



## **SAFEKEEPING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR KIDS, STUDENTS, & VULNERABLE ADULTS**

### **FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA**

"They are precious in His sight" ...and in ours

#### **I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

##### **A. Need for Policy**

The safety and well-being of kids, students, and vulnerable adults is of utmost importance to First Baptist Church. We recognize our responsibility to endeavor to protect kids, students, and vulnerable adults while they are involved in church activities.

We recognize that today's world is not always a safe place for kids, students, or vulnerable adults. Churches are not immune to abuse opportunities. Rather, the open, trusting atmosphere of a church environment can make it a prime target area for potential abuse situations.

Therefore, based on our strong commitment to provide a church environment that is both loving and safe, we have established these Safekeeping Policies and Procedures. The purpose of these Safekeeping Policies and Procedures is to:

1. Safeguard kids, students, and vulnerable adults from any form of abusive behavior while they are involved in church activities.
2. Protect church staff and volunteer workers from unfounded allegations of child abuse.

##### **B. Definitions**

*Adverse information* – any information that adversely reflects on the integrity or character of a volunteer or employee that suggests that his or her ability to safeguard kids, students, or vulnerable adults may be impaired or that his or her access to kids, students, or vulnerable adults clearly may not be in the best interests of kids, students, vulnerable adults or the Church.

*Kids, child, children* - any individual from birth through sixth grade

*Preschool* - any classroom for children or kids, infant through kindergarten

*Student, youth* – A minor that is 12 years of age up to 19 years of age or in grades 7-12. A student/youth may also be an individual who is 19 years or older but still in high school (pending approval of Student Minister).

*Employee* – any person who is paid by the Church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with kids, students, or vulnerable adults.

*Volunteer* – any person who is not paid by the Church on a full-time or part-time basis and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of kids, students, or vulnerable adults.

*Approved Adult* - Any adult serving in ministry that has been vetted and approved per FBC Huntsville safekeeping policy. Ministerial staff are approved adults.

*Approved Adult Driver* - any adult that has been vetted and approved by FBC for driving.

*Child abuse* – harm or threatened harm to a child's or student's health or welfare by a person in a position of trust or leadership, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental, physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.

*Neglect* – harm to a child's or student's health or welfare by a person in a position of trust or leadership which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter or medical care.

*Sexual abuse* – any touching of the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or student or any other conduct or action done for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party.

*Vulnerable Adults* - Any individual age 19 or older who, due to physical or mental disability, cognitive decline, chronic illness, or other conditions, may be unable to care for or protect themselves from harm or exploitation. This includes adults who receive care, supervision, or support through ministries such as Adult Special Needs Ministry (Faith Friends) or Dementia Respite Care (OASIS).

## II. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### A. Volunteer Selection

Before being considered for volunteer work with kids, students, or vulnerable adults, prospective volunteers must: (1) complete for approval the online Leadership Information Form; (2) agree by signature to follow FBC Policies and Procedures; (3) and execute a consent form for a criminal records background check; and (4) have been a member or active participant of First Baptist Church for 6 months preceding the application to volunteer. Individuals completing the Leadership Information Form for the first time, are required to provide three personal references who are not relatives, members of FBC staff or former employers, unless the former employer is involved in childcare such as a

teacher, pediatrician, etc. The prospective volunteer should strive to give references who have knowledge of their experience in working with kids, students, or vulnerable adults. These references will be contacted by the screening consultant who will also initiate a criminal records background check on each volunteer applicant.

#### 1. Applicants With No Adverse Background Information

If no adverse information is received, either from the applicant, his/her references or from the background check, the screening consultant will notify the applicant of his/her approval and will place the applicant's name on a list of approved workers. Only the record of a person's approval for service will be available to others responsible for recruiting workers. The Executive Pastor will be notified of all approved workers. The Executive Pastor shall have the right to refuse any applicant for volunteer service with or without cause.

#### 2. Applicants With Adverse Background Information

Any application with adverse information or questionable background checks will be forwarded to the Executive Pastor. The Executive Pastor will then confer with the minister responsible for the activities of the volunteer applicant concerning the matters under question, known mitigating factors and approaches to pastoral care for the applicant in dealing with the issues under question. The Executive Pastor or conferring minister will contact the applicant for conversations concerning the adverse information and/or background information. Additional pastoral and/or counseling resources will be made available to the applicant, as needed.

A committee comprised of the Executive Pastor, Minister to Students and Families, Minister to Kids and Families, the Chair of Trustees and a representative of the Legal Committee shall make the final decision for approval or disapproval of such applicant. This Committee may consult with mental health or other qualified professionals as needed. The decision of the Committee shall be final.

