

# **MODEL CHILD MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION POLICY**

The intent of this policy is to reduce the risk of child abuse and ensure intervention if it does occur within the church setting and among church family members. We recognize that our policy increases our responsibilities toward fellow church members. However, we believe that these principles serve the greater good of the church.

## **1. Preparation and Administration**

### **a. Important Terms**

(1) Minor, Child or Youth: a person under 18 years of age. Normally, “youth” is synonymous with the teen years. The term “minor” includes both children and youth.

(2) Appropriate conduct: conduct that one could reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by the child's parent or guardian and the church board.

(3) Child abuse: harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare, which may include physical injury, physical neglect, emotional injury or any sexual act inflicted upon a child.

(4) Staff member: any person serving at the church in an official paid capacity.

(5) Ministry leaders: unpaid persons giving leadership in any of church's ministries including but not limited to nursery helpers, children's worship teachers/helpers, Sunday School teachers, youth counselors, youth group leaders, council members and transportation providers.

### **b. Responsibilities**

(1) The pastor is the primary spokesperson for the church in reporting suspected child abuse. The pastor will designate a representative to make reports in his absence. No report of any alleged abuse involving children or youth served by the church or members of church families shall be made without permission of the pastor or his designated representative, except in emergency situations. The pastor will make a written report to the church board regarding any report of suspected abuse to authorities.

(2) The church board is responsible to oversee the implementation of and compliance with this policy and review reports on its use.

(3) All staff ministers and/or ministry leaders will ensure that all teachers and volunteers under their authority are acquainted and in compliance with this policy, as well as coordinate training for children's and youth workers in preventing, recognizing and responding appropriately to alleged abuse.

### **c. Record-Keeping**

(1) Medical Information. The church office will maintain appropriate medical information about minors who participate in church activities, including special health conditions, and medical treatment authorizations.

(2) Authorizations. The church office, nursery and department heads will maintain a list of family members other than the parent or legal guardian authorized to pick-up children at the church or at an activity away from the church. Children will only be released from activities or church services to authorized persons.

(3) Permissions. No minor will be permitted to participate in church sponsored outings or trips without the written permission of the parent or guardian and a medical release form signed by the parent or guardian. For high-risk activities the parental release must describe the types of activities in which the child may participate, such as swimming, boating, etc.

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## **d. Signs of Abuse**

(1) All children's and youth workers need to receive an orientation in the indications of child abuse, which as defined in state law includes physical injury, physical neglect, emotional injury or any sexual act inflicted upon a child. Staff and ministry leaders should make use of the abundant literature available from Christian legal and mental health practitioners to provide the content of the orientation.

(2) All leaders and workers need to be aware that the presence of a particular symptom does not necessarily indicate abuse, but any unusual symptom should be investigated. Many abuse indicators can also be caused by personality problems, medical disorders, involvement in the occult, divorce, family stress or other factors. When a serious incident or multiple indicators appear together, however, it is appropriate to discuss the situation with the pastor or, in emergency cases, to make an actual report to the civil authorities.

## **e. Recruiting and Screening Workers**

All paid staff and volunteer workers will be properly screened before being permitted to work with children and youth and then given appropriate orientation and training for their level of responsibility.

(1) All leaders, helpers, and teachers must complete a youth ministry application form and be approved. References, resumes, and educational preparation will be checked and verified.

(2) Applications for paid staff must include at least two independent references and list the last five years of church affiliation and service. The application and screening process for volunteers may be waived or modified for a long-term member of the church by official action of the church board. Volunteer program leaders must be approved by the pastor.

(3) All applicants, including volunteers, must be members in good standing of a church for at least a year. For a newly transferred member, the candidate should have been a member of the previous church for at least six months. (The church may elect to waive the six-month rule with adequate references to establish the background and qualifications of the person being considered for a position in children's or youth ministries.)

(4) The applicant must have no convictions for child abuse, child molestation, indecency, voyeurism, solicitation of a sexual act, or other crimes against persons. The fact that convictions took place before conversion will have no bearing on this requirement. A criminal background check on any person applying for a paid position in children's ministries, youth ministries or Day Care will be requested from the appropriate local or state authority and the results obtained prior to approval for hire by the church board.

