



Child Protection Policy

Adopted August 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The New Testament makes clear that as Christians we continue in a covenant relationship with God and with the whole community of faith. We must live just and generous lives, following the great commandments set forth by Jesus Christ. Jesus plainly taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. (See Luke 18:15-17 and Matthew 18:5-6.) Throughout the history of the Christian church, children have been included in the worship and ministry of the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously, always attending to their spiritual growth and nurturing. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against physical abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every circumstance. Yet, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough and practical policy of prevention.

The gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children and youth. We must not allow the risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to reduce them.
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children and our workers.
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, making a difference in their lives.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes {a} child...welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

Child and Youth Protection Policy

First Baptist Geraldine

General Purpose Statement:

First Baptist Geraldine seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices below, our goal is to protect the children and youth of FBC Geraldine from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

From automobiles to toys, parents are attracted to features of safety and security. Families are seeking a caring church family where they can be confident their children are protected. First Baptist Geraldine desires to provide quality children and youth programs that are attractive to families seeking a new church home as well as continue to earn the trust of families in our membership.

First Baptist Geraldine has no intention of interfering with parental rights and responsibility regarding the welfare and discipline of their children. These practices relate to times when children are under the direct care and supervision of our staff and volunteers. Parents or guardians are responsible for their children during public meetings (morning or evening), and all other church events.

Definitions:

For purposes of this policy:

- The terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years, or still in High School, or whose mental capacity is that of a minor.
- The term “youth” includes all children over the age of twelve.
- The term “adult” shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
- The term “worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for children.
- The term “youth worker” is defined as any youth who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for children.
- The terms “program” or “activity” are defined as an event organized, administered, scheduled, or supervised by workers or staff of First Baptist while serving in their official capacity. This includes on site and off site activities.

General Policies

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Physical Contact Policy

It is our desire that all physical contact among children or with children be of a kind, considerate, nurturing, and non-threatening manner. Workers and children are not to engage in any physical contact not characterized by the above.

Pastoral Counseling of Children

Pastoral counseling done by a member of the clergy or a professional counselor may require more privacy than provided in the open door policy but must:

- Take place during operating hours of the church, and/or
- Take place with parental knowledge, and/or
- Take place in an unlocked room with immediate access to public areas.

Outside Organizations

First Baptist often allows outside organizations to use facilities for events, classes or meetings. These organizations must demonstrate they have comparable policies and procedures for the protection of children and youth. If such policies and procedures do not exist, these organizations must adhere to the policies and procedures of First Baptist Geraldine.

Worker Policies

Selection of Workers:

All employees and all persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes:

- **6 Month Rule**

No volunteer will be allowed to work with children until he/she has been an active participant of FBC Geraldine for a minimum of six months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

- **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by FBC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, reference, and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence in a locked file at First Baptist Geraldine.

- **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

- **Credit Check**

For employees only

- **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at FBC Geraldine.

- **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees and may be required for all volunteers involved in our on-going programs and ministries.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, she/he will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the pastor and program minister on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding offenses involving, violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check results will be maintained in confidence in a locked file at First Baptist Geraldine.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. When two unrelated adults cannot be present the following conditions must be met:

- The meeting must take place during regular program hours of FBC.
- The meeting must take place in a public area or in a room with the door open to a public area.
- The meeting may take place with the door closed providing the room is in a public area and there is a window in or beside the door.

Youth Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for youth who themselves are under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to such workers.

- Youth workers will be screened as specified above except they are exempt from the background check.
- Youth workers will always be under the supervision of an adult.

Parents and Guests

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for guests to participate in a program or activity without having fulfilled the requirements of the child protection policy. A parent or guardian may want to accompany their child to any event. We encourage such participation with observance of the following guidelines:

- Parents and guests are required to review the protection policy.
- Parents and guests are always accompanied by an adult worker during programs or activities and must never be left alone with children other than their own.

Child Care Policies

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For nursery childcare of preschoolers, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. Similar to common public school procedure, a list of permissible adults to check out children will be kept on file in the church nursery. Only those adults listed by the parent/guardian of each child will be allowed to drop off and pick up children. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian, who will receive a pager for the child similar to a claim check. The parent/guardian, or an approved adult who is listed by the parent/guardian, must present the pager in order to sign out the child from our care. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the pager, a minister or deacon will be contacted. The minister or deacon will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

**NOTE: THIS PORTION, "CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT PROCEDURE," WILL GO INTO EFFECT UPON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PAGER SYSTEM.*

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at FBC Geraldine.

Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not be brought:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours.
- Green or yellow runny nose.
- Eye or skin infections.
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of FBC Geraldine not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy. Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the appropriate minister to develop a plan of action. For trips, parents may make arrangements with leaders for medication to be administered during the trip.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of FBC Geraldine not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, hand slapping, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with

Children's Minister or Youth Minister if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. Preventive measures may need to be taken to prevent physical altercations.

Restroom Guidelines

If a child five years of age or younger should need to go to the restroom a worker is to be able to see the restroom door the entire time the child is there. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child.

For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. **Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class or activity.**

Child Abuse and Injury Reporting Procedures

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- Physical Abuse – any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of consent criticism, belittling, ignoring, and persistent teasing.
- Sexual Abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least three years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect – depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, medical care, and nurturing attention.

In the event that an individual involved in the care of children here at FBC becomes aware of suspected abuse of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the pastor or other ministers for further action including reporting to authorities as mandated by state law.

The State of Alabama Child Abuse Reporting Requirements

The following information is from the Code of Alabama:

I. MANDATORY REPORTING

- a) “[a] All hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, doctors, physicians, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, nurses, school teachers and officials, peace officers, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report, or cause a report to be made of the same, orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority.
- f) Subsection [a] to the contrary notwithstanding, a member of the clergy shall not be required to report information gained solely in a confidential communication privileged pursuant to Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence which communication shall continue to be privileged as provided by law.”

Ala. Code § 26-14-3 [a] (Cum. Supp. 1996) as amended by Act Number 2003-237 of the Legislative Session

II. PERMISSIVE REPORTING

In addition to those persons, firms, corporations and officials required by Section 26-14-3 to report child abuse and neglect, any person may make such a report if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected. Ala. Code § 26-14-4 [1975].

III. IMMUNITY FROM LIABILITY

Any person, firms, corporations and officials participating in the making of a report or the removal of a child pursuant to this chapter, or participating in a judicial proceeding resulting there from, shall, in so doing, be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, that might otherwise be incurred or imposed. Ala. Code § 26-14-9 [1975].

IV. PENALTY FOR FAILURE TO MAKE A REQUIRED REPORT

Any person who shall knowingly fail to make a report required by this chapter shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be punished by a sentence of not more than six months' imprisonment or a fine of not more that \$500.00. Ala. Code § 26-14-13 [1975].

If you have questions about reporting obligations, contact the church office.

Handling Abuse/Molestation Incidents

A. The Church's Role

1. The accused party will be presumed innocent until proven guilty. In an appropriate case, an accused party may be placed on paid or non-paid leave where there are no witnesses other than the accused and the accuser. However, where two adults were present at the time of the alleged incident, one of whom was the accused, and the other adult states in writing that he or she observed no incident to occur, then the accused employee or volunteer shall remain as a church employee or volunteer throughout the investigative process.
2. Upon an accusation being made, a designated representative of the Church Staff will notify and consult with the FBC Corporate Officers, the church attorney, and the liability

insurance carrier representative for the church. Recommendations received from these sources will be followed.

3. Besides any other investigative process that may ensue, the church itself will implement the following procedure for investigation of the incident. The church may arrange for psychological testing for those involved, as well as for possible transference of actual abuse-related emotions from the parent of the accuser to the accused, or for other explanations of the incident that would establish the innocence of the accused. The church will take other steps as deemed prudent by the Pastor, Church Staff, and FBC Corporate Officers.
4. The church will, on a regular basis, keep all interested parties notified of the progress in the investigation and other matters, subject to counsel from the church's lawyer or insurance company.
5. If the investigative process, or the church's own investigation, clearly shows that the accused is in fact guilty of the incident, then the church will take all reasonable steps to cooperate with law enforcement authorities in any action they may take against the accused. Any claim or dispute arising from or related to allegations by or against workers, employees, volunteers, church members or their families, shall be resolved in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation.

B. Reporting Procedures

Observed or reported child sexual abuse or child molestation should be reported immediately to the appropriate age group minister or the church office or the Minister of Children. Reporting abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, failing to report abuse can have severe consequences to a child at risk. Therefore, if there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse, you should talk with an appropriate person to see what steps could and should be taken to protect the child and help the family. When time and circumstances permit, the report should first be made to the appropriate age-group minister, who will then proceed with the correct and thorough process.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid bandages, cold compresses (not including alcohol or Neosporin, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parents or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian as well as a minister or program director will be immediately summoned. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

FBC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new children's workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events