Applicants will not be permitted to work with kids, students, or vulnerable adults in any church function if:

- a) Applicant has been convicted, pleaded guilty or otherwise adjudicated guilty of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or any offense related to child pornography.
- b) Applicant has any pending charges related to sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography.

Applicants may not be automatically prohibited from working with kids, students, or vulnerable adults, but will be subject to further screening including, but not limited to, a personal meeting with an appropriate minister of the Church before his/her application can be considered further if:

- a) Applicant has been previously charged with, but acquitted of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or has offenses related to child pornography.
- b) Applicant provides other affirmative responses or leaves responses blank on "Legal Questionnaire" section of the online Leadership Information Form.
- c) Applicant has been indicated for child abuse or neglect by any child welfare or protection services agency.

A criminal records background check will be performed every three (3) years on all volunteers working with kids, students, or vulnerable adults.

#### B. Employee Selection

Every applicant for any paid position of First Baptist Church, Huntsville shall complete an employment application and a consent form for a criminal records background check or the applicant will not be considered for employment by the church.

All information gathered from the employment application and related background check will be held in strict confidence. Records will be kept in a secure location.

No person shall be employed before the Personnel Committee and/or the staff supervisor responsible for hiring that position has received and reviewed the applicant's completed employment application and has received the all-clear from the process for the on-line background check.

No one who has been convicted, pleaded guilty, or otherwise adjudicated guilty of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography will be permitted to work at First Baptist Church, Huntsville, in any capacity. No one with pending charges of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence or offenses related to child pornography will be permitted to work at the church in any capacity. Anyone who has been previously charged with but acquitted of sexual or physical abuse, sex related offenses, crimes of violence, offenses related to child pornography or who has been indicated for child abuse or neglect by any child welfare or protection services agency will be subject to further screening.

#### C. General

1. When involved in a counseling session with kids, students, or vulnerable adults, ministerial staff are exempt from the “two adult rule”; however, the counseling shall take place in an environment which allows visual access by others. When numerous counseling sessions are contemplated, either:
  - a) Parental permission shall be obtained for the minister to meet privately with the kids or students in an environment which allows visual access by others; or
  - b) The “two adult rule” shall apply.
2. General Procedures
  - a) Windows on Classroom Doors - All doors to classrooms for kids, students, and vulnerable adults will have windows. The windows should remain uncovered at all times. If no window is present in a door going into an area where kids, students, or vulnerable adults are present, the door shall remain open during use so that persons passing by can observe inside. Windows may only be covered in the event of an intruder alarm.
  - b) Supervision of Activities - At all kids, student, and vulnerable adults’ events, a coordinator will be present to make periodic, random visits to the classrooms.
  - c) Overnight Rule - Speakers band members, and visiting volunteers who participate in overnight activities must: (1) complete for approval the online Leadership Information Form; (2) agree by signature to follow FBC Policies and Procedures; (3) and execute a consent form for a criminal records background check. Although not required, the FBC Minister leading the event, may choose to obtain a reference from a minister in the speaker/visiting volunteers’ own local church or ministry in which they regularly participate. (See Safekeeping Housing - Kids document for more details.)
3. Immediate Discussion of Suspicious Behavior - Any suspicious conduct between a worker and a kid, student or vulnerable adult or between two or more kids, two or more students, or two or more vulnerable adults will be reported in accordance with Alabama law as discussed in Section F.

Workers will be advised to be alert if a kid, student, or vulnerable adult appears withdrawn or aloof, exhibits a marked personality change, or exhibits any signs of physical abuse or other behavior that may indicate a problem that deserves attention.

4. Education of Workers - Each church year, opportunities for training in understanding, preventing, recognizing, and reporting suspected child abuse will be provided by the various ministry areas of our church. Workers with kids, students, or vulnerable adults will be required to participate in at least one of these opportunities for training.
  5. Compliance – Any person, whether a volunteer or an employee, who fails or refuses to comply with or who acts in violation of these policies and procedures shall not be allowed to work with kids, students, or vulnerable adults.
  6. Parental Supervision and Participation - Parents should not leave their kids unattended at church, especially before or after scheduled events. Parents are encouraged to attend, participate in and observe all activities in which their kids are engaged. Parents or caretakers should be aware of the time when activities for kids, students, or vulnerable adults begin and end. All kids, students, and vulnerable adults should be promptly picked up or arrangements made for timely pick up.
- D. Reporting Obligations - Abusive situations often continue if they go unnoticed and unreported. All employees and volunteers in ministries involving kids, students, or vulnerable adults must know what constitutes an occasion for reporting, the reporting channels they should use, and their legal obligations to make a report.

