

CHILD SAFETY POLICY OF YOUR CHURCH

Purpose

In keeping with Jesus' command to love children well, YOUR CHURCH has implemented the following Child Safety Policy. In doing so, we hope to:

- A. Follow Christ's example of welcoming children in his name, as outlined in mark 9:37:
"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." (NIV)
- B. Provide a safe, structured, and caring environment for children, from infancy to age 18.
- C. Reduce the church's legal risk and liability exposure.
- D. Comply with state and federal legislation, including (but not limited to) the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

Standard of Conduct

All workers, volunteer, paid, full-time and part-time, of Your Church are expected to comply with the established Child Safety Policy. Any actions contrary to the church policy will be dealt with swiftly and may include disciplinary measures up to and including termination, as well as legal ramifications when applicable.

General Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply.

CHURCH PERSONNEL: The following categories are defined as church personnel.

- 1. All pastors and ministry directors.
- 2. All paid church personnel, including (but not limited to) administrative assistants, bookkeeping, buildings and grounds, and paid childcare provides.

CHILD(REN): Persons under the age of 18 are defined as a child(ren).

ADULT(S): Those over the age of 18 are defined as adult(s)

INDIVIDUAL(S): Refers to Church Personnel and Volunteer Team Members as a collective whole.

VOLUNTEER TEAM MEMBERS: Those who serve with children in any capacity at YOUR CHURCH are classified as Volunteer Team Members. The following are included in this definition:

- 1. All persons who supervise or assist with children's ministry programming, in any capacity, at YOUR CHURCH.
- 2. All persons who supervise or assist with youth ministry programming, in any capacity, at YOUR CHURCH.

Defining Child Abuse and Neglect

In accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), YOUR CHURCH defines child abuse and neglect, at minimum, as:

Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.¹

In accordance with federal legislation and the state laws of Texas, YOUR CHURCH defines the four major types of maltreatment among children below. These definitions are in compliance with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

1. **Physical Abuse:** Physical Abuse is physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child. The physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) can result from punching, beating, shaking, kicking, biting, throwing, stabbing, hitting, burning, choking, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.
2. **Neglect:** Neglect is failure to provide for a child's basic needs necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual Abuse includes fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or producing pornographic materials.
4. **Emotional Abuse:** Emotional Abuse is mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in a child's growth, development, or psychological functioning. It includes extreme forms of punishment such as confining a child in a dark closet, habitual scapegoating, belittling, and rejecting treatment for a child.

Personnel Screening Procedures

Finding quality persons to serve in our children and youth ministry is important. The following procedures serve to guide this process.

1. All new job applicants for paid positions, full or part time, and all volunteers shall be required to complete a written application form. This application form will include at least the following:
 - Personal contact information
 - The name, address, and phone number of at least two references who have worked with this individual in a setting with children.
 - An acknowledgement of consent to allow church personnel to contact these references. References will be contacted by a pastor. All application forms and related information will be kept confidential by the staff.
 - The following question must be answered. 'Has a lawsuit, claim, charge, arrest, ever been made against you for sexual misconduct, abuse, or molestation?'

¹ CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-320), §3.

2. Background Checks

- All paid staff, part time or full time, regardless of their job description, must consent to a national criminal background check and a statewide criminal or statewide sexual offender background check.
- All volunteers that have more than incidental contact with minors and work in our Children's ministries, youth group, and Children's Sunday school must consent to a national criminal background check and a statewide criminal or statewide sexual offender background check.
- Such a check will be run before employment or volunteer work will commence. Results of this background check will be shared with the potential employee/volunteer upon request. In the rare case that the information in the background check is challenged by the applicant, the Lead Pastor and Management Team/Elders shall make the final determination as to what information will be considered in the decision process after an appropriate release of information is granted. Without the release, the applicant cannot continue in the adjudication process.
- No applicant or volunteer ever convicted of a sexual related crime is eligible for service in a position with direct relation to children.

3. Personal Interview

- Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

Supervision Procedures

The care of our children is of utmost importance to this congregation. As we seek to provide a safe place for our children to develop as disciples of Jesus, the following procedures will guide our ministry.

1. Two Adult Rule: Two adults must share supervisory responsibilities of children at all times. A qualified, responsible teenager not related to the other adult may be substituted for one adult if necessary. In cases where an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child (i.e., counseling, visitation), all workers should obtain the consent of the child's parent legal guardian whenever possible prior to being alone with the child. This rule extends to cellphone transactions with minors. Anyone working with minors will limit their cellphone transactions with minors to basic information about events or shall include a third party in the texts.
2. An education leader, or designated person, will make random checks on all classrooms on a regular basis.
3. No volunteer who wishes to work with children or youth shall be permitted to do so until having attended Your Church regularly for at least six months. Exceptions to this rule require the consent of the Lead Pastor and Management Team/Elders.
4. Children elementary age and younger must wear name badges and/or be signed in and out of church supervision.
5. There must be at least one adult (age 18 or older) present with teenage volunteers.

