

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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The Gospel of Mark records that when people brought little children to Jesus, he took them in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them. It is our desire to bring children to Jesus in a manner where they are received and blessed by Him. Because we recognize that we are a reflection of God's love to those in our care, we take seriously our responsibility to them. The following guidelines are set forth to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we can bring our children and youth to the Savior.

We view ourselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide safe, quality care and instruction in all our ministries. All of our guidelines are designed to protect and promote a growing faith in God for each person involved. Everyone who teaches, helps, or cares for others under the sponsorship of Holy Trinity Church, whether paid or volunteer, must follow these policies and procedures. Everyone who works regularly with children or youth at Holy Trinity Church must submit an application, be familiar with the Child Protection Policy, and be notified that we will conduct a background check and screening. Be aware that the document that follows represents minimum requirements. Individual programs may impose additional guidelines as appropriate to their ministry setting.

I. STAFFING GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

A. Screening Process

All volunteers working with children and youth (ages 0-18 years) on a regular basis should be regular attendees who have been attending Holy Trinity Church for at least six months (some exceptions granted on an individual basis by Director/Pastor), have completed a Volunteer Application and been approved. In addition, volunteers will go through a screening process, which may include:

- Interview
- Reference Check
- Background Check

B. Classroom Supervision

1. Children and youth should be under adult supervision during the scheduled ministry program time.
2. The Director of Children's Ministry will make regular visits to the classrooms and nursery to ensure that children and youth are properly supervised.
3. Two-deep leadership is essential. Teachers should serve in teams so that at least two workers are in the room at all times.
 - a. Rooms that are subdivided into sections, easily visible, and regularly visited by the director may have one teacher with an exception.

- b. Every effort will be made to staff rooms for children ages 0-4 with at least one worker who is a woman.
 - c. Although we encourage family ministry, for your protection we ask that all teachers in one room should not be from the same family unless other workers are present or the class is in a public place, visited regularly by the Director.
4. The following ratios are staffing guidelines. (A minimum of two teachers is understood regardless of the number of students present.)

Nursery	One adult per 3-5 children
Pre-School	One adult per 6-8 children
Elementary	One adult per 10-12 children

5. If a class is unexpectedly short-staffed, the following steps will be taken:
- a. Combining Classes: Two classes may be combined, if practical, to meet the staffing requirements. A notice will be posted for parents telling them where to pick up their children.
 - b. Using Parent Helpers: If combining classes is not an appropriate option, a parent will be asked to stay to meet the staffing guidelines before additional students will be admitted to the classroom. The teacher will assume responsibility for informing the parent of pertinent policies (example: bathroom policy).
 - c. Canceling Class: Programs without adequate staffing will not commence. Additionally, programs, which continually experience staffing deficiencies, will be subject to review by the Session and possible cancellation.
6. When babysitting is provided for a church-sponsored event not defined as children's ministry (example: congregational meetings, Community Group meals, musical events, etc.) and church facilities are used, the following is required:
- a. An adult who has gone through the screening process must be present to ensure that protection policies are followed.
 - b. Two-deep leadership is required (one must be over 18 years old, the other may be a "helper" who is over 12 years old), as well as adherence to the staffing ratios listed above.

C. Proper Display of Affection

Touch is essential in nurturing lives. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate. Be aware of and sensitive to differences in children's development, family backgrounds, individual personalities and special needs. The following guidelines will help promote pure, genuine and positive displays of God's love:

1. Hugs & Kisses Younger children are especially affectionate. Use discretion in initiating full contact, body-to-body hugs. Kissing on the lips is inappropriate. One-arm side hugs or hand-to-arm hugs are appropriate, especially for the older children/students.
2. Lap Sitting Appropriate sitting on laps may occur with younger children. Discourage lap sitting with older children. Rather, encourage them to sit next to you.
3. Casual Touch Gentle contact during activities may be on children's heads, shoulders, arms and hands. Roughhousing and physical discipline should never be used.

Ministry Director and Coordinators should be especially sensitive to proper/improper contact between adults and children.

