

# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KENT

## Procedure for Handling Suspected Child Abuse

We believe that the welfare of both children and parents within the congregation will be served by the adoption of a responsible policy for the handling of suspected child abuse within the First Presbyterian Church of Kent.

Section 26.44.030 of the Washington State penal code requires that professional school personnel, health practitioners, registered nurses, psychologists, pharmacists, certified child care providers and social service counselors who have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, file a report with the appropriate agency at the first opportunity to do so and **not later than forty-eight hours after discovery**. Recent litigation regarding child abuse, reporting, statutory requirements and exemptions for clergy (State v. Motherwell, 114 Wn.2d 353, 788 P.2d 1066) suggests that staff and volunteers working with children and youth would most closely fit under the category of social service counselors rather than clergy and that no exemption from the statutory requirement for reporting afforded to clergy when counseling parishioners in their role as clergy would apply. The State of Washington recognizes the special vulnerability of children in society and, therefore, provides protection from prosecution for people who may erroneously report abuse but who have done so in good faith and without malicious intent.

The following protocol should be enacted by anyone working or interacting with children, or by members of any organization or group using the facilities of Kent First in all cases of suspected abuse involving any participant under the age of eighteen.

- I. When anyone working with children believes there is reasonable suspicion of abuse (notation of a bruise without appropriate explanation, spontaneous report of abuse from a child, etc.) the person must immediately contact the Pastor or the chair of the Personnel Committee.
- II. The Pastor or the chair of the Personnel Committee will discuss the situation with the person who suspects the abuse. If both agree that there is reasonable suspicion of abuse, or if, after discussion, one individual remains convinced that there is reasonable suspicion of abuse then **reporting becomes mandatory**.
- III. Although the division of Child Protective Services will accept anonymous reports, we believe that the overall goal of (1) protection of the child, and (2) the mobilization of resources to aid the family and community, will be best achieved by involving the family in the reporting process. All those involved should be treated with care and respect throughout the reporting interaction. Any requests to withhold or withdraw a report cannot, under any circumstances, be granted once the decision to report (II, above) has been made.

- IV. Reporting must be done at once by calling the Child Protective Services (24 hour) intake number at (206) 721-4115. In the event that the intake office cannot respond, or doesn't answer, the report must be made to the local police department by calling 911 and requesting that the officer on duty assist in the reporting of a suspected case of child abuse.
- V. Child Protective Services or the local police authority will provide the structure of the report by asking questions. The person filing the report will fulfill the guidelines for reporting as stated in the Revised Code of Washington, section 26.44.040 by simply and factually answering those questions.
- VI. We as a congregation recognize that child abuse is a sin that is not less amenable to the grace of God for forgiveness and healing than any other. We do accept the responsibility entrusted to us to protect the health and welfare of children within our care and realize that the responsibility may necessitate difficult and painful interactions within the congregation when abuse occurs. We also recognize our own limitations as professional and lay staff and agree that both children and adults involved in child abuse should be referred to appropriate counselors. Pastoral care should be maintained during this entire process.

*I have read the First Presbyterian Church of Kent **Procedure for Handling Suspected Child Abuse**, understand it, and agree to comply with it.*

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_