

## **Child and Youth Protection Policy**

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.”  
 -Matthew 19:14

Our congregation embraces these words of scripture attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ and wholly affirms the “Vision for Children and the Church” adopted by the 205<sup>th</sup> & 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. As such we believe the following theological statements regarding our responsibility to care for the children of our church:

- 1) Children and Youth are gifts of God, created by God and Created good. Therefore, we will set standards for PREVENTION to protect what God has created good.**
- 2) Children and Youth depend upon adults for safety and security. Therefore, we will practice SUPERVISION of those whom we trust to care for those who depend upon us.**
- 3) Children and Youth hope for a world where they can find a safe place. Therefore, we will respond quickly and faithfully to any VIOLATION that may cause harm to a child/youth.**
- 4) Children and Youth need adults to take seriously the baptismal vow of nurture and care. Therefore, we will demand OVERSIGHT from our leaders called to carry out our promises to God.**

The church is a place called by Jesus Christ to trust, welcome, and forgive our friends and our enemies. These same qualities sadly make our church homes a potential “sanctuary” for those who seek to cause harm to God’s precious creation. Therefore, we must continue to live out our practice of extending love and grace to those who are strangers, while also ensuring that we provide measures to ensure the safety of those who cannot protect themselves. We hope the recommendations below will help us take the children of our church up into our arms and provide them a safe place until they are able to protect themselves and others.

“Then Jesus took a little child and put the child among them; and taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”  
 -Mark 9: 36-37

### **Definition**

For the purposes of this document child/children refers to young people from birth through 5<sup>th</sup> grade and youth refers to those in grades 6-12.

Rule of Three – 3 individuals

### **PREVENTION**

**Screening.** All employees, elders, deacons, and those volunteering to work with children or youth must go through a background check. The procedures for background checks are attached. All background checks must be confidential and secured for five years. All persons must re-submit a background check after five years. Background checks from other employers may not be submitted. The screening policies of employers who provide services within the church complex should be reviewed prior to any regular work being performed in the building.

**Review.** All cleared checks will immediately be secured. Any records that are not completely clear will be confidentially submitted to the head of staff. A pastor will discuss the issue with the individual. If the individual continues to pursue leadership following a pastoral discussion, the head of staff will decide on further steps to take.

**Offenses.** Any record which indicates an occurrence of abuse or any form of harm to a minor, any crime against a person or crime of moral turpitude will disqualify a person from participating in leadership with children or youth. The pastoral staff and Child/Youth Protection Taskforce may use discretion in determining what level of contact/leadership an individual with a record of other incidents may have based upon the record of the individual.

**New Prospects.** New prospects or members shall not provide leadership with children or youth within the first 6 months of regular church attendance. Participation in Bama UKirk may count as church attendance. For volunteers with less than two years of regular church attendance, staff should have the prospective volunteer complete the Volunteer Information Form and contact references using the Volunteer Information form. Any exceptions to this requirement require session approval.

**Minimum Age.** Persons under the age of 18 shall not provide leadership of other persons under the age of 18 without supervision of at least 2 adults who have completed the screening process.

#### **Permission Forms.**

- A youth covenant with regard to behavior and safety should be signed by all youth and parents/guardians who regularly participate in any congregational activity. Each covenant should be renewed on an annual basis and maintained by the Youth Director.
- A parent or guardian must complete a Parental Consent and Release and Hold Harmless Agreement for each child/youth participating in out-of-town activities and should be renewed on an annual basis and maintained by the Youth Director or Associate Pastor for Faith Formation (depending on the participant's area of ministry).
- Children participating in Logos must have a signed Logos Registration Form on file at the church. Each individual providing Logos transportation will have copies of the LOGOS roster and emergency contact information for each child.

**Parental Responsibility.** Parents are responsible for direct supervision of children in the church building except when children are participating in a church-sponsored activity directed toward children.

**Media.** Our worship services are recorded and posted online. Permission to use images of children and youth is given during registration for activities. Participants in church events are expected to refrain from posting pictures or video of children or youth without gaining permission from the parent or guardian.

## **SUPERVISION**

**Open Door Policy.** Any one-on-one consultation shall take place in a room with an open door, in view of an accessible window, or video surveillance.

**Adult Supervision.** There shall be at least two non-related adults present at any activity involving children or youth. If children/youth are participating in a small group with one adult leader, the “Rule of Three” should be observed at all times and the door should be open at all times. In an emergency situation, an adult supervisor will make unannounced frequent visits when two adults are not available. Adults supervising youth should be at least 21 years old. The youth committee or staff must approve any youth helpers who have not been out of youth for at least four years.