(5) The applicant should demonstrate no indications of mental, emotional or spiritual instability. The pastor may, at his discretion, require the applicant to complete a psychological test, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, or formal spiritual assessment inventory.

## **f. Training**

Children's and youth teachers and workers should receive training in:

(1) The stages of a child's physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development.

(2) Appropriate age-level teaching methods.

(3) Appropriate methods of correction and discipline by children's teachers and workers.

(4) Physical, emotional and behavioral indications of abuse.

(5) Notification procedures in the event of suspected abuse.

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## 2. Standards of Conduct

The conduct of all children's and youth staff members, lay leaders and workers shall conform to the moral standards of Holy Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 24:15; Lev. 19:13; Jeremiah 22:13; Matthew 7:12; 24:45; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Peter 2:18) and the [title of the denominational governing manual, if applicable], both of which are incorporated by reference into this Policy.

### a. Prohibited Conduct

To achieve the goal of preventing any form of abuse or the potential of false allegation of abuse, staff members, ministry leaders, any church member or any volunteer providing care, management or ministry for children or youth on church property or in church-related activities shall not: (1) commit abuse of any kind as defined by law against any minor; (2) use, circulate, exhibit, or display pornographic material; (3) hit, kick, slap or shove; (4) sell, give or furnish any child with any tobacco substance, alcohol, or controlled drug; (5) use profanity or obscene language; (6) demonstrate any romantic or sexual interest in a minor; (7) remove any dress clothing from a minor, except when appropriately required under necessary circumstances; (8) wear anything but appropriate attire in the presence of others, especially minors; (9) kiss any minor or non-family member on the lips or in an intimate area; (10) engage in inappropriate hugging or embracing; (11) sleep in the same bed or bedding with any minor; (12) remain in any building, room, motor vehicle or private place with a minor except as permitted in this policy; (13) assist any child in the rest room except as permitted in this policy; (14) deny anyone, who is otherwise authorized to be with a child and not a threat to a child, access into a room, vehicle, or other place in which you are present with a child; or (15) take an individual minor any place off church property without notification to and permission of the parent or guardian.

### b. Permitted conduct

It is quite natural, appropriate and desirable for Christians to express and share their love and affection for each other and Christ. Sharing of love is especially important to children for their normal, healthy, and happy growth and development. The expression and sharing of one's Christian love to a child or another adult member shall not be considered abuse or be in any way prohibited, restricted or limited by this policy. The following conduct by a staff member, ministry leader or any other church member whether paid or volunteer shall be considered to be an expression of this Christian love and not abuse or even creating the appearance of child abuse: (1) verbally expressing one's Christian love and affection to another; (2) appropriately holding and comforting another person; (3) occasionally and appropriately hugging or embracing another person, especially when initiated by the other; (4) sharing emotional and spiritual concerns with another person; (4) providing necessary medical care and attention to another person; (5) encouraging another member to appropriately express and share their Christian love.

### c. Safety Precautions

(1) The pastor, staff or other church leaders should make unannounced visits to children's and youth meetings and activities. Ministry leaders should also have someone periodically observe the interactions and relationship between ministry workers and children, as well as between the workers themselves. If a questionable situation is observed, the leader should discuss any questionable action with the worker, document the matter and report to the person in charge. If a children's or youth worker is accused of improper behavior, the worker should be immediately suspended pending a complete investigation.

(2) Ministry workers are prohibited from going into children's homes while parents are away. Children's and youth workers may only have private meetings with individual children

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and youth with the permission of the parents. Parents will be encouraged to determine after the meeting whether the child or teen wants to have another visit and give permission to the child or teen to say “no” if he or she chooses.

(3) Minors will only be released from church activities to the parent or legal guardian who brought them, unless otherwise approved by the parent or guardian.

(4) A child in the nursery will only be given to the parent who left the child at the nursery, unless the parent provides a signed authorization for another person to pick up the child. [For large nurseries a claim-check system should be adopted.] A minor must not be left as the sole attendant in a church nursery or Day Care.

### **d. Discipline Guidelines**

NOTE: The references to children in these guidelines also apply to youth.

(1) The primary means of discipline in church children’s program activities is the development of a healthy and respectful relationship between the adults leading the program and the children involved. Therefore, adults should do all they can to foster respect and care in their program.

