

# Berlin Christian Church

## *Youth Worker Policy*

Matthew 18:1-6 NASB

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven."

"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven."

"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and be drowned in the depth of the sea."

**All youth workers at Berlin Christian Church are expected to have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ (prayer, Bible Study, worship attendance, etc) and reflect the values of Christ in the classroom and their everyday lives.**

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 5/16/2012*

# **I. Introduction and Purpose Statement**

Berlin Christian Church makes every effort and precaution possible to create a safe place for children. We intend to provide a safe place for children to grow in Jesus Christ, and to understand His love and acceptance. Our policy is to make more and better followers of Jesus Christ by properly equipping compassionate, responsible adults in all of our ministries.

The goal of this policy is to protect youth and child activities on and off church premises, and to youth and child activities or functions that use the church premises on a contract or permissive basis. All youth and child activity workers, whether they are paid or volunteer, must become familiar, agree with, and sign this policy.

The Board of Elders, who oversee activities that include youth and children, are responsible for implementing and maintaining this policy as well as all of the specific procedures. The Board of Elders will review the youth and child ministries at least once a year to make certain there is adequate screening, training, record keeping, and follow-up. Results are reported to and reviewed by the Board of Elders. Required corrections are made immediately as directed and overseen by the Board of Elders in charge.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 1/15/2005*

## II. Policy Definitions

- A. **Abuse:** refers to non-accidental physical or mental injury, negligent treatment or maltreatment, sexual abuse or exploitation, or threat of harm to a youth or child under the age of 18. Child abuse includes the following:

Physical abuse - any physical injury to a youth or child that has been caused by other than accidental means. It may appear as, but not restricted to bruises, burns, fractures, bites, cuts, sprains, internal injuries, auditory, dental, ocular, or brain damage.

Emotional or Mental abuse - any actions or statements which form a pattern of destruction so that a youth's or child's ability to think, reason, or have feelings is harmed.

Neglect - negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child which causes actual harm or substantial risk of harm to a child's health, welfare, and safety.

Sexual abuse - any form of sexual contact or exploitation with a minor that is used for the sexual arousal or gratification of the offender, the minor, or a third party. Child sexual abuse can include touching or non-touching behaviors.

- B. **Adult:** any person who has attained the legal age of 18 years.
- C. **Child:** any person under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated by reasons of marriage or entry into a branch of the United States armed forces.
- D. **Church Activity/Function:** any youth or child event that is expressly sponsored or authorized by Berlin Christian Church.
- E. **Employee:** any paid person in the service of Berlin Christian Church (employer) under any contract of hire, express or implied, oral or written, where the employer has the power or right to control and direct the employee in the material details of how the work is to be performed.
- F. **Youth or Child Ministry:** a program or effort sponsored or authorized by Berlin Christian Church, and subject to the direction of the leadership board, to promote Christianity or Christian fellowship.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 10/20/2004*

- G. **Reasonable Cause:** the standard by which one should report an incident if the set of facts would lead a person of ordinary care and prudence to believe and conscientiously entertain honest and strong suspicion that the allegations are credible.
- H. **Volunteer:** a person qualified by this policy, which is willing to assist and render their services in Berlin Christian Church activities without and express or implied promise of payment/remuneration.
- I. **Worker:** a person qualified by this policy that is an employee and/or volunteered at Berlin Christian Church, who participates in church activities while acting within the scope of the employment and/or designated assignment.
- J. **Youth:** any child that is at least 13 years of age and under 18 years of age, unless legally emancipated by reasons of marriage or entry into a branch of the United States armed forces.

### III. Policy Definitions

Berlin Christian Church does not enforce these policies to develop a cold, sterile environment, but to provide a safe environment where the ministry and activities of our youth and children can continue to grow in Christ unimpeded. These policies may seem extreme for Berlin Christian Church. Unfortunately, many churches that relied solely on blind trust and relationships have suffered tremendous, lasting trauma to one or more of their children, or to adults when falsely accused. There is also the risk of public humiliation, media scrutiny or attack, and civil judgments of millions of dollars.

We ask that all paid and volunteer workers cooperate together for the safety of our children. All workers should be knowledgeable of possible symptoms of abuse and share concerns of any child's behavior with the children's or youth ministry leader. If you observe any inappropriate conduct or relationships between any worker and a member of the youth group or a child, please notify the children's or youth director or an elder so an investigation can be carried out. Questionable or inappropriate behavior often precedes acts of child molestation. You are encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed.

Any accusations will be taken seriously, will be investigated thoroughly, and will be reported to legal authorities as required. Should an employee or volunteer be accused of child abuse and/or neglect, they must cooperate with the investigation. Until an investigation is complete and the matter is resolved, the worker shall not be involved in any church ministry that includes contact with minors.

