

First Evangelical Free Church
Children's Ministry
Handbook

Approved by Elders (5/221/2026)
Approved by the Board of Trustees (5/21/2026)

Introduction

Mission Statement: First Evangelical Free Church exists to help guide people into becoming healthy followers of Jesus Christ.

Children's Ministry Mission Statement: Children's Ministry exists to serve children and help families to disciple their children.

Our Commitment to Care for Vulnerable Groups: Jesus Christ role modeled and commanded us in scripture to love and care for "the least of these" (Matthew 25: 31-40), as Christ servants, we as a community of Christ-followers are committed to the safety and protection of all vulnerable groups (James 1:27), including children. Therefore, it is the morally correct and often legally required duty for all believers to seek to protect and care for those around us, inside and outside of our church building. We have no tolerance of abuse and are committed to reporting any suspected abuse or concerning behavior.

NOTE: The role described throughout this handbook as Children's Ministry Pastor or Director is currently held by our Children's Ministry Leader, and all references to that title apply to this position.

Programs

- Nursery
- Sunday school (Newborn – Grade 5)
- Junior Church (Newborn – Grade 5)
- Awana (Toddler – Grade 5)
- Outreach programs for children
- Summer events and special events for children

Structure/Organization

1. Elders.
 - All Children's Ministry policies are approved by the Elders.
2. Child Safeguarding Advisory Committee
 - This Committee serves the Elders by being devoted to the protection of children and providing guidance to the Elder Board about issues surrounding child safety and abuse when consulted.
3. Children's Ministry Pastor or Director.
 - All curriculum, procedures, and decisions within the Children's Ministry programs are under the oversight of a designated Children's Ministry Pastor or Director, who is in turn accountable to the Elders.
4. Team Leaders
5. Volunteers (includes Teachers, Leaders, Welcome Desk, Teen Helpers, etc.)

Values

1. Christ centered – We are committed to presenting a Christ-centered focus in the midst of a “me-centered” culture.
2. Parent connected – We aim to partner with parents who have the primary honor and responsibility for the spiritual nurture of their children.
3. Biblically based – Our curriculum is Scripture based, and we encourage Scripture memory.
4. Age appropriate – We help children apply the truth they learn to their unique circumstances and stage of life.
5. Loving atmosphere – We show love to every child because all children are made in the image of God.

1. Volunteers

1.1 Requirements

In order to be considered for volunteer service in Children’s Ministry, you must:

- (a) Be at least 18 years old.

Note: 13-17 year olds may serve as Teen Helpers. They must fill out a Teen Helper Application and be approved by the Children’s Ministry Pastor or Director.

- (b) Be a regular attender at First Evangelical Free Church for at least 6 months.
- (c) Read and agree to support all the policies and procedures in this Handbook, as well as those communicated by the leadership and Children’s Ministry of First Evangelical Free Church.

(d) Fill out a Volunteer Workers Application.

1.2 Background Check

We conduct appropriate initial and renewal background checks consistent with state and federal law of anyone who is involved in or who seeks to participate in our Children's Ministry. Such checks may include, but are not limited to, criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police, Child Abuse History Clearance from the Department of Human Services, sex offender registry checks in the appropriate state(s), and any other checks that we determine, in our sole discretion, may be appropriate. We will normally assume all costs for all checks that we conduct.

1.3 Review process

The Pastor or Director of Children's Ministry (or someone directed thereby) will review the Volunteer Workers Application. At least two independent references will be contacted and the background checks and clearances will be secured.

If any information obtained by the church through the Volunteer Workers Application, references, or any of the background checks reveals that an applicant or worker, in the church's sole discretion, may pose a threat to minors (or other vulnerable persons), the Elder Board will be notified. The volunteer applicant will be provided a copy of the consumer report or the information obtained along with a copy of the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) Summary of Rights, available on the Federal Trade Commission's website here: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0096-fair-credit-reporting-act.pdf>, and given a reasonable amount of time to review and dispute the report if needed. Upon review, the Elder Board, in their sole discretion, reserves the right to exclude that individual from participating in Children's Ministry and to take all other steps necessary to address the

situation, including but not limited to meeting with the person, restricting or limiting the person's contact with children through the church, and, if applicable, confronting the person about any misrepresentation or concealment of relevant past conduct.

