

**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF SUITLAND**  
**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**  
**VERSION 4.0**

*At FBCS we believe, according to Scripture, that the Christian community is mandated to uphold a high regard for the care and training of children.*

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## **CHAPTER 1 - OBJECTIVE**

**To provide a safe environment for children in our church community with a particular focus on the prevention of child abuse.**

At FBCS we believe, according to Scripture, that the Christian community is mandated to uphold a high regard for the care and training of children. Because FBCS recognizes this value, we seek to model God's love for children (Luke 18:16) and therefore establish firm policies and protocols to protect them from any event that is detrimental to their well being. *Providing a safe environment for children and youth is a vital task in modeling God's love for them.*

While we would like to believe that child abuse could never take place in a church, the fact is that many children are being abused within the Christian community every year. *There is no church that is immune to the reality of potentially abusive and criminal acts toward children.* It would therefore be irresponsible and negligent to operate with the assumption that abusive actions would never occur in First Baptist Church of Suitland. That is why our intention is to apply rigor and prudence (Matt. 10:16) to ensure that our ministry to children is carried out not only systematically, but also with the standard of decency and integrity our Scriptures uphold (ref. Phil. 1:27, Eph. 4:17-32, Col. 3:8, Heb. 12: 14-16).

### **Additional References**

*Psalm 127:3-5* Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

*Proverbs 22:6* Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

*Isaiah 54:13* All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children.

*Deuteronomy 4:9* "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—

*Deuteronomy 6:6-9* And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

*Genesis 18:19* For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."

**To protect our youth workers from being suspected of, or falsely accused of inappropriate, criminal actions toward a child.**

Accusations of this nature can inflict substantial damage to an innocent youth worker. Our procedures for maintaining a safe environment and admonishing inappropriate behavior are designed both to prevent compromising interactions and to strengthen a volunteer's defense against false accusations.

**To minimize the church’s liability by establishing a policy that enforces a high standard of care and interaction with minors.**

As Proverbs 2:3 warns, “A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.” It is our purpose to protect our church from the trauma, liability and destruction that an incident of abuse could bring upon our congregation. When someone accuses another person in the church of abuse, the entire body can be drawn into a deeply traumatic and costly conflict. Divisions can evolve in reaction to disagreements with regard to how the abusive event, or allegation, was allowed to occur; and how it is being resolved. Church leaders are often placed in difficult no win situations, and are subject to the conflicting expectations of the victims and those who have been accused. An incident of abuse is a tremendous distraction. Legal charges may be filed that could result in litigation that is expensive, embarrassing and traumatic. These developments could also deteriorate church health and unity.

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In the United States, court rulings are holding persons and institutions liable for enabling dangerous situations that result in harm to children. The model situation is a church that inadvertently activates a volunteer or hires a paid staff person that is a child sexual offender and then places him or her in regular contact with children.

In the Virginia Supreme Court ruling of J. v. Victory Tabernacle Baptist Church, 372 S.E. 2d 391 (Va 1988). A Virginia congregation hired an employee who had been convicted of aggravated sexual assault on a minor. It was determined that when the individual was hired, the church failed to execute a background check and consequently placed him in a position where he had frequent access to children. This employee raped and sexually assaulted a ten year-old girl with whom he came into contact with. The Court ruled that the church was guilty of negligent hiring. It should be noted that many lawsuits filed against churches for acts of child molestation have alleged that the church was held liable on the basis of negligent hiring or negligent supervision.

While a church may in fact exercise due diligence in hiring an individual, it still can be held liable for criminal or inappropriate acts on the basis of negligent supervision.

**To guard the honor and reputation of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

We are committed to doing everything in our power to prevent such dishonor from occurring. Establishing clear and concise policies is a critical step in protecting our children and the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although the issue of child abuse is an unpleasant one, we believe that God can use our response to these concerns toward the realization of positive results (see Romans 8:28-29). Instead of viewing the screening process as a negative imposition upon one's privacy, FBCS views it as an opportunity to promote unity (I Cor.12:12-31), accountability (Eph. 5:21) and a proper application of gifts and talents in the church. Through this process we can learn more about your gifts and abilities, which will help us to encourage you in the most appropriate context for your participation in the life of our church (Heb. 10: 24-25).

## **CHAPTER 2 - KEY DEFINITIONS**

### **Approved Adult**

Anyone over age 18 who has completed a criminal background check and has been cleared to participate as a Youth Volunteer at FBCS.

