

CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES



"Let the little children come to me..."

Matthew 19:14, NIV

UPDATED 1/2025

Burnt Hickory Church of Christ intends to provide a safe, secure environment in which to teach and care for the children of our church and community. Thus, we adopt these policies and principles for the prevention of child abuse in our church, and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations.

Unfortunately, in some respects, churches are the ideal environments for child molesters. Churches tend to be trusting and unsuspecting institutions. Most churches struggle to get adequate help for children's and youth programs. Churches provide ample opportunities for unsupervised close personal contact between adults and children.

Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse or molestation varies from state to state, but in general includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In a more general sense, child sexual abuse is:

Any sexual activity with a child--whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, 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, provided the child is four years older than the victim.

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 physical abuse, verbal comments, exposure to pornographic materials, obscene phone calls, exhibitions, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Definition of a minor

A minor is any individual under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Child Protection Principles

The principles set forth below will apply to all people, both employees and volunteers, who give supervision or have custody of minors while working within Burnt Hickory Children's and Youth Ministries, having opportunity for contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

I. SELECTION AND SCREENING PROCESS

- A. An employee is defined as anyone who is paid by the church on a full or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with preschoolers, children, and youth.

All church employees will be required to complete a confidential application form and will be interviewed by the appropriate staff members. They must have references checked and verified, and give written permission for a criminal background check. **A criminal background check will then be**

performed; confidential results will be kept on file with the application. Any information indicating that a candidate poses a threat of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person will remove the individual candidate from consideration for employment with this organization.

- B. A volunteer is defined as a person at least 14 years old who is not paid by the church on a full or part-time basis and is serving in any ministry position at the request of the Burnt Hickory ministry leaders.

Volunteers in the Children's and Youth Ministries will be required to complete the Child Protection Training Course offered through the Burnt Hickory Church of Christ, and submit a confidential application form. All volunteers at least 18 years old must give written permission for a criminal background check if they are going to be working in the care of children or youth or have custody or supervision of children. Volunteers aged 14 – 17 will be given an affidavit that must be signed by their parents in lieu of the background check.

A criminal background check will then be performed; confidential results will be kept on file with the application. Any information indicating that a candidate poses a threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person will result in the immediate removal of the individual candidate from consideration to volunteer in the area of youth and children with this organization. In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member and regular attendee of Burnt Hickory Church of Christ for at least six (6) months prior to being eligible to volunteer within the area of youth and children.

All volunteers and employees working with children will be required to renew their Child Protection Training and background check every 3 years.

Note: Exceptions to the guidelines in this section can be made with approval of two ministers. However, there will be no exemption permitted for criminal background checks for volunteers 18 and older.

II. SUPERVISION OF WORKERS

A. Two Worker Principle

The **two worker** principle means that generally two (2) workers should be available in each room where children are present, or with each group of children at church events. This principle can be satisfied with one adult in the room and another adult nearby who regularly monitors the room. The second worker in a room can be a teenage volunteer at least 14 years old so long as the other worker is 18 or older. Further, every effort will be made not to use any husband/wife teams in classrooms of children under age three unless a third non-related adult or teenager is present. Overnight events require supervision from at least two (2) CPT-certified adults.

B. Doors

For all activities, every effort will be made to place preschoolers, children, and youth in rooms that have window in the door. In the event there is no window in the door, the door will be left partially open.

C. Security Identification Procedure

Nursery classes are for babies under two years old. The classes are divided into groups generally by developmental level. Parents complete a name/information sticker and place on the baby's back. When a baby is inconsolable, the parents are contacted.

D. Bathroom and Diaper Restrictions

For those classrooms that do not have a private attached restroom, children (boys and girls) under kindergarten age, should be escorted as needed to the restroom by an adult female only. Children kindergarten through 2nd grade will be escorted by an adult. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe, and then wait outside the restroom until the child comes out. If there are other adults in the restroom, the escort should wait just inside the door.

Never touch a person's private areas except when necessary, as is in the case of changing a diaper. Workers should wear rubber gloves at all times while changing diapers. Only females are permitted to change diapers.

E. Other Guidelines

Workers should avoid the appearance of impropriety, such as allowing children on their laps, kissing a child, etc.

Workers are to release children who are in their care (first grade and under) **only** to parents or a responsible guardian specifically authorized to pick up the child. Children 2nd grade and older can be released on their own at the end of a class unless the parent has requested that they be held until a parent arrives.

