



CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

“They are precious in His sight”...and in ours

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A. Need for Policy

The safety and well-being of children and youth is of utmost importance to First Baptist Church. We recognize our responsibility to endeavor to protect children and youth while they are involved in church activities. “Let the children come to me and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven” is our gospel call to care for children, to protect them, to empower them in their growing, and to be a sanctuary for them.

We recognize that today’s world is not always a safe place for children and youth. Churches are not immune to child abuse opportunities. Rather, the open, trusting atmosphere of a church environment can make it a prime target area for potential abuse situations.

Therefore, based on our strong commitment to provide a church environment for children that is both loving and safe, we have established child and youth protection policies and procedures. The purpose of these policies and procedures is to:

1. Safeguard children and youth from any form of abusive behavior while they are involved in church activities.
2. Protect church staff and volunteer workers from unfounded allegations of child abuse.

B. Why Churches are Susceptible

Churches have unique features that can make them susceptible to incidents of child abuse, such as:

1. Churches tend to be trusting and unsuspecting institutions. Children and youth are given into the care of various church organizations in trust.

2. Very little may be known about a person before he/she is placed in a volunteer position of service in the church.
3. Child molesters are attracted to an institution in which they have immediate access to potential victims in an atmosphere of trust, such as in the church.
4. Churches provide ample opportunities for unsupervised, close personal contact between adults and children. This risk increases dramatically for overnight activities or off campus activities.
5. Most churches struggle to enlist adequate help for children and youth programs. Since turnover among workers is often high, any willing volunteer can provide welcome relief, often with no questions asked concerning that individual's background and qualifications.

C. Definitions

Adverse information – any information that adversely reflects on the integrity or character of a volunteer or employee that suggests that his or her ability to safeguard children or youth may be impaired or that his or her access to children or youth clearly may not be in the best interests of children, youth or the Church.

Child, children and youth – these terms are used interchangeably to denote all young people from birth up to 19 years of age.

Employee – any person who is paid by the Church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with children.

Volunteer – any person who is not paid by the Church on a full-time or part-time basis and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of children.

Child abuse – harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental, physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.

Neglect – harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care.

Sexual abuse – any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or any other conduct or action done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party either (1) through physical force that overcomes earnest resistance or a threat, expressed or implied, that places a child in fear of immediate death or serious physical injury to himself or another person or (2) by a person 19 years old or older against another who is less than 16 years old or by a person four or more years older than the victim.

II. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. Volunteer Selection

Before being considered for volunteer work with children, prospective volunteers must complete for approval the online Leadership Information Form, agree by signature to follow FBC Policies and Procedures and authorize a consent form for a criminal records background check and a child abuse and neglect check. The Leadership Information Form asks for three personal references who are not relatives, members of FBC staff or former employers, unless the former employer is involved in childcare such as a teacher, pediatrician, etc. The prospective volunteer should strive to give references who have knowledge of their experience in working with children. These references will be contacted by the screening consultant who will also initiate a criminal records background check and a child abuse and neglect check on each volunteer applicant.

If no adverse information is received, either from the applicant, his/her references or from the background check, the screening consultant will notify the applicant of his/her approval and will place the applicant's name on a list of approved workers. Only the record of a person's approval for service will be available to others responsible for recruiting workers. The Executive Pastor will be notified of all approved workers. The Executive Pastor shall have the right to refuse any applicant for volunteer service with or without cause.

Any application with adverse information or questionable background checks will be forwarded to the Executive Pastor. The Executive Pastor will then confer with the minister responsible for the activities of the volunteer applicant concerning the matters under question, known mitigating factors and approaches to pastoral care for the applicant in dealing with the issues under question. The Executive Pastor or conferring minister will contact the applicant for conversations concerning the adverse information and/or background information. Additional pastoral and/or counseling resources will be made available to the applicant, as needed.

A committee comprised of the Executive Pastor, Minister to Youth, Minister to Children, Minister to Preschool Children, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and a representative of the Legal Committee shall make the final decision for approval or disapproval of such applicant. This Committee may consult with mental health or other qualified professionals as needed. The decision of the Committee shall be final.

As a condition precedent to volunteer work with children and youth, the prospective volunteer shall have been a member or active participant of First Baptist Church of Huntsville for the six (6) months preceding the commencement of the volunteer service.