**Overnight Activities.** At least 3 adult chaperones are required for overnight outings if separate sleeping accommodations are available. If the group is mixed gender at least 1 chaperone must be male and the other female. For over fifteen students another chaperone is required. For larger groups additional adult chaperones may be required with the understanding that a 1-5 ratio is the best practice. If separate sleeping accommodations are not available, 2 chaperones of each gender are required.

**Transportation.** Anyone who will regularly drive vehicles owned by the church must submit a copy of their driver’s license to the church office. That information will be provided to our insurance company who will notify us if there is a problem. Adults transporting children/youth in their own vehicles must have a valid driver’s license and proof of insurance with them. You may not drive for church events if you have a DUI on your driving record. You must be at least 25 years old to drive the church bus and 21 years old to drive a personal vehicle carrying unrelated youth or children during church events. No youth may drive any other youth unless they are related. Seat belts must be worn at all times and children/youth may not engage in any behaviors that will distract the driver. When the 2-adult rule is not feasible with regard to vehicles in the Tuscaloosa area, the driver should proceed directly to the final destination. No stopping is allowed except in an emergency. Outside the Tuscaloosa area, vehicles with only one adult must travel within sight of the other vehicle(s) at all times and all vehicles should start and stop travel simultaneously.

### **Event Protocols**

- Youth should sign in upon arrival for youth events and visitors must provide the name and emergency contact number for a parent or guardian.
- Parents should sign in children birth to age 5.
- On Sundays, parents should accompany elementary children to their classroom and pick them up when class is over. Elementary children may sign themselves in.

- Children arriving for Logos will be checked in by Logos Volunteers.

## **Age-Appropriate Expressions of Engagement**

**Digital communication between adults and children/youth** in our church community should reflect the same values we uphold in person: respect, transparency, and protection. These guidelines are designed to help volunteers and staff maintain healthy boundaries, foster trust, and ensure that all interactions support the spiritual and emotional well-being of our young people.

- **Purposeful Contact Only:** Communication should be initiated only when necessary and directly related to church programming, pastoral care, or logistical coordination. Casual or personal outreach is not appropriate.
- **Time Boundaries:** Contact should only occur during appropriate hours, typically between 8:00 am and 8:00pm,
- **Social Media Boundaries:** Adults should not initiate friend requests, follows, or other personal connections with minors on social media platforms.
- **Friendly but Formal Tone:** Communication should be warm and encouraging, but remain formal and focused on church-related matters. Avoid overly casual language or personal disclosures.
- **Transparency with Guardians, Accountability, and Documentation:** Whenever possible, include a parent or guardian in digital communication (e.g., group messages, copied emails) to promote openness and accountability. Adults are encouraged to document or report any digital interactions that feel unclear, boundary-testing, or outside standard expectations with a church staff member. This protects both youth and volunteers.

### **Adults supervising children and youth should ALWAYS:**

- Treat each child/youth as a Child of God.
- Respect a child/youth's personal space. Some children/youth prefer high-fives to hugs or prefer not to have others in their personal space at all. An adult should always respect that "no" means "no" regarding a child/youth's personal space unless the safety of the child/youth is at stake.
- Hug a child/youth over the age of 5 from the side unless a frontal hug is initiated by the child/youth.
- Listen attentively and speak respectfully to children/youth.
- Report activity that seems inappropriate to the supervising staff or an elder or deacon on the Children & Families Faith Formation Committee or Youth committee
- Report an activity that constitutes abuse or neglect to DHR. Please see the attached document for details on mandatory reporting.

### **Adults supervising children/youth should NEVER:**

- Be alone with a child/youth; if you need to have a private conversation with a child/youth it should always take place in sight of others.
- Touch a child/youth inappropriately. (Examples of inappropriate touching include but are not limited to: arm tickles, touching a child in anger, disgust or frustration, kissing, wrestling or

tickling, piggy back rides, touching private parts, massages or back rubs. While we recognize that children birth to 5 years will need diaper changes and, at times, assistance with toileting, there should always be another adult nearby. Children birth to age 5 may be comforted by frontal hugs or lap sitting, but these behaviors are inappropriate for elementary children unless initiated by the child.)