### **Child or Youth**

Any person who has not reached his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday that attends or participates in any event hosted or sponsored by FBCS.

### **Child Abuse**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) define child maltreatment as any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child. Child abuse can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interacts with. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse, and child sexual abuse.

### **Child Abuse According to Maryland Law**

Maryland law (Annotated Code, Article 27, Section 35A) defines child abuse as any mental or physical injury sustained by a child (person under age 18) as a result of cruel or inhumane treatment or as a result of a malicious act or acts by any parent, adoptive parent or any other person who has the permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a minor child; any sexual abuse of a child, whether physical injuries are sustained or not. Sexual abuse is defined as: any act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, including- but not limited to- incest, rape, sexual offense in any degree; sodomy or unnatural or perverted sexual practices on a child by any person who has the permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a minor child.

Maryland law (Annotated Code, Article 72A) defines child neglect as: a child under 18 years of age who has suffered or is suffering significant physical or mental harm or injury as a result of conditions created by the absence of his parents, guardian, or custodian; or by the failure of that person to give proper care and attention to the child and his problems. However, a child may not be considered neglected solely

because he is receiving non-medical care and treatment recognized by the State law in lieu of medical treatment.

According to Maryland law, all paid child-care workers and volunteers (including church workers) are *required to report* suspected child abuse or child neglect to the local department of social services (CPS/DSS) in your county. (Child abuse or neglect may also be reported to your local law enforcement agency). You must make an oral report as soon as possible. A follow-up written report is due within 48 hours of the oral report. The written report should include the following:

- The name and current address of the child allegedly abused or neglected and the name and address of the person responsible for the care of that child;
- The present location of the child
- The age of the child
- Names and ages of other children in the home
- The nature and extent of any injuries, sexual abuse or neglect of the child, including any information regarding previous injury to the child.

### **The Child Protection Committee (CPC)**

The CPC shall consist of the Pastor, the Head of Security, the Director of Christian Education and two additional individuals—preferably one male and one female--appointed by the Pastor upon notification of an incident. This CPC will be responsible for implementing and enforcing this Child Protection Policy.

Youth Volunteer - anyone 17 years of age or less who works under the supervision of at least one Approved Adult.

Youth Volunteer Scope of Responsibilities: Youth Volunteers at FBCS will potentially interact with children and/or youth in various circumstances including: teaching, activity coordination; overnight youth trips; any activities away from church building; assistance in the nursery; feeding infants/toddlers; assisting young children in the restroom and changing diapers.

## **CHAPTER 3 – CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

This is a group of three to five members (see definition in Chp. 2) who are designated to enforce this policy; to ensure compliance with the appropriate investigative protocols at the time an incident or allegation has occurred; to enact disciplinary action and to coordinate counseling for both the victim and the accused. These individuals should possess a notable level of personal maturity and judgment. It is also preferred that they have at least a bachelor's degree as well as excellent written and oral communications skills. Designated individuals from the Child Protection Committee will also:

- Collect and forward request for clearances.
- Review all applications and certify applicants as an Approved Adult for participation in youth ministry.

- Maintain records of all clearances.
- Make available, upon request of an individual, his/her clearance reports.
- Maintain the security and privacy of personal information.

## **CHAPTER 4 - INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

While there are specific criminal acts noted as abusive and illegal under state law, FBCS considers certain actions either directed toward or permitted in the presence of children as inappropriate for any FBCS sponsored activity anticipating the presence of youth.

- Verbal comments of a sexual nature of any kind that is outside the context of a pre-established teaching curriculum approved by the Director of Christian Education.
- Inappropriate communication through the internet or social media (i.e. text messaging, Twitter and Facebook). Anyone volunteering in any capacity of youth ministry at FBCS should be aware of the limitations of communicating through social media. Youth workers and volunteers should recognize that communication in these mediums should not be assumed to be private. Messages transacted in these forums could be extracted from their context and subjected to misinterpretation. While not expressly prohibited, communication through the internet, particularly social media, is *not* an advisable forum for regular communication between youth and youth volunteers at FBCS.
- Exposing children to any type of hard or soft pornographic material
- Exposing children to sexual gesturing or acts
- Obscene phone calls, emails or text messaging
- Inappropriate appearance and semi-exhibitionism: With the exception of one-piece swimwear for water activities, semi-exhibitionism includes *any* inappropriate or excessively faddish attire (worn by men or women) that is overtly tight-fitting, revealing, see through and/or low cut that reveals undergarments. The display of undergarments or any body parts normally covered by undergarments is considered inappropriate. Youth workers are expected to maintain an appearance that is an unquestionable model of Christian values. A volunteer's attire or appearance should not be a point of distraction for the youth they are ministering to.
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity
- Fondling of any kind
- Adults sharing beds and/or showers with children on events
- Touching or unusually prolonged embraces that is unbecoming of the context

