

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

I. Purpose

- A. To help the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy provide a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of church life.
- B. To help the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

II. Biblical Foundation

The Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and youth and to minister to victims of abuse and their families. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (Matthew 18:5-7)

Our goal in response to these Biblical mandates is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow: a place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

III. Child Abuse Prevention Policy

The Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy DESIRES TO BE A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL CHILDREN AND ADULTS WHO ATTEND ANY ACTIVITY. Individuals they know and trust sometimes victimize children. The church is not immune to such abuse, either by its members or by those in leadership positions. Incidents of child abuse or neglect cut across racial, social, economic and religious boundaries. Although

no organization or individual can assure complete protection, this Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures Manual reflects the Bible Church of Lake Shore's and Lake Shore Christian Academy's commitment to help to protect children from harm. This manual applies to all volunteer and compensated workers of the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy.

The Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this commitment not only reflects your concern about children's safety in this society, but also your willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects.

For the safety and protection of our children and workers, all people who participate in church-sponsored activities with children are required to comply with the guidelines provided in this manual.

IV. Definitions

In this manual the following definitions apply:

- A. Adult** – Any person age 18 or older.
- B. Child or Youth** – Any person under the age of 18.
- C. Child Abuse** – A physical injury, not necessarily visible, or mental injury of a child by a parent, other individual who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by a household or family member under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed;
 - 1. Child Neglect** – The failure to give proper care and attention to a child, including the leaving of a child unattended by the child's parent, or other individual who has permanent or temporary care or custody, or responsibility for supervision of the child, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.
 - 2. Sexual Abuse** – An act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, whether physical injuries are sustained or not by a parent, other individual who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by a household or family member.
 - 3. Medical Neglect** – Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical; mental; or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

4. **Failure to Thrive** – A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.
 5. **Mental Injury/Neglect** – The observable, identifiable and substantial impairment of a child’s mental or psychological ability to function, or a substantial risk of mental injury that is caused by the act of or the failure to give proper care and attention to a child by the child’s parents, or other individual who has permanent or temporary care or custody, or responsibility for supervision of the child, or by a household or family member.
 6. **Educational Neglect** – The child’s caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
 7. **Bizarre Discipline** – Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child’s behavior
- D. **Compensated Worker** – Hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employee who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.
- E. **Volunteer Worker** – Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.
- F. **Mandated Reporter** – Any persons with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. Maryland law states that if a care giver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report or cause a report to be made to the Department of Social Services or the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- G. **Corporal Punishment** – Any punishment applied to the body but not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching, pulling, or squeezing.

V. **Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy, several abuse prevention

measures will be used. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the two adult rule, standards for appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

A. Six Month Rule

Volunteer workers must have been members or regular attendees of the Bible Church of Lake Shore for at least six months prior to the time they begin serving with children in church-sponsored activities (this rule does not apply to school volunteers). There is an exception to the six-month guideline. If a volunteer worker:

1. Has served in ministry with children for at least six months in the church he or she attended prior to coming to the Bible Church of Lake Shore; and
2. Can provide a reference from the staff person with whom they worked at that church, they may be considered for service prior to the six months of regular attendance at the Bible Church of Lake Shore.

B. Staff Screening

The following procedures reflect the Bible Church of Lake Shore's and Lake Shore Christian Academy's commitment to provide protective care for all children and workers who participate in church sponsored activities.

1. All compensated employees (full or part time) must complete the following procedures before participating in any church or school sponsored child or student activities.
 - a. Complete a standard application and submit a list of professional references. References will be checked;
 - b. Participate in an interview conducted by the staff person responsible for the area of ministry;
 - c. Attend orientation/training activities appropriate to the level of the volunteer or compensated worker involvement;

D. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or school rooms will be visited without prior notice by church/school staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday school superintendent. However, parents and other outside visitors must check in at the school office before being taken to their child's classroom.

E. Driving Policies

The designated leader of the event must know each person designated to provide automobile or van transportation to or from church. The driver must:

1. Meet the same requirements for volunteer workers as stated above in Section V.B.2.
2. Be at least 18 years old and not a current student of Lake Shore Christian Academy;
3. Have a valid state drivers license, qualified for the vehicle being operated;
4. Have no record of convictions for the past five years for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license or reckless endangerment;
5. Have proof of insurance; and
6. Never be alone in a vehicle with a child not his own.

F. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give personal gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible leadership. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

G. Overnight Trips

Situations where staff members are taking children or young people out of the area for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned. Only known, proven staff (those that have been employed by the church/school for at least six months) will be permitted to sponsor/chaperone the trips. New staff or volunteers may be used as additional sponsors, but shall not be left alone with the children or young people in a situation where there are no other staff to observe. In no circumstance will one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing.

