent/guardian if a child violates this electronic communications policy. Children and families are encouraged to communicate violations staff may be unaware of to be sure to correct any behaviors immediately.

### **One-to-One Communication with Students**

We recognize that meeting the emotional needs of older children may occasionally require workers and pastors to minister to them on an individual basis. The guiding principle for contact with students is transparency, therefore communication will be visible to others and/or well-documented. All workers shall observe the below guidelines when interacting with children. Violations could result in termination of employment for Staff or the end of the opportunity to volunteer with Pinnacle:

1. Communications should be specific to the student and/or specifically relating to church events.
2. Personal information shared with non-ordained workers (including through online or electronic communications) is never confidential. Workers may have an obligation to share information that endangers a child or that could create liability for Pinnacle. Workers should not promise confidentiality to a child when communicating about sensitive issues.
3. Pinnacle Staff are Mandatory Reporters to Child Protective Services - staff will communicate with the Director of Children's Ministry or Director of Youth Ministries if there are concerns, who will follow through with current practice and policies.

4. Workers should save all private electronic communications with children via email, text, or other messaging services and be prepared to transmit them to PPC leadership if requested.
5. Communications between workers and children on social media/networking sites should occur in public or group forums. Workers may not initiate private conversations with children online, except as might pertain to incidental communication related to programs and ministry. In the event that a child initiates a private conversation with a worker online, the worker should compassionately inform the child that such private conversations are not permitted.

### **Selection of Workers**

**Background Checking Volunteers & Employees** -Background checks will be done annually through the business office of Pinnacle Presbyterian Church.

**Teenage Workers** - We recognize that there are times when it is necessary or desirable for workers who are less than 18 years old to provide childcare with adult supervision. To protect the safety of workers and children under care:

1. Teenage workers must be at least 15 years old;
2. He/she must be approved by the Children's Ministry Committee;
3. Permission to work must be obtained from his/her parent/legal guardian;
4. Parents/guardians of the children under his/her care must be notified when care is provided by a teenager.

### **Response to Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect**

#### **DEFINITIONS**

**Abuse of a Child** We define an abused child as any child under 18 years of age whose parent or any person is responsible for his or her care:

- a. Causes or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury;
- b. Has a child present during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a controlled substance or during the unlawful sale of such substance where such activity would constitute a felony violation;
- c. Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- d. The Presbyterian Church (USA) adds a phrase regarding the abuse of power: "Abuse includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of position."

**Neglect of a Child** A neglected child is defined as any child under 18 years of age whose parent or any person is responsible for his or her care:

- a. Abandons the child;
- b. Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care;
- c. Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to a child's age and level of development; or
- d. Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person, not related by blood or marriage, who is legally restricted from contact with children.

#### **Mandated Reporting**

Pinnacle mandatory reporters include ministers, teachers, and any other volunteers who are responsible for the care and learning of children.

The reporting requirement is that when an individual has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, a report must be made to the Arizona Department of Child Safety.

In addition, PC (USA), the governing body of Pinnacle, states “Any member of the Presbyterian Church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian Educator employed by the Church or its congregations, shall report to [both] 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...”

### **Advice for Responding to Suspected Abuse or Neglect**

Chances are good that if a worker is told by a child about possible abuse or neglect, that the conversation will be spontaneous. Therefore, the following suggestions can help workers respond appropriately.

- Do not act alarmed but remain calm and listen attentively.
- Assure the person that the alleged abuse was not his/her fault; he or she did not cause it, no matter what the perpetrator may have said or done.
- Reassure the person that he or she did the right thing in telling you.
- Write down what was told to you as close to verbatim as possible so that you can pass accurate information on to those investigating the case. Know what kind of information will be asked of you.
- Do not make promises that you may not be able to keep.
- Do NOT attempt to investigate the matter yourself. The official investigation could be compromised or nullified if the alleged victim is asked leading questions or the alleged perpetrator is pursued.

### **CHURCH PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED HARM**

In the event that a worker involved in the care of children at Pinnacle suspects that a child is in immediate danger, they should contact emergency services by dialing 911. Internal reporting will commence after emergency response is secured. If a worker has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, he/she must report it immediately to the Director of Children’s Ministry and or the Director of Youth and Young Adults. Concurrently, the Head of Staff (or a prearranged designee if the HOS is known to be unavailable) should be contacted. If the Head of Staff (or a prearranged designee if the HOS is known to be unavailable) is unavailable, then the Clerk of Session must be contacted.

