

# **BEREAN BIBLE CHURCH**

## **CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES**

Berean Bible Church is committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for preschoolers, children and youth who attend the church or any sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect church leaders from accusations or suspicions.

Church leadership recognizes the need to have formal, written policies and guidelines to help prevent the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor. The following procedures are not based on a lack of trust in a particular worker but instead are needed to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire church body.

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16*

### **I. DEFINITIONS**

- A. A minor is any person under the age of 18 years of age and may also be referred to as a preschooler, child or a youth.
- B. Child abuse means any of the prohibited behaviors named in section II of these policies or any behavior named in O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 (b) (4), (10), (11).
- C. A "screened worker/volunteer/adult" is one who has undergone the enlistment and screening process outlined in section III of these policies.

### **II. PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR**

- A. The following behaviors are prohibited for all volunteers and employees:
  - 1. Threatening or intentionally inflicting physical injury upon a minor.
  - 2. Committing any sexual offense against a minor, or engaging in any sexual contact with a minor.
  - 3. Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
  - 4. Any prohibited behaviors named in O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 (b) (4), (10), (11).

### **III. ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING**

- A. All volunteers considered for a position in the preschool, children and youth areas of ministry must be actively involved with the ministries of Berean Bible Church for a period of time before serving in these areas. Involvement may include worship attendance, Sunday school attendance or attendance in one of the other ministries of Berean Bible Church. Attendance must be regular and verifiable.
- B. All volunteer and paid teachers with preschool, children and youth must complete the Volunteer Application form, including a Criminal Background Check Authorization and undergo the screening process before they can serve. One-time events may only require a background check.

- C. All workers, volunteer or paid, will be asked to provide institutional and personal references. At least two of these references may be checked, with institutional references having priority over personal references.
- D. Any person for whom the church has a valid reason to believe might endanger or harm children shall not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they will have contact with minors. Individuals who have been arrested for, charged with, under probation for, or convicted of any of the following crimes shall not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they will have contact with minors: homicide; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault(rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; any sex crime involving a minor; possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; endangerment of a child; kidnapping; public lewdness; indecent exposure; enticing a child.
- E. All volunteers and employees must sign a written acknowledgement receipt form acknowledging they have read and understand the churches Child Protection Policies.
- F. It is the responsibility of the ministry leader responsible for that particular ministry area to interview all potential volunteers for their ministry area.

#### **IV. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS & EMPLOYEES OF PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

- A. Volunteer & Employee Conduct
  - 1. Under no circumstances, shall a volunteer or employee be alone with a child behind a closed door. Two adults must always be present in each room where children are present.
  - 2. Classroom doors without glass inserts should be kept open whenever possible or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door should be kept open.
  - 3. Classes shall remain in the assigned spaces. If there is to be a change, the ministry leader must be informed and approve the change.
  - 4. Each room shall maintain a sign-in-sheet or class roll. Any special information provided by the parent shall be kept on the proper form. This sign-in-sheet and/or class roll should be taken with the class in the event of a fire or other emergency requiring the evacuation of the room so that attendance can be taken after the evacuation.
  - 5. Care should be taken by workers so that young children do not leave the classroom unattended.
  - 6. Classroom doors should never be locked while occupied.
  - 7. Volunteers and employees should always wear their nametags while on duty.
  - 8. With preschool and kindergarten children, only a parent or other person specifically designated by the parent and known to the worker may pick up preschoolers. No one under the age of eighteen will be permitted to pick up a child without prior permission from the parent or guardian. Parents will be requested to provide the ministry leader with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where leadership should pay particular attention to

who picks up the child. Children may not be released without being picked up by a parent or other designated person unless the parent provides written permission to do so.

9. Preschool children should wear a nametag to allow easy identification.
10. Touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Children in first grade or older should not sit in the lap of workers. Workers shall not touch children in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist a child in the bathroom as noted below.
11. Precautionary measures for dealing with dirty diapers, blood, vomit and the like, such as the use of protective gloves should be communicated to the worker. Any items needed for the precautionary measures will be provided by the church.
12. Either men or women may change diapers if it is done in open view.
13. Male workers are allowed only to take boys to the bathroom and are not permitted to use the bathroom themselves when taking the children. When a child is taken to a bathroom outside the room, someone must check the bathroom before the child is permitted to enter to ensure it is safe.

#### B. Discipline of Children

1. Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement is always appropriate.
2. Workers shall be advised on the best age-appropriate discipline methods.
3. The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class should be discussed with his or her parents and the ministry leader. In appropriate circumstances, the parents can be asked to attend class to observe or control the problem behavior. If the behavior persists, the child may be removed from the class. A child who is a danger to other children shall be removed immediately.

#### C. Communication with Parents

1. Workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.
2. All children who attend must be registered. The registration form will include information on special needs, disabilities, continuing medications and will be updated annually or as circumstances necessitate.
3. Parents shall always be permitted to observe a classroom, if done through the glass door, although the parent may be told that his or her presence may be disruptive to the child. Parents may enter their child's room with the approval of the ministry leader of that ministry area.
4. Parents should be given a summary of the guidelines which have an impact on them.
5. Parents shall be clearly advised as to where to report suspected abuse or other concern regarding a classroom situation and be assured that they will not be retaliated against for making a report.
6. Parents should be encouraged to pick up their preschool children no later than ten (10) minutes after the service or event is over unless special arrangements are made with the ministry leader.

7. Parents should be encouraged to change diapers and take children to the bathroom before class.
8. Under no circumstances should parents leave a child if the child has a fever or other severe illness. Parents must advise the workers if the child is on medication.