All information and decisions should be documented. All clearances submitted by a volunteer applicant will be maintained by the church in a secure location.

1.4 Disclosure

Any volunteer who is arrested for or convicted of an offense that would constitute grounds for denying participation in Children's Ministry, or is named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report, must provide the Pastor or Director of Children's Ministries with written notice not later than 72 hours after the arrest, conviction, or notification that the person has been listed as a perpetrator in the statewide database. Failure to disclose any relevant information can be cause for suspension or removal from Children's Ministry.

1.5 Expectations of Volunteers

- Arrive on time – 15 minutes prior to the program start time.
- Be prepared – make sure you are familiar with the curriculum and that your heart is ready to serve.
- Communicate – we need to know if you are going to be absent, and we value your constructive feedback.
- Develop – if you are going to encourage spiritual growth in children, you need to be growing yourself (attend services, join a small group, be in God's word).

Failure to meet these expectations can be cause for suspension or removal from Children’s Ministry.

1.6 Scheduling

Once approved, volunteers will be scheduled with the priority of not missing more than one worship service a month. Scheduling is done through Planning Center Services online at www.planningcenteronline.com. New volunteers will receive a welcome email from which they can create an account. All volunteers are expected to read, understand, and follow the policies and procedures set forth in this Handbook or otherwise communicated by the leadership of the Church and the Children’s Ministry. Volunteers who do not follow the policies and procedures may be taken off the schedule.

1.7 Name Badges

A picture name badge will be provided for all volunteers, and for the security of our Children’s Ministry it must be worn at all times while serving.

1.8 Check In

All volunteers must check in at the Welcome Desk when they are scheduled to serve. Our registration keeps an accurate record of every child and all teachers and helpers who are present every time we conduct any event, program, or service for children. This is crucial so that if any accusations or claims are made—even years later—we know exactly who was present in the room to establish verification or denial.

1.9 Headcount of the Classroom

The main teacher should take a headcount at the beginning of class and update as any late children arrive. Planning Center tracks attendance, but in the event of an emergency during class that requires an evacuation from the building, it

is important that all teachers are also aware of the number of students in their room.

2. Registration Procedure

All children attending a Children's Ministry program or event (Sunday school, Junior Church, Awana, summer event, etc.) at First Evangelical Free Church must be registered to the proper classroom location for their age upon arrival. A parent/guardian must be physically present with the child. A name tag for the child will be printed and it must be worn by the child at all times during the program. A security tag will also be printed and given to the parent/guardian. We will only release a child to the parent/guardian when they show their security tag. If a spouse or other responsible adult is going to pick up the child, it is the responsibility of the registering parent/guardian to give the security tag or send a photo of the tag to the person who will pick up the child.

Attendance records will be kept for at least 10 years.

3. Classroom and Program Policies

3.1 Two Deep

For the safety and protection of our children and volunteers, all children registered in any Children's Ministry program will at all times be in the presence of at least two workers. The main leader must be 21 or older and will be responsible for ensuring the policies are followed. If a situation arises where it's unavoidable that a worker must be alone with a child/children, it will only be in rooms with adequate visibility. In no event shall any child be left alone with a Teen Helper. The classrooms and hallways of the Children's Ministry wing are equipped with cameras that are being actively monitored by a member of the safety team during ministry times.

Additionally, a safety team member rounds on each classroom during ministry gatherings at unspecified times.

3.2 Bathroom Policy

No child is ever allowed to leave the classroom or program area unescorted. This can be accomplished several ways:

- The whole group can take a bathroom break (preferred method – midway through the class time).
- Helpers from other classrooms, safety personnel, or other available Children’s Ministry workers may assist if necessary.
- If one helper escorts a child to the bathroom, he or she must position him or herself to be in view of another adult volunteer from the Children’s Ministry or Safety Team while waiting for the child in the hallway.