After conferring with the appropriate member(s) of the leadership team, and if the incident of abuse or neglect occurred at Pinnacle Presbyterian or during a church-sponsored activity with witnesses, the following procedures must be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child must be notified unless the parent or guardian is alleged to be the perpetrator.
2. If the alleged perpetrator is a church worker, he/she will immediately be placed on leave, pending an investigation, and will be instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified. The church staff and members of Session will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident.
4. Our Presbytery must be notified of the situation so the church may rely on their counsel.
5. The church’s insurance company may require that they also be notified, and their incident report will need to be completed. Any further documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations must immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The minister or a representative from the Presbytery of the Grand Canyon will be our sole spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect unless he/she is reported to be the perpetrator. Pinnacle will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church shall refrain from speaking to the media.
7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
8. Any person who is found guilty of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be permanently removed from their position.

If the Director of Children’s Ministry and/or the Director of Youth and Young Adults, or other staff in the line of reporting, are unsure if the situation needs to be reported, the worker may call the Arizona Child Abuse

Hotline to discuss the situation. The person at the hotline can also give advice that might help the family in crisis.

### **How to Report to Child Protective Services**

Suspected abuse or neglect is reported to the Arizona Child Abuse Hotline number: (1-888-SOS-CHILD as of 2021). All calls can be made anonymously, but reporters are encouraged to give their names. If the reporter's name is given when a report is filed, it will be documented. This makes it possible for a Department of Child Safety worker to later contact the reporter should additional information be needed. A pastor or staff member in the line of reporting can assist if needed.

The reporter should be prepared to answer the following questions to the best of his/her ability:

1. Name, address, and telephone number of where the child and parents or another person (s) responsible for the child's care are located;
2. Child's birth date or age, sex, and race;
3. Names and ages of other persons who live with the child and their relationship to the child;
4. Whether or not there is a family member who can protect the child;
5. The alleged perpetrator's name, address, sex, age, relationship to the victim, and condition;
6. Nature and extent of the abuse/neglect, including any knowledge of prior maltreatment of the child or siblings;
7. Whether the alleged victim is in immediate danger;
8. Knowledge of any child or adult developmental issues or whether the child has a disability and the ways in which the disability affects the child's functioning and care;
9. Name, daytime telephone number, and relationship of the reporter to the alleged victim, and names of others with direct information, and how they may be contacted;
10. Any other relevant information.

While making a report to the Arizona Child Abuse Hotline, the reporter should document the following information:

1. Date and time of the call
2. Name and title of the person on the Hotline taking the reported information
3. What was reported specifically
4. What the person on the Hotline said would happen

### **Youth Trips Code of Conduct**

As we build a Christian community based on mutual trust and respect, we seek to respect the choices of individuals in expressing themselves while setting norms to establish an atmosphere conducive to faith development and personal growth.

#### **General**

- Respect of People: Youth must respect, listen to, and cooperate with all adult Youth Leaders and drivers, as well as fellow youth. Bullying, harassment, and intimidation will not be tolerated. Negative talk put-downs, and disrespect are not allowed.
- No obscene language.
- No drug, alcohol, or tobacco use.
- No weapons.
- No public display of affection with your significant other while at church functions. This detracts from our purpose.
- For the safety and well-being of all, every meeting and event has physical boundaries. Stay within those boundaries.
- During youth events, cell phones should stay in the student's pocket or purse

unless needed for the youth event. It is disrespectful and unhelpful to be on one's phone instead of paying attention to the leader or others around you. If there is a problem with cell phone usage and not respecting this concept, cell the phone may be taken away until the end of the youth event.

- Always let adult leaders know if/when you are leaving a youth event.

### **Dress Code**

Students participating in youth events should not wear clothing that:

- Is too revealing (e.g., clothing that is too tight or transparent; clothing with extremely short hemlines; shirts that reveal a bare midriff visible undergarments).
- Advertises alcohol, tobacco products, or other substances abusive to the body.
- Contains language or images that ridicule a person's gender, sexuality, or geographic/ethnic origin.

Pinnacle's intent for these expectations is to apply irrespective of gender and encourage a careful conversation with program leaders if there are any questions.

### **Student Driver Policy**

It will be assumed that parents of students that arrive at youth events together have given their permission. Parents should be in direct conversation with youth staff if driving other students or riding with other students is not allowed. An adult designated driver will be the goal for all off-campus events. In the event students are needed, parent permission will be attained.

Updated/Approved August 2021

Reviewed May 2022