

# Harpeth Hills Church of Christ Child Protection Policy

## General

### **I. Goal**

It shall be the goal of the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ to provide a safe environment for the physical and emotional well being of all children participating in church activities, including participants in any daily or temporary childcare programs. The church's goal is to inform workers and enforce policies to ensure that all children are safe and well protected while attending scheduled activities.

Future revisions to this policy may be made with the authorization of the church leaders and ministry staff.

### **II. Definition of "children"**

The term "child" or "children" shall include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

## Selection and Screening Process

### **III. Pre-employment procedures for paid and volunteer workers**

It is the goal of the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ (herein referred to as the "Harpeth Hills Church" or as "Church") to adequately screen the applications of persons desiring to work with children participating in all church programs, including participants in any daily or temporary childcare programs.

### **IV. Volunteers must be members of the Church**

All volunteers who work with children must first be members of the Harpeth Hills Church.

### **V. Classification of workers**

In order to screen workers appropriately for their responsibilities, the ministerial staff person responsible for each division will categorize workers into two categories: primary and secondary. These terms refer to the relative levels of responsibility and risk, not to the ages of the children being served.

**Primary volunteer workers:** All paid staff members plus those volunteers in roles with greater responsibility or risk are classified as primary workers and should meet the primary screening standards.

Must be eighteen (18) years of age.

**Secondary volunteer workers:** Persons who occasionally interact with children and/or do so in less risky circumstances, i.e.: Sunday school teachers and volunteers who see children only in a group setting, on Church premises, or who interact with children in the presence of an approved

primary worker are classified as secondary workers. This category may also include parents of participants who help supervise activities.

Teen volunteer workers: Teen volunteer workers ages thirteen through seventeen may volunteer to serve in activities with children under primary supervision of two primary or secondary workers.

## **VI. Minimum age**

All primary and secondary volunteer workers must be 18 years of age or older. Younger persons may assist adults, but may not take the place of adult workers. The Church may employ responsible teens (under the age of 18) only in positions with and under the supervision of at least two adult workers. Teens who work in children's ministry must fill out an application and participate in a training series before being allowed to serve.

## **VII. Six-month rule**

No volunteer will be allowed to work with children in any capacity until they have been an active and participating member of the Church for a minimum of Six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation of the applicant for working with children.

The six-month rule may be waived with the authorization of the Church leadership and/or ministry staff, as in the case of a new staff member. If waived, program ministers must take additional steps to screen the applicant.

## **VIII. Volunteer applications**

Volunteer applicants must complete and sign an *Application For Volunteer Workers Who Will Work With Children*. All teen volunteers will complete and sign an application for Teen Volunteers. Applications will be submitted to Harpeth Hills Church.

The Church keeps confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Such information will be stored with access afforded only to appropriate Church staff on a need-to-know basis.

## **IX. References**

The minister in charge of the division in which the person will work must check and document at least two (2) references for each primary worker applicant and must conduct a reasonable inquiry into the character of secondary worker applicants. References may be checked by phone, mail or in person.

Whenever possible, the references could include:

- a person who has known the applicant for an extended period;
- a former supervisor; and
- a member of the applicant's family.

## **X. Confidential interviews**

All applicants desiring primary work with children must be interviewed for the work they desire to do. The ministry leader of the program in which the applicant will work conducts interviews. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy concerning prevention and response to child abuse and neglect must be discussed during the interview.

## **XI. Criminal background check**

A criminal background check shall be required for all children's worker positions, both employee and volunteer workers. No one who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children, or a crime which might endanger children, will be allowed to work with children. Completing the *Application for Volunteer Workers Who Will Work With Children* authorizes the Church to conduct these checks. Background checks will be kept confidential in a locked file with access afforded only to appropriate Church staff on a need-to-know basis.

The designated Church representative will conduct criminal background checks notifying the appropriate minister if a negative report is received.

## **XII. Vehicle safety**

Persons who drive Church-owned or privately-owned vehicles for conducting Church business or transporting children on a regular basis must maintain a current valid Tennessee drivers license, provide proof of insurance in such amounts as may be required by the Church and comply with all other Church transportation policies.

## **XIII. First aid training**

It will be the goal of the Church for most paid employees who work with children to maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR (or the equivalent) as required by applicable licensing requirements.

## **XIV. Acknowledgement of Church policies**

All applicants must acknowledge in writing that they understand the Church's policies pertaining to the protection of children and that they agree to abide by them. This requirement will be met by having applicants sign the *Acknowledgement of Receipt* form.

