

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Statement of Purpose and Procedure to Safeguard the Wellbeing of Children and Youth

The members of Second Baptist Church are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of this church. This policy addresses the preventable risk of any form of abuse or harassment, whether physical, verbal, mental, or sexual, by any of the employees, teachers, or volunteers of this church while on church property or while engaged in church activities or programs. Furthermore, the policy addresses the responsibilities of church members and staff regarding updating and implementing this policy. We are called to hold each other accountable to protect the most vulnerable in our church and we do this with consistency and compassion rather than judgment and condemnation.

In establishing policies and procedures that provide safeguards against child abuse in our church, five critical areas must be addressed:

1. Screening and selection of paid and volunteer children's caregivers
2. Training and Procedure
3. Reporting Allegations
4. Responding to Allegations
5. Reviewing and Updating of Child and Youth Policies and Procedures

I. **Screening and Selection of Paid and Volunteer Children's Caregivers**

a. Caregivers Requirements

1. Volunteer caregivers must be regular attenders of the church for a minimum of six months. This six-month provision may be modified only with the consent of Pastoral Staff.
2. All caregivers must fill out a confidential Child/Youth Protection Information Form. This allows for a criminal history check. The criminal history check will be completed prior to service with minors. This information is to be kept in a confidential file available only to church staff with two staff members required to review and approve each file. The confidential file will include:
 - a. Authorization to conduct criminal history check
 - b. Results of the criminal history check
 - c. Signed form indicating the receipt of the Child Protection Policy
 - d. Certificate or test acknowledging completion of required online training
 - e. Attending in person training and orientation for procedures pertinent to ministry area, which are found in the Manual for Caregivers
3. Caregivers may be requested to complete a personal interview.

4. Youth under the age of 18 who help in the children's programs must always be supervised by two adult caregivers. Two adult caregivers must always be in any room where children/youth are present.

b. Staff Responsibilities

1. Church staff will distribute and collect the Child/Youth Protection Information Forms and conduct interviews as needed.
2. The pastoral staff will review a yearly criminal history record check on each employee or volunteer in their area. This will be documented, recorded and maintained by church staff.
3. Access to these records is limited to church staff.
4. Staff will be responsible for all training, orientation, and distribution of materials pertinent to their area of ministry, including the Manual for Caregivers.
5. Staff will review policies and procedures annually to include new laws and update procedures as needed.

II. Training and Procedure

All caregivers who work with minors will fulfill the following requirements:

a. Caregiver Training

1. Caregivers will complete training twice a year concerning behavior, procedures, and policies for working with children, including the Manual for Caregivers.
2. The Manual for Caregivers will include the current Texas' legal definition of child abuse, written information describing Texas laws regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse, church policies on responding to abuse allegations, and a copy of this policy.
3. All youth that serve as caregivers under the supervision of 2 adults will receive developmentally appropriate training that reinforces these policies and procedures.
4. All caregivers will sign a document stating they have received, read, and completed training regarding the implementation of the policies and procedures contained in the Manual for Caregivers.
5. Caregivers will complete the online Protect My Ministry Training before working with minors and then once every 2 years to continue working with minors.

b. Procedure

All Second Baptist activities and programs, regardless of location, involving minors will be subject to the following policy:

1. All volunteer teachers and leaders must be regular attenders of the church for a minimum of six months, complete a criminal history check, complete the online Protect My Ministry training, receive the child and youth protection policy, and complete the in person training on the Second Baptist Manual for Caregivers which details proper implementation of the Child and Youth Protection Policy and all other policies relating to the care of children at Second Baptist Church.
2. Two unrelated adult caregivers will be present during any activity involving minor children including youth helpers. The supervising pastoral staff member will ensure that these required ratios are always met.
3. Written parental permission will be maintained for involvement in off-campus church sponsored activities and programs. Parental signature will be required for early pick-up from these activities.
4. Caregivers will respect each child, youth, and adult by refraining from verbal abuse, including put-downs, inappropriate jokes and gestures, sarcasm, and slurs.
5. Caregivers will not subject minors to punishment. Inappropriate forms of punishment include shaking, striking, spanking, thumping, pinching, biting, hair pulling, yanking, slamming, excessive exercise, name calling, shaming, food deprivation, isolation, or any cruel treatment that may cause pain. Examples of restorative practices to be used in place of these punishments are found in the Manual for Caregivers.
6. Physical contact should be appropriate to the minor's age and should be intended for the child's affirmation only. Examples of appropriate contact are found in the Manual for Caregivers.
7. Individuals who have committed emotional, physical, or sexual abuse should not serve or seek employment in any church sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children or youth.
8. No minor will be left alone with only one adult on church premises or in any church-sponsored activity unless it occurs in a counseling situation with a member of the Pastoral Team. In such a situation written consent for counseling must be obtained by the Pastoral Team.
9. Volunteer and paid caregivers are always responsible for avoiding the prohibited acts defined below in Section C with minors in their care.