Alabama's child abuse reporting statute (ALA. CODE § 26-14-13) makes it mandatory to report child abuse cases for physicians, nurses, other health care officials, law enforcement officials, school teachers and officials, social workers, day care workers, mental health professionals, members of the clergy and any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when such child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect. These persons are required by law to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect under a penalty of a misdemeanor fine or sentence. The Alabama statute grants a privilege to those making such reports. (ALA. CODE § 26-14-9).

It is the policy of FBC, Huntsville that employees follow mandatory reporting requirements, as referenced above, immediately reporting all incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse to the proper authorities. In addition to following mandatory reporting requirements as dictated by Alabama law, the employee making the report shall also immediately notify his/her supervisor who shall in turn immediately report to the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor or other minister of FBC, Huntsville. FBC shall then take all reasonable steps to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no further contact with the alleged victim while present on the campus of FBC, Huntsville and to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no further contact with kids, students, or vulnerable adults in the church pending completion of an investigation by the appropriate authorities.

Nothing in these policies and procedures should be construed as a limitation on a person required by law to report child abuse to fulfill their obligation pursuant to AL Code 26-14-3. To the extent volunteers working with kids, students, or vulnerable adults, are considered mandatory reporters under Alabama law, this section applies to such volunteers.

#### E. Response to Allegations

All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. The care and safety of the victim will be the first priority. All such matters will be handled forthrightly with due respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality, for both the victim and any accused. Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement authorities.

The parents or caretakers of any alleged victim of abuse will be promptly notified by either the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor or other ministerial staff. They will be informed of the steps that are being taken, and will continue to be advised of the status of the church's actions. The safety and privacy of the victim will be a paramount concern. The church will demonstrate care and concern for the victim and his/her family. Privacy and confidentiality will be preserved to the extent possible.

When an incident of abuse arises, the Senior Pastor or Executive Pastor, in consultation with other ministerial staff, legal counsel and the Chair of Trustees, will designate a spokesperson for the church. This person will have all contact with the media and the congregation, and will handle all such communication in a discrete, informed and Christlike manner.

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All required forms for volunteers and employees can be accessed at <https://www.ministryopportunities.org/fbchsv>

# Kids' Ministry Specific Guidelines

## General

### A. Supervision of Kids

1. When supervising kids ages birth to sixth grade, a minimum of two adults, age 19 and older, should be present in the classroom. Exceptions to this rule are:
  - a) The Heart of the City Kids ministry may staff a room with only one adult teacher with the following safeguards in place:
    - (1) The teachers, as paid employees, have been through the complete screening procedures, including a criminal background check and a child abuse and neglect check.
    - (2) Visual access into the classroom is available at all times.
    - (3) Random, unannounced visits are made to the classroom regularly by another adult.
  - b) Classrooms may be staffed by one adult and one student, age 16 and older, if:
    - (1) The student has been approved by a minister to work in this area and the student's parent or guardian has signed a form confirming that he or she knows of no reason why the student should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with kids, or vulnerable adults.
    - (2) Another adult, serving as coordinator or division director, makes periodic checks on the room, and is available to assist in the classroom if needed.
  - c) Students younger than age 16, who have received permission from the appropriate minister to work with kids, may assist in the classroom as helpers, but may not count as one of the two required adults. Such student's parent or guardian must have signed a form annually confirming that he or she knows of no reason why the student should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with kids, other students, or vulnerable adults.
  - d) Classrooms with kids in grades 1-6 may be staffed with only one adult teacher with the following safeguards in place:



- (1) The volunteers have been through the complete screening procedures, including a criminal background check.
  - (2) Visual access into the classroom is available at all times.
  - (3) Another adult is walking the hall, making visual checks on classrooms throughout the class time.
2. The “two adults” that are scheduled to work with kids may be from the same family. However, the church will seek to provide additional adult workers to assist couples and other family members when working together.
3. Bathroom Procedures - Preschool classes are to use the restroom in their classroom. If a teacher must assist a child in the restroom, the door to the restroom shall remain open. Older preschoolers, who do not require assistance in the restroom, should be given the privacy of being alone with the door closed. If a child must use the restroom when outside the classroom, every effort should be made to avoid a situation where one teacher and one child are alone in the restroom
4. Shut Door Policy - In infant through three-year old classrooms, the door to the hallway should either be shut or a gate securely in place at all times preschoolers are in the room.
5. Release of Kids-
  - (1) Kids in infant through kindergarten church classes will only be released to an adult who presents the security tag matching the number on the child’s nametag. If the adult does not have the security tag and is personally known to the classroom volunteer, they may sign the attendance book for the child to be released to them. If the adult is unknown to the volunteer, he or she must present a valid photo ID indicating such person is a parent or guardian and sign the book. Kids will not be released to any other adult who does not have a security tag without the verbal consent of the parent or the (Associate) Minister to Kids and Families.
  - (2) Kids in first through fifth grade will follow the same procedure as above but may also be released to a family member who is in seventh grade or older who presents a security tag.
  - (3) Kids in sixth grade may come and go from classrooms without security tags.

