

Guidelines Regarding Pastoral Staff/Elder Counseling of Females

Purpose:

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide counseling to single and married female members of PBC yet also ensuring the counseling takes place in a manner that protects both the counselor and the counselee not only from the appearance of impropriety, but also provides reasonable protection for both from developing an inappropriate relationship and (most importantly) ensures that God is honored in the process.

NOTE: For the purpose of this document “counselor” refers to any Pastoral Staff Member and/or Elder who is engaged in counseling

Goal:

Given the number of unique counseling scenarios that may present themselves, the intent here is not to present a set of rigid rules, but rather, establish guidelines that will help PBC counselors make prayerfully wise decisions regarding the counseling of females.

Guidelines:

1. Priority should be given to the training of spiritually mature female members to provide counseling to female members. The church will cover the cost for such training.
2. A list of recommended professional counselors, psychologist, psychiatrists should be developed and maintained to enable quick referrals when counseling with a professional is necessary.
3. No counselor should engage in counseling with an individual in a manner that violates the counselor’s personal conscience.
4. With the exception of the initial meeting, a counselor of the opposite sex should avoid meeting with a counselee one-on-one more than once.
 - a. The purpose of that meeting should be to ascertain the nature of the counseling need and determine the most healthy approach to meeting that need.
 - b. A third party should be included in the counseling sessions or at least be physically present in the area.
 - c. At least 2 people (in addition to the counselor) should be aware of the counseling session and its location before it occurs, including who is involved, where it will take

- place and when it will occur. These two can include the counselor's spouse, another Pastoral Staff Member and/or an Elder(s)
- d. If an abusive situation is revealed, during this 1st session, then immediate and appropriate action should be taken to ensure the safety of the counselee and any children involved.
 - e. In the event of an unexpected counseling situation, e.g., a female stops by the church when only one staff member is present:
 - i. Attempt to schedule a session at another time when proper precautions can be taken
 - ii. If it is necessary to engage in counseling immediately, sit in the foyer outside the office or the sanctuary rather than behind a closed door.
5. In the event a counselor decides to continue counseling a female rather than refer them to someone else, the following guidelines should be observed:
- a. Counseling period should be limited to a total of 4 weeks. If more than 4 weeks is deemed necessary, the counselor should engage 2 other counselors in a dialog before continuing as it is likely a professional may be needed and the risk of developing an inappropriate relationship is higher. A third party should be included in the counseling sessions or at least be physically present in the area. If the counselee is not a member of the church, and thereby not subject to the discipline of the church, then it is mandatory a third party must be present while the counseling is taking place.
 - b. If the counselee is married, their spouse should be made aware of the nature of the counseling as well as the time and location of each session. With the counselee's knowledge, the counselor should provide a summary to the spouse within a reasonable time after each session.
 - c. If it is deemed necessary for the counselor to meet with the counselee one-on-one, at least 2 other people should be aware of the time and location of the counseling session (see 4.c above)
 - d. Counseling sessions should occur either at the church or at the counselor's home (if someone else is present), Counseling should not occur in public locations.
6. Counselors should maintain records of each person they counsel with, time/location of each session and a summary of the content of each session. This information should be carefully protected and not shared with anyone; it is primarily to help the counselor recall accurately the counseling events as they transpired but could be critical in the unlikely and unfortunate event an accusation of impropriety is made by the counselee or someone else.
7. Counselees should be made to understand the counseling provided by PBC is guided by scripture with a goal to ensure a right understanding of God's will in their circumstances

and a right response to the will of God. PBC counselors do not provide legal advice and are not qualified to provide the help that only psychologists/psychiatrists can provide.

8. Members of PBC who are counselors by profession and who agree to counsel a referred member should be compensated for their time.

Approved by the PBC Shepherding Elders on 11/19/2013