Before any child enters the bathroom, a volunteer will enter the bathroom to make sure that it is safe. If assistance is needed, a parent/guardian will be called.

3.3 Off-Site Policy

Children’s Ministry workers are not permitted to take children from the premises during regularly scheduled programs or events (Sunday school, Junior Church, Awana, summer event, etc.) without written authorization from the child’s parent or guardian.

Official church events meeting in homes with children present (such as small groups) will have at least two approved adults watching the children at all times.

3.4 Discipline Policy

According to Scripture, parents bear the primary responsibility for training and disciplining their children. Therefore, Children’s Ministry teachers and helpers are not to “discipline” children, other than to provide verbal instruction and correction or to separate disorderly children. Children’s Ministry volunteers should not spank, touch, handle, or forcibly move children.

If a child continues to be uncooperative after being clearly made aware of what is expected, the classroom teacher or program leader should speak gently and appeal lovingly to the child. If the child does not respond, a parent/guardian is to be called and informed about the problem.

3.5 Behavioral Guidelines for Volunteers

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact and verbal interactions between ministry leaders and children. The guidelines below are intended to prevent contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.

Examples of positive and appropriate forms of affection:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes, high fives, and fist bumps
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth
- Arm around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children

- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer (always in a visible area, so while standing in a circle on or top of a table. Hands should never be held under a table)

The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children and youth in ministry.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses
- Tickling
- Holding children over three years of age on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Wrestling or rough-housing with children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult, or an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Snapping bras, giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
- Private meals with individual children or youth

Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others
- Give verbal praise and encouragement
- Avoid any language that belittles or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a person's body or sexual attractiveness)

- Avoid sexualized comments including inappropriate jokes or stories (or sharing media)
- No comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development.

These items are by no means exhaustive and are meant to serve as examples to guide the behavioral decisions of a volunteer.

If volunteers interact with children or youths in a way that is concerning, but not abusive, the behavior needs to be reported to the Elder Board immediately via elders@myfefc.org. The specifics will be documented by the Elder Board in a confidential file and notify the pastors and relevant ministry leaders. A pastor or ministry leader will inform the volunteer of the documented concern and explain why the behavior was considered concerning. Depending on the nature of the concern and the volunteer's response to church leadership about it, he or she may no longer be permitted to serve in Children's Ministry.

3.6 Sickness Policy

Parents are asked to keep their children out of Children's Ministry programs if:

- (a) The child has been sick or has had a fever within 48 hours of the program
- (b) The child has a runny nose (unless the child is known to have allergies and the nose is running clear)
- (c) The child has a wound that is oozing

If a child is diagnosed with a communicable disease (flu, chicken pox, etc.) within five days after attending a Children's Ministry program, the parents should notify a Children's

Ministry team leader or the Children's Ministry Pastor or Director, who will then determine if other parents need to be alerted.

If a child contracts a pest infestation (head lice, bed bugs, etc.) they should not attend Children's Ministry programs or events until the infestation is gone for a sufficient amount of time. Parents should notify a Children's Ministry team leader or the Children's Ministry Pastor or Director, who will then determine if other parents need to be alerted.

Scheduled volunteers should not serve if they have been sick or have had a fever within 48 hours of the program. In this case, notify the appropriate administrative assistant who handles teacher scheduling.

3.7 Lost or Stolen Articles

First Evangelical Free Church is not responsible for lost or stolen articles. To prevent this, do not bring any valuables into Children's Ministry.

3.8 Cell Phones

Children may carry a cell phone with them, but must keep it in their pocket or bag while in the Children's Ministry area. If they get it out during a Children's Ministry program or event, it will be removed and held for them at the front desk until the conclusion of the program or event.

Volunteers may carry their cell phones with them, but we ask that during ministry times, volunteers focus their attention on the children they are there to serve and keep phone usage limited to emergencies or situations where they are used briefly for the lesson, such as looking up a Bible verse quickly, or for communicating important updates or changes to fellow leaders/parents.

