

Child Protection First!
Child Abuse Prevention Policy

PURPOSE:

It is the purpose and intent of The Church at Brook Hills to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for the children and students of our faith family.

GOAL:

Our goal is to protect children from sexual abuse, child molestation or any type of inappropriate sexual behavior by employees or volunteers in this church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations.

DEFINITION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:

The National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse defines child sexual abuse as "any sexual activity with a child, whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in any organized ministry, whether at the main facility (church) or away, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child.

Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling; penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas; intercourse; and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include verbal comments, any exposure to pornographic materials, inappropriate internet activity, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

DEFINITION OF A MINOR:

A minor is any individual under the age of 19 years.

The policy and procedure set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of minors or who have opportunity to have contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

This policy will address four (4) areas that are critical for the protection of the children, our employees and our church: **selection process, protection policy, reporting procedures, and responses to allegations.**

I. SELECTION PROCESS

- A. **Employee** – anyone who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with preschoolers, children and students.
- **Current employee**
 - Complete a confidential application form
 - Complete a consent to release confidential information
 - Recommendation Report completed by supervising staff member
 - Criminal records check
 - DHR records check authorization form
 - Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
 - Received appropriate clearances of all checks to work with minors
 - **New employee** (effective September 1, 2002)
 - Complete a confidential application form
 - Complete a consent to release confidential information
 - Criminal records check

- DHR records check authorization form
- Interview by appropriate staff member
- References checked and verified
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee’s confidential personnel file.

- B. **Volunteer** – anyone who is not paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors. Examples: Nursery, childcare, preschool, grade school, middle school, high school, and college workers, bus drivers, teachers, chaperones, others as designated by the Executive Pastor, etc.

Current volunteer

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Recommendation Report completed by supervising staff member
- DHR records check
- Possible criminal records check*
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

New Volunteer (effective September 1, 2002)

- Complete a confidential application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information
- Interview by appropriate staff member
- References checked and verified
- DHR records check
- Possible criminal records check*
- Received letter from State of Alabama DHR stating “meets the suitability” criteria under State statute
- Received appropriate clearances on all checks to work with minors

*Criminal records check for volunteers will be limited to any criminal activity involving the following: (1) a minor; (2) child molestation, (3) any type of sexual offense; (4) any type of pornographic or obscene material; (5) any drugs or alcohol; (6) any type of physical violence; and (7) suspected child abuse.

In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member of The Church at Brook Hills, or regular attendee, for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet these membership requirements may serve only upon approval of the appropriate age-group minister.

- C. **Minors** – In addition to the above requirements a minor who is an employee or volunteer must also submit a separate certification from his or her parent or guardian that the parent or guardian “knows no reason why the minor should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with other minors.”

II. PROTECTION POLICY

A. Two Adults

Age-group ministers, division directors, hall monitors, greeters and/or program directors will be present, or nearby, and available on each floor and in the hallways where minors are present. Reasonable effort will be

made to have two (2) adult workers present, or nearby, with preschoolers, children and students during church activities. Reasonable effort shall be made to assure that one adult is not left alone with one minor. A husband and wife working the same room will typically be considered as one adult for purposes of this policy.

B. View Windows/Open Doors

Reasonable effort will be made to place preschoolers, children and students in rooms with view windows or open doors for all teaching/learning activities.

C. Over-Night Activities

All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all of the Child Protection First! Policies during The Church at Brook Hills sponsored over-night activities.

D. Within Town Activities

All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with all of the Child Protection First! Policies during The Church at Brook Hills sponsored within town activities.

E. Out-of-Town Activities

All participants should have written parental consent and a notarized medical release form. Consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and should be renewed annually. All consent forms will be considered valid until renewed. All Employees and Volunteers shall be required to comply with all of The Church at Brook Hills' policies including, but not limited to, those outlined in Child Protection First! during The Church at Brook Hills sponsored out-of-town activities.

F. Preschool Security Policies and Age-Specific Guidelines

The Church at Brook Hills has a detailed, working preschool security policy that should be conscientiously followed and all Employees and Volunteers shall abide by the preschool security policy as well as any other applicable age-specific guidelines and Child Protection First! Please contact the age group minister or Pastor of Discipleship relative to questions about these policies.

G. Weekday Programs

Due to the professional relationship of the teacher and student, parents understand that only one teacher may be present in certain learning or artistic performance programs. All professional teachers shall complete the "employee" selection process, even if they are volunteers.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

Observed or reported child sexual abuse or child molestation should be reported immediately to the appropriate age group minister or Pastor of Discipleship or Executive Pastor. Reporting abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, failing to report abuse can have severe consequences to a child at risk. Therefore, if you have reasonable cause to suspect abuse, you should talk with an appropriate person to see what steps could and should be taken to protect the child and help the family. When time and circumstances permit, the report should first be made to the appropriate age-group minister, who will then proceed with the correct and thorough process.

IV. RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

- A. All allegations will be taken seriously and church staff will take appropriate action in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policy requirement, and based upon advice of legal counsel.
- B. The official spokesperson for the church in any of these matters will be the Executive Pastor or his appointee.

No other staff members or church members shall speak to the media in an official capacity.

- C. The church staff will document (in writing, with date and signature) all efforts in the handling of any incident.
- D. The church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. The Church at Brook Hills staff will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

V. RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

The Church at Brook Hills believes that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, any civil claim or dispute arising from or related to allegations by or against workers, employees, volunteers, church members or their families, will be submitted to biblically based conciliation in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker Ministries. (A complete text of the Rules is available at <http://www.hispeace.org/html/geticrul.htm>.) That forum provides the best opportunity for resolving issues in a fair manner while seeking to preserve or restore the relationships fractured by the dispute and allowing the Church to continue its ministry to all people.

IV. AMENDMENT OF POLICY

The Pastoral Board may amend these policies upon 30 days notice to the congregation.

VII. EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2002.