Applicants will not be permitted to work with children or youth in any church function if:

(a) Applicant has been convicted, pleaded guilty or otherwise adjudicated guilty of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or any offense related to child pornography.

(b) Applicant has any pending charges related to sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography.

Applicants may not be automatically prohibited from working with children or youth, but will be subject to further screening including, but not limited to, a personal meeting with an appropriate minister of the Church before his/her application can be considered further if:

(a) Applicant has been previously charged with, but acquitted of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or has offenses related to child pornography.

(b) Applicant provides other affirmative responses or leaves responses blank on “Section B. Legal Questionnaire” on the volunteer questionnaire.

(c) Applicant has been indicated for child abuse or neglect by any child welfare or protection services agency.

A criminal records background check and a child abuse and neglect check will be performed every three (3) years on all volunteers working with children and youth.

B. Employee Selection

Every applicant for any paid position of First Baptist Church, Huntsville shall complete an employment application and a consent form for a criminal records background check, and a child abuse and neglect check or the applicant will not be considered for employment by the church.

All information gathered from the employment application and related background checks will be held in strict confidence. Records will be kept in a secure location.

No person shall be employed before the Personnel Committee and/or the staff supervisor responsible for hiring that position has received and reviewed the applicant’s completed employment application and has received the all-clear from the process for the on-line background check.

No one who has been convicted, pleaded guilty, or otherwise adjudicated guilty of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography will be permitted to work at First Baptist Church, Huntsville, in any capacity. No one with pending charges of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography will be permitted to work at the church in any capacity. Anyone who has been previously charged with but acquitted of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence, offenses related to

child pornography or who has been indicated for child abuse or neglect by any child welfare or protection services agency will be subject to further screening.

C. Supervision of Children and Youth

TWO ADULT RULE – All workers, whether volunteers or employees, should avoid being alone in a one-on-one situation with children and youth.

1. When supervising children ages birth to third grade, a minimum of two adults, age 19 and older, should be present in the classroom. Exceptions to this rule are:

- a) The Weekday Early Education ministry may staff a room with only one adult teacher with the following safeguards in place:
 - The teachers, as paid employees, have been through the complete screening procedures, including a criminal background check and a child abuse and neglect check.
 - Visual access into the classroom is available at all times.
 - Random, unannounced visits are made to the classroom regularly by another adult.
- b) Classrooms may be staffed by one adult and one Student, age 16 and older, if:
 - The Student has been approved by a minister to work in this area and the Student's parent or guardian has signed a form confirming that he or she knows of no reason why the Student should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with children or other youth.
 - Another adult, serving as coordinator or division director, makes periodic checks on the room, and is available to assist in the classroom if needed.
- c) Students younger than age 16, who have received permission from the appropriate minister to work with children, may assist in the classroom as helpers, but may not count as one of the two required adults. Such Student's parent or guardian must have signed a form annually confirming that he or she knows of no reason why the Student should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with children or other youth.

2. When involved in a counseling session with children or youth, ministerial staff is exempt from the "two adult rule"; however, the counseling shall take place in an environment which allows visual access by others. When numerous counseling sessions are contemplated, either:

- a) Parental permission shall be obtained for the minister to meet privately with the child or youth, in an environment which allows visual access by others; or
 - b) The “two adult rule” shall apply.
3. The “two adults” that are scheduled to work with children may be from the same family. However, the church will seek to provide additional adult workers to assist couples and other family members when working together.
4. General Procedures
- a) Bathroom Procedures - Preschool classes are to use the restroom in their classroom. If a teacher must assist a child in the restroom, the door to the restroom shall remain open. Older preschoolers, who do not require assistance in the restroom, should be given the privacy of being alone with the door closed. If a child must use the restroom when outside the classroom, every effort should be made to avoid a situation where one teacher and one child are alone in the restroom
 - b) Windows on Classroom Doors - All doors to classrooms for children and youth will have windows. The windows should remain uncovered at all times. If no window is present in a door going into an area where children are present, the door shall remain open during use so that persons passing by can observe inside.
 - c) Shut Door Policy - In infant through three-year old classrooms, the door to the hallway should either be shut or a gate securely in place at all times preschoolers are in the room.
 - d) Supervision of Activities - At all children and youth events, a coordinator will be present to make periodic, random visits to the classrooms.
 - e) Release of Children - Children in infant through three year old church classes will only be released to a properly identified and authorized adult.
 - f) Security – All doors leading to hallways should be equipped with locks and windows. As a part of the safety and security of the church, hallways will be patrolled by members of the Security Team and by off duty police officers employed by the church.
 - g) Overnight Rule - Special attention will be given to planning and carrying out activities that involve children in overnight stays, on or off church property. Adequate adult supervision, appropriate separation of sexes, and other precautions will be taken. All adult

