

Bethesda Baptist Church

Children and Youth Protection Policy

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Purpose

It is the purpose of the members and staff of Bethesda Baptist Church to demonstrate our commitment to the physical and emotional safety and protection of our children and youth entrusted to our care. The following policies are established to protect children from cradle through youth and all persons, paid or volunteer, who work with them. Bethesda Baptist Church has a zero tolerance policy prohibiting any act of sexual, emotional, or physical abuse. This zero tolerance policy requires all church employees and volunteers to immediately report any occurrence or suspected occurrence.

Scope

These policies will apply to all current and future staff and volunteers who are responsible for teaching and/or supervising the activities of all children from cradle through youth.

Definitions

1. Cradle through Youth – any individual under the age of eighteen (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor). This group shall include infants, toddlers, preschoolers, children and youth.
2. Minor – any person under the age of 18.
3. Adult – any individual at least 18 years of age.
4. Worker – any adult (18 or older) who volunteers or is a paid employee of Bethesda Baptist Church who has been given the responsibility of teaching, supervising, working with or caring for minors
5. Teen Worker – any person between the ages of 16 and 18 who is enlisted as an assistant in the care of minors
6. Child Abuse – verbal, physical, emotional or sexual misconduct directed to a minor.

7. Criminal Background Check (CBC) – the procedure used by local law enforcement agencies to check the background of adult workers for criminal activity.
8. Alford Plea – an Alford plea is a plea in criminal court wherein the defendant does not admit the act and asserts innocence, but admits that sufficient evidence exists which the prosecution could likely convince a judge or jury to find the defendant guilty.
9. Nolo Contendere – Latin phrase meaning “No contest”. A plea of nolo contendere entered by a defendant in which the defendant neither admits guilt nor declares innocence. The defendant agrees that the court may consider him guilty for the purpose of sentencing.
10. First Offender Act/Status - Upon a verdict or plea of guilty or nolo contendere, but before an adjudication of guilt, the court may, in the case of a defendant who has not been previously convicted of a felony, without entering a judgment of guilt and with the consent of the defendant, defer further proceeding and place the defendant on probation as a first offender.

Worker Requirements

All adults, whether volunteer or compensated employees, who work with children and/or youth are required to:

1. Complete a Child and Youth Employee/Volunteer Application Form (Attachment A);
2. Sign a consent form for a criminal background check (CBC) (Attachment B);
3. Successfully complete prescribed child protection training appropriate to his/her duties;
4. Be a member of Bethesda Baptist Church and a committed Christian for a minimum period of six (6) months. Exceptions to this policy may only be made by the Pastor.
5. Read and sign a copy of this policy acknowledging understanding of the Children and Youth Protection Policy and stating an intent to abide by the policy.

All applications shall be reviewed by the Pastor and reviewing body comprised of church members and or personnel as designated by the Pastor. Applications, criminal background information, signed consent forms, motor vehicle reports (MVR)(when applicable) and other related materials shall be

kept by the Pastor and said designated church personnel under lock and key in a safe and secure location. All information obtained by Bethesda Baptist Church on employment applications, volunteer information, CBC and MVR may be reviewed by the applicant, but copies of these reports will not be distributed to the applicant.

A Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) will be obtained on each person designated to provide transportation for children and youth. Persons wishing to drive vehicles purchased and maintained by Bethesda Baptist church will be required to obtain a copy of their current MVR and must provide it to the aforementioned selected church reviewing body for review.

If, during the process of checking references or CBC, it is verified that an applicant has been convicted, pled guilty, pled under an "Alford Plea", pled nolo contendere or received first offender status for the commission of a felony or misdemeanor (other than a minor traffic violation) then the applicant must submit an explanation in writing regarding the charges and circumstances surrounding the conviction. Said written explanation shall be reviewed by the Pastor and the aforementioned reviewing body. Please note that D.U.I. or D.W.I. are not considered a minor traffic offenses.

If an applicant has been convicted, pled guilty, pled under an "Alford Plea", pled nolo contendere, or received first offender status involving, but not necessarily limited to, child abuse, sexual misconduct, sex related offense, or neglect, said offense(s) shall serve as an absolute bar and that applicant will be denied the position for which he/she has applied and shall be excluded from working with children and youth.

Procedures

1. Two Adult Rule – it shall be the goal of the church that a minimum of two adults will be present at all times when children and youth are being supervised during a church activity regardless of the number of participants, location or activity.
2. For counseling sessions with a child, parental permission will be obtained, if possible, and parents will be allowed to participate if all parties (counselor, child, and parent) are in agreement.
3. Occasional volunteer workers with children and youth will be required to complete the same application and background checks that apply to regular workers.
4. Teen workers will be required to complete a volunteer information form and be referred by their current Sunday School teacher or youth director. Teen workers are exempt from a CBC.

5. For every church sponsored event held off-site, a Parental/Guardian Permission Form (Attachment C) will be obtained. If no permission form is obtained, the child will not be allowed to participate in the event.
6. Overnight Rule - Special attention will be given to planning and carrying out activities that involve children and youth in overnight stays, on or off church property. Adequate adult supervision, appropriate separation of sexes, and other precautions will be taken. All adult chaperons must be approved and complete all procedures pursuant to this policy before being allowed to participate. Sleeping arrangements will be made to avoid one adult and one child being in a room alone except family members. All children and youth participating in overnight church activities shall be required to furnish a parent or guardian consent and release form.
7. Release of Children: Children in infant and pre-school classes will only be released to a properly identified and authorized adult.

Prohibited Practices

The following practices are prohibited:

1. Infliction of physically abusive behavior to a child or youth;
2. Toleration of physically or verbally abusive behavior between children and/or youth (i.e. bullying);
3. Language or behavior toward children or youth that is belittling, demeaning or harshly critical;
4. Possessing obscene or pornographic materials in the proximity to children or youth;
5. Possessing, using or being under the influence of any illegal drugs or alcohol; and
6. Using profane or obscene language or gestures.
7. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an adult and a child or youth or between children;

Incident Reporting

In the event any worker witnesses or is told of an event of abuse or a violation of the prohibited practices relating to individual conduct, the following actions will be taken to the extent appropriate under the circumstances:

1. Personally and immediately secure the safety of the child or youth and any other child that may be at risk in the situation;
2. When child/children are safe, immediately report the incident to the pastor or a deacon of the church;
3. The Pastor or his designee will then provide guidance regarding notifying local law enforcement and/or other proper authorities; notifying the child's/youth's parent or guardian; and notifying the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier;
4. If the accused violator is the Pastor, then the Chairman of the Deacons will be notified. The Chairman shall promptly provide guidance in the same manner as described above.
5. In the event that any adult is accused of violation of the Child and Youth Protection Policy, then he or she will be suspended from all activities dealing with children and youth pending the results of an investigation.

If child abuse allegations occur, workers shall:

1. Respond to each allegation in a serious manner;
2. Treat each allegation with confidentiality and respect for the privacy of all persons involved;
3. Cooperate fully with law enforcement;
4. Extend genuine care to all victims of child abuse or suspected abuse.

Conclusion

Adoption of these provisions contained in this Children and Youth Protection Policy will enable Bethesda Baptist Church to provide a more safe and secure environment for our church family and guests.