



OOLTEWAH
BAPTIST CHURCH

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

September 2024

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Ooltewah Baptist Church (OBC) is called to create a loving community that seeks to secure the welfare of its members and guests. OBC is committed to protecting all children participating in its activities and programs. Its Child Protection Policy protects minors and the adults who minister to them.

This Child Protection Policy covers any person employed by or volunteering at OBC in any capacity involving minors (anyone under the age of 18) and all outside organizations using OBC facilities for minor programs. OBC requires all staff members and volunteers working with children, students, and other vulnerable populations to adhere to this Child Protection Policy.

An application process is followed to be employed by or serve as a volunteer in any capacity involving minors. The application process is open to active adult members or regular attenders of OBC. No worker will be approved and scheduled to serve unless they meet the qualifications set by OBC. An active member and regular attender are defined as someone active in the church's life.

The first step in the application process is for prospective workers to read, affirm, and sign this Child Protection Policy, answering a series of questions, including giving permission for OBC to do a background check. The remaining steps include a meeting with the ministry leader, calling references, and completing a background check. Then, the time to train will be scheduled.

After you have carefully read this policy, please sign and return the Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement along with the application.

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SECTION 1

GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 Abuse Tolerance

OBC has **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer at OBC to act in the best interest of all children in every program. If staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to a ministerial staff member.

1.2 Enforcement of Policies

OBC staff members and volunteers are charged with diligently enforcing all policies. Violations of these policies result in the inability to volunteer at OBC.

Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor and his staff. Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from activities and programming that involves children, students, or vulnerable populations at OBC. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or child protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act will be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, students, or vulnerable populations at OBC.

1.3 Sexually Oriented Materials

Staff members and volunteers in ministries involving minors at OBC are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of minors.

1.4 Tobacco Use

Because tobacco is a common “grooming” gift, OBC requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of minors or their parents, or during OBC activities or programs. OBC is a tobacco-free facility.

1.5 Intoxicants

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any OBC facility while traveling with minors, or while working with or supervising minors.

SECTION 2 REPORTING

2.1 Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors

In keeping with our commitment to provide a safe and secure environment any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and must be reported to law enforcement, in accordance with this policy and state law. This reporting is required by state law to take place within 24 hours, but our policy requires immediate reporting.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a ministerial staff member of OBC. Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ minors for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a minor for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers must report ‘grooming’ behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a ministerial staff member.

2.2 Reporting Violation of Policy

OBC staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that violates these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to a ministerial staff member.

Employees and volunteers are required to verbally report a policy violation to a ministerial staff member within 24 hours of the incident. After receiving a report from a staff member or volunteer, the Senior Pastor will be immediately notified. If the reported action is potentially criminal and not merely an OBC policy violation, the Senior Pastor will notify the proper law enforcement authorities immediately upon his notification. If it is a policy violation alone, the Senior Pastor or his designee will meet with the worker for a review of the incident.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act will be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students, or vulnerable populations at OBC.

2.3 Reporting Suspicions of Abuse to Law Enforcement Agencies

As required by Tennessee law: Any person with a reasonable cause to believe a child is being abused or neglected must, under the law, immediately report to the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services or to local law enforcement. The reporter can remain anonymous. Everyone in Tennessee is a mandated reporter. If you suspect abuse or neglect, call 877-237-0004.

Staff members and volunteers at OBC are required to report suspicions of child abuse, neglect, or other harmful behavior immediately to law enforcement. It is paramount that the appropriate leadership be involved in this communication process, but communication with authorities must be made by the volunteer or staff member initially notified.

From an internal perspective, it is certainly desirable that information be shared all the way to the Senior Pastor's office. But under no circumstances shall the chain of immediate notification of law enforcement be broken where the suspected act is criminal or thought to be potentially criminal.

2.4 Response to Report of Abuse

While every worker is responsible, per policy, for immediately reporting to law enforcement, the Senior Pastor will oversee the overall response on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs. In the case of a Senior Pastor's absence or where the Senior Pastor is the subject of the investigation, the chairman of deacons and vice-chairman shall fill all the roles assigned to the Senior Pastor in the policies and procedures.

SECTION 3 SUPERVISION ON MINORS

3.1 Grades 5 and Under

No child will ever be left unattended in areas of campus utilized by OBC Kids during programming or classes. OBC Kids staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. If a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others or to a location easily observed by others. If a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.

After every program or event, OBC Kids staff and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom are checked before leaving. On the children's playground, staff members and volunteers are to circulate, watching children during play periods and paying attention to areas that are not easily seen from all viewpoints. Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

3.2 Grades 6 – 12

Student Ministry staff members or volunteers will be responsible for ensuring that areas of campus utilized by OBC Student Ministry are monitored during Sunday Grow Groups and Wednesday Gatherings. This will include unobserved monitoring of staff members, volunteers, and students in student's classrooms. No student will ever be left unattended in the Student Center or during Student Ministry programs or meetings.

