

Reporting Abuse

1-866-607-SAFE (7233)

If you have been abused or know someone who is being abused within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), please call the above number.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) strives to make its congregations and church events safe for everyone. If you have been abused or know someone who is being abused within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) we want to know so we can make sure it does not happen again.

If you are unable to call the above number, please talk with someone whom you trust within the church. It could be your pastor or a session member or a member of your presbytery.

Abuse Prevention: The Book of Order requires all church councils to implement child and youth protection policies to make the council and church events safe for everyone.

Book of Order – G-3.0106 General Principles of Councils Administration of Mission

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child protection policy.”

Abuse Reporting: If you are reporting abuse, please call the above number or report to church leader so the church can take steps to stop the abuse, to hold the abuser accountable and to provide appropriate pastoral care to you.

Abuse Reporting for a church leader:

If you have received a report of abuse within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), there are a couple of items to discern to determine how to further report.

1. What is the nature of the abuse?

If it is abuse a minor or of an adult who lacks mental capacity, all ministers, ruling elders and certified Christian educators are required under the PCUSA constitution and may be required under state law to report the abuse to church authorities and secular authorities. Please consult your state law for state reporting requirements.

G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting

Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to 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 or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

If it is abuse against a youth (no longer a minor) or an adult, follow the steps below in the Lines of Accountability to determine to whom you should report.

2. What is your role in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and how did you gain the knowledge of abuse?

A. Teaching Elder or Minister of Word and Sacrament

a. You will need to understand the requirement to keep information that you received in the exercise of pastoral care confidential and the circumstances under which you may reveal the information and the circumstances under which you must reveal and report the information under the To whom should you Report: Lines of Accountability.

b. G-4.0301 Trust and Confidentiality

In the exercise of pastoral care, teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament) and ruling elders who have been commissioned by a presbytery to limited pastoral service (G-2.10), shall maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, and shall hold in confidence all information revealed to them in the course of providing care and all information relating to the exercise of such care.

When the person whose confidences are at issue gives express consent to reveal confidential information, then a teaching elder or a ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service may, but cannot be compelled to, reveal confidential information.

A teaching elder or a ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service may reveal confidential information when she or he reasonably believes that there is a risk of imminent bodily harm to any person.

B. All other leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), ordained or not ordained, paid or volunteer

- a. Report following the To whom should you Report: Lines of Accountability below.

3. To Whom should you Report: Lines of Accountability

If you have received a report of abuse of a child or youth or vulnerable adult within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) you will also need to discern the relationship of the person accused of the abusive behavior with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in order to determine to whom should you further report the abuse.

A. Abuser is a member of a Congregation

If the person accused of the abusive behavior is a member of a congregation, you should report the abuse to either a pastor of the congregation or the clerk of session of the congregation. The session will appoint a committee to investigate the alleged behavior and may place immediate and/or long-term protective limits around the individual person who is accused's participation in the congregational community.

B. Abuser is a pastor/ teaching elder/minister of word and Sacrament or a ruling elder commissioned to a particular pastoral service

If the person accused of the abusive behavior is a pastor/ teaching elder/minister of word and sacrament or a ruling elder commissioned by a presbytery to a particular pastoral service, you should report the abuse to the Stated Clerk of the presbytery of which the pastor/teaching elder/minister of word and sacrament is a member or the presbytery which has commissioned the ruling elder to a particular pastoral service. The presbytery will appoint a committee to investigate the alleged behavior and may place immediate and/or long term protective limits such as administrative leave around the individual person who is accused's participation in the PCUSA.

C. Abuser is a non-member volunteer or employee of a congregation or PCUSA related entity such as a presbytery, synod, or agency of the PCUSA.

If the person accused of the abusive behavior is a non-member volunteer or employee of a congregation you should report the abuse to any member of the session or a pastor/teaching elder/minister of word and sacrament or the clerk of session.

If the person accused of the abusive behavior is a non-member volunteer or employee of a presbytery or a synod, you should report the abuse to the clerk of the presbytery or synod or a member of the council personnel committee.

If the person accused of the abusive behavior is a non-member volunteer or employee of an agency of the General Assembly, you should report the abuse to a personnel employee (human resources), or a member of the legal department.

The congregation, council or General Assembly agency will respond according to its policy to investigate and may place immediate and/or long-term protective limits around the individual who has been accused's volunteer or employment capacity.