6. Security – All doors leading to hallways should be equipped with locks and windows. As a part of the safety and security of the church, hallways will be patrolled by members of the Security Team and by off duty police officers employed by the church.

## Housing- Kids

### **General Housing Guidelines for Overnight Events**

1. All kids will be housed in rooms specific to their sex.
2. Kids will be grouped with others whose age spans no more than three grades (example: first through third grade is acceptable).
3. Student and adult leaders may share rooms with kids if there are at least two unrelated students or two unrelated adults present in the room.
4. A minimum of two adults will be present in every building where kids sleep.
5. Participants of all ages will change in a room or stall by themselves, out of sight of other participants.
6. Kids must be able to shower and attend to personal hygiene needs independently to attend overnight events, unless a parent is present.
7. All kids participating in overnight church activities will be required to furnish a notarized Ministry Participant Form.
8. Exceptions: For parent and child events, the age in a single room may span more than three grades to accommodate siblings.

### **Regarding Sexual Identity**

If a kid who expresses same-sex attraction attends an overnight event, FBC will work with that kid and kid's family to identify overnight accommodations that support all event participants. In the event of a kid who identifies as transgender, FBC will work with that kid and kid's family to identify overnight accommodations that support all event participants.

# Student Ministry Specific Guidelines

## Digital Engagement Policy- Students

It is the purpose and intent of these guidelines for digital engagement that the safety and well-being of our students and their leaders be first and foremost in our concern. We want to foster connections and relationships between students and adult leaders but we understand that limitations are necessary due to the inherent risks of digital communication. The following policies are in place to keep digital communications within safe and healthy boundaries.

All FBC Students' staff members and adult leaders are required to follow the policy and:

1. Review and sign the FBC Students Digital Engagement Policy at the beginning of each ministry year
2. Participate in training regarding these policies and best practices for interacting with students digitally

Parents/guardians can opt out of digital engagement from FBC staff and adult leaders to their student(s), including messaging and/or posting of photos of their student on social media by signing the opt-out form provided by FBC.

Staff and adult leaders are allowed to communicate freely with students when using large group messaging (e.g., Sunday School class GroupMe), e-mail through Church Center, text groups that include multiple adult leaders and/or students, or similar.

Staff and adult leaders are allowed to have limited digital communications directly with a student under the following guidelines:

- Parents/guardians have not opted out of digital communication
- Messages must be brief, ministry-focused, and not ongoing. For example, short check-ins, encouragement, or for planning or logistics purposes.
- Any continuing digital conversations must include at least one additional person or be continued non-digitally in a manner permitted by the FBC safekeeping policy.
- No digital communication via anonymous/non-traceable apps
- Communication should be healthy, uplifting, and positive. Communications cannot be sexual in nature or construed to be harsh, coercive, threatening, shaming, derogatory, or humiliating.

Staff and adult leaders are allowed to accept friend requests from students on their social media accounts and may react to or comment on student posts on public-facing social media platforms.

Staff and adult leaders are allowed to post photos that include FBC students to social media under the following guidelines:

- Parents/guardians have not opted out of photos
- Posts should be healthy, uplifting, and positive, and cannot be sexual in nature or construed to be harsh, coercive, threatening, shaming, derogatory, or humiliating.

\*Digital engagement - Virtual interactions via any electronic means, including texting, e-mail, phone, social media, or messaging apps.

## Housing- Students

### **Regarding Sexual Identity**

In the event of a student who experiences same sex attraction or identifies as transgender, FBC will work with that student and student's family to identify overnight accommodations that support all students.

#### **Working Guidelines:**

1. In cabin settings (5+ per cabin), use privacy / shower stalls for changing areas as much as possible.
2. In hotel-style room settings (2-4 people), offer roommate suggestions to students and have conversations with students and families involved.
3. Housing for all students will be divided by the designated sex at birth of the students.

