

Safe at First

Child Abuse Prevention Policy



First Baptist Church
301 S. Center St. #500
Arlington, Texas 76010
www.fbca.org

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CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

First Baptist Church, Arlington is a "Family of Faith" that cares for others. This sense of care and responsibility extends especially to the youngest members of our congregation - the children. In a world where child abuse has become increasingly common, the church must be a safe haven where children experience first hand God's loving care.

The purpose of **Safe at First** is to strive to provide a secure environment for the children involved in church activities. Additionally, it serves to protect the best interest of our families, volunteers, and staff who work with children.

DEFINITIONS

Child: For the purposes of this document, a child or children is anyone under the age of 18 or any aged persons with special needs. This includes preschool, children, youth/students, and special needs unless specifically set out otherwise.

Volunteer: An 18 years or older person who has successfully completed the screening process.

Student Volunteer: A student who is under 18 years of age and has the approval of the Division Minister.

Supervisor: The individual – either paid or volunteer – responsible for the ministry area, as designated by the Division Minister.

Division Minister: Any person designated by the church to lead a ministry area.

You can see the current Texas "Family Code" at www.statutes.capitol.texas.gov/DOCS/FA/HTM/FA.261.HTM.

Texas law defines Abuse, Neglect, and Sexual Abuse in the following ways.

Abuse

The following acts or omissions by a person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare:

1. Mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
2. Causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
3. Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or

reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator, that does not expose the child to substantial risk of harm.

Neglect

1. Leaving a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of harm without arranging for necessary care for the child.
2. The following acts or omissions by a person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare:
 - a. Placing the child in or failing to remove the child from a situation that a reasonable person would realized requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and that results in bodily injury or a substantial risk of immediate harm to the child;
 - b. Failing to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for the child, with the failure resulting in or presenting a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury or an observable and material impairment to the child's growth, development, or functioning; or
 - c. Failing to provide the child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the child's life or health.

Sexual Abuse

1. Sexual contact, sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct, as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code; sexual penetration with a foreign object; incest; sexual assault; or sodomy inflicted on, shown to, or intentionally practiced in the child's presence if the child is present only to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any person.
2. Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual contact, sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct, as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code.
3. Compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code.
4. Causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene (as defined by the Penal Code) or pornographic.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services offers additional definitions and explanations of abuse and neglect, as well as a place to report concerns, on their website... www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/Recognizing.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS

The following procedures apply to all paid employees and church volunteers including clergy who will come in contact with children. Anyone desiring to work with children must complete an application form provided by the Division Minister.

1. Primary screening for all paid employees will include the following: complete an application form, personal interview, reference checks, authorized background check

form, and approved Child Abuse Prevention Training. The individual must supply a complete list of the last 3 work references as well as 3 personal references.

2. Volunteers will fill out a Volunteer Application form, have a personal interview, provide personal references, complete the authorized background check form, and complete the approved Child Abuse Prevention Training.
3. Volunteers may be a church member in good standing, a regular attendee, or person otherwise designated by the Division Minister.

SECURITY PROCEDURES

1. In the Preschool and Children Ministries, a security system will be utilized for church events. This system provides a **child name tag** and a **parent claim tag**. Note: If a parent returns without a security tag and the volunteer does not know them, the parent will be required to show a driver's license before the child is released. A child will only be released to an adult with the corresponding claim tag, unless a specific arrangement has been made with the Division Minister.
2. All rooms where children are cared for should have a window in the wall or door. The window is not to be covered at any time. If a room does not have a window, the door is to remain ajar at all times. When Preschool teachers assist a preschool child in using the restroom facilities, the restroom door should remain open. All teachers should avoid one on one situations. Staff, Division Ministers, and Emergency Response Team members should make frequent, random visits to classrooms and inspect areas of the church buildings that are isolated from view.
3. A reasonable effort will be made to honor the "two person rule" in all church activities including on and off campus and overnight events. The "two person rule" consists of having at least two approved volunteers and/or paid staff with each group of children. When working with children, volunteers should avoid isolated one-on-one situations by remaining in visible sight outside of the group. Note: A volunteer worker under the age of 18 will be considered a "secondary worker" and should not be left alone without an adult ("primary worker") being present in the room.
4. All church programs, activities, field trips, and overnight activities that involve children should be adequately staffed with trained employees and volunteers. Unless otherwise noted, the ratio of children-to-adults should not exceed 10-to-1.
5. Any contact with a child by an employee or volunteer outside of scheduled church activities should be arranged through a parent and will not be considered a church-sponsored activity.
6. A signed parental consent form is required for each child who participates in a church sponsored off-campus or overnight activity. Each consent form should be specific to the particular event.
7. A designated supervisor will be on duty each time children are in the care of the church or at a church-sponsored event. The supervisor – or "deputized person" – is directly responsible to the minister in charge of the activity. The supervisor is encouraged to make frequent, random visits to all classrooms and/or areas where children are assembled. The supervisor should remain at the event until it has concluded. All volunteers should be made aware of the identity and authority of the supervisor.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

All allegations of child abuse should be taken seriously and acted on immediately!

State law requires anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect to report those suspicions to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or to a local law enforcement agency. Any person making a report to DFPS is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in good faith. The reporter's name is also confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee. There are circumstances under which DFPS is required to disclose a reporter's identity to law enforcement, a court of law, or another state agency. A person who suspects child abuse or neglect, but fails to report it, can be charged with a misdemeanor or state jail felony. Remember, reporting suspected child abuse or neglect makes it possible for a child to get help.