- Well intended touching or displays of affection that are subject to misinterpretation and without regard to a child’s social development or maturity
- Massages
- Exposing children and youth to dancing in a sexually suggestive manner
- Physical punishment or physical discipline of any kind
- Any action or representation in the presence of children or youth that could potentially serve as a sexual stimulant (i.e. heavy fragrances; excessive use of cosmetics)
- Any action toward children that could be potentially misconstrued by a witness as sexual in nature
- Comments about a child or youth’s physical features or attractiveness
- Serving or allowing youth access to alcoholic beverages
- Use of profanity or obscene language of any kind
- Playing unapproved non-Christian music or media in the presence of children or youth

## **CHAPTER 5 - APPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

As we remain vigilant in being as clear as possible regarding actions that may be inappropriate. FBCS intends to facilitate a relaxed, warm and nurturing environment for youth. Therefore we acknowledge that there are undoubtedly certain gestures of support, affection and care that FBCS considers normal and appropriate for youth workers. These include for example, brief hugs, an affirming nudge or tap on the shoulder; as well as youth workers who assist with diaper changing and assisting small children in the restroom.

We also recognize that FBCS is a community with a variety of relationships among members. Therefore actions of care and gestures of support are expected to vary with each relationship. FBCS expects its Youth Volunteers to use their best judgment when serving our youth; *and when in doubt seek counsel or clarification prior to proceeding with certain actions.* For example, if there is a visitor who brings an infant or toddler to the nursery, volunteers are expected to clearly inquire whether the parent would like their child’s diaper changed if it is needed. Any questions about Child Protection Policy compliance should be directed to the Head of Security or the Director of Christian Education.



## **CHAPTER 6 – SCREENING PROTOCOLS**

### **Objective**

It is the goal of the First Baptist Church of Suitland to thoroughly screen the applications of persons interested in working with children in **any capacity**.

### **Screening requirements**

All adults (age 18 and over) volunteers who work with children must be members of the First Baptist Church of Suitland and must pass a criminal background inquiry.

### **Probationary Period**

No volunteer will be allowed to work with children in any capacity until they have been a member of the church for a minimum of six (6) months. The applicant must have been a regular attendee and involved in church activities during this time period. This time period will also allow for better evaluation of the applicant for working with children. The six-month rule may be waived with the authorization of the by the Pastor and/or Director of Christian Education in limited circumstances.

### **Volunteer applications**

Volunteer applicants must complete and sign the appropriate form granting FBCS to initiate a background inquiry. Applications will be submitted to the Director of Christian Education and Head of Security who will process the background checks. The church strictly maintains all information received in the applicant selection process. This information will be stored in a locked file with access afforded only to appropriate church staff on a need-to-know basis. If the church learns of false, intentionally misleading or amended information on an application that could cause potential danger to children or liability to the church, that person will be disqualified.

## **Applicants who are Survivors of Abuse**

Survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. A past experience of abuse does not automatically disqualify an individual from participation. Nevertheless, First Baptist Church of Suitland acknowledges that one's experience with abuse and their recovery process may be pertinent to the success of their work with children. Survivors of abuse may, if they choose, request confidential counseling either from the Pastor or from a professional counselor. A request for counseling does not automatically disqualify one from participation. The desire of the church is to assist and care for survivors of abuse as well as fulfill our obligation to protect the children in our care.

## **Background Check**

A criminal background check and child abuse registry check is required for all volunteer and paid staff positions. No person who has been convicted of a crime involving any misconduct with children will be allowed to participate in youth ministry activities. Completing the application for a background check authorizes FBCS to conduct these inquiries. All information surrounding background checks will be kept confidential in a locked file with access afforded only to appropriate church staff on an absolute need-to-know basis. The designated church representative will conduct criminal background checks notifying the appropriate ministry leader if a negative report is received. Upon the implantation of this policy, all Youth Volunteers will be subject to a background check every three years.

