



## **Child Protection Policy**

*FINAL - Approved by Governance, March 2024*

### **Purpose**

The Otter Creek Church maintains an absolute and unwavering commitment to ensuring the physical and emotional safety of all minors who engage in the programs of this church or who participate in activities/events on Otter Creek's campuses. This document outlines the policies and procedures that undergird this commitment.

### **Policy Statement**

Otter Creek will not tolerate any form of abuse or neglect. Credible allegations of such will be promptly investigated<sup>1</sup>. All individuals working with minors on behalf of Otter Creek Church as well as all OC Staff must be CPP-Approved and must meet the requirements of this policy in order to do so. Otter Creek will comply with all applicable laws and regulations regarding the protection of children.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all individuals - paid or unpaid - who work with the OCKids Ministry, the OCYG or Otter Creek Church *while they are interacting with minors on behalf of the Otter Creek Church*. Note: CPP-Approved individuals are expected to carry themselves in a manner consistent with the spirit of this policy in *all* interactions with minors and a failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

All such individuals will be CPP-Approved prior to engaging in this type of work. This policy does not extend to all-church events or to programming aimed at groups of adults (e.g., college/young adult). Additionally, some aspects of this policy also apply to the adults of outside groups who contract for the use of OC's facilities *while they are interacting with minors on the premises of Otter Creek Church*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Otter Creek Schools**

Otter Creek's schools are governed by a separate set of policies and procedures.<sup>3</sup> This policy does not apply to Otter Creek's Kindergarten and Preschools.

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<sup>1</sup> Investigations will be initiated by the Director of Student Ministries; with supervision by the Executive Minister and Chair of the OC Shepherds.

<sup>2</sup> See OC's Facility Use Policy or Gym Usage Policy for specifics.

<sup>3</sup> For specific details, please contact these schools directly.

## **Training and Compliance**

Otter Creek Church is committed to providing annual training and support to all CPP-Approved individuals to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and are equipped to safeguard minors.

## **Enforcement**

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer status.

## **Interpretation of this Policy**

Otter Creek Church's Child Protection Team is responsible for the interpretation of this policy. The Child Protection Team, Otter Creek staff, and Shepherds are aware that situations may arise that extend beyond the scope of this policy. Please reach out to the chairperson<sup>4</sup> of the Child Protection Team<sup>5</sup> if you have any concerns or questions.

## **Review and Evaluation**

The Church recognizes the importance of regularly reviewing and evaluating its Child Protection Policy to ensure its ongoing effectiveness and relevance. To this end, the policy will be reviewed and evaluated as often as circumstances warrant but at least on an annual basis.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Adult:** Anyone 18 years of age or older who is not also a student participant in events, trips or activities of the OCYG.

**Child Protection Team:** Also "CPT". Collection of Otter Creek members, commissioned by the Otter Creek Shepherds, committed to the care and protection of minors and responsible for establishing and updating Otter Creek's Child Protection Policy.

**CPP-Approved:** A designation applying to any individual that has met the requirements of this policy and has been approved to work with minors on behalf of Otter Creek Church.

**Minor:** Anyone who is under the age of 18 *as well as anyone who is 18 or older while being a student participant in events, trips or activities of the OCYG.*

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<sup>4</sup> Currently David Rubio, Director of Student Ministries ([david@ottercreek.org](mailto:david@ottercreek.org))

<sup>5</sup> Members as of the publication of this document (March 2024) are Dawn Crisler, Chris Gonzalez, Laurie Netterville, Elizabeth Parnell, Jennifer Potgeter, David Rubio (Chair), Leslie Sitton, Gail Srygley, Kelly Swiggart, Amy Tate, Kim Toliver, and David Wilson.

