



Bethlehem Baptist Church

7836 Fordson Road
Alexandria (Gum Springs), Virginia 22306
(703) 360-4170

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, PHYSICAL ABUSE, AND NEGLECT

PURPOSE:

The purpose of these procedures is to institute a set of preventive measures to ensure that minors participating in church sponsored activities both on and off church premises receive the supervision and protection needed to ensure their physical safety, spiritual well-being, and healthy mental development.

BACKGROUND:

The number of lawsuits brought against churches as a result of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect has risen substantially over the last decade. Most of the lawsuits filed against churches for acts of child abuse have alleged that the church was legally accountable either on the basis of negligent hiring, negligent supervision, or negligent retention.

Negligent hiring simply means that the church failed to act responsibly and with due care in the selection of workers (both volunteer and compensated) for positions involving the supervision or custody of minors. Negligent supervision means that the church did not exercise sufficient care in supervising a worker. Negligent retention refers to the continue use, employment or retention of a worker who although screened and cleared at the outset is later found to have engaged in conduct which would render him or her unsuitable for the role in which such a worker has been hired or placed. However, even more important than the legal issues, is the potential long-term effect of incidents of child abuse on the growth and development of the abused child. The matter of abuse of children and the corresponding damage to their physical, spiritual, and mental health involve significant issues which must be addressed by all segments of our society.

WHAT IS OUR CHRISTIAN TRADITION?

The prevailing biblical themes in relation to children reveal a God that is especially concerned with children, as the most vulnerable members of society, who require the protection and nurture within the structures of the larger community. Within Jesus' ministry children are not only cared for as vulnerable, but also held up as examples of faith.

On the other hand there are biblical verses, for instance in the book of Proverbs, which taken out of context, have been used to justify child abuse. Most of us have heard, "Spare the rod, spoil the child." Proverbs 13:24 actually says, "Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them."

In Jesus' ministry, we find a wonderful image of compassion for children: People were bringing little children to him in order that he might teach them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. Mark 10:13-16

As Christians, we must understand children as inherently valuable members of Christ's community. Jesus highlighted not only their faith, but their vulnerability. This vulnerability puts children at risk, but it also places them close to God; their dependence on Him may be what Jesus was trying to get his disciples to see as a model for their own faith. This vulnerability and dependence makes the protection and the support of the community of faith even more important. Jesus was teaching that, within the community of believers, there must be protection for each of us in our dependence on God and each other. Not only must we, as members of Christ's Body, protect children in their vulnerability we can also learn from them as we grow in faith.

WHAT IS OUR UNIQUE CALLING AS CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 12:26 reminds us that we are all members of the body of Christ; if "one member suffers, all suffer together with it." **As people of God, we are responsible for and to each other. What affects children also affects us and our communal relationship with God.** We cannot underestimate the spiritual cost of abuse to victims and survivors; the sense of loss trust and betrayal cuts to the core of their faith and ability to trust God and others.

As representatives of Christ to each other, we have a unique calling and opportunity: **we must act to end suffering, to prevent further harm, and to be God's agents for healing the brokenness in our midst, as we minister with the victim and/or survivor of abuse, the abuser, and the others affected.** Our task as communities of faith is to demonstrate that we can be trustworthy; we can be a place where children are not betrayed, where their suffering is not ignored, and where true redemption and reconciliation are continually offered. Through our actions God can provide hope and redemption to those affected by the sin of child abuse.

AT BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH:

Children are our most precious resources. Here at Bethlehem Baptist Church we consider the physical protection, religious development, and spiritual well-being of all children to be among our most important concerns. Fortunately, we have had no known cases of such abuse here at Bethlehem. However, as much as we would like to believe otherwise, Bethlehem, like many other institutions in our society is not immune. It is the policy of Bethlehem Baptist Church that every effort will be made to protect the rights of children

entrusted to its care, and to provide a safe, wholesome, religious environment for their continued growth.

CHILD ABUSE:

Under the law of the State of Virginia, a bruised or neglected child is any child under 18 whose parents, or any other person responsible for the care of the child:

- Causes, or threatens to cause, a physical or mental injury except for an accident
- Fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or caring support
- Abandons the child
- Fails to provide the kind of supervision necessary for a child's care or level of development
- Commits, or allows to be committed, any illegal sexual act involving the child—or allows the child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse varies from state to state, but it generally includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In a more common sense, child sexual abuse is:

“Any sexual activity which a child—whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim” (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 199

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent, and included behavior that involves touching and non-touching aspects. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual situations for which they are not personally, socially, or developmentally ready.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

The *Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence* has identified the attributes listed below as possible indicators of child abuse or neglect. *However, it must be strongly emphasized that the presences of these attributes do not necessarily constitute proof that a child is being abused. They only serve as warning signs to look further, ask questions or seek assistance in determining whether or not a child needs help.* Other possible indicators of child sexual and physical abuse and neglect are:

- Self-destructive and destructive behavior
- Fractures, lacerations, and bruises that cannot be explained or explanations that are improbable given the child's developmental stage
- Failure to thrive