### Supervisory Requirements

It is the policy of the Church to provide adequate supervisory control of persons working with children participating in all Church programs, including daily or temporary childcare programs of the Church. The following regulations shall be applicable to all primary and secondary workers having contact with children participating in all Church programs:

## **XV. Safety of children**

It is the responsibility of all persons having contact with children participating in Church programs to promote the emotional and physical safety of the participants giving regard to all factors and circumstances known to them. If, in their opinion, an unsafe condition exists, such persons shall immediately take appropriate precautions to protect all children. Nothing contained in any other Church policy, procedure or instruction shall be construed to relieve persons having contact with children from this responsibility.

## **XVI. Infant through Kindergarten Identification System**

To reduce the possibility of kidnapping, the Church will have in place an identification system so that the adults who drop off a small child are the same adults who pick the child up. The identification system will not be necessary for children above the grade of kindergarten unless a parent specifically requests it in writing.

## **XVII. Two-adult rule**

It shall be the goal of Harpeth Hills Church of Christ that a minimum of two workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during a Church activity regardless of the number of participants, location or activity.

Some Youth Sunday School classes may have only one adult in attendance as the teacher while the class is in session. In these instances, doors to the classrooms either will be removed or will remain open. Doors and/or window blinds will remain open. With the above exception, at no time should an adult ever be in a room or an enclosed area alone with a child.

## **XVIII. Observation of children / Restroom Policy**

Church activities for children should be scheduled in areas visible from adjoining areas. Such visibility will be maintained by leaving curtains and blinds open and, wherever possible, by leaving the door to the room open. Reasonable exceptions to this rule may be made by the minister in charge where seclusion is necessary for rest provided two workers are present in the room at all times.

At no time will an adult meet alone with a child in any room where the door is closed or in an area where they cannot be seen. If a child needs to go to the restroom they are encouraged to use the restroom in their classroom and, if it is not available, an adult will escort the child to the restroom remaining outside the restroom monitoring the child until he/she returns to class.

## **XIX. Worker training**

Each new worker will be given a copy of the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ's Child Protection Policy. They must sign a statement indicating they have received and read this policy before they can begin working with children.

## **XX. Ministerial and staff oversight**

The ministerial staff member responsible for each division shall coordinate with the respective ministry coordinators to ensure ongoing supervision of all workers. This should include regular unannounced visits into classes and other program sites.

## **XXI. Awareness of Church policy**

The minister responsible for each division shall periodically review the definition of child abuse and neglect as defined by law and the Church's policy concerning these crimes. These reviews can be conducted either with the workers individually or in groups. Each worker shall acknowledge receipt of a written copy of the policy prior to the time they commence working with children. The signed acknowledgements shall be retained on file.

## **XXII. Children's pickup**

Children who are first grade or older are permitted to leave the area of the Church activity at the conclusion of the scheduled activity without further supervision of the workers unless otherwise instructed by the parent or guardian. If their parent or guardian does not pick up a child younger than first grade on time, the child will be kept by their teachers in the children's area where safe supervision can be continued until the parent or guardian is located. A child of twelve years or younger shall not be taken from or allowed to leave Church property, either unattended or in a group without specific parental permission.

## **XXIII. Release of claims**

Prior to any activity away from the Church building, a *Liability Release Form* will be necessary to be signed by the child's parent or legal guardian. Without the form signed and in the possession of the Church, the child will not be allowed to participate in the away activity.

## **XXIV. Definition of Child Abuse**

Simply stated, Child abuse is the bad treatment of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caretaker, someone living in their home or someone who works with, teaches or interacts with the child. Abuse is anything that causes injury or puts the child in danger of injury. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional or involve neglect. Examples would be:

Physical-hitting, shaking, burns, human bites, strangulation.

Emotional- constant disapproval, belittling, constant teasing..

Sexual- fondling, the showing of private parts by an adult, sexual intercourse, oral and anal sex, forcing a child to watch while others have sexual intercourse, Incest, exposure to pornography.

Neglect-absence of adequate food, shelter, emotional and physical, and not providing medical care.

Note: definition based upon the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), and the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2002.

## **Reporting and Responding to Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect**

### **XXV. Reporting policy**

It is the policy of the Church to report any incident of child abuse or neglect toward any child in the Church. This would include participants in temporary childcare programs. The guidelines follow:

- Do not treat any suspicion as frivolous.
- Notify an appropriate Church leader immediately. Begin the investigation right away.
- Suspend the accused person from the performance of duties involving children until the official investigation has been completed. This is the responsibility of the staff member in charge.
- Cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.
- Inform the victim and victim's family of the steps that are being taken, and continue to keep them advised of the status of the investigation. This is the responsibility of the Church leadership or their agent. If child abuse is confirmed, ask the victim and the victim's family what action they would like to take in the matter and fully cooperate to address their requests within the bounds of a legal and prudent response. (Church legal counsel will assist in this determination.)
- In an instance where child abuse is confirmed, the Church will immediately dismiss the worker from their position.
- If child abuse is confirmed, a legal and prudent response will be made with consideration for the victim's family. The Church may take action with the advice of legal counsel in consultation with law enforcement officials depending on the strength of the evidence available and after consideration of the victim and the victim's family's requests.
- The Church leadership, in consultation with legal counsel, will determine the amount of information that is believed to be appropriate to relate to the congregation.