chaperones must clear the appropriate screening procedures before being allowed to participate. Sleeping arrangements will be made to avoid one adult and one child being in a room alone except family members. All children participating in overnight church activities will be required to furnish a parent or guardian consent and release form. Speakers and visiting volunteers who participate in overnight activities must complete an on-line application and include a reference from a minister in their own local church or ministry in which they regularly participate.

5. Immediate Discussion of Suspicious Behavior - Any suspicious conduct between a worker and a child will be reported immediately to appropriate authorities.

Workers will be advised to be alert if a child appears withdrawn or aloof, exhibits a marked personality change, or exhibits any signs of physical abuse or other behavior that may indicate a problem that deserves attention.

6. Education of Workers - Each church year, opportunities for training in understanding, preventing, recognizing, and reporting suspected child abuse will be provided by the various ministry areas of our church. Workers with children and youth will be required to participate in at least one of these opportunities for training.

7. Compliance – Any person, whether a volunteer or an employee, who fails or refuses to comply with or who acts in violation of these policies and procedures shall not be allowed to work with children or youth.

8. Parental Supervision and Participation - Parents should not leave their children unattended at church, especially before or after scheduled events. Parents are encouraged to attend, participate in and observe all activities in which their children are engaged. Parents should be aware of the time when activities for children or youth begin and end. All children and youth should be promptly picked up by parents or arrangements made for timely pick up.

D. Reporting Obligations

Abusive situations often continue if they go unnoticed and unreported. All employees and volunteers in ministries involving children and youth must know what constitutes an occasion for reporting, the reporting channels they should use, and their legal obligations to make a report.

Alabama's child abuse reporting statute (ALA. CODE § 26-14-13) makes it mandatory to report child abuse cases for physicians, nurses, other health care officials, law enforcement officials, school teachers and officials, social workers, day care workers, mental health professionals, members of the clergy and any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when such child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect. These persons are required by law to report known

or suspected child abuse or neglect under a penalty of a misdemeanor fine or sentence. The Alabama statute grants a privilege to those making such reports. (ALA. CODE § 26-14-9).

It is the policy of FBC, Huntsville that employees follow mandatory reporting requirements, as referenced above, immediately reporting all incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse to the proper authorities. In addition to following mandatory reporting requirements as dictated by Alabama law, the employee making the report shall also immediately notify his/her supervisor who shall in turn immediately report to the Pastor or other minister of FBC, Huntsville. FBC shall then take all reasonable steps to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no further contact with the alleged victim while present on the campus of FBC, Huntsville and to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no further contact with children or youth in the church pending completion of an investigation by the appropriate authorities. Nothing in these policies and procedures should be construed as a limitation on a person required by law to report child abuse to fulfill their obligation pursuant to AL Code 26-14-3. To the extent volunteers working with children are considered mandatory reporters under Alabama law, this section applies to such volunteers.

E. Response to Allegations

All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously. The care and safety of the victim will be the first priority. All such matters will be handled forthrightly with due respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality, for both the victim and any accused. Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement authorities.

The parents of any alleged victim of child abuse will be promptly notified by either the Pastor or other ministerial staff. They will be informed of the steps that are being taken, and will continue to be advised of the status of the church's actions. The safety and privacy of the victim will be a paramount concern. The church will demonstrate care and concern for the victim and his/her family. Privacy and confidentiality will be preserved to the extent possible.

When an incident of child abuse arises, the Pastor, in consultation with other ministerial staff, legal counsel and the Chairman of the Trustees, will designate a spokesperson for the church. This person will have all contact with the media and the congregation, and will handle all such communication in a discrete, informed and Christlike manner.

REQUIRED FORMS - VOLUNTEERS

Leadership Information Form
Consent for Criminal Records Background Check
Consent for Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance
Parental/Guardian Consent for Students Age 16 to 18 Years of Age

REQUIRED FORMS – EMPLOYEES

Employment Application
Consent for Criminal Records Background Check
Consent for Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry Clearance