

# Children and Youth Protection Policy

## Purpose

Greenwood First Baptist Church (GFBC) and staff recognize that our children and youth are entrusted to the care of adults who lead church programs and activities both on and off GFBC property. As a people of faith, it is our desire and calling to create environments that are welcoming and free from danger and harm and where people can grow and prosper in their faith journey. We especially take very seriously our charge to care for the "least of these".

GFBC is committed to creating a caring and secure environment in which the children and youth that have been given to us to nurture and care for are protected from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and in which church staff, teachers, and volunteer workers are protected from potential false allegations of abuse. We recognize that by protecting our children and youth, and reducing the possibility of abuse, we are also taking critical steps necessary to protect the entire ministry of our church.

The general policy and procedure shall apply to all persons, whether compensated staff, teachers, or volunteer workers, all church members, visitors, and guests. As situations arise in the future which are not adequately covered by a specific procedure or policy, this policy may be revised.

## Definitions

**GFBC:** Greenwood First Baptist Church

**Child(ren):** Any person from birth through grade 5 involved in programs provided at or sponsored by GFBC.

**Youth:** Any person in grade 6 through grade 12 and under 18 years of age.

**Regular Teachers and Workers:** Any paid or volunteer worker who serves in a GFBC ministry to children or youth four or more times in a three month period. They agree to abide by the policies of the leadership and government of the church in their service.

**Scheduled Teachers and Workers:** Any other paid or volunteer worker who serves in some capacity in a GFBC ministry to children or youth fewer than four times in a three month period. They agree to abide by the policies of the leadership and government of the church in their service.

**Child Abuse and Neglect:** Any wrongful treatment of a child or youth that results in any non-accidental injury to the child, including physical, emotional, and/or sexual injury.

- Physical abuse includes non-accidental injuries, burns, bruises, broken bones, or cuts.
- Sexual abuse includes adults engaging in sexual acts with children or youth or involving children or youth in pornography or prostitution.
- Emotional abuse means an injury to the child's or youth's intellectual or psychological capacity as evidenced by a discernible and substantial impairment to the child's or youth's ability to function.
- Neglect includes not providing the child or youth with necessary food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, or supervision appropriate to the child's or youth's age and development.

## Policies and Procedures

1. GFBC is subject to South Carolina law Title 63, Chapter 7(also referred to as SC Children's Code) regarding the protection of children and youth.
2. GFBC will seek to prevent the abuse of children and youth when they are participating in church programs. Preventive measures shall include screening, training, and supervision of custodians of children and youth, including particularly teachers and workers as defined in this policy.
3. The GFBC staff member accountable for any GFBC program that involves children or youth will insure that appropriate practices are implemented within those programs and activities to reduce the risk of abuse. The specific circumstances of each program shall be considered in the development of those program-specific practices.

## Training

1. All teachers and workers will be given a written copy of this policy. They will be asked to sign and affirm that they have read and understand this policy when applying to serve with the children's or youth ministry.
2. Information and instruction concerning this policy and related abuse issues involving children and youth shall be offered periodically, and at least annually, at GFBC.

3. This information and instruction is required training for each new regular and scheduled teacher and worker involved in the custody of children and youth.
4. Whenever this policy is changed significantly, previously qualified teachers and workers will be required to read the revised policy, attend training, and commit to the new requirements.

### **Screening**

1. All regular and scheduled teachers, workers, and other persons involved in the custody and care of children and youth at GFBC must have been a member of the church for at least six months. Exceptions to this provision will be made in cases where the GFBC staff member directly responsible for the ministry in question recommends that an exception be made in the case of a given individual.
2. Background checks will be completed on all staff members, regular teachers and workers, and scheduled teachers and workers. The cost of these checks will be borne by GFBC. These will be conducted by the church administrator and GFBC staff person directly involved in the ministry. The results, along with all personal information required, will be kept confidential in a locked area by the church administrator. Those convictions that would disqualify a staff member, teacher, worker, or volunteer include all crimes of violence, abuse, or felonies against people, especially children or youth. Other crimes revealed will be reviewed by the ministerial staff.
3. The personnel files of all compensated GFBC staff working with children and youth shall include the application and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on these forms.
4. All regular and scheduled teachers and workers must complete an introductory training session that includes a review of the material contained in this *Child and Youth Protection Policy*. This session will take place once each year under the direction of the GFBC staff member directly responsible for the ministry specific to that person.