- Depression, passivity
- Hyperactive (disruptive behavior)
- Sexualized behavior or precocious knowledge of explicit sexual behavior
- Running away, promiscuous behavior
- Alcohol or drug abuse

SEXUAL ABUSE:

- Redness or swelling in the anal area
- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, or swollen genitals
- Pain in urinating or defecating
- Unusual odors in the genital area
- Vaginal infections, discharges, or venereal disease
- Pregnancy in a child
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Unexplained persistent sore throat or gagging (due to oral sex)
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Physical complaints with no apparent somatic base

PHYSICAL ABUSE:

- Unexplained bruises (in various stages of healing), welts, human bite marks, bald spots
- Unexplained burns, especially cigarette burns or immersion burns (glove-like)
- Unexplained fractures, lacerations or abrasions

PHYSICAL NEGLECT:

- Abandonment
- Unattended medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger. Inappropriate dress, poor hygiene
- Lice, distended stomach, emaciated

SCREENING PROCEDURES FOR PAID AND VOLUNTEER WORKERS WHO WORK WITH YOUTH:

Each applicant for a position at Bethlehem Baptist Church involving work with youth must submit an application through the appropriate sponsoring ministry. Both current and future volunteers and individuals occupying paid positions involving work with minors must complete the screening form attached as Enclosure 1 (Child Protection Form) (CPF-1), the (Authorization for Release of Information Form) (CPF-1a) attached as Enclosure 1a. A member of the Interview Committee will check all references.

All individuals who work with minors will be required to update the data contained in their screening forms at least every three years by completing a new screening form and criminal record check. Notwithstanding this requirement however, all such individuals are required on a continuing basis to report to the Pastor, a member of the Deacon or Trustee Ministries, any incident which would ordinarily be included in the screening form immediately upon its occurrence.

Should the updated data contain in their screening form or criminal record check show that any volunteer worker or employee has become ineligible at that time for working with children or youth, they will be immediately removed from their current position, and will not be considered for other positions involving work with children or youth.

Individuals applying for positions involving work with minors must also be interviewed by the Child Risk Interview Committee (Interview Committee). Specific duties of the Interview Committee are listed in Enclosure 2 (CPF-2).

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM BACKGROUND CHECKS

Individuals apply for positions involving work with minors should put completed forms for background checks into envelope, seal it, and mark confidential and either put them in the lock box located in the Administrative Office or give to the Assistant Office Clerk who will put them unopened into the lock box. Regularly the Secretary from the Interview Committee will remove them for the box for placement in the child risk file cabinet located in the Finance Office. At the earliest practical time, the Interview Committee will convene and the Secretary for the Interview Committee will turn over all reports received by that time unopened to the Interview Committee. The Interview Committee will be required to sign the non-disclosure form (CPF-3) attached as Enclosure-3.

For each report of background check evaluated, the Interview Committee will complete the evaluation form (CPF-4) attached as Enclosure 4.

- For applicants whose reports contain no derogatory information, under "approved", the Committee will check the statement: "National background reports were checked, no derogatory information was found".
- For applicants whose reports contain some possible derogatory information but for other reasons the Committee decides to approve the application anyway, under "Approved", the Committee will check the statement: "Other" and provide a statement explaining why approval was granted.
- For applicants whose reports contain sufficient derogatory information to warrant disapproving the application, under "Disapproved", the Committee will check the statement: "National background report and enter the number and date of the report on the evaluation form.

- For applicants whose reports contain no derogatory information but for other reasons the Committee elects to disapprove the application, under “Disapproved”, the Committee will check the statement: “Other” and provide a statement explaining why approval was not granted

The Committees with Pastor’s concurrence is authorized to inform the sponsoring ministry by separate correspondence when applicant is not approved for work with minor without citing reason. Applicant wishing to know specifics of adverse information can be referred to the appropriate reporting agency, or other authority in the proper jurisdiction.

When not being actively used by Committee, all reports will be secured in locked safe. Except with prudence and with Pastor’s permission, reproduction of any reports or background check documentation is prohibited.

For deceased persons, burning or shredding will destroy all background investigation reports received on applicants within 30 days. For persons who have since moved their membership, files will be purged and labeled as inactive. After a period of three years, files will be destroyed via burning or shredding. Destruction will be witnessed by at least one other person and documented with date and signature of official conducting destruction.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ADULT SUPERVISION:

At all times, at least two adult supervisors should be present during any church sponsored activity involving minors.

For children under the age of five, at least one approved adult female should take girls to the restroom, and one approved adult male should take boys to the restroom. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe, and then wait outside the restroom until the children come out. If no approved adult male is available, children five years of age or younger (boys and girls) should be assisted in the restroom by an approved adult female.

Children will only be released to parent, guardians, or persons specifically authorized to pick up the child.

Volunteer workers should never spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Disciplinary problems should be reported to any Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Coordinator, to any ministry leader or to a parent or guardian.

An approved adult will patrol the hallways, checking bathrooms, etc. at every function where children under 18 are present.

Parents will need to inform workers when children are ill. Children who are ill (with a fever, or having a communicable disease which can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity.