c. Prohibited Acts

The following acts are prohibited by this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any Second Baptist activity or program. Any observations or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to the

appropriate Pastoral Team member after the safety of the child has been assured.

1. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
2. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a minor.
3. Public Displays of Affection, sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a minor and another minor (sexual advances or sexual activity includes verbal or nonverbal graphic representations of sex or sexual activity, verbal or nonverbal requests for sexual activity, and/or any physical sexual acts).
4. Infliction of physical abuse or bodily injury to a minor.
5. Physical neglect of a minor including failure to provide adequate supervision.
6. Causing mental or emotional injury to a minor.
7. Possessing or being under the influence of any illegal drugs.
8. Consuming, possessing or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors.
9. Possessing any gun, firearm, or other explosive device while leading or participating in a function for minors.
10. Neglecting to address observable safety issues amongst children and youth in their care including but not limited to:
 - a. Bullying—use of power which can occur in a variety of ways—either physical or mental—to harass, hurt, coerce, intimidate, or ridicule others.
 - b. Sexual harassment—includes but is not limited to excessive commenting on someone’s appearance, using sexual innuendo and jokes, and engaging in unwelcome physical and verbal advances.
 - c. Hazing-- means any intentional, knowing, or reckless act, occurring by one person alone or acting with others, directed against a minor for the purpose of initiation or affiliation that subjects the minor to an unreasonable risk of harm or that adversely affects the mental or physical health or safety of the minor.
11. Communicating with any minor on social media or gaming platforms.
12. Communicating with a minor through text messages or direct messages on any social media or gaming platform on a personal cell phone without including another pastoral team member or parent in the conversation loop.

13. Engaging in behaviors that could be construed as grooming such as buying expensive gifts, testing boundaries, isolation, secrecy, shaming, material or emotional bribery, desensitization to touch and sexual topics, creating dependency, threats, and manipulation.

III. Reporting Allegations

a. Violations of the Policy

To maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all, the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of Second Baptist must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected abusive behavior or harassment shall be directed to the Children's Pastor and appropriate Pastoral Team member.

In the event a child or youth reports abusive conduct while engaged in a church sponsored activity, on campus or off, the person initially contacted by the child should contact the Children's Pastor and appropriate Pastoral Team member and complete an Incident Report. The person contacted should record verbatim in the Incident Report the specific words first spoken by the child or youth and the conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident. The person completing the incident report should ask open ended questions only that invite the child to explain what happened. If the child uses unclear words, then the person completing the incident report should ask the child to clarify what the word or detail means to them. That person should not make any assumptions about what has happened.

b. State Law Requirement for Reporting Child Abuse

In addition to the duty to report violations of the Child Youth Protection Policy, Texas State law requires reporting of child abuse. Anonymous reporting is no longer accepted in the state of Texas.

1. Legal requirements for reporting child abuse in Texas are as follows:
Any person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report the person's belief in accordance with this procedure. (Texas Family code, Section 261.101.) Reports should be made to one of the following agencies:
 - a. Any local or state law enforcement agency
 - b. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ("TDFPS") if the alleged or suspected abuse involves a person

responsible for the care, custody or welfare of the child (TDFPS, 1-800-252-5400 or www.dfps.state.tx.us (24-Hour Reporting).

- c. The state agency that operates, licenses, certifies, or registers the facility in which the alleged abuse or neglect occurred; or
- d. The agency designated by the court to be responsible for the protection of children. (TDFPS, 1-800-252-5400 (24-Hour Reporting).

