

**Sexual Misconduct Policy for Volunteers**  
**First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Bryan, Ohio**  
**506 Oxford Drive**  
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**Introduction**

Increasingly, churches are being held legally liable for sexual misconduct of volunteers; especially in cases involving children and adolescents. The problem is compounded by the fact that as other organizations for children and youth (e.g. Boy/Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, etc.) have become more stringent in their screening and supervision of volunteers, individuals who are prone to sexually abusing children and youth seem to be moving toward youth-related organizations that provide easier access to children and youth. In light of increasing lawsuits and trends of sexual abusers toward relatively lax organizations like local churches, more attention needs to be given to those who volunteer to work in "high risk" areas of the church's life.

Since it is impossible to guarantee absolutely a child's safety, but it is possible not to be negligent, *the purpose of a sexual misconduct policy for church volunteers should be to strengthen screening procedures and supervision and to establish procedures for responding to accusations and situations of suspected sexual misconduct.*

Ultimately, the responsibility for the implementation of this policy lies with the Session. All allegations of sexual abuse of children and youth by a volunteer shall be brought to the confidential attention of the Session, the pastor, the church's legal counsel, the church's insurance carrier, and the appropriate civil authorities.

**The Screening Process**

1. Use the "Six Month Rule" when staffing children and youth programs. *Leaders and teachers* must have been members or friends of First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Bryan for at least six months before being given independent responsibility for children and youth. *There should be at least one church member in good standing who is a part of each VBS, Awakening or Great Banquet staffing team.* Exceptions to this rule must be specifically approved by the Session.
2. A signed copy of the *Covenant for Children and Youth Workers* (see appendix) will be received from all youth advisors, camp staff, and church school staff, VBS and other volunteers who are given responsibility for children at First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Bryan. A separate *Covenant for Children and Youth Workers* has been developed for *Awakening* team members. ( See appendix) The Covenant is to include a signed statement indicating that the volunteer has read, understands, and is willing to uphold the church's sexual misconduct policy.

**Supervision**

1. Apprise volunteers of this sexual misconduct policy. Distribute and review this policy statement with all new volunteers who work with children and youth at First Presbyterian Church (USA) of Bryan. Review this statement periodically at orientation and staff training sessions.
2. When possible follow the "two adult rule": Try to have at least two adults present with children and youth. This reduces the opportunities for sexual misconduct and provides a witness if accusations are made against a volunteer.
3. Volunteers will be advised as to signs of potential sexual abuse. Suspicious activity and/or suspected abuse are to be reported in writing to the Session, and /or the pastor. If accusations are made against a volunteer, that volunteer will be immediately removed from the supervision of children/youth with reinstatement dependent upon the outcome of the investigation into the allegations.
4. An adequate number of adult leaders shall be present for children/youth events. All events shall have at least two adults present, in keeping with the "two adult rule." The ratio of adults to children/youth participants should be at least 1:10. An adult is someone 18 years of age or over. When working with youth, at least one adult should be 21 years of age or over.
5. **Special considerations for overnight events:**
  - a. Provide an adequate number of adults (may vary between 1:5 and 1:8).
  - b. Provide separate sleeping quarters for male and female participants.
  - c. Follow the "two adult rule" in sleeping quarters.

## Responding to Accusations

1. Report in writing any accusations of abuse or suspicious behaviors to the Session and the Pastor or the Awakening Spiritual Director.
2. Responses to the situation:
  - a. Be sure the allegations are made in a written report.
  - b. Immediately remove the volunteer about whom the accusations were made from his/her position of responsibility.
  - c. Crisis Intervention  
When faced with a situation, either on church grounds or at a church sponsored activity that may be sexual misconduct take the following steps:
    1. Determine the safety needs of the individual.
    2. Determine what the individual wants from us.
    3. Determine whether the individual's claim is valid.
    4. Assure the individual they have friends here that will help in any way possible.
    5. Let the individual know they have the right to be safe and that we will take action to insure their safety.
    6. Always remain calm. Your reaction to the information makes a difference to the individual.
    7. Believe what you are hearing. Too often children and adults lack credibility as they talk or tell their story. Never become judgmental about the information received or the person giving it.
    8. Do not avoid embarrassing subjects or be offended by explicit language used. This not a time to correct language or comment on what might be or what might not be correct to talk about.
    9. Do not project your thoughts or attitudes into the story. Allow the individual to tell you the entire story in their way and their time, leaving all of your personal assumptions aside.
    10. Never offer direct advice without the help of the pastor. Personal advice can be detrimental to the individual and to you if it were to go badly.
  - d. Contact the pastoral staff to apprise him/her of the situation.
  - e. Contact the following: *or have the pastor make the following contacts:*
    1. Williams County Department of Job and Family Services (419-636-6725) and make the mandatory report
    2. You may also call 911 then call church legal counsel and the church insurance carrier.
  - f. Keep a written log of specific steps taken to deal with the situation.
  - g. Maintain confidentiality beyond the parties named.

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