D. Special Events/Overnights

1. Field Trips and Special Events
 - a. Church-sponsored off-campus activities must be pre-approved by the appropriate ministry director (Director of Children's Ministries, Youth Pastor, or Senior Pastor). Parents will be notified at least one week prior to the outing.
 - b. Proper written consent and medical release forms are required for each child participating in off-campus activities. These forms are available from the Director of Children's Ministry.
 - c. Appropriate adult/student ratios will be ensured by the staff member or volunteer in charge (See Staffing Guidelines listed above). Again, two-deep leadership is essential for any excursion.
 - d. When transportation is involved in an activity, all drivers must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance. The number of persons per car should never exceed the number of seat belts.

2. Overnight Policy

- a. All overnight activities must be pre-approved by the appropriate ministry director/pastor.
- b. No overnight activities for children younger than 6th grade will be allowed (except for parent/child outings).
- c. All overnight activities must have a ratio of two leaders for every 10 children.
 - Again, two-deep leadership is required.
 - One of the leaders should be an adult who has gone through the application and screening process. Each leader will be assigned a group of children that they will be responsible for throughout the duration of the overnight event.
 - Never permit sleeping arrangements where one leader is with only one student/child.

II. DISCIPLINE POLICY

The Session desires to encourage, stimulate and foster the Christian growth of all participants. Because of this, students will not be allowed to disrupt the classroom and/or hinder the growth and learning of others. The purpose of discipline is not punishment for wrongdoing, but assistance in doing what is right. All interaction regarding discipline needs to carefully consider a child's dignity and fragile life. Physical punishment or intimidation will not be used. The Director of Childrens Ministries is available to assist with a disruptive child if needed.

III. SPECIAL CONCERNS IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY (Birth-5th Grade)

A. Architectural Considerations

- Rooms for children under age three: use gates to help keep children contained.
- Preschoolers will use rooms with adjoining toilets whenever possible, preventing the need for children to leave the room. Small toilets are advisable so children can use them with little assistance.
- The door into the nursery should remain locked to prevent anyone from entering unnoticed.
- Nursery changing tables are in full view.

B. Drop-Off Policy

Children should never be dropped off in a classroom without a leader present, one of which has gone through the application process. Generally, supervision will be provided 10 minutes before a program starts.

C. Registration Policy

1. Programs for nursery children (ages 0-2) provide a weekly sign-in sheet. Parents are required to complete the information requested.
2. Parents shall fill out a registration card for any child who attends any of the regular church programs. These forms are available in each classroom/nursery.
3. Children should be registered and attend the class at their age, grade or development level.

D. Security System (Infants and Toddlers)

1. All infants and toddlers will be issued a claim tag. The claim tag is used to release children back to their parents.
2. A child will be released only to the person with the child's claim tag.
3. If the security tag is lost, verification of a person's identity will be needed before the child can be released. A coordinator, director, or Pastor will be responsible to verify an identity.
4. Parents are advised not to enter the nursery/classroom when picking up their child unless requested to do so.

E. Diaper Changing Policy

Due to the architectural safety precautions and staffing requirements, men and women may both change children's diapers using the changing pads provided. Children under the age of 14 should refrain from changing diapers. Nursery changing tables need to be in full view.

F. Bathroom Policy

1. Preschoolers

A teacher should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed or go into a bathroom stall with a child and shut the door.

If a classroom for preschoolers does not have a bathroom, an adult should escort a child/children to the hallway bathroom. The supervising adult should remain outside the bathroom door and then escort the child/children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the supervising adult should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the supervising adult should prop open the bathroom door and leave open as the child is assisted.

2. Grade Schoolers

Any time a child is out of the classroom for any reason, he or she should be escorted or supervised by a teacher at all times. Teachers are required to keep track of any student in their care. Follow the guidelines outlined above for hallway bathroom use.

Parents are strongly encouraged to take their children to the bathroom prior to class.

