

Child Protection Policy

Shepherd's Heart Fellowship (SHF)

Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children and youth. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children. Sadly, child abuse is prevalent. It is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. No faith community is immune.

1. *Physical abuse* exists when a child has a non-accidental injury.
2. *Emotional abuse* is injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.
3. *Sexual abuse* exists when an adult uses a child as a part of any type of sexual act.
4. *Emotional neglect* is when the child suffers from an adult failing to give chances for feeling loved, wanted, secure, and worthy.
5. *Physical neglect* is when an adult does not provide basic needs or supervision.

We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday school, youth activities, vacation Bible school, and nursery. We commit to:

1. Make our church facility safe for children.
 - a. Windows will be placed in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (e.g., Life Application Class rooms, pastor's office).
 - b. A fully stocked first-aid kit will be available in the church building.
2. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children.
 - a. We will follow a *two-adult rule* for all overnight activities involving children and when activities are being conducted in homes or other private locations, avoiding situations where a child is alone with one adult who is not the child's parent or guardian.
 - b. Two adults (over 18 years of age) are preferred in all circumstances where childcare and ministry for minors are occurring.
 - c. In the case of only one adult present with minors, there must be EITHER an open door or an unobstructed window AND another adult circulating in the building who will randomly check each ministry setting.
 - d. A youth/minor will never teach/care for children alone without supervising adults available.
 - e. Prior consent will be obtained from a parent or guardian if a child is to be transported away from church facilities.
 - f. We will practice and model appropriate touch and healthy boundaries.
 - g. Guidelines will be implemented for child-to-child and youth-to-youth contact.
 - We will expect respectful behavior at all times.
 - Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.
 - There will be no inappropriate wrestling or roughhousing.
 - Only one child or youth may use a bathroom stall at a time.
 - h. No physical discipline (e.g., hitting, slapping) will be used. When a child misbehaves, we will use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child will be taken to their parent. If a parent is not available, we will speak with them as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will ensure the child's safety but remove him or her from the activities to minimize disruption.

3. Attend to related personnel issues.
 - a. Annually, each teacher and leader of children will be presented with a copy of the congregation's child protection and abuse policy and SHF covenant and will be asked to acknowledge with a signature that he or she has read and will abide by the policy.
 - b. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on final candidates for all church paid staff positions—including the pastor and custodians—before hiring. Background checks will be repeated every three years.
 - c. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before they are permitted to become a teacher or leader of children or youth.
4. Reporting process for suspected abuse
 - a. If a child discloses abuse or child abuse is suspected, the person who the child disclosed to or who has the suspicions will immediately make a report to Child Protective Services [1-800-800-5556] or the police.
 - b. Any staff suspecting the abuse of a child or youth should speak to church authorities in confidence immediately.
 - c. Church and staff are to follow the State Child Abuse Reporting Law.
 - d. Do not speak to an alleged abuser about any accusations.
 - e. Parents will be notified by church authorities.
5. Response to abuse
 - a. Be sensitive to the child and their family.
 - b. Treat all accusations as serious and legitimate.
 - c. Church leadership and professional assistance will be notified immediately.
 - d. Inform district conference leadership.
 - e. Workers are not to discuss their knowledge of any situation with others or publicly
 - f. A victim of abuse will still be able to participate in the life of the church
 - g. An alleged abuser will be notified by church leadership and/or authorities in a timely manner.
 - h. An alleged abuser and other witnesses are required to submit documentation about an incident immediately.
 - i. The church will provide the victim with a list of professional counselors as needed.
 - j. By constitutional law, the victim has the right to seek legal retribution from the alleged abuser.
6. Consider technology and social media concerns.
 - a. Adults will limit one-on-one electronic communications with children.
 - b. Parents or other adults will be copied on emails and kept apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations.
 - c. Communication will be traceable.
 - d. Photos of children or youth will not be shared on personal social media platforms without permission from a parent/guardian.

This policy will be implemented and facilitated by the SHF Christian Education Ministry Team appointed by the congregation. It will be posted on the church website and posted in the building. It will be reviewed and updated every three (3) years (unless circumstances warrant doing it sooner).

Approved by SHF Leadership Ministry Team on 10/9/19

Covenant for Ministry with Children and Youth

For all who are in ministry with children and youth
in Shepherd's Heart Fellowship

I accept the call to ministry with children or youth in Shepherd's Heart Fellowship (SHF). I remember how Jesus welcomed the children, took them in his arms, and blessed them. I follow the ways of Jesus when I value young people and care for them with love and gentleness.

I recognize the importance of the responsibility entrusted to me. I realize that my words and actions toward children and youth will influence their faith in God and their lives for many years to come.

I promise to be responsible in all of my attitudes and actions, especially toward the children or youth under my care. I have read and agree with the SHF's Child Protection Policy.

I attest that I have never: abused a child; been charged with nor convicted of child abuse, physical or sexual misconduct; contributed to the delinquency of a minor; nor participated in criminal conduct related to children or youth. I further attest that I will not engage in any inappropriate contact with children or youth. I will not abuse anyone physically, sexually, or emotionally.

I covenant and promise to be a good example to the children and youth. I will strive to honorably fulfill my responsibility with integrity.

It is the hope of this congregation that all involved in ministry with children and youth will experience the joy and reward of their relationships and interpersonal interactions. May you feel blessed, encouraged, and supported!

(tear here)

Please sign below and return this signature portion to the Chair of the SHF Christian Education Ministry Team:

Signature

Date

Printed name