

Child and Youth Safety Policy

Each child is a gift from God. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children and youth. It is the responsibility of all the adults in our community to protect our children from abuse.

According to the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/identifying):

1. *Physical abuse* exists when a child has a non-accidental injury.
2. *Emotional abuse* is injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.
3. *Sexual abuse* exists when an adult uses a child as a part of any type of sexual act.
4. *Emotional neglect* is when the child suffers from an adult failing to give chances for feeling loved, wanted, secure, and worthy.
5. *Physical neglect* is when an adult does not provide basic needs or supervision.

We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday school, youth activities, vacation Bible school, and nursery/childcare.

Our commitments:

1. Training
 - A. Annually trainings will be made available and materials offered to all adults in the congregation and especially to teachers and adults who care for children. Adults who want to work with minors must first complete the training.
 - B. Information sessions will be provided every three years for all children, covering topics such as safety, empowerment, and boundaries. This training will be appropriate to the child's age group, as discerned by the children/youth committee.
2. Supervision
 - A. We will follow a *two-adult rule*, for church activities involving children, so as to avoid situations where a child is alone with one adult who is not the child's parent or guardian. Staff and mentors with completed background checks do not need to follow this rule, if permission is given by a parent/guardian.

B. When possible, pastoral one-on-one interactions with children and youth will take place in public settings. When an office or private meeting is needed, the door will remain open, the meeting will take place in a room where the individuals are visible, and others will be informed in advance of the meeting.

C. Any person under 18 who works with children and/or youth will be supervised by or paired with someone older than 21.

D. Sunday school classrooms will have windows in the doors.

E. Prior consent will be obtained from a parent or guardian if a child is to be transported away from church facilities or functions.

F. We will practice and model appropriate touch and healthy boundaries.

G. Guidelines will be implemented for child-to-child and youth-to-youth contact.

i. We will expect respectful behavior at all times.

ii. Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.

iii. There will be no inappropriate wrestling or roughhousing.

iv. Only one child or youth may use a bathroom stall at a time.

H. No physical discipline (e.g., hitting, slapping) will be used. When a child misbehaves, we will use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child will be taken to their parent. If a parent is not available, we will speak with them as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will ensure the child's safety but remove them from the activities to minimize disruption.

3. Personnel

A. Each teacher and leader of children will be presented with a copy of the congregation's child protection and abuse response policy and be asked to acknowledge that they have read and will abide by the policy.

B. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on final candidates for all church staff positions. These background checks will be conducted in all the states the individual has lived in during the previous twenty years. Background checks will be repeated every five years.

C. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before they are permitted to become a teacher or leader of children or youth.

4. Allegations of abuse

A. If a child discloses abuse or child abuse is suspected, the person who the child disclosed to or who has the suspicions will immediately make a report to Child Protective Services.

B. When the victim and alleged offender are both in the church community, the child protection team will follow these additional steps (if a member of the team is the subject of the allegation, the deacons will appoint someone to replace the team member):

i. Immediately attend to the victim's and the family's safety and needs through church leadership and an outside agency (like a child advocacy center), keeping the victim's needs at the center of any process.

ii. Immediately relieve the alleged offender from all responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation.

iii. Within 48 hours, notify all parents whose children may have encountered the alleged offender. Let them know that allegations have been made and reported.

iv. Keep victims and alleged offenders separated during the investigation.

v. Inform area conference leadership.

vi. After the investigation, follow all legal implications for the offender. Inform the whole congregation.

vii. Even if the abuse is not confirmed, attend to the dynamics that prompted the allegations and carefully consider the degree to which individuals involved need to remain separated.

viii. Make pastoral care available to all involved, prioritizing the needs of the victim.

C. Any known or credibly accused child abuse offender will not be allowed to be around children or youth unsupervised and will not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal).

D. Parents/guardians of minors will be notified if there is a registered sex offender attending the church at the time this information becomes known. New families to the church will be notified of this information within two months of beginning to attend church.

Guidelines for technology and social media:

E. An adult should ask permission from a parent/guardian before initiating one-on-one electronic communication with a youth.

- F. An adult may use electronic communication with youth for logistical purposes. Such communication should be brief.
- G. If a youth uses electronic communication to contact an adult, the adult should inform the youth's parent/guardian and may only continue the electronic conversation if the parent/guardian gives permission.
- H. Parents or other adults will be kept apprised of ongoing texting, email, or phone conversations between adults and youth.
- I. Adults may not "friend" or "follow" or initiate a connection with youth via social media. But an adult is welcome to accept a friend/follow request from a youth, if such a connection is initiated by the youth. If an adult accepts the request, the adult should exercise care in subsequent social medial postings, given that the youth is now participating in their online presence.
- J. Photos of children or youth will not be shared on personal social media platforms without permission from a parent/guardian.

This policy will be implemented and facilitated by a child protection team of at least two individuals appointed by the congregation. The deacons will be responsible for the emotional care of the congregation as needs arise as a result of the administration of this policy. It will be posted on the church website and posted in the building. It will be reviewed and updated every five years.

Adopted: March 1, 2020

Effective date: July 1, 2020

Best Practices

- Consider the vulnerability of children whose parents or guardians are not members of the faith community. Communicate protection policy information to these parents/guardians as part of the relationship-building work with them.
- Children need love. At times affection can be appropriately expressed through physical touch that is in the view of others. Touch will not be based on the adult's emotional need, nor will it ever be forced on a child. Adults should ask before initiating touch, such as prior to giving a side hug or handshake. Touch will be age appropriate, will never involve private parts (except as needed for diaper changing/wiping), and will only be as a response to the child's need.

- Communities themselves may need healing from a crisis situation. This can happen through informational meetings with time for Q&A, circle gatherings to hear harms and feelings, and formulation of a task group for future prevention.

What to remember when reporting abuse:

- You do not need to collect documentation or proof of abuse in order to file a report. Do not conduct an investigation yourself. Instead, please consult with professionals from the local Child Protective Service's office if you have any questions or concerns.
(<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/child-welfare-services/child-protective-services/about-child-abuse-and>)
- Child abuse is not an issue to deal with through church leadership.
- When notification of abuse is made, the pastor and/or a member of the child protection team must be informed at once.
- Cooperate with the professionals who investigate.