### **Regarding Age and Gender Differences with Students**

Student housing will be assigned based on grade level and sex assigned at birth. When multiple grades are housed in the same room, effort will be made to ensure grades are adjoining and no more than two years difference from youngest to oldest in the same room. When the available housing puts all the participants of the same gender in one room, the same ages will be grouped together in different parts of the room. For example, grades 7 and 8 can share a cabin but grades 7 and 10 cannot. Grades 7, 8, and 9 can share a cabin because the three grades adjoin and do not have more than 2 years separating the students.

## Three Person Rule- Students

1. For activities occurring within classrooms and other enclosed areas/rooms at the church and off-site, there should be at least two approved adults (see definitions) present, with the following exceptions:

#### **Exceptions:**

- a. A single approved adult may supervise gatherings of students/youth in small groups when held in an openly visible space where other approved adults or the general public are nearby.
- b. An approved adult, as authorized by a member of the ministerial staff, may have an individual conversation or provide confidential counseling to a student as long as it is within eyesight of other people. A door cannot be closed unless there is an unblocked window. The approved adult must make another approved adult aware of this one-on-one meeting as it is happening.
- c. A single approved adult may lead gatherings of students in discipleship groups (D-Groups), with the written approval of the student's parent or guardian.

**2. Open Door Policy:** In general, doors to rooms in which students are present are to remain open. However, if there is clear glass in the door, nothing impedes vision through the glass, and the “three-person” rule is followed, the door may be closed to reduce noise and distractions. Approved adults shall avoid any situation in which they could be alone with a student or out of sight of others except in emergencies.

**3. Transportation:** Students shall ride in the vehicle of another student only if permission is given by both students’ parents or guardians in the form of a written note or email. An approved adult shall not transport a lone student without written permission of the parent or guardian. This can be a written note, text or an email. In such cases, the adult driver must notify the parent when leaving and again when the student is dropped off and the driver’s phone must remain on at all times.

## Transportation of Students

Keeping students safe while being transported for student ministry events is a priority of FBC Huntsville. These guidelines apply to transportation during a student ministry event, not the transportation leading up to or following an event.

1. There will be no fewer than three people in the vehicle, with the exception of those who are related or have specific written permission from the parent/guardian.
2. Each student should have a Student Ministry Transportation Agreement on file.
  - . Student Ministry Transportation Agreements will be regularly updated, or at the discretion of a parent.
  - . In the absence of a Student Ministry Transportation Agreement on file for a student, that student will be transported only by approved adult drivers.
  - . Guests of students will be transported in accordance with the hosting student’s Student Ministry Transportation Agreement.
3. Students will be transported during student ministry events, in accordance with the Student Ministry Transportation Agreements.
4. All drivers will follow applicable local and state driving laws.
5. Students are not allowed to drive to/from out-of-town events.

## Student Ministry Transportation Agreement

Please list the student(s) in your family that this Student Ministry Transportation Agreement applies to.

_____	_____
_____	_____

Check the option(s) that apply to your student(s)

\_\_\_ My student(s) can be transported during student ministry events in a vehicle driven by an approved adult associated with the FBC activity.

\_\_\_ My student(s) can be transported during student ministry events in a vehicle driven by any peer currently in the student ministry.

\_\_\_ My student(s) can transport other students during church-sponsored events.

_____	_____
Signature of parent/guardian	Date

_____	_____
Signature of student	Date

_____	_____
Signature of student	Date

_____	_____
Signature of student	Date

_____	_____
Signature of student	Date

# Vulnerable Adults Specific Guidelines

## 1. Purpose

To extend the same level of care, protection, and safe environment provided for kids and students to adults who may be vulnerable due to cognitive or physical limitations.

## 2. Volunteer and Staff Requirements

- a. All individuals working with vulnerable adults must complete the same screening, training, and background checks as those working with kids and students.
- b. Volunteers must agree to follow the church's protection policies and complete annual refresher training specific to serving vulnerable adults.

## 3. Supervision and Safety

- a. A **two-adult rule** should be followed whenever possible when caring for or supervising vulnerable adults.
- b. Activities should be conducted in rooms with visual access (windows or open doors) and with regular check-ins from coordinators or staff.
- c. Volunteers and staff should receive training on recognizing signs of physical, emotional, financial, or sexual abuse in vulnerable adults.

## 4. Reporting Concerns

Any suspected abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult must be reported immediately to ministerial staff and appropriate state authorities, as required by law. Like with kids, Alabama law mandates reporting of abuse involving vulnerable or incapacitated adults.