6. Any supervisor is responsible to address suspicious behavior or any behavior that may be contrary to church policy and to document and report such occurrences to the proper authorities.
7. Children five years of age and younger should utilize a classroom bathroom, if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group of 2 or more, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom stall first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the child 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 he/she assists the child. For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.
8. It is the policy of Your Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. A parent at home should administer all medications before arriving at Your Church. Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Children's Ministry Director to develop a plan of action.
9. It is the policy of Your Church not to allow any child who has had a fever, vomiting, or diarrhea within the preceding 24 hours in children's classrooms.
10. It is the policy of Your 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 children. Workers should notify the Children's Ministry Director if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.
11. In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:
 - 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 the time the child is picked up from our care.
 - 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.
 - Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Reporting Procedures

If you suspect this policy has been violated in some manner, please follow the steps outlined here.

1. All allegations must be taken seriously.
2. All allegations should be reported to the most senior staff or volunteer available and not directly or indirectly involved in the allegation as immediately as possible.
3. The most senior staff or volunteer available and not directly involved in the allegation will notify the parents or legal guardian.
4. All situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
5. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities when applicable.
6. No accused will be addressed by anyone other than the established authorities and/or the most senior staff or volunteer available not involved in the allegation until the safety of the child or victim is secured.
7. No victim involved in an allegation nor anyone responsible for reporting an allegation will be retaliated against.
8. Texas law requires that ANYONE with knowledge of confirmed or suspected child abuse or neglect (wherever it may have occurred) must report it to appropriate authorities. This law extends to individuals whose communications may otherwise be privileged, such as clergy, attorneys, and health care professionals. The report may be made to any local or state law enforcement agency, or to Child Protective Services (CPS), which is under the Dept. of Family and Protective Services.
9. The adult who becomes aware of the abuse or neglect from the child is the one responsible for making the CPS or law enforcement report. If the incident or the report occurred in the church, it should first be reported to the supervisor and a pastor, who would usually then be the one to make the report (but verified by that adult who was legally responsible to report). However, while it is a legal mandate to report child abuse, it is not a legal mandate to have supervisory or pastoral permission to do so.
10. The abuse or neglect must be reported to the government authority in *no less than 48 hours after becoming aware of it*. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a Class A Misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment of up to one year and/or a fine of up to \$4,000. *Merely reporting the incident to your supervisor or pastor is insufficient.*
11. While it is sometimes appropriate to explore a situation further, legally it is NOT our job to investigate and determine the truthfulness of abuse allegations or suspicions. A report MUST be made to an appropriate government authority *who is the one to conduct such investigations*. A person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect is immune from civil and criminal liability.

12. The report should be made to CPS if the child could have further contact with the reported perpetrator. CPS's job is just that—to protect the child. It is not a law enforcement agency. If the child is being kept safe by their parents (which includes prohibiting their child from having ANY further contact with the suspected abuser), then only law enforcement needs to be contacted, who will handle all criminal matters.
13. CPS can be contacted in two ways:
 - a. When the child is immediately safe and the situation does not need to be immediately investigated, report online at <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/Default.aspx> .
 - b. “Urgent” cases should be reported by phone at 800-252-5400. “Urgent” is defined as:
 - Serious injuries and/or immediate need for medical treatment (including suicidal thoughts)
 - Sexual abuse where the abuser has or will have access to the victim
 - Children age five and under who are alone or likely to be left alone within the next 24 hours (or even within the next few days)
 - Anytime you believe the situation requires action in less than 24 hours
14. Keep in mind that it is the child's safety and mental health that is of highest importance, NOT their parents or other adults.

Response Procedures

The following outlines the steps to be taken in the event a violation of this policy occurs.

1. Established authorities and/or Human Resources will handle all allegations expeditiously.
2. Any accused worker will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed.
3. All details, interviews, and information will remain confidential to those legitimately involved in the investigation. Any individual or group responsible for a breach in this confidentiality is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.
4. Anyone who presents themselves or is presented to the church as a victim of sexual abuse, misconduct or molestation, must be:
 - Offered counseling by a qualified counselor not in any way connected to the church.
 - Given the opportunity to present his/her side of the allegation to a representative of the church in a non-threatening and confidential environment.
5. Anyone accused of an act or acts of sexual abuse, misconduct, or molestation, must be:
 - Given the opportunity to present his/her side of the allegation to a representative of the church in a non-threatening and confidential environment.

6. The pastor and chair of the Management Team/Elders must decide together what course of action needs to be taken after reviewing the facts of the case as reported by the victim and the accused. Responses can include any of the following:
 - Report the incident/s to the proper government authority.
 - Report the incident/s to the insurance company.
 - Church disciplinary action on the accused.
7. In all cases, the goals of the process must be to promote the safety of all minors, repentance and restoration of perpetrators (though not restored to the position), protection of falsely accused individuals, and maximum care and support for victims.

Incident Report Form

This report **must be completed and submitted** to a Children's Ministry staff member to be filed by the Children's Ministry Director **on the day of the incident**.

Name of Child: _____

Nature of Incident: _____

Location of Incident: _____

Date & Time of Incident: _____

Witnesses: _____

Actions and Reports Made: _____

Documented By: _____

Documenter's serving capacity/role at time of incident: _____

Date Documented: _____

Parent Signature: _____

Date Signed by Parent: _____