An approved substitute (who has been approved as a volunteer worker through the screening process) must be used to take the place of workers who are ill.

Children will be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as an illness is discovered. If this is not possible, then the child who is ill will be isolated in the Health Unit in a manner that will allow approved supervision to continue until the child can be returned to their parent or guardian.

Reasonable steps will be taken by approved persons to avoid contact by anyone with body fluids of any kind. An approved person will wear gloves to avoid contact with body fluids. For example, blood, urine, or saliva.

Any Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Coordinator, or any ministry leader who becomes aware of an injury to a volunteer worker or child will take steps to ensure proper medical attention is given to the injured person. Ministry leaders and volunteers will follow procedures for rendering aid in case of accidental injuries that are included in the Ministry Handbooks.

Children who receive an injury, which is obviously minor (not life threatening), will be given first aid as needed at the time of injury by a Health Ministry worker. The child's parent or guardian will be notified of the minor injury when they pick up the injured child.

Any injury, which may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid, will be given immediate attention. The parent or guardian of the injured child will be immediately notified, along with a Church Officer. An ambulance will also be called immediately if warranted by the injury.

Attendance lists will be kept for all of the ministry's functions involving children and youth. The date of the function, along with the names of all participants and ministry volunteer coordinators will be recorded.

Any one who becomes aware of any injury, abuse, or molestation connection with any ministry activity will immediately inform a Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Minister or any ministry leader of such injury, abuse, or molestation and will complete "Notice of Injury" form (CPF XXX)

Any Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Minister or any ministry leader who becomes aware of possible abuse or molestation of a participant will ensure that the child's parent or guardian is immediately informed that possible abuse or molestation has occurred. The Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Coordinator, or any ministry leader will also see that the Child Protection

Inquiry Committee is promptly contacted to provide a written opinion as to whether the church should report the abuse or molestation to Child Protective Services.

For all outside activities and specific internal activities where the minor is attending unaccompanied by the parent or guardian, such as the tutorial program, church staff or volunteer workers should obtain the written consent from the minor's parent or guardian before going out alone with a child, or spending time with the minor in an unsupervised situation.

The parent or guardian of the minor must complete and sign the permission form (CPF-5) attached as Enclosure 5 for internal activities, or the permission form (CPF-6) attached as Enclosure 6 for external activities. Additionally, for internal activities either a member of the Deacon or Trustee Ministries should be notified of such activities in advance by the completing a Facility Request Form as outlined in the Revised Church Procedures, dated January ~~xx,xxx~~.

Any applicant, who has been investigated, convicted or has pled guilty to either child sexual or physical abuse may not be assigned to work with minors in any capacity. However, this would not preclude him/her from working in other positions within the Church.

Volunteer workers must promptly notify the Church Officers, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Coordinator, or any ministry leader of any activity undertaken on their own behalf or by others, which violates this policy and/or procedures.

Any Church Officer, Sunday School Superintendent, Youth Minister, or any ministry leader who becomes aware of a violation of the policy or procedures will take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with the policy and procedures by all workers; and will remove workers from their position if such removal is warranted, or if the worker poses a potential threat to others.

This policy and procedures will be conveyed for review annually to all volunteer workers, employees, and leaders to whom it applies.

REPORTING PROCEDURES:

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a minor and any other person, or outward sign of child sexual, physical abuse or neglect should be brought immediately to the attention of the Pastor, a member of the Deacon or Trustee Ministries for inquiry. In the event of an occurrence, each complaint will be considered serious until proven otherwise. The confidentiality of the complaint and of the investigation will be maintained as much as possible. Upon notification of a potential problem, the official receiving the notification will cause a confidential inquiry to be conducted immediately. If appropriate, following the initial inquiry, an Inquiry Committee will be convened within 24 hours of receiving the complaint to

conduct a prompt and thorough investigation to determine if there is sufficient grounds to warrant reporting the matter to the Department of Child Protective Services. The Inquiry Committee will be composed of at least three members. Specific duties of the Inquiry Committee are listed in Enclosure 7 (CPF-7).

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the law does require that any "Mandatory Report" such as a doctor; nurses; social workers; probation officers; and law enforcement offices who have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, must report the matter immediately by telephone to the Department of Child Protective Services of the county or city wherein the child resides; wherein the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred; or to the Fairfax County Department of Social Services Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline, (703) 324-7400. "Failure to do so within seventy-two hours of a mandatory report's first suspicion of child abuse or neglect shall be fined by not more than \$500 for the first failure, and for any subsequent failures not less than \$100 nor more than \$1,000." (Commonwealth of Virginia Code, Section 63,1-248.3)

In addition to the mandatory reporting requirements outlined above, any person who suspects in good faith that a child is abused or neglected may make a complaint concerning such child to the local department or the county or city where the child resides or where the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred or where the abuse or neglect is believed to have occurred. Any such person acting in good faith shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability unless it is proven that such persons acted with malicious intent. Also an anonymous report can be made over the phone in the presence of an independent third party witness (Such as a local attorney or the pastor of another church) who can verify later, if necessary, the identity of the reporter.