Student Ministry staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual student in any room or building. In the event that a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single student, that staff member or volunteer will take the student to a room or building occupied by others or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a student desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or volunteer after a regular program has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members are present.)

After every program or event, Student Ministry staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving. Any two students together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area. The Student Center will remain locked until there is adequate adult supervision to open it.

3.3 Release of Minors Grades 5 and Under

At any time a child is entrusted to OBC staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the child's safety and well-being. Staff members and volunteers must ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

OBC Kids Ministry staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. It is presumed that a person who drops off a child or student has the authority to pick up the child. If staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact the staff member in charge of that ministry before releasing the child. Parents and their children will be given a sticker that correlates to each other at drop-off. The parent will present their sticker to the volunteer, who will check the number to ensure it matches the child they are picking up. If the parent does not have their sticker, the volunteer should get the staff member in charge for permission to release the child(ren)

3.4 Release of Minors Grades 6-12

At any time a minor is entrusted to OBC staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for that minor's safety and well-being. Staff members and volunteers must ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Student dismissal will be done as approved in writing by parents/guardians at the beginning of the ministry year or at the first activity attended. This can be updated or changed at any time. Student Ministry staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing students in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. It is presumed the person who drops off a student has the authority to pick up the student. If a minor intends to leave the OBC campus with an unauthorized party, express notice from a guardian of the minor in question must be provided. Any minor of legal driving age, assuming parental permission and the appropriate licensure, may transport themselves and immediate family members.

Apart from express notice of a guardian, minors may not provide transportation to other minors. If staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact the staff member in charge of that ministry before releasing the child.

3.5 Worker To Child Ratios Grades 5 and Under

OBC is committed to providing adequate supervision in all OBC Kids programs. Accordingly, the following worker-to-child ratios will be observed:

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	4
Toddlers, 2-3 yrs. old	2	8
Preschool, 4-5 yrs. old	2	10
Elementary	2	16

If a worker is ‘out of ratio,’ it is his or her responsibility to notify the staff person in charge immediately. Staff will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to bring worker-to-child ratios into compliance with policy immediately.

3.6 Worker to Child Ratios Grades 6-12

OBC is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Student Ministry programs. Accordingly, the following ratios will be observed for Student Ministry activities and programs:

1. At least 2 staff members or volunteers will supervise groups up to and including 10 students.
2. At least 3 staff members or volunteers will supervise groups ranging from 11 to 29 students.
3. At least 4 staff members or volunteers will supervise groups larger than 30 students.

If a worker is ‘out of ratio,’ it is his or her responsibility to notify the Student Leader or volunteer in charge immediately. The Student Leader or volunteer in charge will make diligent efforts to immediately bring staff member/volunteer worker-to-child ratios into compliance with this policy.

3.7 Rotations of Age Groups

The church may rotate the age group with which the volunteer works. However, workers will generally not be allowed to move up or “promote” annually with the same group of children. Nor will they generally be allowed to work in the same age group for an indefinite period. This is to help prevent a worker from developing an inappropriate relationship with a specific minor over a period of time and to prevent a person from remaining with a group of their own age preference.

3.8 Sleeping Arrangements

It is anticipated that certain Children and Student Ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff/volunteers (i.e., lock-ins, mission trips, ski trips, etc.). In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. Two (2) adults (unrelated) are the minimum for an overnight student activity. All adult leaders present must have previously completed OBC’s application and screening process.
2. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be approved by the Student Leader prior to the activity.
3. If any students are awake, one of the leaders must also be awake and monitor students to ensure safe behavior.
4. Leaders should check with parents and use good judgment regarding movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
5. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn.
6. If a sleepover on campus involves both boys and girls, they must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by student leaders of the same gender.
7. Staff and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff and volunteers should never physically touch a student.
8. Whenever possible, at least two staff members or volunteers will sleep in the same room as students or in an adjoining room with the door between the rooms kept open.
9. If overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a “one-person-to-one bag or blanket” rule will be observed.

10. Where multiple minors are in the same room, such as a hotel room or a room at a camp, great care should be taken to equalize the age, size, and developmental ability of each person in the room. Room assignments should avoid, as much as reasonably possible, any inequity that might increase vulnerability for peer-to-peer abuse.