You may call the Texas Abuse Hotline at **1-800-252-5400** to report abuse or neglect. The hotline is answered by DFPS Intake Specialists (who are all degreed professionals) 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You will be asked to provide your name and contact information. You will be asked to explain your concerns. The Intake Specialist might ask additional questions to determine if the situation that you describe meets the Texas Family Code's definitions of abuse or neglect.

You may report your allegations to the Texas Abuse Hotline through the Internet at **www.txabusehotline.org**. This secure website provides a way to explain your concerns in writing. You must provide your name and a valid e-mail address. Your identity remains confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee. Once an Intake Specialist processes your report, you will receive a confirmation e-mail with a Call Identification Number. The e-mail will also tell you whether or not your report was forwarded to a local DFPS office for further investigation.

Please note that the Internet Reporting System is for non-urgent situations. Receipt of internet reports may be delayed during times of high call volume to the Texas Abuse Hotline. The Internet Reporting System should NOT be used in urgent or emergency situations, including but not limited to:

1. Injury to a child age 5 or under or serious injuries to any age child;
2. Immediate need for medical care (including a suicidal child);
3. Sexual abuse where the perpetrator has access or will have access to the child in the near future;
4. A child age 5 or younger who is alone or is likely to be left alone in the next 24 hours; or
5. Any other situation you feel requires a response within 24 hours.

<p>Call in reports about these (and similar situations) to the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400. Always call local law enforcement first if a child is in imminent danger.</p>
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RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

First Baptist Church, Arlington Response Procedure

1. Document in writing everything that has been observed and done.
 - a. What led you to suspect abuse or neglect?
 - b. Did you witness something?
 - c. If so, what did you see?
 - d. Where and when did it occur?
 - e. Was anyone else present?
 - f. If someone said something to you, who was it (the child or someone else)?
 - g. What did the person say?
 - h. When did the person tell you?
 - i. Are you aware of anyone else who may have been told?
2. Upon learning of the likelihood of abuse or neglect, an oral report should be made to the supervisor, the Division Minister, or the Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation.
3. A written report should be made to the same person within 5 days. If one of the above individuals is not readily available, then the matter should be reported to the Associate Pastor of Operations or the Associate Pastor of Pastoral Care.
4. If the allegation involves the supervisor, the Division Minister, or one of the Associate Pastors, the matter should be reported to the Senior Pastor. If the concern involves the Senior Pastor, then it should be reported to the Chairperson of the Personnel Committee.
5. If the allegation involves a volunteer or paid church employee, that individual should be relieved of duty until the investigation is concluded.
6. If the allegation is made regarding a child, the family will be contacted, the appropriate action will be taken, and counseling will be offered. The church's attorney and insurance carrier will be notified immediately.
7. The Division Minister or Associate Pastor will provide the worker's file as part of the investigation into the allegation. This file should include the worker's application, references, results of criminal records check, and any other screening forms or background check results.
8. The Pastor will select the appropriate person to interact with the media, congregation, and individuals directly involved in the situation.
9. All allegations and investigations should be handled with due respect for the privacy and confidentiality of everyone involved.

PROCEDURES RELATED TO CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK

1. Every employee or volunteer of First Baptist Church, Arlington must sign a "Request for Criminal History Record Inquiry and Authorization" form which is hereinafter referred to as "CHRI."
2. All CHRI are processed and the necessary information forwarded to the firm or organization in charge of providing the CHRI reports.
3. Reports are read and examined by the Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation or his designee. The reports are confidential and the information used or discussed only as set forth below.

4. Upon receiving an adequate (no record found) CHRI report, the Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation will make a decision regarding the applicant's suitability for placement as a volunteer or employee working with children at First Baptist Church, Arlington.
5. No one will be allowed to work with children who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children. The following operates as an automatic disqualification of an individual from working with or coming into contact with children: a conviction, deferred adjudication, or plea of "no contest" to any sexual offense concerning children, including but not limited to rape, incest, murder, kidnapping, sodomy, assault, pornography, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. Other charges and/or convictions may not cause automatic disqualification but may require further investigation as set forth below. Failure to disclose information may be considered in determining disqualification.
6. CHRI reports that need further investigation should be handled as follows:
 - a. Additional information will be sought as quickly as possible by one or more members of the Executive Leadership Team from the police, district attorney, or other public official or office with knowledge of the situation.
 - b. An extensive interview will be done in a reasonable time with the employee or volunteer by one or more members of the Executive Leadership Team.
 - c. Upon completion of the investigation, a decision will be made by one or more members of the Executive Leadership Team, taking into consideration all relevant information brought forth by the investigation and by the employee or volunteer.
7. All CHRI reports are kept in a separate and secured file drawer. Only members of the Executive Leadership Team or their designee shall have access to said files.
8. Upon request, the employee or applicant may review his or her CHRI report on the property of First Baptist Church, Arlington. Under no circumstances will the individual be allowed to keep or photocopy the report. Any questions or disputes will be referred to the appropriate agency for clarification.
9. The First Baptist Church, Arlington Child Development Center is a state-licensed facility with its own process for CHRI as required by Texas state law.

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

Acknowledgement of Acceptance and Agreement

All applicants must acknowledge in writing that they understand the above policies pertaining to the protection of children and agree by their signature to abide by them.

"I confirm that I have read and understand the above *Safe at First* Child Abuse Prevention Policy and agree to abide by its terms and conditions."

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____