3.9 Photography and Social Media

Phone photography has given us a readily-available method of capturing many precious moments so that they can be remembered and shared with others. As a church family we also value recording the many fun and special memories children have as part of our ministry. At the same time, we want to be respectful of people's privacy and do our best to honor their preferences. Therefore, we ask all volunteers to stay off of social media or digital platforms while serving in the Children's Ministry wing and to share any pictures they take while serving with our staff, who can then obtain permission from parents prior to posting.

When posting pictures that include children from First Free:

- Blur or black out any identifying name tags on children and volunteers.
- Written consent from a parent or legal guardian must be given prior to posting any child's picture on any of First Free's social media or digital platforms. Written consent can be submitted via email, text, or may be included in an annual registration form.
- We strongly encourage the respect and dignity of every person depicted in an image. Only pictures depicting children in an appropriate light should be posted. "Appropriate" pictures may include goofy pictures that the child's parents are comfortable being posted. If a picture would make a child or parent feel self-conscious, vulnerable, or would subject the child or parent to ridicule, the picture should not be posted.

All photography within children's and student ministry must be submitted and approved by respective ministry heads.

3.10 Weapons

Children and Volunteers are prohibited from bringing weapons into the Children's Ministry area (unless adults possess a permit to carry a concealed weapon and have received prior approval from the Safety Ministry Team). This includes, but is not limited to, pocketknives, knives, and guns.

The weapon will be confiscated and released to a responsible party. Possession of a weapon without prior approval from the Safety Ministry Team may result in suspension or expulsion. If necessary, the incident will be reported to the police.

3.11 Fighting

Fighting among children and/or Volunteers is strictly forbidden. This includes, but is not limited to, hitting, kicking, biting, wrestling, shoving, verbally abusive language, and any angry yelling that creates an unsafe environment.

Children caught fighting will be removed from the situation and will be suspended or expelled from the program. Volunteers caught fighting will immediately lose their privilege to serve in Children's Ministry. The incident will be documented, and their background clearance will be revoked.

If the physical contact can be considered child abuse (according to the definition in section 5.1), the proper reporting and documentation (according to section 5.6) will be done.

If necessary, the incident will be reported to the police.

3.12 Drugs

Children and Volunteers are prohibited from bringing, buying, or selling illegal drugs or prescription drugs in

Children's Ministry or during any Children's Ministry program or event. Children and Volunteers may be in possession of medically necessary prescription drugs not exceeding the legally prescribed amount.

Children caught with illegal drugs or prescription drugs in excess of the legally prescribed amount will be suspended or expelled from the program. Volunteers caught with illegal drugs or prescription drugs in excess of the legally prescribed amount will immediately lose their privilege to serve in Children's Ministry. The incident will be documented, and their background clearance will be revoked.

If necessary, the incident will be reported to the police.

4. Emergency Procedures

4.1 Medical Emergency

If a child should get physically hurt in any way during the time they are in a Children's Ministry program, do not attempt to administer any medical help on your own other than a band aid. Instead, notify the Safety Team or program director. Call 911 for serious medical emergencies.

An Ouch Report must be filled out immediately (this includes all minor injuries—bump on the head, brush burn, band aid). The Ouch Report requires two signatures. One copy of the report is given to the parent, and the other copy is filed with Children's Ministry.

4.2 Evacuation

(This evacuation policy was developed by the Safety Ministry Team in conjunction with the Trustee Board, 2019, and the entire policy is included so that all ministries sees how the whole building is evacuated.)

The purpose of the First Evangelical Free Church Safety Team is to make sure with God's help that there is a safe place to worship.

In order to have a safe place to worship an automatic Fire Alarm System has been installed. This system will sound an alarm when there is a fire or smoke condition in the building.

4.2.1 Evacuation of Children's Ministry wing

In the event of certain emergencies that require evacuation, all children attending the Children's Ministry will be safely evacuated from the building as follows.