### **XXVI. Reporting obligation**

By Tennessee law, anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is being physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected, is required to report this information. The report is to be made to public officials charged with the safety of children. (See appropriate reporting information in XXVI.) Church leadership should also be informed immediately of any suspected child abuse.

### **XXVII. Reports required**

Any worker of the Church who has cause to believe that a child's physical or emotional health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report that belief according to the following procedure:

- A. The worker shall report such belief to a member of the Church staff or appropriate Church leadership.
- B. The Church staff member or Church leadership will immediately report to one of the following:
  - 911 if the situation is a life-threatening emergency.
  - 1-877-237-0004 or 1-877-542-2873, the Central Intake Child Abuse Hotline, if abuse is suspected.

- C. The Church leader will notify the parents of the child (unless the parent is the person responsible for the abuse or neglect).
- D. The appropriate Church leader will contact legal counsel.
- E. The appropriate Church leader will notify the Church's insurance agent that an abuse report has been filed with the appropriate local or state agency.

### **XXVIII. Incident report**

The person making a report should identify:

- A. The name and address of the child.
- B. The name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child.
- C. Any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.

### **XXIX. Confidentiality**

All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with any official investigation. Any breach of this confidentiality by an employee of the Church shall be cause for immediate dismissal. The Church leader, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation, may authorize limited additional disclosure if it is necessary to protect other children from harm in the near future.

### **XXX. Investigation of alleged abuse or neglect**

No person shall attempt to conduct a detailed investigation either through examination or interrogation of the child, the accused person or a witness. It is acceptable to obtain a reasonable amount of information to determine if there is cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected. Interviews shall be conducted only by authorized officials of the agency to whom the suspected crime has been reported or, when appropriate, by legal counsel or persons representing the Church in an official capacity. All employees and volunteers of the Church shall cooperate with the official investigation as requested.

### **XXXI. Suspension of Church related duties**

A person accused of child abuse or neglect will be suspended from all Church related duties involving children. This would include all childcare, teaching, transportation or sponsorship duties. The Church leadership is not authorized to conduct an investigation of the incident but is allowed to monitor any such investigation and receive confidential information concerning the incident as may be necessary to determine issues concerning continuation of employment and compensation. The person accused should be suspended until the investigation is completed.

### **XXXII. Liaison with the community**

An appropriate Church leader will serve as the Church's sole access to the media. The Church should emphasize to the public its position on child abuse, its concern for the victim and the extensive steps being taken to address the safety of all children.

**Acknowledgement of Receipt of the  
Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect Booklet  
and  
the Child Protection Policy Statement**

I have been given a copy of the Tennessee Law TCA 37-1-403 (i), requiring all persons to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect, and the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ Child Protection Policy.

I have read and understand the Tennessee Law, as well as the Harpeth Hills Church of Christ Protection Policy. I understand that my services as an employee of The Harpeth Hills Church of Christ or as a volunteer worker who works with children at The Harpeth Hills Church of Christ is dependent on my strict adherence to these policies.

NAME (please print):

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SIGNATURE:

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WITNESS:

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DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Tennessee State Child Abuse Reporting Law

### TCA 37-1-403 (a)

“(1) Any person who has knowledge of or is called upon to render aid to any child who is suffering from or has sustained any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition shall report such harm immediately if the harm is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect or that, on the basis of available information, reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect.”

(2) Any such person with knowledge of the type of harm described in this subsection (a) shall report it, by telephone or otherwise, to the:

(A) Judge having juvenile jurisdiction over the child;

(B) Department of Children Services, in a manner specified by the Department, either by contacting a local representative of the department or by utilizing the department’s centralized intake procedure, where applicable;

(C) Sheriff of the county where the child resides; or

(D) Chief law enforcement official of the municipality where the child resides.”

(3) If any such person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been sexually abused, the person shall report such information in accordance with § 37-1-605, relative to the sexual abuse of children, regardless of whether such person knows or believes that the child has sustained any apparent injury as a result of such abuse.”

### Relevant Telephone Numbers:

Department of Children Services: 1-877-237-0004

Sheriff:

Davidson County            615-880-1945

Williamson County        615-790-5560

Call or google information for other counties.

Police Chief:

Davidson County            615-862-7400

Williamson County        615-371-0160 Brentwood

615-791-3246 Franklin

Call or google information for other cities.