

Child Protection First! Policy

Colonial Heights Baptist Church

PURPOSE: It is the purpose and intent of Colonial Heights Baptist Church (“Church”) to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for the preschooler, child, and student (collectively “Child” or “Children” or “Minor”) and Vulnerable Adult members of our faith family, as well as those who are our guests.

GOAL: Our goal is to protect such persons from sexual abuse, molestation, or any type of inappropriate sexual behavior or physical or mental abuse by employees or volunteers in this Church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations of such conduct.

DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE: In accordance with Section 43-21-105 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, “Abused Child means a child whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, whether legally obligated to do so or not, has caused or allowed to be caused upon said child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, non-accidental physical injury or other maltreatment. Provided, however, that physical discipline, including spanking, performed on a child by a parent, guardian or custodian in a reasonable manner shall not be deemed abuse under this section.”

In regard to physical abuse, it is important to understand that although parents, guardians and custodians are legally allowed to utilize corporal punishment, they are not allowed to cause bruises, marks, or other injuries to children when utilizing corporal punishment. Any evidence of such will constitute abuse by the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

The Church further defines abuse as physical abuse resulting from physical injury or death threatened or inflicted upon a Minor by a parent or caretaker or upon a Vulnerable Adult by a caretaker by other than accidental means, physical neglect or exploitation (for another’s financial gain or other personal purposes) of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult; inappropriate physical discipline (unexplained bruises, marks, welts, lacerations, burns, fractures, abdominal injuries, human bites, or other physical injuries) of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult; and/or other physical maltreatment (violent or nonviolent) of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult. Further, abuse may occur in the home by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in an organized ministry (whether a Church facility or away), or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the Minor or Vulnerable Adult (collectively “**Physical Abuse**”).

Sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It includes criminal behavior that involves Minors in sexual behavior. Sexual abuse can involve fondling or gratification of lust; sexual gratification; penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas; intercourse; and forcible rape or other sexually-related physical assaults; and consensual statutory rape.

Other forms of sexual abuse can include sexually explicit, suggestive or obscene verbal comments, gestures, or jokes; any exposure to pornographic or sexually-suggestive objects or images; obscene phone calls or other verbal abuse of a sexual nature; exhibitionism or voyeurism; allowing Minors to witness sexual activity; sexual exploitation (for financial gain, personal sexual stimulation, or other sexual purposes); other sexual molestation or abuse (violent or nonviolent, verbal or non-verbal); any criminal sexual offense; sexually-suggestive comments about an individual’s body; or sexual flirtations, advance or propositions, whether welcome or unwelcome, and even if encouraged by the other individual (collectively “**Sexual Abuse**”). Sexual abuse does not include touching a Minor or Vulnerable Adult in a private, otherwise sexually-related area necessary and incidental to caring for the personal hygiene

and bodily-function needs of such an individual who is unable to care for such needs himself/herself.

Mental abuse involves emotional abuse or non-accidental mental injury (resulting from non-physical or non-accidental physical injury). Mental abuse may be non-violent or violent (including threatening behavior causing the person to fear physical injury or death or for their physical safety), as well as neglect or exploitation (for financial gain or other personal purposes) (collectively, "**Mental Abuse**").

The Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Mental Abuse defined above is collectively referred to in this Policy as "**Abuse**." Abuse involving a Minor is referred to in this Policy as "**Child Abuse**." Abuse can result from single or multiple incidents.

DEFINITION OF A MINOR: A Child who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday ("**Minor**").

DEFINITION OF A VULNERABLE ADULT: "Vulnerable Adult" means a person, whether a minor or adult, whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation or improper sexual content, is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging ("**Vulnerable Adult**").

PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR: The following behaviors are prohibited for all workers. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but is intended to provide guidance as to what may constitute prohibited behavior.

- Threatening or inflicting physical injury upon a Minor or Vulnerable Adult, other than by accidental means
- Committing any sexual offense against a Minor or Vulnerable Adult, or engaging in any sexual contact with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult
- Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any Church function
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at Colonial Heights.

SCOPE OF THIS POLICY: The Policy and related Procedure set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of Minors or Vulnerable Adults, or who have opportunity to have contact with Minors or Vulnerable Adults, in Church facilities or Church-sponsored activities. Church-sponsored events or activities are those which are calendared on the Church calendar and should include a time of commencement and conclusion.

This policy will address five (5) areas that are critical for the protection of all affected individuals and our Church: employee and volunteer selection process, employee and volunteer training, operating practices, reporting of allegations, and response to allegations.

Administration of the Child Protection First! Policy (“**Policy**”) is handled in the office of Pastor of Administration. All records are maintained in confidential files in such office. However, when necessary or required by law, these records will be shared with the Mississippi Department of Human Services and other appropriate state agencies and legal and law enforcement authorities in order to investigate allegations of Abuse.

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 Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
1. All church employees will be required to complete a confidential application form, be interviewed by an appropriate Church staff person, have references checked, and give written permission for a criminal record and background investigation.
 2. All records, forms, and reports regarding employees will be filed in the office of the Pastor of Administration.
- 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 or Vulnerable Adults.
1. All volunteers will be required to complete a confidential application form, be interviewed by an appropriate Church staff person, will have references checked, and must give written permission for a criminal record and background check.
 2. In addition to the above requirement, a volunteer must be a member of the Church or regular attendee for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet these requirements may serve only upon recommendation of the appropriate age-group minister and approved by the Senior Staff-level minister.
 3. All records, forms and reports regarding volunteers will be filed in the office of the Pastor of Administration.
- C. **Minors** – If a minor desires to be a volunteer working with other Minors or with Vulnerable Adults, his or her parent or guardian must sign the confidential application form indicating that the parent or guardian knows no reason why the Minor should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with other Minors or with Vulnerable Adults.

II. **TRAINING**

A. **Orientation**

All new employees and volunteers will be given orientation training that will familiarize them with established age-group ministry guidelines, definition of Abuse, identifying possible symptoms of Abuse, and this Policy regarding safety, security, disciplining Minors, and reporting Abuse.

B. Annual Training

Providing employees and volunteers with an orientation is not sufficient by itself. Effective learning can only be accomplished through repetition and reinforcement of previously learned material. Consequently, the Church will provide re-training to all employees and volunteers annually. Such re-training not only increases the awareness of protection of Minors or Vulnerable Adults, but also demonstrates the Church's commitment to ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable members.

C. Minors

Minors who volunteer will not be provided the same training as is provided to adults. Minors who volunteer will be given basic instruction about appropriate interaction with Children but will not receive instruction on Abuse.

III. PROTECTION POLICY

A. Two Adult Rule

Pastors, ministers, directors, or assistants will be present, or nearby, and available whenever Minors or Vulnerable Adults are present. A reasonable effort will be made to have two (2) adult workers present in the room, or nearby, with Minors or Vulnerable Adults during Church activities. A reasonable effort will be made to assure that one adult is not left alone with one Minor or Vulnerable Adult. 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

Minors or Vulnerable Adults should be placed in rooms with view windows or open doors for all activities.

C. Over-Night and Local Activities

All employees and volunteers will be required to comply with all of the Church policies (including, but not limited to, those outlined in this Policy and Procedures) during Church-sponsored over-night activities and local activities.

D. Out-of-Town Activities

All Minor participants should have written parental consent and a medical release form in order to participate in out-of-town activities. Consent forms must be completed for each trip. Medical release information may be completed for one-year periods and renewed annually. All employees and volunteers will be required to comply with all Church policies (including, but not limited to, those outlined in this Policy and Procedures) during Church-sponsored out-of-town activities. (See Age-Specific Guidelines -- Appendices A, B, C, and D to the Procedures.)

Security Policies and Age-Specific Guidelines

The Church has procedure manuals and detailed worker guidelines available for review in all ministry areas where Minors or Vulnerable Adults are present. Each ministry area will maintain age-appropriate guidelines that apply to their workers. All employees and volunteers should conscientiously follow all age-specific guidelines in the ministry area(s) where they serve. Questions about specific ministry-area policies should be directed to the appropriate ministry office.

IV. REPORTING PROCEDURES

Observed or reported Abuse or suspicion of Abuse, molestation, or any type of observed or suspicious inappropriate behavior or conduct possibly constituting Abuse should be reported immediately to the appropriate Church staff member as outlined

below. The staff member will immediately notify the Pastor of Education and the Pastor of Administration.

The person reporting an incident of Abuse shall contact:

The Preschool Minister, if an incident of Child Abuse involves a preschool Child (or in his/her absence, the Pastor of Education);

The Children's Minister, if an incident of Child Abuse involves an elementary Child (or in his/her absence, the Pastor of Education);

The Student Pastor, if an incident of Child Abuse involves a middle school or high school Child (or in their absence, the Pastor of Education);

The Pastor of Single Adults, Pastor of Married Adults, or Pastor of Senior Adults if an incident of Abuse involves a Vulnerable Adult in the respective ministry area (or in his/her absence, the Pastor of Administration);

The Pastor of Worship if an incident of Abuse involves a Minor or Vulnerable Adult participating in an activity of the Worship Team (or in his/her absence the Pastor of Administration).

The reporter shall inform him or her of all relevant facts with respect to the incident of Abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of Abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the Pastor of Administration and the reporter, shall complete the written Suspicion of Child Abuse Report ([Form No. 7-18](#)). However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom a report shall be made, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure.

V. RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS

A. Reporting Abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult as well as the accused, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. However, failing to report Abuse can have severe consequences to a Minor or Vulnerable Adult at risk. Consequently, if you have reasonable cause to suspect Abuse, you should talk with the appropriate staff member mentioned above to see what steps can and should be taken to protect the Minor or Vulnerable Adult, to help the family, and to attempt to avoid erroneous accusations.

B. All allegations of Abuse will be taken seriously and investigated as deemed appropriate; provided, however, an individual accused of Abuse shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty. The Church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. The Church will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

C. The appropriate Church staff will then take appropriate action to report allegations in accordance with this Policy, the reporting requirements of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, insurance policy requirements, and advice of legal counsel.

D. The official spokesperson for the Church will be the Senior Pastor or his appointee. No other staff members or Church members shall speak to the media regarding such matters.

E. The Church staff will thoroughly document all efforts in handling any incident.

VI. GENERAL GUIDELINES:

QUICK RULES TO REMEMBER:

- Molesters and abusers seldom look like criminals.
- Report anything that looks like Abuse, seems suspicious, or makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Strive to be with at least one other adult when working with Minors or Vulnerable Adults. A married couple only counts as one adult.
- All teachers and helpers should be screened. Do not allow visitors or parents who have not been screened to remain in the classroom by themselves with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- Make certain that touch is age-appropriate and is only for the purposes of encouragement and affirmation.
- Follow all additional policies of the ministry in which you are serving.
- Diapers should be changed by women, not men.

SITUATIONS TO AVOID:

- Going into a lavatory with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult without another adult.
- Going into a lavatory with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult of the opposite sex.
- Releasing a Minor to an adult who is not the parent that properly checked in the Child in the preschool or children's areas. The verification system in place that identifies a parent/child match must be used and verified.
- Touching a Minor or Vulnerable Adult inappropriately – do not slap, push or touch a Minor or Vulnerable Adult in a private area.
- Going behind closed doors with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult or take a Minor or Vulnerable Adult into an area of a room that is not fully visible to other workers .

VII. AMENDMENT OF POLICY

The Pastor of Administration, with approval of the Personnel Committee, may amend these policies as they see fit; provided, however, that this Policy shall, at all times at a minimum, be subject to and in accordance with and shall be read in conjunction with Sections 43-21-105, et. seq. (specifically including, but not necessarily limited to, Section 43-21-353), and 43-47-1, et seq. (Mississippi Vulnerable Adult Act), of the Mississippi Code of 1972, as amended.

VIII. INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

The Child Protection First! Administrative Procedures and Appendices attached thereto (collectively "**Procedures**") are hereby incorporate into this Policy by reference and expressly made a part hereof for all purposes as if fully copied herein; all references herein to this Policy are also deemed to refer to and include the corresponding applicable Procedures; and all capitalized terms used in the Procedures which are defined in this Policy shall have the same meaning in the Procedures as assigned to such terms in this Policy even though not defined again in the Procedures

IX. APPROVAL

This Policy and the related Procedures and Appendices thereto were approved by the Personnel Committee of the Church in January 2013.

X. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Policy and its related Procedures shall become effective on and after August 1, 2013.

XI. REVISION DATE(S)