IV. OUR READY RESPONSE TO ABUSE WHICH OCCURS IN THE MINISTRY SETTING OF HOLY TRINITY CHURCH AND TO ABUSE THAT OCCURS ELSEWHERE BUT OF WHICH WE ARE MADE AWARE

A. Suspicion of Abuse

Anyone working with children/youth (ages 0-18) in the ministries of Holy Trinity Church shall immediately report to the designated individual or board member (Director of Children's Ministry, Youth Pastor, Senior Pastor, or Session Member) any suspicions of child abuse or neglect which may indicate a need for further investigation. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person nor the Director to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. Possible indications of abuse or neglect can include:

- Pattern of injuries not typical for everyday childhood accidents (i.e., marks or bruises on the back, buttocks or abdomen, symmetrical or patterned bites or bruises, skin markings or welts in the shape of a hand, belt or rope)
- Very poor hygiene or obvious lack of medical care
- Sexual knowledge or speech not appropriate for the child's age
- Overtly sexual behavior or demonstrations

- Extreme reluctance to go to a particular place or be with a particular person; withdrawal and depression
- Allusion to incidents in writing or through prayer request

B. Confidentiality

At all times keep the information confidential. If your director of ministry is unavailable, please contact a pastor or session member.

C. Communication with the Child/Student

Rather than a teacher observing signs of possible abuse, a child may approach a trusted adult with testimony of abuse. In such a case, be sure to take the child's word seriously. Listen attentively and calmly, reassuring the child that he/she is not at fault and was right in telling you about the problem. Do not promise the child you will not tell anyone.

D. Report Form

Immediately contact your ministry director (Director of Children's Ministries or Youth Pastor). Together fill out a Suspicion of Child Abuse Report Form.

E. Summary of Steps

1. Gently affirm the child.
2. Report to the appropriate director of ministry.
3. Immediately fill out report form with the director of ministry.

F. Assessing the Report

The Director/Pastor of the ministry, along with (the Pastor and Session) will make every effort to make an assessment within 24 hours of the report. A review committee consisting of a lawyer, doctor, and psychologist/psychiatrist (preferably one experienced in working with children) may also assist in assessing the report.

If after the review it is determined that the investigation should continue, the Session will review how best to proceed.

V. CONTINUING THE INVESTIGATION - RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS

A. **Initial Response** (The following steps should be handled by the Pastoral Staff and/or Session).

1. Document all your efforts at handling the incident.
2. Notify the parents.
3. Report the incident to the church's insurance company and lawyer.
4. Report the incident to the proper authorities.
5. Notify the accused after the safety of the child is secured.
6. Appoint a spokesperson.
7. Prepare a public statement to answer the media and to convey the news to the congregation.

B. **Responding to Alleged Victim**

1. Do not minimize or deny the allegation or assess blame.
2. Assure victim that the church is taking allegations seriously.
3. Make sure the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
4. Provide ongoing support and assurance of acceptance to victim and the victim's family.
5. Help the family find professional counseling if desired.
6. Commit to helping the victim and the family toward full restoration.

C. **Responding to Alleged Perpetrator**

1. Treat the accused with dignity and support.
2. Remove the leader immediately from his/her position until the investigation is finished.
3. Put in place a process of healing and restoration.
4. Future restoration to church fellowship should be handled with great care, taking the feelings of the victim and the victim's family into consideration.
5. If the accused confessor is convicted, concern and support should be given, with the goal of forgiveness and restoration. However, no convicted child abuser should ever be placed in a position to work with children or youth. Other appropriate places of service should be encouraged.

Protection Policy Sources:

Better Safe Than Sued by Jack Crabtree. Loveland, CO: Group, 1998.

The Focus on the Family Complete Book of Baby and Child Care by The Focus on the Family Physicians Resource Council. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1997.

It Should Never Happen Here by Ernest J. Zarra III. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997.

Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church by Richard Hammar, Steven Klipowicz, and James Cobble. Matthews, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 1993.

When Child Abuse Comes to Church by Bill Anderson. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1992.

Facing the Issue of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church by Christian Service Brigade.