(2) Adults should especially engage in praying regularly for the children in their program, asking God to protect them from any kind of harm; workers should also pray that God would give them wisdom and discernment so that they will be sensitive to ways to help and protect the children.

(3) Adults should also treat children as they would like to be treated. But there are times when the usual methods of maintaining order appropriate to the setting fail. If this is the case, then the following procedure should be used:

(4) In responding to disruptive behavior of children, workers must never commit acts prohibited by law, including corporal punishment. In addition, workers should never use shouting, profanity, physical intimidation or threats to deal with unwanted behavior.

(5) A misbehaving child should not be restrained unless he or she is about to harm another person in the program.

(6) If someone is disrupting a program, he or she should be warned verbally. If he or she has to be warned a second time during the session of the program, the teacher/leader should speak to the child one-on-one when that session is finished.

(7) If the child persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, the teacher/leader should contact the parents/guardians. If appropriate, the parent/guardian should stay with the child in class for at least one period.

(8) If the child persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, he or she shall be forbidden to attend the program until after he, his parents (or guardians), and the pastor have met to work through the problem. As part of that meeting a written agreement for appropriate behavior and consequences for misbehavior shall be drawn up and signed by the child’s parents/guardians.

(9) If the child violates the contract, consequences for violation shall be enacted including expulsion from the program for the year.

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## 3. Abuse Prevention Guidelines and Procedures

### a. Supervision

(1) Children's and youth leaders will ensure that an adequate number of adults are assigned to supervise all activities involving children and youth. Whenever practical, ministry workers should be required to work together in teams of at least two people.

(2) The pastor, staff or other church will follow the safety precautions listed in this policy.

(3) The pastor, one other man, and two women will be designated as "safe people" and will be introduced to the children and the congregation as such. Children and other members of the congregation will be encouraged to report abuse or inappropriate behavior to one of the safe people.

(4) The safe people, church officers, leaders, teachers, and anyone in a position representing the church are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the pastor [or to a designated representative]. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse but only to report it to the pastor.

### b. Handling Allegations of Abuse

(1) Any allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. When a report is made, the appropriate action will depend on the ages of those involved and the circumstances of the particular case. If an initial assessment by the pastor gives reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, the following people will be notified: (1) the church's attorney, (2) Child Protective Services (if a minor) and/or local police, (3) the church's insurance carrier, (4) parents/guardians of the alleged victim (if a minor), (5) the accused person after the safety of the alleged victim is guaranteed, (6) denominational authorities (if the alleged abuser is the pastor), (7) church board officers. If necessary, other people directly involved will be notified. The allegation of abuse will remain within the confidence of these parties.

(2) The pastor will minister to the alleged victim and victim's family and offer assistance as seems appropriate.

(3) The pastor will maintain records of reported allegations of abuse, which must be kept, secure and confidential. When the pastor leaves the church, he shall turn over pertinent records to the church board secretary who will provide them to new pastoral staff.

### c. Handling a Charge Against a Church Member

(1) If an initial allegation and assessment of abuse against any child gives reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have been committed by an employee, church staff member or program leader or worker, then the alleged abuser will be suspended from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties. If the alleged abuser is the pastor, a staff member, or an employee, he will be suspended according to the bylaws [or denominational rules] with full pay and without prejudice pending a hearing. If the alleged abuser is a lay program leader or volunteer worker, he or she will be suspended from the church position without prejudice pending a hearing.

(2) The church will cooperate fully with any investigation done by Child Protective Services or local police. All persons involved in a particular case, including their families, will be supported as appropriate with pastoral and professional counseling/care throughout the hearing, investigation and/or legal processes. Depending on the circumstances church discipline procedures may be initiated.

(3) In the event that criminal charges are dropped or prosecution does not result in conviction, the church board must decide whether or not the church leader is to be restored to

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his/her previous position or duty. Conviction or lack of it is not the only criterion the church uses to discern ungodly conduct. An alleged abuser is not reinstated to a previous position of leadership until the church board, in consultation with the police/child-protection authorities, legal counsel, and child abuse experts, deems it safe and proper to do so.

(4) If abuse is judged to have been committed by a church member, then the church discipline procedures will be invoked.

(5) When an allegation of abuse becomes public knowledge outside of the church, one official spokesperson will be designated by the pastor to interact with the media.

**APPROVED BY THE CHURCH BOARD:**

Board Secretary \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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