**Misconduct:** Misconduct refers to any behavior that is inappropriate, harmful, or that violates this policy. This can include, but is not limited to:

1. Sexual misconduct - (i.e., sexual abuse, sexual harassment or exploitation of a minor)
2. Physical abuse - non-accidental trauma or physical injury of a minor, or failure to protect a minor from harm
3. Psychological harm - repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to minors they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered. May include both abusive acts against a minor and failure to act (i.e., belittling, bullying or traumatizing a minor)
4. Neglect - Failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm, or risk of harm, to the child's health or safety.
5. Any behavior that violates applicable laws or regulations regarding the protection of minors

**OCKids:** Otter Creek's Children's Ministry - a ministry of the Otter Creek Church serving minors (through the 5th grade) and their families.

**OCYG:** Otter Creek Youth Group - a ministry of the Otter Creek Church serving minors (from 6th grade through High School graduates) and their families.

**Parent or Guardian:** Person legally responsible for the regular care/custody of a minor.

**Policy:** This document and related procedures.

**Sexual abuse:** When a minor is involved in intentional sexual acts that produce sexual arousal and/or gratification for the perpetrator or sexual behaviors/situations in which there is a sexual component.

**Shepherd:** A member of OC's governing body. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

**Staff:** Any individual hired by Otter Creek Church to work in a paid capacity.

**Student Volunteer:** A volunteer in the OCKids ministry (3rd-5th grade) or the OCYG (6th-12th grade) who is under the age of 18.

**Student Worker:** A student who is under the age of 18 and employed by Otter Creek Church as a childcare worker.

**The Church:** Also "Otter Creek Church" or "OC" - Otter Creek Church of Christ (Brentwood and/or West End campus).

**Volunteer:** A person who provides services to Otter Creek Church on a voluntary basis (i.e., without expectation of payment or compensation.)

## The CPP-Approval Process

### Application, Selection, and Screening

In an effort to provide for the safety and well-being of minors, all individuals who work with or serve minors on behalf of Otter Creek Church must undergo a screening process in order to be CPP-Approved.

CPP-Approved individuals will receive a security level designation. Otter Creek reserves the right to require any individual who works with minors on behalf of the church to resubmit applicable documentation at any time. Specific requirements for each security level are outlined below.

#### CPP-Approved Adult - Level 1

Includes the following designated roles: *Nursery Worker, Toddler Caregiver, Worship Model, Tech Worker, Check-in Greeter and Childcare Worker*. Specific requirements:

1. Must complete Otter Creek's Confidential Application for CPP-Approval, which:
  - Requires applicant to indicate an understanding of and agreement to adhere to Otter Creek's Child Protection Policy
  - Requires affirmation that the applicant has not resigned, been terminated or removed from a previous position, either volunteer or paid, due to misconduct (In the event this cannot be affirmed, full disclosure must be provided)
  - Requires applicant to submit references<sup>6</sup>
2. Must authorize Otter Creek to conduct a background check<sup>7</sup>
3. Must complete applicable training

#### CPP-Approved Adult - Level 2

Includes all roles not specifically designated as "CPP-Approved Adult: Level 1" (above). Specific requirements:

1. Must meet all Adult Level 1 requirements
2. Must be baptized
3. Must be an actively engaged member of the Otter Creek Church. (*Note: After placing membership, there will be a mandatory 6-month waiting period prior to becoming a Level 2 CPP-Approved Adult.*)

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<sup>6</sup> Check must be completed (by an OC Minister) with satisfactory results prior to CPP-Approval.

<sup>7</sup> Must be conducted to the satisfaction of OC's Ministry Staff prior to CPP-Approval (and will be rerun at least every 5 years).

## CPP-Approved Student

This section applies to all minors who wish to use their gifts to serve or work with other minors on behalf of the OCKids Ministry, the Otter Creek Youth Group or the Otter Creek Church of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

1. Must complete OC's Confidential Student Application for CPP-Approval, which:
  - Must be signed by student and parent/guardian
  - Must be approved by an OCKids or OCYG minister
  - Requires High School students to provide references<sup>9</sup>
2. Must read and sign OC's Student Volunteer/Worker Policy
3. Must complete applicable training

## Waiver of Requirements

In special cases and at the conclusion of the application process, an OCKids or OCYG Minister, with the approval of the Director of Student Ministries, may request a waiver of any above requirement. Such a request will be submitted to the OC Shepherd's Governance Chair and the Executive Minister for final approval.

