Minors Protection Policy
First Lutheran Church
Fergus Falls, MN

Adopted by Church Council:08/08/2023
Revisions approved:07/16/2024

General Purpose Statement

First Lutheran Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the minors who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the minors of First Lutheran Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "minor" includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with minors. The term "volunteer" means anyone involved in church programs involving minors, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the minors participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**
No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with First Lutheran Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with minors.

b) **Criminal Background Check**
A national criminal background check is required for all employees 18 years of age and older (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers age 18 and older:

- Those who will be in involved in overnight activities with minors;
- Those counseling minors;
- Those teaching or supervising minors
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of minors; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with minors (vehicle drivers).

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be emailed an authorization form. Completion of this form will initiate the check. If an individual declines to complete the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with minors. Background checks will run at a minimum of every 2 years.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with minors will be determined by the Pastors in consultation with the First Lutheran Church Council President and First Lutheran Personnel Committee Chair on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving minors and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with minors. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check and results will be maintained in confidence on file at the office of First Lutheran Church.

Youth Volunteers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for volunteers who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to youth workers:

- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when minors are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some classes may have only one adult worker in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open (unless there is a window in the door) and there should be no fewer than two students with the adult worker. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

When Confirmation students meet with prayer partners, this will be done in one large room. When students are awaiting rides home from parents, staff will ask a volunteer to stay until the last child is picked up whenever possible. When this is not possible, the second-to-last youth may be asked to stay behind until the last one is picked up.

Open Door Policy

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.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a minor'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 minor that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the minor is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a minor and an adult or between a minor and another minor at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a minor of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

In the event that an individual involved in the care of minors at First Lutheran Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to Otter Tail County Human Services at 218-998-8150 for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at First Lutheran Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the minor will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with minors pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and First Lutheran Church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. First Lutheran Church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.

4. Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media unless directed to speak to the media by legal counsel.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with minors.

Sick Minors Policy

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

- Fever over 100.5 degrees within the last 24hours;
- Diarrhea or vomiting within the last 24 hours;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

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

Medications Policy

It is the policy of First Lutheran Church not to administer either prescription or non- prescription medications to the minors under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick minor policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of minors with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such minors should address their situation with the church staff in charge of the program to develop a plan of action.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of First Lutheran Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of minors. Workers should consult with the church staff in charge of the program if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age and younger, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a minor in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a minor. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit

the bathroom prior to each class.

Accidental Injuries to Minors

In the event that a minor is injured while under our care, the following steps should befollowed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids,etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at thetime the minor is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, 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.
3. Once the minor has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

First Lutheran Church will provide training on this minor protection policy to all staff annually.
All workers and volunteers working with minors will be required to receive a copy of this policy annually upon application, and sign that they have read this policy and agree to abide by it.