# **CHAPTER 7 – GENERAL PROCEDURES**

## **Two Adult Rule**

It is the goal of FBCS to have a minimum of two adults present during all youth activities and classes. Parents should be aware that there are limited circumstances when this may not be possible due to a limitation in the number of volunteers.

## **Special Circumstances and Exceptions to Two Adult Rule**

Under certain limited circumstances and time frames, the Director of Christian Education, the Head of Security, the Pastor and the Chairman of the Deacon Board may authorize an exception to this rule for a specific event. Individuals who are granted this exception can only participate in the presence of an Approved Adult. Note: "Certain limited circumstances and time frames" may refer to for example, i) an adult or child care worker from a local nursery who brings her children to Vacation Bible School and she assists throughout the day with serving food or moving her group of young children from the various activities points; or ii) during Saturday Women's Fellowship when regular nursery volunteers are not available. In circumstances such as these, the child's parent or guardian, strictly at their discretion, may ask an appropriate adult or teenager to watch their child in the nursery.

## **Newborns and First Time Visitors**

It is preferable that newborns aged 0-6 months should only be left in the presence of an adult. Nursery workers should ask first time visitors or anyone they are unfamiliar with if they would like their child's diaper to be changed if needed.

## **Nursery: Transfer of Child Care**

The Nursery coordinator should have a system in place to ensure that children are returned to an individual who is authorized to assume care for that child. This system should include, for example, the use of numbered wristbands; hand stamps; identically numbered stickers; or any equally effective system.

All first time visitors who bring their children to the nursery should also fill out a short registration form to be kept on file. This information should include the child's full name; age; the parent/guardian's contact information; allergies; and the names of individuals who are authorized to pick up their child.

In the event that someone attempts to assume care for a child who is possibly unauthorized to do so, this person should be politely asked to wait until verification is completed. A reasonable attempt should be made to explain to the individual the reason their child cannot be immediately released. It is imperative that this communication is respectful but also firm and concise. A conscientious effort should be made to not cause the individual any undue embarrassment. *It is important to recognize that the issue may be a simple error in communication between the parents or guardians.* In the event that the individual becomes irate or hostile, immediately call 911 and ask for prompt police assistance. After calling 911, seek the assistance of the Head of Security or any member of the Child Protection Committee.

## **Conduct and Parental Relations:**

Persons selected for any youth ministry at First Baptist Church of Suitland should not only be of sound Christian character but also be socially mature. They should recognize that parents are very concerned about those they are temporarily placing the care of their child under. Therefore youth workers must be able to relate to parents comfortably and respectfully. Relations with parents should be genuinely enjoyable and not forced. Volunteers in youth ministry have a responsibility to help reassure parents that their child will be placed under the care of responsible persons. Youth workers should be able to comfortably make eye contact and initiate a "Hello" or "Good morning" to the parents and not just the children. Workers should *not* assume that because they have established a rapport with the children that the parents are equally comfortable with them. Any Youth Ministry leader who observes a youth worker who is aloof; has a persistently unfriendly demeanor; or has difficulty interacting with parents should strongly consider removing that person from participation until training or counseling has occurred.

## **Counseling and Relationship Development**

It is preferable that youth volunteers refrain from meeting with children and youth alone. However if there is a special need for one-one-one counseling, volunteers should:

- Request the parent’s permission in advance; and preferably in writing. If this is not possible, permission should be sought from the Director of Christian Education or the Head of Security.
- The meeting shall occur in a visibly open, public place, library, restaurant or coffee house in view of other adults.
- Volunteers should notify the Director of Christian Education or the Head of Security in writing of these plans in advance.
- If one-on-one counseling is to occur at the FBCS building, counseling should be facilitated on the first floor/ground level with the door open.

## **Transportation**

FBCS will make every attempt transport children in groups rather than alone. A child's parent or guardian, at their discretion, may give permission to an adult to drive their children to and from church-sponsored activities. Youth Volunteers who transport children alone, should obtain parental permission in writing. This policy is not intended to prohibit volunteers from offering a ride home to children in emergency situations. In the event of an emergency a Youth Volunteer shall make a reasonable attempt to contact parents prior to providing a ride. No person under the age of 21 may drive other youth to a church sponsored activity. It is the responsibility of the child’s parent to evaluate appropriate transportation for their child if arrangements are made outside of this protocol.

## **Open Classrooms**

Church staff, parents and volunteers may visit classrooms and child care rooms at any time without prior notice. The Director of Christian Education, the Head of Security and the Nursery Care Coordinator will make periodic observations of child care rooms and classrooms during the times when child/youth programs are being conducted.