VI. Age-Specific Guidelines for Working With Children

A. Nursery

1. A minimum of two adult female caregivers must be present in each nursery regardless of how few children are in attendance.
2. The windows of the nursery will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. Church nursery workers who change diapers must adhere to the following procedures.
 - a. Always wear rubber gloves.
 - b. Always use rubber gloves when applying lotion or powder.
 - c. Always keep a cloth or wipe between her hand and the child.
4. Children will be released to parents at the nursery counter. Persons other than the child's parents or guardians must be authorized to pick up the child.
5. Only assigned workers are allowed to stay in the nursery or to be in the nursery area during sessions.
6. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**

B. Preschool Ministry (Toddlers Through Kindergarten)

1. A minimum of two caregivers (one being an adult) must be present with each group of children regardless of how few children are in attendance. The only exception to this is at Lake Shore Christian Academy during school hours where only one teacher may be present with the children.
2. The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child.
4. Children will be released to parents at the door of the nursery. Persons other than the children's parents or guardians must be authorized to pick

up the children.

5. When children are taken out of the classroom (playground, etc.) the teachers are to take a count of the children to insure all are present.
6. Only assigned workers are allowed to stay in preschool rooms or to be in the preschool area during sessions.
7. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
8. The pastor or principal must approve any school or church-sponsored children's activities that are held off-site. Parental permission will be secured for off-site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present.

C. Children's Ministry (First Through Sixth Grades):

1. A minimum of two caregivers (one being an adult) must be present with each group of children regardless of how few children are in attendance. The only exception to this is at Lake Shore Christian Academy during school hours where only one teacher may be present with the children.
2. The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child.
4. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
5. The pastor or principal must approve any school or church-sponsored children's activities that are held off-site. Parental permission will be secured for off-site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present.

D. Student Ministry (Seventh Grade Through Twelfth Grade):

1. A minimum of two adults must be present regardless of how few students are in attendance. The only exception to this is at Lake Shore Christian Academy during school hours where only one teacher may be

present with the children.

2. Organized events on or off the church/school campus will be staffed with a minimum of 1:10 adult to students when possible.
3. The pastor or principal must approve any school or church-sponsored activities that are held off-site. Parental permission will be secured for off-site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present.
4. Overnight events that are attended by students of both genders must also be chaperoned by adults of both genders. At least one adult will be present in each sleeping area.
5. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
6. It is recognized that certain counseling and ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two adults and that the general guidelines for supervision of workers should not restrict situations where individual counsel and guidance is necessary. However, such counseling should only take place in a room where interior windows allow a clear view of the activities in the room.

VII. Reporting Child Abuse

If the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy receives an allegation of child abuse, it will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy personnel will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

When it becomes necessary to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the legal responsibility of any person with responsibility for the care of children to report all cases of child abuse they observe, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the church, the observer or both. The Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy has determined that it is the responsibility of the program staff to report all cases of suspected child abuse to the proper legal authorities. While the confidentiality of the pastor/parishioner relationship is very important, reporting reasonable suspicion of child abuse has the potential for helping individuals receive help for a previous problem and may prevent further harm to a child, that person or others.

What is reasonable suspicion? Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse.

A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

Because we believe children are our most important concern, the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy has adopted the following guidelines for reporting:

- A. Treat each allegation of child abuse seriously.
- B. Attempt to assure the safety and protection of persons who have been harmed.
- C. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
- D. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
- E. Immediately notify the pastor and/or principal. The pastor and/or principal will initiate an internal investigation of the allegations within 24 hours of notice.
- F. The principal and/or pastor should immediately notify other members of the leadership board (e.g. Deacons, School Board) about the allegation and pending investigation. The leadership board will work together to make decisions throughout the investigation process. The decisions will be relayed to other parties by the pastor or another person designated by the board.
- G. Immediately notify the Department of Social Services Child Protective Services of the allegation.
- H. Immediately notify the parents of the alleged victim if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the allegations.
- I. Immediately notify the church's insurance company. If the abuse allegation does not implicate a church/school staff member or church/school volunteer, this step may be omitted.
- J. Treat the accused with dignity and respect. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church or school, that person must be temporarily relieved of his duties until the investigation is concluded. Based on the results of the investigation, their duties may be reinstated or permanently terminated.
- K. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the

pastor or other ministry leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an official investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.

- L. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
- M. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the pastor and/or principal.
- N. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.
- O. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the alleged victim and his or her family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority.
- P. If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the pastor (or to the person designated by the leadership board). Only the pastor or designee should make comments about the allegations. They will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the church/school staff, parents of current school students, and/or the congregation. The prepared statement shall be made only after consultation with the church's attorney and will include the steps the church has taken to protect children, such as the development and implementation of this manual, and the care and concern the church has for all parties involved. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved shall continue to be of primary concern.

Important Contacts and Their Phone Numbers

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD

County Child Protective Services Office (410) 421-8400

MD Social Services Administration (410) 767-7112

(Adapted from the Christian Law Association and MD COMAR Regulations)

Please sign and return this page to the Bible Church of Lake Shore
and/or Lake Shore Christian Academy

By signing below I, _____, acknowledge that I have received and reviewed a copy of the Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures Manual of the Bible Church of Lake Shore and Lake Shore Christian Academy. I also acknowledge that I understand that this manual may be changed or updated at any time without prior notice and I will be notified of any changes that are not merely stylistic or grammatical.

Name

Signature

Date