Workers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically hurt a child. Serious disciplinary problems should be reported to the Children's Minister or Youth Minister and to the Child's parent or guardian.

F. Youth Ministry

The following guidelines have been established specifically for the ministers and volunteers in the Youth Ministry that serve kids in 6th – 12th grades.

Any verbal or nonverbal sexual interaction with any student is inappropriate at all times.

Discretion should be used when displaying physical contact with all students at all times. Even innocent behavior/interaction can sometimes be misinterpreted.

One-on-one private counseling with a student should always take place in a public setting, such as the Teen Center, while others are present. Private one-on-one counseling appointments that take place off of the Burnt Hickory church property is strongly discouraged and should never be done in a private/non-public location or without the knowledge of a person in a leadership position. When a situation arises where you are alone with a student, quickly move that situation to a public setting.

Driving alone with a student should be avoided at all times. If an adult must transport a student, prior parental consent must be obtained and at least one other person must be in the vehicle.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR CASES OF ABUSE

- A.** All church employees and volunteers are considered to be “mandatory reporters.”
- B.** Observed, reported, or suspected child abuse or child molestation will be verbally reported immediately to the Children’s or Youth Minister, and written documentation will follow. If the accusation is against a minister, that should be immediately reported to a Burnt Hickory elder.
- C.** The Children’s/Youth Minister will report the allegation to the local police department where the abuse is reported to have occurred within 24 hours of the initial discovery.
- D.** The Children’s/Youth Minister will also notify the elders as soon as possible and keep them updated as to progress of the reporting procedures.
- E.** The original reporter will be notified when the incident has been reported to state officials.

IV. RESPONSE PLAN FOR CASES OF ABUSE

- A.** All allegations will be taken seriously, and the appropriate action will be taken, including immediately notifying the appropriate minister regarding cases where there is reason to believe abuse or criminal acts have occurred.
- B.** The church staff will not deny or minimize the allegation. The Burnt Hickory Church of Christ ministerial staff will be available to all persons involved and will cooperate with civil authorities. The church will not investigate the situation; all investigations will be handled by civil authorities.
- C.** The parents of the alleged victim will be notified immediately by the appropriate minister and an elder regarding any allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse that does not involve them as the alleged perpetrator(s). Reporting alleged abuse to the civil authorities will be handled by the appropriate minister.

- D.** The Children's Minister or Youth Minister will document, in writing with date and signature, all efforts in the handling of any incident.
- E.** Any employee of the church who is the subject of a child abuse or molestation investigation either within or outside of his/her work with the church will be removed from any work associated with Children's and/or Youth Ministry, pending completion of an investigation (unless the employee has admitted to the abuse or molestation, in which case he/she will be terminated in accordance with organizational employment practices).
- F.** Any volunteer worker who is the subject of a child abuse or molestation investigation either within or outside of his/her work with the church will be removed from any roles in ministry pending the completion and outcome of the investigation.
- G.** Any person who is found guilty of abuse or molestation will be permanently removed from working with our ministries.
- H.** The elders will designate the official spokesperson for the church. Consultation will occur with external legal counsel and insurance company prior to any public comments. No other elders, staff members, or volunteers shall speak to the media with regard to any actual or alleged incidents of abuse.
- I.** All elders, employees, and volunteers will cooperate fully with any law enforcement or governmental agency that may be investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation in connection with activities of the church.

V. ILLNESS AND INJURY

- A.** Workers who are ill (with a fever, or have a communicable disease which can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity. A suitable substitute (who has been approved as a volunteer worker through the above screening process) must be used to take the place of workers who are ill.
- B.** Children should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If this is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that will allow supervision to continue until the person can be returned to his/her parent or guardian.
- C.** Reasonable steps should be taken to avoid contact with bodily fluids of any kind.
- D.** Any ministry leader who becomes aware of an injury to a volunteer or student will take steps to ensure proper medical attention is given to the injured person.
- E.** Children who have received an injury which is obviously minor, should be given simple first aid as needed at the time of injury, however no medication, either orally or topically, should be

administered without written consent from the parent in advance. The child's parent or guardian should be notified when they pick up the injured child.

- F.** Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parent or guardian of the injured person should be immediately notified, as well as the ministry leader. 911 should also be called immediately if warranted by the injury.