## Training

All CPP-Approved individuals must be trained and educated.

- Any applicable role-specific training which may be required for a specific role will occur *prior to serving as a volunteer in that role*.
- Training in recognizing, reporting and understanding the dynamics of child abuse and neglect will occur *within 3 months of beginning as a volunteer and* will be required annually.<sup>10</sup>

## Confidentiality of Information

The church will maintain the confidentiality of and securely store all information related to applications and background checks. Only authorized personnel, with a need to know, will have access to this information.

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<sup>8</sup> Infant nurseries will be restricted to individuals who have completed their freshman year of High School and overnight trips will be restricted to individuals who have completed their sophomore year of High School.

<sup>9</sup> Satisfactory check must be completed by OC's Ministry Staff prior to serving on overnight trips.

<sup>10</sup> Students who have not completed their sophomore year of High School will be required to attend/undergo training with a parent or guardian.

## **Procedural Guidelines**

### **The “Never Alone” Principle**

All CPP-Approved individuals must avoid any situation where they could be alone, unobserved, and uninterrupted with a minor. To support this, all OCKids and OCYG classes and on-campus activities will be held in rooms where monitoring is possible.

### **Applicability of the Child Protection Policy**

When an OCKids or OCYG activity is specifically labeled a “Parent/Teen” or “Parent/Child” or “Family” event or in a case where no official OCKids or OCYG event/activity is occurring (e.g., all-church events), parents have sole responsibility for the supervision of their minors while at Otter Creek’s facilities or participating in off-site OC events.

### **Two-Adult Rule**

To the best of the church’s ability, all OCKids and OCYG programs, events and activities will have at least two CPP-Approved adults present in supervisory roles.<sup>11</sup>

### **Check-in/Check-out**

Nursery-2nd grade minors will follow secure check-in and check-out procedures for Sunday AM and Wednesday PM programming while 3rd-5th grade minors will follow secure check-in procedures and will be allowed to leave on their own upon dismissal.

### **Diaper Changing/Restroom Assistance**

Only CPP-Approved adults may change diapers or accompany minors to the restroom. Additionally, when one CPP-Approved adult is accompanying a minor to the restroom or changing diapers, a second, unrelated CPP-Approved adult must also be within the line of sight of the adult or minor.

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<sup>11</sup> The Two-Adult Rule is not satisfied in a case where the two people are family members. (This is understood to involve the following relations: spouses, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, sons-in-law or daughters-in-law).

## **Adult-to-Minor Ratios for Travel and Off-Site or Overnight Activities**

The following ratios are recommended on trips, events or activities requiring travel and/or overnight lodging as well as events or activities that are off-site:

- OCKids Grades 3-5: ONE adult to FIVE minors
- OCYG: ONE adult to EIGHT minors

If these ratios cannot be met, parents will receive notification prior to the trip.

## **Overnight Event Chaperones**

During overnight trips, the church will work diligently to ensure that all sleeping units containing minors will *exclude* non-CPP-Approved adults and will *include* one of the following:

- At least TWO CPP-Approved Adult chaperones of the same gender as the minor(s) -  
**Note: required for all OCKids overnight events**
- No chaperones (Restricted to OCYG trips with parental notification prior to the trip)

*Note: No adult may share a bed with a minor.<sup>12</sup>*

## **Reference Checks**

Prior to becoming CPP-Approved, an applicant's references will be contacted via teleconference or in person by an Otter Creek Minister. These conversations will be documented and securely stored.

## **Vehicle Safety and Transportation Requirements**

Only individuals who have been approved to drive after completing Otter Creek's Driver Application Form are permitted to transport minors to and/or from OCKids or OCYG activities/events/trips *on behalf of Otter Creek Church*.<sup>13</sup> All approved drivers must comply with applicable traffic laws. Every attempt will be made to ensure that no fewer than three individuals - one being a CPP-Approved Adult - occupy such a vehicle.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Exception: a parent sharing a bed with his/her own minor

<sup>13</sup> Does not apply to professional, contract drivers.

