

Boundary Training Shenandoah Presbytery 2025

Case Studies

#1 You are sitting in the Session meeting, when Sharon, a new Elder on Session, says: “I don’t understand why we need to have all these safety and abuse policies. If you ask me, this is the reason a lot of people stop being Presbyterian—too many rules! We never had any problems with “abuse” (she uses her fingers to make air quotes). Besides, Mrs. Johnson has been taking care of kids for years. Why should she have to be background checked and go through training? In fact, she would be insulted if you told her she had to do that.”

How will you answer Sharon? What theological, practical and polity issues pertain to this? What, if any, liability issues are involved? How can you help everyone (Session, volunteers, staff, congregation) understand the need for both policies and training?

#2 It is a Friday morning, and you are prepping for the youth lock-in that begins that night. Your other 2 chaperones, a married couple, call and say the whole family is down with the stomach bug. They are not able to attend or to be chaperones. You don’t have anyone else who is available who has already been background checked or trained, per your congregation’s policy.

What will you do? What does your policy say? Can you have the lock-in, or do you have to reschedule?

#3 You are a member of a church, and you like the new pastor, who has been there a couple years. The pastor’s preaching is good, relevant, and the pastor has a great sense of humor. Because of that, you have become more involved in church activities in the last few years, always receiving praise from the

pastor for the good job you have done. The pastor frequently texts you about things that could be handled in a non-urgent way and asks for you to meet them at the office to discuss “some things.” You go, but when you arrive no one else is in the building, and when you go to the pastor’s office, the pastor asks you to sit down on the couch, and then sits too close to you, and while talking, keeps putting hands on your arm, shoulder, etc. You begin to feel really uncomfortable.

How will you handle this? Who, if anyone, will you tell? Is this misconduct? If so, why? If not, why?

#4 A long time tradition in your youth group has been to play “sardines,” the game of reverse hide and go seek, where 1 person hides, and then others looking for them also hide, crowded together in the same space. This happens during the youth retreat, in some areas that are dark and not easily visible. Somebody later makes a comment about “all the funny stuff” that happened during sardines last week. When you ask, you don’t get much more of an answer than “oh, you know, just fooling around kinda stuff.” A few weeks later, you notice that one of the youth no longer comes to youth group or worship. When you ask, you just get adolescent shrugs, “well, I’m busy with school,” etc., but it doesn’t feel right to you.

How will you respond? What policies do you have in place? What actions need to be taken/what questions asked in order to create a healthy and safe atmosphere for youth?

#5 A member of your congregation contacts you because Kris, a Ruling Elder and a youth group volunteer, has been on her granddaughter’s Instagram account, and has been texting with the youth. When you check, you see that the comments seem innocuous, but frequent. You ask for copies of the

texts, and see the same thing, a lot of checking in and reminders about youth activities, etc. You notice, however, that not all of them contain a cc to the grandmother, per your church's Social Media Policy. When you meet with the youth volunteer to discuss this, Kris says that she has concerns about the youth, who is being raised by her grandparent, and Kris just wants the youth to know that the church is always there for them. In addition, Kris says, the youth has told Kris something but asked Kris not to tell anyone else.

Is this a boundary issue? What will you do? What will the Session do with a volunteer who has not followed an agreed upon policy? How will you inform—or not—the grandmother, the Session, and the congregation about this?

#6 Fred is a long-time member of the church, has served as Elder and Deacon, and is gregarious, always greeting everyone with a hearty “hello! Good to see ya!” and often...too often, giving people “bear hugs” with a little too much body contact for comfort for most people. Fred persists in this behavior, even after you have told him “Not cool, Fred. Maybe people don't want a hug.” At the church harvest dinner, he swatted one of the volunteers on the rear end, telling them to “get a move on!” and also made comments about “just what I like to see: big breasts and thighs...on these turkeys!” When you talk to people, they are clearly uncomfortable with this behavior, but do not want to hurt Fred's feelings. No one is willing to make a written complaint, but everyone wants the behavior to stop.

How will you handle this? What policies do you have—or don't have—to address this behavior? Are there any other things you might have to consider?

#7 It is Sunday Morning, and the time for the Children's Moment of worship has arrived. Per your congregation's practice, the children come up front and sit with you as you tell/read a story, or use a prop to illustrate a Bible passage. One child climbs onto your lap. In order to continue smoothly through the service, you let the child stay on your lap. You read the story, close with prayer, and send the children back to their families or to Sunday School, helping the child off your lap. The child, says loudly as she exits "Pastor Sam touched my boom-boom!"

Is this a boundary issue? How will you handle this?