*Adopted 3/15/2005*

*Revised 1/15/2005*

Berlin Christian Church will use a five fold policy to provide safeguards against child abuse. These are: 1) Worker Selection, 2) Worker Supervision, 3) Responding to Child Abuse Allegations, 4) Reporting Obligations, and 5) Record Retention and Records.

## **A. Worker Selection**

To ensure adequate safeguards, Berlin Christian Church will implement the following screening procedures.

1. **Child/Youth Worker Application:** All potential workers and volunteers must apply by completing the Child/Youth Worker Application. Forms are available through the church office or the person(s) directly responsible for children's and youth ministries.
2. **Application Approval:** All potential workers must be approved in writing and/or direct permission by the youth or children's ministry leader and/or leadership team before they may participate as a worker in any capacity at any function involving a youth or child.
3. **Reference Check:** All potential workers will need to provide references. Those references will be checked and a record of those checked will be made on the reference's part of the application. This information will be maintained by church's confidential file system for applicants approved as workers.
4. **Six Month Rule:** All potential worker and volunteer applicants seeking to work with youth or children should have attended Berlin Christian Church regularly for at least six months. Applicants not meeting the six-month rule will be required to have a personal interview with leadership and at least three references checked before they have contact with a youth or child.
5. **Personal Interview:** All potential workers will have a personal interview. The interview will be conducted by no less than 2 persons from the leadership responsible for youth and children's ministries. The interview will cover the potential workers strengths and weakness for the position, attributes, information, derived from the Child/Youth Worker Application, criminal convictions, policies governing the position and the selection process. Information gathered at this interview will be retained in the interviewee's confidential file.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 10/20/2004*

6. **Confidential File System:** The Child/Youth Worker Application and any references are maintained in a confidential file system at the church for future reference. The application can be reviewed by the applicant, interviewer, and by the church leadership who is responsible for the children's and youth ministries.
7. **Policy Given:** All new workers will be given a copy of this policy, which they must read, sign, and return to the Board of Elders.
8. **Background Investigation:** All potential workers must allow a criminal background check to be performed. This will consist of, but not limited to, a name search against the Illinois State Police Sexual Offenders database. Docket entries from the Circuit Clerk's office where the potential worker currently resides or where he/she previously resided will be checked to determine whether any Orders of Protection or Restraining Orders have been entered. If a potential worker has been convicted of any sexual offense, or abuse offense involving a youth or child, he/she would be disqualified from working with or supervising children in the church.

## **B. Worker Supervision**

The following rules and guidelines are to be followed when dealing with youth and children from Berlin Christian Church.

1. An adult (or any minor working with other minors) will not be alone with an individual child. Two adult workers or volunteers should be present during any church activity that includes a youth or child. One of these adults is a supervisor and, preferably, over 21 years of age. The "Two Adult Rule" should apply to all contact with children. This rule extends, when possible, to transporting children to and from church activities including those off the church premises. Situations may arise where these standards cannot be met. In such cases the adult in charge will use best judgment in assigning appropriate supervision. In situations that violate the "Two Adult Rule" the worker must report this to the supervisor or leadership as soon as possible.
2. Workers or volunteers should not counsel individual youth or children in a secluded room. Stay in public areas and/or be able to be seen at all times.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 1/15/2005*

3. All rooms or locations where children meet should, when building design permits, either have viewing windows or doors with windows, otherwise, doors must be left open. Supervisors should periodically, without being announced, view what is happening in the rooms. Existing structure may be an exception to this rule.
4. Workers or volunteers should arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled activity and should keep watch over those in their care until all have been picked up by an authorized person. Nursery and preschool areas use child identification procedures to ensure the child is returned to the parent or legal guardian.
5. Programs that involve children must always include adequate supervisory personnel. The ideal staffing ratio is equal to the age of children being supervised. For example, if two & three year-old children are being supervised than the ideal staff to child ratio is one worker to every three children. Supervision is provided before and after an event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians. Siblings cannot pick up their brothers or sisters under the age of 8, without parental permission.
6. Under no circumstances will any worker or volunteer spank, hit, or shake a child or youth. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the workers' supervisor, and/or the church leadership, or to the parent or guardian.
7. Special attention is to be given to overnight activities or retreats sponsored by Berlin Christian Church. All adult chaperones and supervisors are cleared in advance with the staff person in charge of Children's or Youth ministries or the supervising Elder or leadership. Two adults of like-gender should be assigned to every sleeping area for children through Jr. High age and one adult for high school children. Anyone under 18 should not be considered a supervisor or adult chaperone.
8. There will be no touching of a youth or child in an inappropriate manner. This includes but is not limited to the touching of a child's breast, buttocks, genital area, inner thigh or the clothing covering the immediate areas of those parts of the parts. The touching of a child as required for hygienic purposes only is permitted.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 1/15/2005*

9. Anyone who has an official's role as volunteer staff in children's ministries is considered "on duty" at any church event and should conduct themselves accordingly. Any contacts with children apart from church sponsored events or activities must be considered personal and the church, its elder board, employees will be released and held harmless from any responsibility, penalty or claims for and actions by such parties.
10. All workers or volunteers who act inappropriately, or in a manner deemed by the supervisor, or leader of the ministry, as dangerous to the well-being of the youth or child will be asked to leave immediately.
11. All workers, volunteers, and leadership should note when a youth or child exhibits characteristics that may be indicative of abuse.
12. Any suspicious behavior or any inappropriate behavior between a worker/volunteer and a youth/child will be reported immediately to a minister, a member of the church leadership, or supervisor of the activity or ministry.
13. Workers and volunteers will not show, display or send via e-mail any pornographic material or images, questionable pornographic material, web site links to pornographic material, or distribute pornography by any other means to youths or children.
14. All adults who work with minors are notified that sexual abuse and/or relationships with minors can lead to a felony conviction and imprisonment. Berlin Christian Church's insurance policy will not provide for the worker's legal defense in such cases once guilt is proven.
15. Sexual misconduct or child abuse of any nature will be investigated with the possibility of being reported to local authorities. Such conduct could lead to a felony conviction and therefore, workers and volunteers should be informed of this potential.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 11/24/2004*

### **C. Responding to Child Abuse Allegations**

Berlin Christian Church's policy regarding child abuse adheres to the following principles if an allegation is ever brought against the church, its workers, or its leadership. The principles are as follows:

1. Do not prejudge the situation.
2. All allegations are taken seriously. Do not, in any way, initially respond with disbelief or denial. Do not display an attitude that may be interpreted as a desire to minimize the allegation, keep it secret or cover it up. Do not make any other statements, show any actions, or express any attitudes that might make the alleged victim feel guilty or to blame. Be supportive and reassuring to the alleged victim. Never discount an accusation because of who is accusing or being accused.
3. Document all efforts in the handling of an allegation. This will include, but is not limited to all individuals involved, all addresses and phone numbers of those involved, date(s) and time(s) of occurrence(s), church activity or function, all involved witnesses, and all pertinent conversations regarding the occurrence(s).
4. Situations are handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality. Under no circumstances shall any incidence or suspicion of child abuse be discussed with anyone other than your designated leadership team or ministry team leader, a minister not alleged of abuse, or Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) personnel. It is vitally important that child abuse is reported, and equally important that it only be reported to and discussed with appropriate authorities.
5. Full cooperation is given to civil authorities under the guidance of church legal counsel. Relay all pertinent information given you to the designated supervisor who must make an immediate phone call the church leadership, elders, minister, the church's legal counsel and the church's insurance representative. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. Do not press the child for details. Leave that to the professionals. Information to relay to the authorities includes; the name, age, and address of the child and his/her parents or guardians, the nature of abuse, including any evidence of previous abuse and any explanations given for injuries.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 10/20/2004*

4. Adequate care and sensitivity is shown for the well being of victims and the accused.
5. The minister and/or elders will coordinate efforts to disseminate the appropriate information to the media and church members. Use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey the news to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.
6. Victims are not held responsible.

NOTE: Our greatest concern is the safety of our children and that is the main focus of our efforts. It is also our purpose to protect the church, its workers, its reputation, and its resources. It is important to know that many allegations are not presented until years after an incident. Families usually pursue court judgments only after approaching the church or organization and receiving no acknowledgment or validation of their trauma. It is alienation that drives them to a courtroom. So be sure you show the same concern for and attention to a report of misconduct several years ago as you would for a recent event.

#### **D. Reporting Obligations**

It must be understood that with regard to child abuse, confidentiality considerations are complex and depend upon the facts in each different situation. Most forms of confidentiality otherwise provided under Illinois law are subordinate to the importance of protecting the youth or child and to reporting the abuse as provided by law. If a question of confidentiality arises, an immediate legal opinion must be requested by the person who has the confidentiality concern.

If there is reasonable cause to suspect that child abuse has occurred, the following procedures shall be implemented:

1. Notify a minister(s) of Berlin Christian Church. If unavailable, notify only the elders.
2. It shall then be the responsibility of Berlin Christian Church' Chairman of the Board of Elders to notify the minister(s), contact the church's attorney for advice concerning the next appropriate step to follow, and contact the appropriate social service (IDCFS) and/or local law enforcement agency to request assistance in investigating the allegation(s).
3. The church elders will serve as liaison with all external agencies and the church attorney.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 2/17/2005*

## **E. Record Retention and Records**

All documents created as a result of this policy shall be secured by the Berlin Christian Church Board of Elders for a period of 20 years. File labels will contain the workers name and date of the initiating document. These documents must be secured in a lockable file cabinet or vault. These files are only viewable by the Board of Elders. Any request to review any and all documentation created by this policy must be approved by the Board of Elders.

*Adopted 3/15/2005  
Revised 11/20/2013*