<sup>14</sup> Otter Creek Church recognizes the presence of pre-existing relationships and permits a flexible approach to transportation arrangements. However, any arrangements which fall outside the practices and procedures in this policy must be accompanied by permission from the parent or legal guardian of the minor involved.

## **Outside Groups**

When reserving space at Otter Creek, the leadership of groups that reserve OC facilities for private use, but which are not sponsored by or officially associated with the Church may be required to comply with aspects of this policy and accept responsibility for their group's adherence to such while using OC's facilities.<sup>15</sup> The Church will not be responsible for enforcing compliance.

## **Visitors**

When it is deemed appropriate by OC ministry staff for non-CPP-Approved individuals to be present for OC's programming for minors, these individuals must be:

- Approved by the minister responsible for the event or activity<sup>16</sup>; and
- Observable by a CPP-Approved adult at all times

## **Temporary Contract Personnel**

When/if an Otter Creek Ministry chooses to invite an outside individual or agency (e.g., retreat guest speaker, backpacking guides) to provide specialized services for minors, the Director of Student Ministries will decide whether (and to what extent) any provisions of this policy should be met by said contract personnel.<sup>17</sup>

## **Unforeseen Circumstances**

When unforeseen circumstances make it impossible or inadvisable to follow this policy, CPP-Approved individuals should promptly communicate with the appropriate minister. Whenever possible, this should be done before adjusting to practices which fall outside the terms of this policy. If this becomes necessary, CPP-Approved individuals will work with the appropriate minister to document the situation in a timely manner using the CPP Incident Report Form.

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<sup>15</sup> These are documented in Otter Creek's Facility Use and Gym Usage Policies.

<sup>16</sup> Otter Creek's CPP-Visitor Approval Form will be used for documentation.

<sup>17</sup> Otter Creek's CPP-Temporary Contract Personnel Form will be used for documentation.



## Prohibited Acts

Otter Creek Church strictly prohibits any form of misconduct against a minor. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, harassment, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of sexual conduct with or towards a minor
- Any form of sexual advances or sexual activity, contact or behavior between an adult and a minor
- Student Volunteer or Student Worker sexual activity, contact or behavior with a minor (i.e., minor to minor)
- Verbal, written or electronic comments or remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a minor, including, without limitation, any such comments or remarks made through the internet, social networks, blogs, cell phones, text messages or other similar devices or forms of contact
- Infliction of physically, verbally or emotionally abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor
- Spanking a minor
- Accessing, possessing or viewing obscene, pornographic or sexually suggestive material while in close proximity to minors or while participating in any OC activity, event or trip.
- Possession or use of illegal substances anywhere at anytime, or possession or consumption of alcohol<sup>18</sup>, tobacco (whether smokeless or not) or vaping at an Otter Creek event/activity or on the property of Otter Creek Church, or providing the same to a minor.
- Carrying/using any type of weapon while in close proximity to a minor or while participating in any OC activity, event or trip <sup>19</sup>
- Secretive gift-giving to a minor. (Or *anything* that could be interpreted as "grooming".)

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<sup>18</sup> Does not apply to the use of alcohol for religious ceremonies (e.g., Lord's Supper)

<sup>19</sup> In this regard, a "weapon" includes, but is not limited to, any firearm, explosive, explosive weapon, Bowie knife, hawkbill knife, pocket knife, ice pick, dagger, slingshot, leaded cane, switchblade knife, blackjack, or knuckles. Exceptions to this restriction may be made with prior approval from an OCKids or OCYG Minister.

## Reporting Guidelines

### Mandated Reporting of Minor Abuse/Neglect

Tennessee Code Annotated §37-1-403(i) (1) requires all persons to report suspected cases of minor abuse or neglect. Everyone in Tennessee is a mandated reporter under state law. Any person with reasonable cause to believe a minor is being abused or neglected must, under Tennessee law, immediately report to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or to local law enforcement. The reporter can remain anonymous.