- (a) When an emergency drill has started or the alarm sounds, teachers and helpers shall remind the children to remain quiet and shall take a head count before leaving the room.
- (b) Remind the children to stay together and move quickly to the established evacuation rally point across the street at the Penn State Nittany Lion Statue.
- (c) The Nursery and Preschool classes will have Safety Team or ministry leaders come to the classrooms to assist in the evacuation of the children, using "doorway safe" cribs that can handle multiple babies. Safety Team members will be identified by appropriate visible nametags.
- (d) A Safety Team member will check the bathrooms and classrooms to make sure that everyone has evacuated the building.
- (e) All Children's Ministry personnel will meet across the street at the Penn State Nittany Lion Statue.

- (f) A teacher or helper in each classroom will take a head count at the evacuation rally point.
- (g) A Safety Team member will come to each class to ascertain if all children are accounted for.
- (h) Once children have been accounted for:
 - (1) If it is a drill – The Safety Team member will let the teachers and helpers know when they can safely take the children back into their classrooms. When back in the classroom, a final head count shall be taken to account for all the children.
 - (2) If it is an emergency – Teachers and helpers are to help keep the children calm and together. A team leader or teacher will release children to their respective parents/guardians with the proper security tag.
- (i) Any problem shall be immediately brought to the attention of a Safety Team member, pastor, or director.

4.2.2 Evacuation of Auditorium

If the alarm sounds or a Safety Team member gives instructions for evacuating, all persons who are in the auditorium are to exit the room in a safe and orderly manner. Using the nearest emergency exit. All exits are marked with lighted exit signs.

In order to help with a safe and orderly evacuation of the Auditorium a member of the Safety Team will help with the evacuation.

As you are sitting in the Auditorium facing the stage you will notice that the Auditorium is divided into four sections.

- The right most section will exit to the rear left exit and to the left, through the double doors, and out the exit door on the right, then proceed to the grassy area across the street at Penn State.
- The right middle section will exit the doors to the rear of the Auditorium and proceeded through the main doors to the grassy area across the street at Penn State.
- The left middle section will exit the doors to the rear of the Auditorium and proceeded through the main doors to the grassy area across the street at Penn State.
- The left most section will exit to the left out the emergency exit then turning left and proceeded through the main doors to the grassy area across the street at Penn State. (Exit option turning right and exit the back doors and proceeding to the upper parking lot.)

4.2.3 Evacuation of Auditorium Balcony

The right section will exit to through the right emergency exit doors down the steps out the emergency exit and proceeded to the grassy area across the street at Penn State.

The middle section will exit out the center exit down the steps and proceed through the main doors to the grassy area across the street at Penn State.

The left section will exit through the left emergency exit doors down the steps out the emergency exit then turning left and proceed through the main doors to the grassy area across the street at Penn State. (Exit option turning right and exit the back doors and proceeding to the upper parking lot.)

After the evacuation of the auditorium a Safety Team member or Usher will make sure that the room is clear and make sure that all doors are closed.

4.2.4 Evacuation of the Rest of the Building

When the alarm sounds, all persons who are in the office area, Fireplace Room, second floor offices, second floor classrooms and Gymnasium are to exit the area in a safe and orderly manner. Using the nearest emergency exit, proceed to the assembly area located on the grassy area across the street at Penn State. All exits are marked with lighted exit signs.

After the evacuation of this area a Safety Team member or designated person will make sure that the rooms are clear and make sure that all doors are closed.

At the assembly area all persons are to be accounted for and a report will be given to a Safety Team member.

4.2.5 General Information

If you are responsible for a child in Children's Ministry proceed to the rally point with your security tag. A Safety Team member or designated Children's Ministry person will escort you to get your child. A team leader or teacher will release children to their respective parents/guardians with the proper security tag

The area in front of the church is to be kept clear for emergency vehicles.

The Safety Team leader along with the First Responder Incident Commander will keep the Chairman of the Trustee's and Elders informed of the situation.

All Safety Team members are to immediately report to the back of the auditorium for assignment.

Once evacuation is complete a Safety Team leader will begin to clear the building room by room and apply a piece of tape across door.