## **Classroom Discipline**

All teachers and workers will be guided by the following discipline guidelines in order to maintain order:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher/worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable, and state what the expected behavior is: for example, "Please do not throw pencils. Pencils should only be used to draw pictures for this activity." If this is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity.
2. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in an area where he/she will work alone, away from the other students for a brief period of time.
3. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Director of Christian Education or the Head of Security who will provide counsel. If a child must be removed from a classroom or youth activity, this action will be discussed with his/her parents or guardian. In the most severe cases of discipline, a child can be permanently suspended from any youth activity.

## **Overnight Trips**

- Whenever FBCS children or youth are involved in church sponsored overnight trips, leaders must ensure that children are given appropriate privacy in the areas of sleeping, changing, or bathing. Specifically, a Youth Volunteer must never sleep in the same room or tent with children without another Youth Volunteer present (two-adult rule). Only the child's parent or guardian can share a room or tent alone with his or her child.
- Children and adults must never be permitted to bathe in the same facility at the same time. Similarly, youth of the opposite gender must not be permitted to change or bathe together.
- Children of the opposite gender must not be permitted to sleep in the same room together, except in situations such as a mission activity where sleeping arrangements and safety concerns might restrict living options. In situations such as this, an entire group of children, supervised by at least two adults, may be sleeping in one big room together, parents will be informed in advance and asked to give permission for these events

## **CHAPTER 8 - COMPLIANCE**

The Pastor, the Head of Security and the Director of Christian Education shall assume responsibility for compliance with the Child Protection Policy. Such responsibility includes supervision and implementation of the policy as well as education and training. The intention of the Child Protection Policy is to protect. The Policy is not intended to substantially interfere with the nurturing, teaching, and supervising of the children and youth. In order to create the safest possible environment at FBCS, the following practices will be observed:

## **Staff Training**

- Communication and an explanation of the Child Protection Policy will be included in all training and orientation programs for youth volunteers. Written information about this policy shall be posted in a central area of the church and included in new member classes. The responsibility for ensuring that this is included in training programs shall rest with the Child Protection Committee.
- First year teachers and workers are required to attend these training sessions.
- FBCS shall make copies of the policy available to all parents of children participating in youth programs, and will invite parents to attend a meeting on the Child Protection Policy.

## **CHAPTER 9 – REPORTING ABUSE**

Anyone who learns of or suspects any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of a child shall immediately report it to the Pastor, any Deacon, the Head of Security or the Director of Christian Education. According to Maryland law, all individuals with knowledge of an incident must ensure that a report is made to the local Child Protective Services or local Police agency (see Maryland Law, Annotated Code, Article 27, Section 35A). The Pastor in consultation with the Child Protection Committee and legal counsel will also verify proper reporting to government and law enforcement authorities as required by state law.

Child Protective Services can be contacted on Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 301-909-2450 and after hours at 301-699-8605. The Prince George’s County Police can be contacted by dialing 911. A follow-up written report is due to the agency chosen within 48 hours of the oral report. The written report should include the following

- The name and current address of the child allegedly abused or neglected and the name and address of the person responsible for the care of that child;
- The present location of the child
- The age of the child
- Names and ages of other children in the home
- The nature and extent of any injuries, sexual abuse or neglect of the child; including any information regarding previous injury to the child.

A person may learn of abuse by direct observation, by noting signs of abuse as described below, or by being told of abuse by the victim, perpetrator or other person. All persons involved in reporting or investigating any alleged incident of abuse should hold information received in strict confidence with the exception of any necessary disclosures required by law or this policy.

If an allegation of abuse is directed against any Youth Volunteer, that person will be immediately removed from any position involving contact with children until the allegation is resolved. The Pastor will maintain a confidential written record of each such report, and activate the Child Protection Committee to carry out an investigation. During the investigation, the Pastor and/or Child Protection Committee will notify the parents or guardians of victims, as well as those who have been accused.

The following are some common signs of child sexual abuse that should be reported:

**Physical Signs:**

- Unusual lacerations and bruises
- Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody clothing
- Venereal disease

**Behavioral Signs:**

- A sudden obvious change in behavior such as nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- Sexual self-consciousness
- "Acting out" of sexual behavior

**Verbal Signs:**

- "John or Jane Doe does things to me when we're alone",
- "I don't like to be alone with John or Jane Doe."

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