***If you believe a minor has been abused or neglected, call 877-237-0004 to make a report to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or complete the form at <https://carat.app.tn.gov/carat/>. In case of emergency and life-threatening situation, call 9-1-1.***

### Incident Response Procedures

- **Reporting:** The first person who becomes aware of any incident of misconduct towards a minor at one of Otter Creek's facilities or during an off-site Church-sponsored activity must prioritize the safety of the child and, after having done so, immediately report the incident to the Minister (or person) in charge of the activity/event/trip, the Director of Student Ministries, the Executive Minister or an Otter Creek Shepherd. **Note: The person reporting the incident should not leave the child alone or confront the alleged violator.** *(The church's liability insurance carrier must be promptly notified by the Administrative Director that an incident has been reported.)*
- **Legal Requirements:** As mentioned above, if the incident in question is believed to represent abuse or neglect of a minor, it **must** be reported to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or local law enforcement. In such a case, this must be done even if the alleged or suspected incident did not occur at Otter Creek or during an OC event.
- **Support and Response to the victim:** The minister (or person) in charge of the event, the Director of Student Ministries, the Executive Minister or an OC Shepherd will respond promptly to provide support to the minor's parents and family, as needed or appropriate. This support might include informing the parents of the situation, providing guidance and working to ensure that the minor's emotional and physical needs are met. The focus will be on ensuring that the minor feels safe and secure, and that the minor's family is informed and involved in the process.

- **Support and Response to the alleged perpetrator:** The Church recognizes the importance of offering support to the individual who has been accused of misconduct against a minor. This individual may have access to resources such as professional counseling and pastoral support to help in this challenging time. The Church recognizes that such allegations can have a significant impact on individuals and it is Otter Creek's goal to support all parties, including the accused, while upholding Otter Creek's commitment to the safety and well-being of minors in its care.
- **Incident Report:** The person who reports the incident to the Department of Children's Services must also fill out Otter Creek's Child Protection Policy Incident Report Form as soon as possible, providing critical information for the investigation of the incident. This form will be stored in a secure location to ensure confidentiality. All information regarding the incident should be kept in strict confidence by all persons involved in the reporting and investigation process.
- **Investigation:** A Minister or Shepherd with knowledge of an alleged incident of misconduct against a minor will alert the Child Protection Team in a timely manner. The CPT may assist with an investigation, if one occurs, and/or determine next steps.
- **Suspension:** The person against whom allegations have been made will be immediately suspended from working with minors, pending a full investigation. Such a suspension would be in place until it is lifted by the Governance Committee of the Otter Creek Shepherds.
- **Notification:** The Chair of the Child Protection Team will inform Otter Creek's Governance Shepherds and the Executive Minister of the incident.
- **Documentation:** When appropriate and depending on the nature of the incident, the Chairman of the Shepherds will appoint someone to document the incident and its aftermath as the process moves from initial report to completion of the investigation. Such documentation will be kept in a secure location.
- **Confidentiality:** All information related to an incident of misconduct against a minor must be kept confidential to ensure the privacy and well-being of all parties involved.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Confidentiality will be maintained in keeping with Otter Creek's Confidentiality Policy. Failure to maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer duties as a breach of confidentiality could negatively impact the investigation and resolution of the incident, as well as harm the reputation of the victim, the perpetrator and the church as well as its mission to support and protect minors.

**Cooperation with Civil Authorities**

The Church will fully cooperate with the Tennessee Department for Children's Services and all other civil authorities in the event that an investigation of any alleged incidents of misconduct against a minor are conducted, including making available all relevant information and materials.

It is expected that all staff and volunteers of the church will adhere to this policy and comply with all requests for information and support from DCS and other civil authorities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or volunteer status.

**Media Response**

In the event of an alleged incident of misconduct against a minor, a designated individual will be responsible for managing all media inquiries. This individual will be chosen by the Governance Shepherds and will be authorized to provide information to the media in a controlled and informed manner.

**Congregational Response**

Working with the Child Protection Team, the Otter Creek Shepherds will determine if and when it is appropriate to inform the church about the alleged incident.