D. Staffing of the Children's Program

1. There shall be a minimum of two (2) adult screened workers assigned to each class, and a minimum of one (1) assigned to each "break-out group" which is part of a larger class. In pre-school rooms, at least one (1) of the workers must be female.
2. Our goal is to have a ratio of workers to children of not less than 1:4 for pre-school classrooms and 1:6 for school age classrooms.
3. During any event there shall always be a screened worker on duty making roving checks of all classrooms from time to time.
4. Teenagers under the age of 18, who have completed an application and interview, may assist adults with children K-5<sup>th</sup>. Students under the age of 18 must always work under the direct supervision of a screened adult worker.
5. To ensure that there shall be sufficient substitutes available when the regular workers cannot attend parents should be encouraged to undergo the volunteer screening process to be available on a standby basis.

**V. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES OF YOUTH (middle school/high school) PROGRAMS**

A. Physical Contact

1. Back rubs, neck rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact are not allowed by volunteers or employees.
2. Side-by-side hugs are to be used instead of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but staff and volunteers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact. Unwelcomed touching of any kind is not allowed.

B. Staffing Considerations for All Activities and Events

1. A minimum of two screened adult workers must be present for all activities. A specific ratio of leaders to youth is not suggested; instead, the ratio should be appropriate for the activity being undertaken.
2. Any one-on-one meeting involving an adult and youth must be conducted in view of another screened adult through an open door or window.
3. One-on-one meetings of any kind outside the office should not occur.

**XI GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES OF ALL PROGRAMS INVOLVING MINORS**

A. Driving Rules

1. Only qualified, screened adults may drive. All drivers must have a valid driver's license and auto insurance. The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seatbelts, and all occupants must wear seatbelts.
2. If the event requires the use of a church owned vehicle, the driver must be a qualified driver on the churches insurance Approved Drivers List.
3. A minimum of two screened adult workers must be present in all vehicles.

B. Overnight and Trip Rules

1. Written Permission and Medical Consent forms must be completed prior to the trip. The total number of adults on each trip must be adjusted according to the requirement of the planned activities.
2. The two adult rule (see section IV, A, 1) must be followed throughout the trip.

## XII REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

A. Reporting Violations of These Policies

1. All volunteers and employed workers shall immediately report to the ministry leader any violation of these policies which they have observed.
2. All volunteers and employed workers shall immediately report to their ministry leader if someone has threatened physical injury upon a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
3. Ministry leaders who become aware of a violation of the procedures set by this policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with them. In the process of ensuring compliance with this policy, it may become necessary to remove workers from their positions.
4. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

B. Reporting Child Abuse

1. **As of July 1, 2012 all volunteers and employees are required by law to report suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused. An oral report should be made immediately, but in no case later than 24 hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, by telephone or otherwise and followed by a report in writing, if requested, to a child welfare agency providing protective services, as designated by the Department of Human Services, or, in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney. (OCGA 19-7-5(e))**
2. An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which any person:
  - a. Has inflicted physical injury upon a preschooler, child, or youth other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
  - b. Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a preschooler, child, or youth

or engages in any sexual contact with a preschooler, child or youth, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

c. Any behavior named in O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 (b) (4), (10), (11) is considered abuse.

3. **Failing to report child abuse is a criminal offence which is punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 or confinement in the county jail for up to one year.**

C. Reporting Procedure

1. The person reporting an incident of abuse shall immediately contact the ministry leader of the department they serve in.
2. The Administrative Pastor should also be immediately notified in all cases of reported abuse and given all the relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse.

D. Imminent Threat

In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact an Administrative Pastor to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the personal witnessing the incident of abuse shall report it as outlined above.

E. Obligation to Report to the Child Abuse Investigators

In all cases where any worker has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, the worker shall first consult with the Director of Preschool & Children's Ministries and complete a written report. The Director of Preschool & Children's Ministries will make a report to appropriate authorities.

F. Responding to the Report

1. After receiving a report of abuse the Administrative Pastor or his designee shall:
  - a. Immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim.
  - a. Conduct an investigation and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
  - b. Contact parents or guardian of the alleged victim to inform each one of them of the incident and shall ensure each parent or guardian has been notified. If one parent or guardian is the alleged wrongdoer, the person receiving the report shall contact the other parent or guardian and inform him or her of the incident individually.
  - c. Make the appropriate notifications to the churches' insurance provider.

G. Internal Investigation

1. This ministry organization considers any allegation of abuse a serious matter. Each situation will be fully investigated by ministry leaders, always with the assistance of legal counsel and civil authorities.
2. Employees who are the subject of an investigation will be removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Employees who admit to the abuse will be terminated consistent with the established employment practices of this ministry.

3. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be removed from their positions immediately pending completion of the investigation.
4. Berean Bible Church will permanently remove any volunteers or employees from their duties within the organization if it is determined they committed abuse. Employees will also be terminated from employment.

### **XIII CRISIS RESPONSE**

#### **A. General Guidelines**

1. After consultation with legal counsel the Senior Pastor or the Discipleship Pastor shall act as spokesman to handle dissemination of information to staff, media and congregation. Unless prior authorization is given no one else should disseminate information concerning the situation.
2. Have ready for release, a clear position statement stating Berean Bible Church's policy regarding abuse of minors and established safeguards.
3. Select outside Legal Counsel (if necessary) who will be present with the spokesperson while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.
4. Use text or prepared public statement to answer press and inform congregation. At all times maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all those involved.
5. Use careful judgment so as not to compromise an ongoing investigation or place the church in unnecessary jeopardy.

#### **B. Guidelines for Spokesperson**

1. Be prepared.
2. Be candid and honest.
3. Never say "no comment."
4. Be clear, concise and in context. Do not answer more than what is asked. Do not volunteer information.
5. Always respond to all calls and questions as quickly as possible.

I have read and understand the above Child Protection Policies and agree to adhere to them.

Please Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*“But whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me — it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea!” Matthew 18:6*