

First Baptist Church Dunlap, Tennessee Child Protection Policy

Because First Baptist Church, Dunlap, (FBCD), has the occasion, opportunity and responsibility of ministering to minor children, and acknowledging the tragic reality of child abuse, this Child Protection Policy is intended to provide guidance and actions to be taken in instances where possible child abuse is observed, including neglect, physical or sexual abuse. It is the desire and intent of FBCD to comply will all Federal, State and local laws pertaining to child abuse, while proceeding in strict accordance with standards set forth in the Scriptures.

Further, implementation of this policy is intended to:

1. Provide protection for all children attending FBCD from potential abuse;
2. Provide protection for those working with children from unfounded accusations, and;
3. Provide a deterrent to actions taken with malicious or divisive intent.

Notwithstanding the fact that reports of abuse may be made with relative ease and pertinent facts are often difficult to establish, FBCD shall, without exception, take all such reports seriously. Recognizing the serious harm that can be done to an individual's or the church's reputation from reports of abuse, careful and prayerful consideration will be given to these reports, with care being exercised to avoid rushes to judgment.

Under no circumstances does FBCD permit or condone abusive behavior of any type, particularly in instances where children are involved. To effectuate this policy, and to provide guidelines in the event that is a report of child abuse, the following procedures shall be followed. Further, our state is a “all-person” mandatory reporting state. As such, all instances of suspected abuse or neglect must be passed on to the proper authorities.

I. Definitions

A. “Child Abuse” means harm or threatened harm to the health or welfare of a child by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare, occurring as the result of non-accidental physical or psychological injury, or sexual abuse.

B. “Child Neglect” means harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare, occurring as the result of withholding basic needs of the child, including failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care.

II. Procedure for Child Abuse / Child Neglect Reporting

A. While it is recognized that no governing authority nor FBCD requires that church leaders and staff assume the duties and responsibilities of a professional investigator or social worker in seeking to discover instances of child abuse or neglect, such leaders and staff shall exercise due diligence in immediately reporting to the pastoral staff any indication of possible abuse such as excessive bruising, cigarette burns, black eyes or other obvious signs of possible physical abuse.

B. In instances where child abuse or child neglect is reported to a ministry worker, in addition to reporting as stated above, the ministry worker shall follow these additional guidelines:

1. Avoid panic, “knee-jerk” reactions and over-reactions.
2. Do not challenge, argue with, refute or criticize the child; make no attempts to influence the child towards a conclusion that the child was wrong or misunderstood what had actually happened.
3. In every regard and to the extent possible, respect and protect the privacy of the individual making the report. Insure that all discussions regarding suspected child abuse or child neglect take place in a location conducive to privacy and where the conversation cannot be overheard

4. Ministry workers shall not disclose the name of the child or any information concerning the reported child abuse or child neglect to any individual other than one of the church' pastoral staff. The ministry worker shall not disclose any such information to any other ministry worker. Such information shall be kept strictly confidential.

5. Ministry workers, church staff and other adults involved shall be sensitive to the emotional needs of the child and make every effort to minimize the stress and anxiety which almost always accompanies instances of abuse.

6. Any child reporting abuse should be encouraged to repeat the report to the pastoral staff; the child should be assured that reporting of abuse is the right thing to do.

III. Supervision of Minors by Paid and Volunteer Workers

A. Prior to becoming a ministry worker, an applicant must be a member of FBCD for six months. The six-month waiting period may be waived if the member-applicant has a continuous verifiable history of teaching or serving in a church of like faith. All ministry workers must complete a confidential application that will be presented to a pastoral staff committee for approval, which application shall include express permission to conduct a criminal background screening on the applicant. This screening will be repeated on a three-year interval.

B. Ministry workers will be made aware of the fact that they will be working in an environment where there is a certain level of vulnerability to false accusations of abuse. That given, ministry workers will be encouraged to take reasonable precautions to avoid groundless accusations. Examples such precautions are included in the paragraphs following.

C. A "two-adult" rule in all FBCD preschool, children's, and youth classrooms will be strictly adhered to. Both ministry workers must be 18 years of age or older, while the other may be a youth. If one of the ministry workers must leave the room for any reason, the door must be left open. All preschool, children and youth activities held outside the classroom will follow this guideline as well, both on church property or wherever the activity may take place

D. Directors and/or pastoral staff shall have knowledge of all off-campus and any over-night activities. Parental permission must be obtained prior to such activities.

E. Ministry workers will be encouraged to respect the privacy of the children. While being diligent in monitoring the health and safety of children participating in FBCD activities, ministry workers will make every effort to avoid intruding on their privacy. Children will be allowed to take care of restroom needs independently. In cases where bathroom accidents occur for children older than the nursery, parents or guardians will be notified for their assistance in gently dealing with the situation.

F. Ministry workers will exercise discretion in what is shared with children; care will be taken to avoid sensitive subjects or unnecessarily share details of one's private life.

G. Ministry workers will be sensitive to principles of modesty, both for themselves and for those in their care in all situations.

H. While FBCD encourages warm and healthy relationships between ministry workers and children, reasonable limits shall be maintained with respect to physical contact or physical interaction. It is recognized that some children will come from backgrounds in which wholesome affection is not openly displayed. Such children may be uncomfortable with even a genuine and wholesome display of affection, (e.g., hand on shoulder or "Christian hug"). Ministry workers will be encouraged to be sensitive to these

differences and use discretion and wisdom to avoid and displays of affection that could in any way that could be misinterpreted, or which may make a child uncomfortable. At no time may physical discipline be administered.

I. The proper supervision of our children and youth is very important. While on campus, they should be involved in a class or be in the care and custody of their parents.

IV. Responsibility of the Pastoral Staff in Responding to Allegations of Abuse

In instances where allegations of abuse are received, the pastoral staff will respond with the utmost concern for the victim, parent or other party making the allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, the staff of FBCD will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints will be assured that FBCD takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

V. Screening Committee Guidelines

Our pastoral staff has selected a three-person team consisting of individuals who are not serving or working with minor children. It is their responsibility to complete the reference checks and background screenings to determine the character of the applicant. Should any discrepancies or “red flags” arise during their reviews and deliberations, they will refer the applicant to the pastoral staff. The determination as to whether an applicant can serve as a worker will be based on the information received through the application, screenings and interviews with one of the pastoral staff.

VI. Security Measures

In order to provide proper security for those under their care, appropriate security measures will be set in place providing a positive check-in, and check-out process for each age group. This may include, (but not be limited to) sign-in/sign-out sheets; security wrist-bands; printed tickets; etc. and may vary depending upon the activity in which the child is engaged.

VII. Training

All ministry workers will be provided annual training on these and any additional child protection and security measures adopted.

VIII. Events

Depending upon the nature of the event, parental and or guardian attendance may be required to accompany the child. This will be determined by the committee or staff coordinating the event.

IX. Special Needs

It is the goal of FBCD to minister effectively to all people. In situation where FBCD has the opportunity to minister to children and youth with special needs or disabilities, pastoral staff and ministry desire to work with the families and the children/youth such that those special needs may best be accommodated.