All reports must contain the name and address of the child, the name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child, if available, the full name and contact information of the person making the report, and any other pertinent information. **This procedure is not only required as a condition of your job but is also required by law. Reporting an incident to your superior is not a substitute for reporting abuse to the authorities. It is important that you act in accordance with your conscience and best judgement. (Texas Family Code, Section 261.101.) Failure to report suspected child abuse is a misdemeanor.**

c. Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined by Texas law as harm or threatened harm to a minor's health or welfare by a person responsible for the minor (a minor is defined as a child or youth under 18 years of age). This law is not limited to parents only but to any person responsible for the care of the child, including volunteers and employees of Second Baptist church.

1. **Physical abuse** is a non-accidental physical injury to a minor.
2. **Sexual abuse** is any sexual conduct with or exploitation between an adult or care giver and a minor even if the victim gives consent.
3. **Mental injury** is an injury to a minor's psychological growth and development. It is caused by a chronic pattern of behaviors, such as belittling, humiliating and ridiculing a child.
4. **Threatened harm** means a substantial risk of harm to the minor. It may include acts or expressions of intent to inflict actual harm presently or in the future.
5. **Neglect** is deprivation of living conditions sufficient to provide the physical and emotional needs essential for safety and health.
6. **Grooming Behaviors** Examples of these behaviors may include building trust and rapport, testing boundaries, isolation, shaming, secrecy, material or emotional bribery, filling a needed role, desensitization to touch and sexual topics, creating dependency, threats and manipulation, and communication control.

IV. **Responding to Reported Allegations**

These procedures will be followed by the church to protect the rights of the accused and quickly and fairly investigate and resolve any allegations or violations of the Policy or of State Law.

1. Once the initial statement or complaint has been made and recorded, the investigation of any alleged incident shall be conducted by the appropriate Pastoral Team members and the Vision and Leadership Team, together with outside entities as needed.
2. The accused will be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is completed.
3. The investigation shall be conducted in strict confidence to protect the privacy of the minor(s) involved, as well as that of the accused. However, this confidence will not prohibit appropriate action (e.g., securing the safety of the minor(s) involved or notifying the pertinent civil authority).
4. Once the investigation concludes, one of the following courses of action will be taken:
 - If the investigation determines the incident does not meet the definition of child abuse,
 - Parents and guardians of all parties will be informed of the process and decision.
 - Policies and procedures will be reviewed to attempt to prevent future occurrences.
 - All attempts will be made to restore trust, relationships, and improve safety for all youth and children.
 - If the investigation determines that one of the defined forms of child abuse has occurred, the incident will also be reported to civil authorities. It will be decided by the investigating party who will report the incident, and that action will be witnessed by a Pastoral Team member.
 - In accordance with policy requirements, the incident will be reported to the Church's insurance company.
5. Upon completion of the investigation, a report will be made to the appropriate members of the Pastoral Team and/or the Vision & Leadership Team and a determination will be made whether the accused will be allowed to return to their duties.
6. A review of the investigation will be conducted and approved by the Vision & Leadership Team and an outside entity.
7. If necessary, a spokesperson will be designated by the VLT to convey information to the congregation and to respond to inquiries while maintaining individual privacy.

V. Reviewing and Updating the Child and Youth Protection Policy and Procedures

Policies (Child and Youth Protection Policy) and procedures (Manual for Caregivers) regarding the safety and welfare of children and youth at Second Baptist Church must be reviewed and updated annually and/or as needed by the appropriate Pastoral Team member. Additionally, the Child and Youth Protection Policy must be approved by the VLT when any changes are made. The purpose of the review process is to ensure the following:

1. Pastoral Team members understand and implement policies for safety of children.
2. Policies and procedures are being communicated effectively by the pastoral team and practiced consistently by caregivers at all levels.
3. Ineffective policies and procedures are reviewed and updated for the benefit of children, youth, and caregivers.
4. Any problems resulting from ineffective policies and procedures or lack of policy or procedure are addressed.
5. Changes to Texas Law are reflected in the policies and procedures.
6. Policies and procedures are communicated to and understood by parents and other interested congregation members.