### **Supervision**

1. Teachers, workers, and other persons involved in the custody of children and youth at GFBC should observe the "two adult rule" which requires an adult working with children or youth to be accompanied by another responsible worker. The "two adult rule" should be followed whenever possible. The "two adult rule" must be followed strictly in areas considered to be isolation settings. The "two adult rule" may include and allow for scenarios in which an adult regular teacher or worker is assisted by a youth worker who is older than the children or youth being supervised, subject to approval by the GFBC staff member directly responsible for the ministry.
2. One-on-one supervision of a minor or any other exception to the "two adult rule" is acceptable only in the event it occurs in a public area that is not considered to be an isolation setting or if parental permission is received in advance. Pastoral and ministerial staff are exempt from this policy.
3. All rooms used by adult and minors together should be accessible (unlocked doors) and have open visibility (a window in the door or the door left wide open).
4. Compensated church staff or their designees shall make unannounced visits to scheduled classes or small group situations involving children, youth, teachers, and workers.
5. Parents or legal guardians are welcome to observe any activity involving their child or youth.
6. Physical force will not be used except in self-defense or when deemed necessary to prevent possible injury. Teachers and workers will work in teams in all significant behavior problems using positive verbal instruction and defining behavioral expectations.
7. All planned children's or youth activities away from church property require a signed permission statement from parents or guardians of the participating children or youth.
8. The parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that a child or youth is not left alone in an unsupervised area. Pick up of children up to and including kindergarteners shall be by a family member unless notification is provided for other arrangements.

### **Procedures for Reporting Incidents of Abuse**

1. Incidents of abuse that occur or are reasonably believed to have occurred at GFBC, and where a child's or youth's physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected, shall be reported as soon as possible to the county Department of Social Services (DSS) or to a local law enforcement agency. Concurrently with the notification to DSS or the law enforcement agency, any such incident must also be reported to the GFBC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry who, in turn, will inform the Senior Pastor. The staff person and/or Senior Pastor shall verify that a report has been made to appropriate authorities.

2. Reports to local authorities can be made orally, by telephone, or otherwise. Reports from persons requesting to remain anonymous shall be made by telephone in the presence of a witness of the reporter's own choosing to verify the filing of the oral report. Such a witness may include the GFBC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved.
3. Organizations that routinely use GFBC facilities and have reporting procedures of their own shall follow those established reporting practices. Copies of their procedures should be on file in the church office. In addition to following their notification procedures, however, any outside organization that uses GFBC facilities shall also notify the GFBC Senior Pastor or Church Administrator as soon as possible about any such incident involving any persons affiliated with that organization. Those organizations that routinely use GFBC facilities without their own reporting procedures must follow those of GFBC at their own expense.
4. The identity of any person making such a report, pursuant to South Carolina law, will be kept confidential by the agency or department receiving the report except as provided by law. Such exceptions would include DSS providing such information to the law agency investigating the report.
5. GFBC will follow and comply with Section 63-7-310 of the code of laws of South Carolina concerning reporting of abuse.

### **Procedures for Responding to Questionable Conduct**

1. All members of GFBC, staff, and other adults participating in programs on the property of GFBC are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse of children. They shall caution others that activities they observe are, or may appear to be, questionable.
2. Questionable behavior, when observed, shall be reported to the GFBC staff person directly responsible for the specific area of ministry involved.

### **Procedures for Responding to Abuse Allegations**

1. Facts and circumstances of an incident shall be documented. Concurrently with the notification to the DSS, the GFBC staff person directly responsible for the area of ministry involved or the Senior Pastor shall be notified of the incident of abuse. In the event the person making the report wishes to remain anonymous or otherwise prefers not to document the report, the GFBC staff person or Senior Pastor notified of the incident shall document the report.
2. The Senior Pastor or designee shall be responsible for securing the safety of the potential victim in cases where DSS is not responsible for the potential victim, for immediate notification of parents/guardian of the potential victim, and for notification of the person accused of the abuse. The safety of the potential victim must be safeguarded before contacting the person(s) accused of the abuse.
3. In the event any in-depth investigation becomes necessary, it shall be carried out by DSS and/or appropriate law enforcement personnel and not by church personnel.
4. Person(s) accused shall be immediately relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with children or youth until any investigation is completed and the allegations are cleared or charges are formally brought against the accused.
5. The Senior Pastor or designee shall report incidents of abuse to legal counsel on behalf of the church, the liability insurer for the church and the Diaconate. The Senior Pastor or designee shall document all steps taken in the course of handling the incident or report. The documentation shall be kept in a locked, confidential file maintained by GFBC.
6. All parties involved in the incident or reasonably suspected incident, including the accuser, the accused, and the victim shall be treated with dignity, support, and love. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible.
7. The Senior Pastor shall be the sole spokesperson for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned. However, where appropriate the Senior Pastor may designate another individual to act in such a capacity with regard to a given case. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible.