

Date Approved/Revised: 11/3/2025
Approved By:

PREVENTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE

Statement of Policy:

Members of Gospel Way Baptist Church come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and needs. Many of Gospel Way Baptist Church ministries have young married and single adults who have children in our preschool, children and youth areas. Church leadership is committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for children and youth who attend the Church or any sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect Church leaders from accusations or suspicions.

Church leadership recognizes the need to have formal, written policies and guidelines to help prevent the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor. The following procedures are not based on a lack of trust in a particular worker but instead are needed to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire Church body.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." Mark 10:14, 16

*"Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful."
1 Corinthians 4:2*

Procedures:

1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

.01 By fostering awareness of appropriate, as well as inappropriate behaviors in the presence of minors, Gospel Way Baptist Church, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another.

.02 Leadership recognizes that certain people have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of Gospel Way Baptist Church's children and youth, and we wish to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. At the same time however, we have set certain criteria on those adults who choose to serve in this capacity, so as to protect the well-being of our children and youth. We also recognize the number of single parent households with no positive male influence as a real problem in society. Therefore we encourage the involvement of positive role models from our youth and from married couples working with our children and youth.

.03 Our intent is not to be judgmental, for we are all accountable to God. We rely on God's wisdom in developing, implementing and carrying out His will through these guidelines. Compassion and truth will be the guiding forces for any investigation, reporting or follow-up action that results from the procedures as outlined in this policy.

.04 Congregational support is critical for adherence to this policy. The limited nature of our resources, and our desire to devote as much as possible to the work of the Lord, dictate that this policy be fully understood by every member of our congregation and extended family. This will enable staff and leadership to do what is within their power to preserve the Church resources for the work of the Lord.

.05 In the context of these procedures, the words “worker” or “workers” can mean any of the following individuals who provide services or work support for the care and oversight of a minor in a ministry activity or event of Gospel Way Baptist Church.

- Any full-time or part-time paid employee of Gospel Way Baptist Church,
- Any self-employed individual or company who provides such care and support, and

- Any volunteer, no matter of their age, who is not compensated for their services.

.06 In the context of these procedures children include bed babies through 5th grade and youth include 6th through 12th grades.

.07 All paid employees of Gospel Way Baptist Church are also subject to those rules, guidelines and procedures outlined in the Church's personnel policy.

2.0 PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR

.01 The following behaviors are prohibited for all workers. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but is intended to provide guidance as to what may constitute prohibited behavior.

- Threatening or inflicting physical injury upon a child or youth, other than by accidental means.
- Committing any sexual offense against a child or youth, or engaging in any sexual contact with a child or youth.
- Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornography materials at any function of Gospel Way Baptist Church.
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at Gospel Way Baptist Church.

3.0 WORKER ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING

.01 Individuals considered for a position as a worker in the preschool, children and youth areas of ministry should be members or regular attenders in good standing of Gospel Way Baptist Church for a minimum of six months before serving in these areas with the following exception:

- The church has introduced programs for children and youth that draw participation from church families other than Gospel Way (i.e. Awana, Upwards, etc.). These programs may require the use of

leaders from non- Gospel Way families. These individuals will be required to provide a personal testimony and a letter of recommendation from their home pastor and undergo the same background checks as Gospel Way individuals.

.02 All workers must be 18 years of age or older to work with children and 21 years of age or older to work with our youth. Younger persons may assist adults but they may not take the place of adult workers. The Church may utilize responsible youth (under the age of 18 years) in preschool and children's ministries with and under the direct supervision of an approved adult worker but are limited to serving no more than one time per month during Sunday morning worship. Our desire is for our youth workers to be good role models for our younger children, therefore recommendations are required from parents, our youth leadership and the children's program Ministry Leader before youth workers are permitted to serve.

.03 As part of the screening procedure, all paid employees and volunteers that work with preschool, children and youth will complete the Authorization for Criminal/Court Records Check. Non- Gospel Way volunteers serving in the Upward Ministry will also need to complete the Upward Basketball Coach & Referee Application Form as well as the Authorization for Criminal/Court Records Check.

.04 Names of all potential Directors and those in teaching positions will be submitted to the Nominating Committee as an additional screening procedure. Additional information concerning the applicant may be required in the screening process.

.05 The steps listed above must be completed, information returned and evaluated and training completed prior to the worker being allowed to serve in the preschool, children or youth ministries. Church leadership cannot assume that a person's prior behavior is proper without first verifying their past. Formal training for new volunteers and others interested in refresher training will be offered annually.

.06 Individuals who have been arrested for or charged with either sexual or physical abuse cannot be used to serve nor will they be employed for any Church sponsored activity or program for preschool, children or youth until the charges have been resolved. Individuals who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse cannot be used to serve nor will they be employed for any Church sponsored activity or program for preschool, children or youth.

.07 Workers shall be allowed to review his/her criminal records check and transcript at the Church, but under no circumstances shall the Church allow the worker to retain and/or copy his/her transcript.

4.0 GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS IN CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

4.1 Worker Conduct

.01 Under no circumstances shall a worker be alone with a child behind a closed door. Two adults must always be present in each room where preschool children are present with the exception of short intervals to care for bathroom needs, etc.

.02 Whenever possible the door to classrooms shall be kept open.

.03 Classes shall remain in their assigned spaces. If there is to be a change, the Ministry Leader must be informed and approve the change.

.04 All workers with preschool through fifth grade children must wear a name tag in a visible location on their body at all times they are responsible for youth.

.05 Each preschool parent will be responsible for checking in their child using the current check-in system. Parents will provide any special instructions during the check-in process. Attendance roster will be taken with the class in the event of a fire or other emergency requiring the evacuation of the room so that attendance can be taken after the evacuation.

.06 Care shall be taken by workers so that children do not leave the ministry activity unattended.

.07 Classroom doors must never be locked while occupied. Teachers must follow the Evacuation Floor Plan that is posted in the classroom whenever an emergency evacuation is required.

.08 Two adult workers must be in all preschool rooms at drop-off and pick-up times. If one of the workers has not arrived, a parent will be enlisted to stay in the room until the second worker arrives.

.09 With preschool children, only a parent or other person specifically designated by the parent may pick up children. Kindergarten through second grade children must be picked up by a parent or other designated

person if the parent provides written permission to do so. Third grade and older children will be released at the end of class unless the parents provide special instructions to the contrary. When a person must pick up a child, the person shall do so immediately after the service. Parents are responsible to provide copies of child custody court documents, and any later amendments, to the Ministry Leader in regards to who is eligible to pick up the child.

.10 Bed babies up to 3 years old children shall wear a name tag to allow easy identification.

.11 Touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Children in first grade or older shall not sit in the lap of workers. Workers shall not touch children in genital areas except as necessary to change a diaper or to assist a child in the bathroom as noted below.

.12 Workers will change diapers of pre-school children as needed unless requested otherwise by the parents.

.13 The Ministry Leader shall prescribe, and communicate to the workers, precautionary measures for dealing with dirty diapers, blood, vomit and the like, such as the use of protective gloves. Any items needed for the precautionary measures will be provided by the Church. These measures will be updated as new knowledge becomes available.

.14 Either men or women may change diapers if it is done in the open and not behind closed doors.

.15 Two adult workers must be present to assist children up to age three years old in the bathroom and where necessary in the case of special needs individuals. When a child is taken to a bathroom outside the room, one worker must check the bathroom before the child is permitted to enter to ensure it is safe.

4.2 Discipline of Children

.01 Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement is always appropriate.

.02 The Ministry Leader shall advise and instruct workers on the best age-appropriate discipline methods.

.03 The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class shall be discussed with his or her parents and the Ministry Leader only. In appropriate circumstances, the parents may be asked to attend class to observe or control the problem behavior. If the disruptive behavior persists, the child may be removed from the class at the sole discretion of the Ministry Leader. A child who is a danger to other children shall be removed immediately.

4.3 Receiving and Dismissing of Children

.01 Children facilities open fifteen minutes prior to Church meetings and services. Parents are asked to pick up their children immediately at the close of each session. Sometime even the most well-adjusted child will become anxious if he is left after the other boys and girls are gone.

.02 Only the appointed and enlisted workers are to be in the classroom with the children.

.03 Childcare workers are instructed to receive and dismiss children at the door of the classroom by the use of the current check-in/out system.

4.4 Continuing Training for Workers

.01 The Ministry Leader shall encourage workers to take advantage of ongoing continuing education opportunities. Some classes may be mandatory.

.03 Mandatory training shall be provided on a regular basis. Workers who do not attend this training will be relieved of their service unless absence was excused by the Ministry Leader prior to training class.

.04 Fire drills may be conducted for every classroom periodically.

4.5 Communication with Parents

.01 Workers shall attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.

.02 All children will be registered through the current check-in/registration system. Parents are responsible for reporting any allergies and/or special needs.

.03 Parents shall always be permitted to observe in a classroom but the worker may tell the parent if his or her presence may be disruptive to the child.

.04 Parents, upon request, shall be given access to a copy of this “Prevention of Children and Youth Abuse Policy”.

.05 Parents are encouraged to bring any comments, questions, or concerns regarding their child’s classroom to the Ministry Leader. We request that parents not discuss classroom situations with workers immediately before or after class sessions as it distracts from the workers’ responsibilities to their entire class. In regards to suspected child abuse, parents are to follow the reporting procedure outlined below in Article 8 of this Policy.

.06 Parents shall be advised that they must pick up their children no later than ten (10) minutes after the service is over unless special arrangements are made, with consent of the workers concerned.

.07 Parents shall not leave a child if the child has had a fever, diarrhea or vomiting within the past 24 hrs.

.08 General guidelines shall be sent to all parents for children ministry sleepovers.

4.6 Staffing the Children's Program

.01 There shall be a minimum of two (2) qualified adult workers assigned to each preschool class. The workers assigned to a class may not all be in the same family except during major program times when multiple classes are in session and hall monitors are in use (e.g., Sunday Morning and Wednesday Evening). Workers may be accompanied by their own children or grandchildren if space permits.

.02 There shall always be a Hall Monitor on duty while class is in session that will make roving checks of all classrooms. The checks shall be on an irregular basis so that the time of the visit cannot be predicted from week to week.

.03 The Ministry Leader shall make provision for last-minute replacements of a worker who cannot be present on a given day. If the required number of workers cannot be obtained, the class must be cancelled or combined with another class.

4.7 Children/Youth Protection Agreement

.01 Upon acceptance as a children's ministry worker, each new worker is required to sign and date a Children/Youth Protection Agreement. This Agreement states that the worker has received a copy of the Church's Prevention of Children and Youth Abuse Policy; has read and understands it; and will comply with the guidelines set forth in it.

.02 This signed Agreement and Background Check Information will be stored in the worker's file and current church database.

5.0 GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

5.1 Physical Contact

.01 Back rubs, neck rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact by and between workers is not allowed. Side-by-side hugs are to be used instead of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but staff and workers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact.

5.2 Staffing Considerations for Planned Activities

.01 A minimum of two (2) adults who have completed the required screening and training shall be present for all activities

.02 Any one-on-one meeting involving a youth must be conducted at church with the door open. At no time shall a youth worker pursue a dating relationship with a student.

5.3 Unplanned Meetings between Director and Youth

.01 Unplanned contacts between a youth and the Director or youth workers shall, insofar as possible, be conducted under the same rules, as are planned activities

5.4. Driving Rules

.01 All activities outside the Church in which children and youth participate require the completion of a Permission and Medical Consent and a Waiver and Indemnity Agreement.

.02 Only leaders or other qualified screened individuals may drive. All drivers must complete an Auto Safety Certification stating that they have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance to show to the person in charge of an event, if requested. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-adult rule still applies unless parental permission is obtained prior to the trip. When several vehicles are taken for an event, keeping the other vehicles in sight is an acceptable substitute for the two-adult rule. The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seatbelts, and all occupants must wear seatbelts.

.03 Leaders and workers who drive on a consistent basis must be additionally screened by completing an Application for Inclusion on the Approved Drivers List. The information on this form will be used to screen the potential driver through the Church's insurance company and the State Department of Motor Vehicles for the purpose of determining if the requested drivers' driving records indicate that he or she is a safe driver.

.04 In accordance with the Gospel Way Baptist Church Personnel Policy, qualified drivers are not permitted to use their personal or Church-provided cell phone while driving. This prohibition includes texting, which is illegal under Virginia law. If a phone call must be made, the driver is required to pull off to the side of the road and place the vehicle in "Park" before making or answering his or her phone. Any violation of this policy will result in the worker's driving privilege being revoked.

5.5 Overnight Trip Rules

.01 Written Permission and Medical Consent and an Activity Participation Agreement must be completed prior to the trip. Two adult leaders must be provided throughout the trip, with any exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirement of the planned activities.

.02 Parent chaperones must complete the same documentation as a

worker. This includes completing the “Authorization for Criminal/Court Records Check” and signing and dating the Children/Youth Protection Agreement.

5.6 Children/Youth Protection Agreement

.01 Upon acceptance as a youth ministry worker, each new worker is required to sign and date a Children/Youth Protection Agreement. This Agreement states that the worker has received a copy of the Church's Prevention of Children and Youth Abuse Policy; has read and understands it; and will comply with the guidelines set forth in it.

.02 This signed Agreement and Background Check Information will be stored in the worker's file and current church database.

6.0 GUIDELINES REGARDING CHURCH FACILITIES

.01 Parents are notified that they are to:

- always accompany their children to the restroom during worship time
- disallow their children from wandering around Church facilities unaccompanied
- discourage their children from leaving the worship service unattended

.02 Church ushers have been instructed to observe the access to restrooms by minors during worship services. If an usher observes that an adult or older minor enters the restroom while a minor is still in the restroom, the usher has been instructed to enter the restroom if the minor does not exit after a reasonable time frame.

.03 Church ushers have also been instructed to be alert for minors leaving worship services or wandering around Church facilities unaccompanied. If the ushers feel that the minor has no valid reasons for leaving the service, the usher will confront the minor and direct him or her back to the parent or supervised activity. One usher has been assigned the responsibility to roam throughout the Church facilities while worship services are being conducted to look for wandering minors.

.04 An inspection of the nursery/toddler area will be regularly conducted by an assigned ministry coordinator. The following items, but not limited to, will be inspected:

- Are all electrical plugs equipped with child-proof covers?
- Are all drapery/blind cords out of reach of cribs and children?
- Are cribs free from loose or protruding pieces?
- Are safety gates modern and safe?
- Do the changing tables have safety straps?
- Do all high chairs have both waist and between-the-leg straps?
- Are all toys clean and in good repair?
- Are all toys and parts large enough not to be swallowed?
- Are cribs free from items tied onto them?

.05 All outside groups requesting use of Gospel Way Baptist Church facilities shall provide proof to the Elders that they have similar Prevention of Children and Youth Abuse policies in place and that they are being adhered to before facility use approval can be granted

7.0 GUIDELINES REGARDING CHURCH WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

.01 Gospel Way Baptist Church shall never use the names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, or other information that identifies minors whose photos are used on the Church's website or social networking sites, even with permission from parents, since this information could be used by pedophiles to solicit or seduce children. Parental permission is required and will be obtained for all photographs prior to be displayed on the Church's website or social networking sites.

8.0 REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS

8.1 Reporting Requirements

.01 All workers shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or violation of these policies of which they have knowledge or which they have observed. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential. See par. 8.3 for reporting procedures.

8.2 Incident of Abuse Defined

.01 An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which any person:

- Has threatened or inflicted physical injury upon a child, youth or

vulnerable adult, other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

- Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a child, youth or vulnerable adult, or engages in any sexual contact with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- With respect to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for sexual favors, or engaging in sexually motivated physical contact, or engaging in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

8.3 Reporting Procedure

.01 The person reporting an incident of abuse shall contact:

- The Director /Associate Pastor of the ministry involved if an incident of abuse involves a child or youth.
- The Senior Pastor in all cases where the Director/Associate Pastor is absent or unavailable and/or a report is required to be made to him.

.02 The reporter shall inform him or her of all relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the reporter, shall complete a written report. However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom a report shall be made, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure.

8.4 Imminent Threat

.01 In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact Church Staff and request that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the person witnessing the incident of abuse shall complete a written report in accordance with the above reporting procedure.

8.5 Obligation to Report to the Child Abuse Investigators

.01 In all cases where any child or youth worker has reasonable cause to

believe that a child or youth, known to the child or youth worker in an official or professional capacity, may be abused or neglected, the worker shall consult with the Ministry Leader and, if deemed appropriate, make a report to the local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators. If there is doubt regarding whether a report shall be made, telephone the agency anonymously and discuss the situation with a counselor to determine whether a report shall be made. The child or youth worker shall make a written record of the name and title of the counselor with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the counselor.

8.6 Responding to the Report

.01 When someone receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured and after the report has been appropriately documented, the person receiving the report shall:

- Immediately contact parents or guardian of the alleged victim to inform each one of them of the incident and shall ensure each parent or guardian has been notified. If one parent or guardian is the alleged wrongdoer, the person receiving the report shall contact the other parent or guardian and inform him or her of the incident individually.
- Immediately contact Church Staff, who shall within 72 hours of the report conduct an investigation and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
- Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
- Take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with children, youth or vulnerable adults pending the investigation.

8.7 Investigation

.01 Upon learning of a reported incident of abuse, an investigation shall be conducted under the supervision of the Elders.

.02 The Elders shall ensure:

- That the investigation is kept strictly confidential and that all evidentiary privileges are maintained.
- That the investigation is thoroughly documented and that a confidential file is maintained.
- That all relevant witnesses are contacted and interviewed.
- That the interests of the alleged victim and alleged wrongdoer are protected during the investigative phase.
- That the Elders, within 72 hours, will reach a conclusion whether there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred.

8.8 Conclusion of No Abuse

.01 If the Elders conclude that there is not reasonable cause to believe the abuse may have occurred, the Elders shall provide a written report.

.02 The written report shall:

- Preserve the anonymity of the victim and the witnesses.
- Summarize the allegations and the steps taken to investigate them.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion.
- Set forth any temporary actions taken by the Elders.

8.9 Conclusion of Abuse

.01 If the Elders conclude that there is reasonable cause to believe abuse may have occurred, the Elders shall provide a written report.

.02 The written report shall:

- Identify the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Set forth the allegations and the steps taken to investigate the allegations.

- Set forth the facts revealed by each significant witness.
- Set forth the conclusion and the reasons supporting the conclusion;
and
- Set forth the temporary action taken by the Elders and also set forth a recommendation of additional action to be taken.

.03 The Elders shall have the power to take all reasonable action it deems appropriate in response to the reported incident of abuse.

.04 In addition, the Elders shall:

- Report the incident to the appropriate local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators.
- Report the incident to all other appropriate governmental authorities.
- Send notice of a claim or potential claim to Smith Memorial Baptist Church general liability insurance carrier and, if appropriate, the sexual misconduct liability insurance carrier, as soon as possible, but in no event later than thirty (30) days after receiving the report of the incident or such shorter period of time as set forth in any applicable policy of insurance. The Elders shall also provide the carrier with all other information and cooperation such carrier shall lawfully require.
- Cause the crisis response plan to be implemented.
- If the incident of abuse involves a member of the clergy, report the incident to the appropriate denomination office.
- Obtain the services of an attorney to provide guidance and support.

9.0 CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN

9.1 General Guidelines

.01 The Senior Pastor or substitute determined by the Elders will handle dissemination of information to staff, media and congregation.

.02 Utilize the advice and counsel of the attorney selected in 8.9 above.

.03 Have ready for release, a clear position statement stating Gospel Way Baptist Church's policy regarding sexual abuse of minors and established safeguards.

.04 Use text or prepared public statement to answer press and inform the congregation. At all times, the privacy and confidentiality of all those involved must be strictly maintained.

.05 Church spokesperson shall keep in mind that information given to or obtained by news media may have a bearing on the Church's liability, so careful judgment shall be exercised.

.06 Anticipate media questions.

.07 If the spokesperson does not know the answer to a question, he shall simply state, "I don't know."

.08 All staff and workers are to direct all questions to the Senior Pastor or the designated substitute.

9.2 Guidelines for Spokesperson

.01 Be prepared.

.02 Define strategy.

.03 Be candid and honest.

.04 Never say "no comment".

.05 Be clear, concise and in context. Do not answer more than what is asked. Do not volunteer information.

.06 Take notes.

.07 Do not ask for quote review.

.08 Always respond to all calls and questions as quickly as possible.