- Talk, text or message on your phone while supervising children/youth unless it is an emergency situation and you are seeking assistance
- Talk to a child/youth inappropriately. (Examples of inappropriate talk includes but is not limited to compliments or questions relating to physique or body development, sexual jokes, homosexual innuendos, or bathroom humor, swearing or vulgar language, verbal harassment or abuse, individual secrets or special gifts, etc.)
- Consume or be under the influence of alcohol or any substance which may cause impairment while supervising children/youth.
- Allow youth/children to consume alcohol or other prohibited substances
- Use tobacco in any form including vapor or e-cigarettes in the presence of a child or youth

**Training.** Each adult supervising children or youth shall be given a copy of this policy by the Youth Director or Associate Pastor for Faith Formation depending on the volunteer area. The policy will be readily available onsite. Video Training for adults supervising children and youth will be provided and adults will be required to complete training prior to supervising children or youth with required renewal every 3 years. Documentation of completed training will be recorded in the church information management system.

## VIOLATION

**Reporting & Investigation.** Any allegation of inappropriate behavior shall be reported immediately to the nearest supervising adult and/or a member of the pastoral or program staff. The person receiving the report shall record the report in writing and initiate an investigation. The person suspected of a violation may be removed immediately from further contact with children or youth until completion of a full investigation. In the case of any suspicion of abuse or neglect, the mandatory reporting procedures below must be followed. Additional reports shall be made to the appropriate authorities in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama and denominational policy. If a violation is reported about a pastor, a report shall be made to another pastor and to the appropriate Presbytery authority. All reports of inappropriate behavior will be investigated by the pastoral staff and/or the Child/Youth Protection Task Force.

**Consequences.** The Child/Youth Protection Task Force and the pastoral staff will work together to determine appropriate consequences which could include barring the individual from all church activities.

**Mandatory Reporter.**

1) Mandatory Reporters:

- a) The State of Alabama law includes **our volunteers and staff** as legally mandated reporters. For example, teachers, officers, day care workers, employees of private institutions of education, are all included.
- b) Regarding teaching and ruling elders, any ordained, licensed, or commissioned pastor, and any person who devotes a substantial portion of his or her time and abilities to the service of his or her church or religious organization, all are Mandatory Reporters of suspected abuse or neglect. Also included is any person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child.

2) Procedure for Reporting:

- a) When a child/youth is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, the laws of the State of Alabama require the mandatory reporter to report orally by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report to a duly constituted authority. (See attachments for details.) The person who has direct knowledge of or suspicion of abuse or neglect must be the one to make the report. A pastor will make themselves available to assist with this process.
- b) The "duly constituted authority" refers to any law enforcement officer, (such as a sheriff or police officer), or the Department of Human Resources office in the county where the abuse is taking place, or in the county of the child's residence. In the case of an immediate emergency, 911 is an appropriate authority to notify.
- c) Regarding teaching elders/ministers of the Word and Sacraments, the law states: when a person communicates with clergy in the scope of the clergy person's professional capacity, and when that communication is made with the understanding that it should not be revealed to another, and the person is merely seeking spiritual advice, the communication is protected by privilege, under Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence. However, the communication from a person to clergy is NOT protected (and is thus reportable) when the communication is in furtherance of a crime or a fraud, including abuse or neglect of a child.

## OVERSIGHT

**Implementation.** The oversight of the safety of our children is ultimately the responsibility of the Session, employees, and all members of the church. However, the specific implementation of guidelines shall be handled by the Children & Families Faith Formation Committee (birth to grade 5) and Youth Committee (grades 6 to 12). They shall be responsible for ensuring that all persons are screened prior to volunteering in leadership and appropriately trained on child/youth protection policies.

**Confidentiality.** All reports and background information shall remain confidential to those who have received the report and the pastoral staff. Reports of proven incidents shall remain in a confidential, locked file along with background checks.

**Child/Youth Protection Task Force.** The Child/Youth Protection Task Force will be called into service as needed due to the report of a violation, at the request of the pastoral staff, or at the request of session. The Child/Youth Protection Task Force will consist of the chair or his/her designee serving

on the Children & Families Faith Formation Committee, Youth Committee \*(“and the deacons serving on the Early Childhood Committee” has been omitted), a member of the pastoral staff. At least one person from each committee must be present for the Child/Youth Protection Task Force to take action. This policy shall be reviewed and updated as needed, but at least once every five years by a task force to be appointed by and have representatives from the Children & Families Faith Formation Committee and Youth Committees.

Attachments:

- Volunteer Information Form
- Youth Covenant
- Parental Consent and Release and Hold Harmless Agreement
- Changes to Alabama’s Mandatory Reporting Law
- Code of Alabama Title 26. Chapter 14

Child/Youth Protection Policy Assessment Team members (2025): Rev. Emily Frandsen (Pastoral Staff), Nick Rebbe (Program Staff), Wendy Tucker, Lillian Beavers & Allison Bothwell (Youth), Beth Curtis & Caroline Ritchey (Children/Families).