3.9 Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may sometimes be able to provide transportation for minors. The following guidelines must be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of minors:

1. Minors should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops in a non-public place are not allowed.
2. Employees and volunteers are never to provide transportation circumstances that leave only one minor in transport.
3. Employees and volunteers should avoid physical contact with minors while in vehicles.
4. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving OBC vans or vehicles owned or rented by OBC unless in an emergency.
5. No drivers under age 25 may drive OBC-owned or rented vehicles.

3.10 Nudity and Clothing Change

Employees and volunteers at OBC should never be nude in the presence of minors in their care. In the event of a situation (pool party, rafting trip, etc.) that may call for changing clothes, showering, etc., employees/volunteers will exercise caution during these activities to ensure nothing immoral, illegal, immodest, or unethical takes place.

SECTION 4 BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE

4.1 Nursery Children Diapering and Toilet Training

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers must observe the following policies:

4.1.1 Diapering

1. Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
2. Changing diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
3. Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
4. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the information sheet ("Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.")
5. Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon changing their diaper.
6. Children should be changed only at/on changing stations.

4.1.2 Toilet Training

1. No child will be forced to toilet train. Parents of 4-year-olds will be asked to come change their child's diaper.

2. Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
3. When children are taken into bathrooms, the door will be left partially open.
4. Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
5. Parents should be consulted on each child's progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card ("Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.")
6. Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
7. "Accidents" should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. If the parent has not furnished a clothing change, extra clothing and diapers are available from in the children's area.

4.2 School-Age Children

School-age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based on their individual capabilities.

Staff members and volunteers should never take an individual child to the restroom. If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance.

If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

4.3 Special Needs

Parents will instruct staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special needs individuals. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change all special needs individuals' diapers.

SECTION 5

INTERACTION WITH A MINOR

5.1 Children Grades 5 and Under

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interactions with children while participating in the OBC Kids Ministry programs. Another adult who has completed the OBC application and screening process or the parents should always be present. This includes all electronic communication, including but not limited to text, Facebook Messenger, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp.

5.2 Students Grades 6-12

OBC recognizes that meeting students' emotional needs may occasionally require staff members and volunteers to minister to them individually. Staff members and volunteers should follow the guidelines below when interacting with students.

1. Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with individual students when other staff or volunteers (unrelated) are present, and interactions can be easily observed.
2. In the event a closed-door meeting must occur, the door must remain unlocked. The doors of the said room must have a window in it where the room can be observed from the outside.
3. One-on-one communication via social media and/or text messaging with those 18 and under is prohibited. Leaders/teachers must message students only in a group chat on an approved platform.

5.3 Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between employees or volunteers and minors should be positive and uplifting. OBC employees and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of minors.

To this end, employees and volunteers should not talk to minors in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, employees and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of minors.

5.4 Physical Contact

OBC is committed to protecting minors in its care. To this end, OBC has implemented a 'physical contact policy' that promotes a positive, nurturing environment for OBC Kids and Student Ministries while protecting minors. The following guidelines are to be followed:

1. Pats on the back, fist bumps, and similar forms of physical contact between employees or volunteers and minors are important for minor's development and are suitable in the church setting. However, if any measure of doubt is present, one should simply choose to refrain from initiating or engaging in physical contact.

2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should be immediately reported to the staff person in charge of that ministry. No touching should take place in the mouth, breast, buttocks, or genital areas.
3. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable locations or when in the presence of staff members, and volunteers. When physical contact is open to observation, it is much less likely that touching will be inappropriate or misinterpreted.
4. Physical contact in any form should not give the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of employees or volunteers in ministries involving minors must always foster trust. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
5. Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant minor. A minor's preference not to be touched must be respected.
6. Employees and volunteers are responsible for protecting minors under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touching by others.
7. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by an employee or volunteer must be reported immediately to the staff person in charge of that ministry.

5.5 Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with minors and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities with any minor in the program.

Student ministry group discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex, and human sexuality. These lessons will occur in group settings and will convey the church's views on these topics in accordance with Article 4 of the OBC Constitution.

5.6 Discipline

It is OBC's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline to manage minors. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force in retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by minors. Minors are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management.

1. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:
2. Verbally redirect the minor before physically intervening. With younger minors, some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a minor who is hitting another).
3. If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the minor away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the minor).
4. Provide the minor with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the minor with a clear explanation of your expectations. ("Jamie, you didn't stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will upset the minor. Do not physically hold the minor in time-out.
5. Provide the minor with a chair to sit in or a "spot" to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.

6. Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the minor's life (3 years old = 3 minutes).
7. Monitor the minor through the entire time-out. For longer time-outs, give intermittent praise to reassure the minor and keep them on task. ("Jamie, you're doing a great job of sitting quietly just 2 more minutes.")
8. Praise the minor once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Follow this with praise.
9. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the appropriate ministry staff. Parents may be requested to come assist with their child.