4.3 Intruder

If an unauthorized intruder is detected within the secure area of Children's Ministry, the Registration desk, Safety Team, and/or program director will be notified immediately. A determination will be made if the intruder should be courteously confronted or if the Children's Ministry area should be evacuated.

If evacuation is necessary, push the police alert button on the emergency response key pad or dial 911 for police assistance and follow the steps outlined in 4.2.1 Evacuation of Children's Ministry

4.4 Fire

If a fire or smoke is detected by anyone or by the fire alarm system, push the police alert button on the emergency response key pad or dial 911 for firefighter assistance and follow the steps outlined in 4.2.1 Evacuation of Children's Ministry

4.5 Natural Disaster

In the event of a threat of any natural disaster such as flood, earthquake, hurricane, tornado, notify the Registration desk, Safety Team, and/or program director immediately. The situation will be monitored, and appropriate action will be taken. If parents need to be notified or if early dismissal is initiated, it will be done as orderly as possible. If an immediate evacuation is necessary, follow the steps outlined in 4.2.1 Evacuation of Children's Ministry

5. Child Protection Policy

Child abuse is against the law, and it is a violation of human conscience and dignity. Every state in the United States of America has laws against the abuse of children. Moreover, because the identification of child abuse in every form is vital to its prevention and its treatment, each state has enacted mandatory reporting statutes. Child abuse cases must be reported. Even when there is reasonable suspicion, meaning that it is objectively reasonable for a person to entertain such a suspicion, based upon facts that are observed, a report must be made. This requirement is part of the penal code of most states.

5.1 Definition of child abuse

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania identifies a child as anyone under 18 years of age.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania defines child abuse as:

- (a) Serious physical injury or imminent risk of serious physical injury – anything that causes the child severe pain or significantly impairs the child’s physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently. This includes kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing, or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child, unreasonably restraining or confining a child, forcefully shaking, slapping, or otherwise striking a child under one year of age, and interfering with the breathing of a child.
- (b) Serious physical neglect – prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child’s life or development or impairs the child’s functioning.

- (c) Serious mental injury – anything that renders a child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic, or unable to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.
- (d) Sexual abuse or exploitation – persuasion or coercion in sexually explicit conduct, simulation of sexually explicit conduct for photographing or filming, rape, sexual assault, sexual intercourse, indecent assault, indecent exposure, prostitution, looking at the sexual or intimate parts of a child for the purpose of arousal, engaging or encouraging a child to look at the sexual or intimate parts of another person for the purpose of arousal, sexually explicit conversation with a child in person, by phone, or by computer.¹

5.2 Objectives of this Child Protection Policy

- (a) To protect the children of our church from the risk of abuse.
- (b) Provide clear policies and boundaries to help guide volunteers and staff on expectations and acceptable behaviors, and provide spiritual care for all parties in the unfortunate event of an allegation of abuse.

To ensure these objectives, the Children’s Ministry facilities are secure and video monitored. All church employees and volunteers are screened (as described above in section 1 on Volunteers) and supervised with accountability to ensure that the approved training and reporting procedures are followed.

¹ CPSL—The Child Protective Services Law, 23 Pa.C.S. § § 6301—6385.

5.3 Mandatory and Permissive Reporters

A mandatory reporter is someone who by law must report the hearing of, witnessing of, or suspicion of abuse to police and/or the child protective agency. According to the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, clergy and day care or child center workers are mandatory reporters, and they must report if there is reasonable cause to suspect (within their respective training) that a child has been abused.

A permissive reporter essentially includes everyone who is not a mandatory reporter, which means they are not legally mandated to report, but Christians have an ethical obligation to speak up for children who cannot speak up for themselves (Psalm 9:9, 12). When concerns arise, rather than waiting until you have reasonable cause to report, you should report as soon as there is reasonable suspicion, directly to the child protective agency first, and then internally to a member of the pastoral staff via their staff email address and the Elder Board via elders@myfefc.org. Resolve doubts in favor of reporting.

5.4 Training for Child Abuse Recognition

According to the state of Pennsylvania, certified training for child abuse recognition and reporting is only required if the facility/program is state certified (like a day care center).²

Even mandatory reporters are not required to take the training unless they are licensed by the state.

However, the training is available online from these sources, and is encouraged for anyone who serves in Children's Ministry at First Evangelical Free Church.

² Pennsylvania state law, 2014, Act 31.

- Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance (cost is \$30, and it takes about 2-3 hours)
<http://www.pa-fsa.org/Mandated-Reporters/Mandated-Reporters-Training/On-Demand-Online-Training>

- Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center (free, and it takes about 3-4 hours)
<http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/Resources/CPSL.%20Resources/Reporting%20Flyer.pdf>

5.5 Child Safeguarding **Advisory Committee**

The mission of the Child Safeguarding Advisory Committee is-to advise the Elder Board when needed on matters related to child protection and compliance with the policies.

The Child Safeguarding Advisory Committee will at all times work to maintain a civil, respectful, and collaborative tone, even and especially, when disagreeing. We operate on the assumption that everyone on this Advisory Committee cares deeply about protecting children and is contributing their time, effort, and thoughts in order to benefit children, along with keeping all discussions in strict confidence.

- (a) Size and Composition. In the interest of safety and efficiency, this Committee will at all times have a minimum of 4 members and a maximum of 7 members. Committee members can be men or women, and should include the Pastor or Director of Children Ministries, Pastor or Director of Student Ministries, professionals in child psychology or mental health, parents who can remain calm and productive in the face of difficult conversations, church leaders, lawyers, or survivors of child abuse who have received substantive and professional care.

- (b) Chairperson. A chairperson for this Committee will be appointed by the Elder Board. The chairperson's role is to coordinate meetings, facilitate discussions, disseminate educational resources, and resolve conflicts or hindrances to Committee progress. The chairperson's term is indefinite and voluntary. The chairperson may step down from this position at any time after providing notice to the Committee. The chairperson may be removed for cause at any time by the Elder Board on recommendation from the Committee. Subsequent chairpersons will be selected from the Committee by the Elder Board.
- (c) Admittance and Removal. Admittance onto this Committee is by invitation only from the Elder Board. Invitations will only be extended to those who have undergone the background checks of section 1.2 and have met with church staff members or lay leaders for an interview. Committee members may be removed for cause at any time by the Elder Board on recommendation from the Committee. Individuals who wish to resign from the Committee may do so at any time and for any reason, with no advance notice required, by sending written notice to the entire Committee or to the chairperson.
- (d) Training. Upon admittance to the Committee each member will undergo at least 2 hours of training for child abuse recognition (through the sources listed in section 5.4 or through an organization like MinistrySafe or G.R.A.C.E.), for which each member will receive a certification of completion. A copy of each member's certificate will be kept on file at the church. Each member will also read assigned books or articles on the subject, such as *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide* by Basyle Tchividjian & Shira M. Berkovits or *On Guard* by Deepak Reju. The

Committee will also retain an expert on child protection to address the Committee as requested.

- (e) Meeting structure. All Committee and subcommittee meetings will begin with prayer and the reading of the Committee mission statement at the beginning of section 5.5. Minutes will be taken during each meeting and shared with all Committee members.
- (f) Quorum and Voting. A quorum of 2/3 is required for any meeting. A majority vote is required to approve or disapprove policy recommendations as well as any other action recommended to the Elder Board. A unanimous vote is required for the recommendation to remove any Committee member or the chairperson. Any Committee member may call for a vote at any time.
- (g) Confidentiality. In order for Committee members to feel safe sharing their candid opinions, members may share summaries of meeting content (for example, to explain to a congregant the reasoning behind specific policy terms) but may not disclose the identity of individual speakers.

5.6 Reporting procedure

Reporting is not claiming that someone is guilty of abuse. It is merely providing experts with information that they may or may not decide to follow up on, which then may or may not reveal a credible allegation of abuse. The reporter's job is not to provide evidence of or to investigate the abuse, but provide as much factual information as he or she can as to why there is a concern for abuse. All incidents (including but not limited to accusations or suspicions) of suspected or actual child abuse must be reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services by calling 1-800-932-0313 or going to their website at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/>

[KeepKidsSafe/Pages/Report-Abuse.aspx](#). When you call, you'll be asked to provide the following information to the best of your ability. Note: if you do not have all the information, or you are in doubt, still call:

- Basic contact information
- Names, contact information, and location of parties involved in the alleged incident(s)
- Details about the alleged abuse and resulting action
- When and where the alleged abuse occurred.

When you call, you'll be given the first name of the case worker who is recording your report and a case number. Please record these for your records.

The person reporting the accusation or suspicion shall write up the following and submit to a member of the pastoral staff and the Elder Board:

- (a) Date, time, and location of the incident
- (b) Child's name, age, gender
- (c) Parent or guardian who brought the child, address, and phone
- (d) Nature and extent of suspected abuse (be as specific as possible)
- (e) Name and relationship of the perpetrator or person causing the abuse (if known)
- (f) Action taken by the reporter
- (g) Name, phone, and address of the reporter

5.7 Action plan for Alleged Abuse

In the event that an allegation of abuse occurs, it should be taken seriously and handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality. The following steps should be followed by the Lead Pastor or someone delegated by him. If the Lead Pastor is the accused, these items will be handled by presiding Elder or someone designated by the Elders.

- a) Immediately contact the church's insurance carrier. – Brotherhood Mutual Insurance through James O. Bower Insurance (Mechanicsburg, PA). Agent: Andrew Bosworth, (724) 495-9525 or (800) 326-7200.
- b) Immediately contact an attorney and obtain written advice.
- c) Contact and cooperate with civil authorities (Children and Youth Services) under the advice and guidance of church attorney.
- d) Make certain that any mandated reporting is done by required parties within the proper time frames.
- e) Notify parents of the victim and interact compassionately with the victim and family. Care and safety of the victim is the first priority. If parents or someone within the household may be involved as the perpetrator then it is typically best to have Child Protective Services or law enforcement make the first contact with the family.
- f) Do not inform the accused that a report was made. It is important that outside authorities make the first move after reporting as no opportunity should be given to destroy evidence, manipulate facts, or coerce/encourage children to respond to interview

questions in a certain manner. Interact with the accused in a manner that communicates dignity and respect, without passing judgment (do not do this until safety of victim is assured). Arrangements will be made to remove the accused temporarily from duties until allegations are cleared.

- g) Speak to media and congregation. Communicate to others to be silent and how to refer questions to the spokesperson.
- h) Document all objective information that was observed that caused concern for abuse and the action taken in response to these concerns.

5.8 Caring for Survivors

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support.

This support will include:

- Listening and staying calm
- Affirming without judgment
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging and empowering their agency
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate
- Asking if there is anything practical the church can do

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other professional advice, but will focus on personal support and empowerment.

We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances - even when the abuse is alleged and not proven - will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief
- Attempt to silence the victim
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the perpetrator

Receiving an abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. First Free Church encourages anyone receiving an adult’s abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

DO Say	Do NOT Say
Thank you for telling me	Why are you telling me this?
I believe you	Why didn’t you _____(run, scream, stop him, etc.)
I’m so sorry this happened to you. How can I help?	What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?
Take as much time as you need	You need to forgive and move on.
I am here.	It’ll take some time, but you’ll get over it

<i>The following should be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind</i>	It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go
It is okay to be angry	Try to be strong
It's understandable you're feeling this way	Out of tragedies good things happen
Your reaction is not an uncommon response	You're lucky that - _____ didn't happen.
You're not going crazy. These are normal responses following abuse	I know how you feel
It wasn't your fault	Perhaps you misunderstood.

Conclusion

Much of the information in this Handbook is necessary because of the world we live in. We cannot change the world around us, but we can adapt to it and conduct our Children's Ministry with wisdom and grace.

Serving in Children's Ministry requires commitment, diligence, and sacrifice, and we hope your motive for all of this is to reflect the attitude of Christ Himself. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).