

# **HARMONY BAPTIST CHURCH**

## **Monroe, GA**

### **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

It is one of our supreme duties as a church to work hand-in-hand with parents to take God's precious gift of a child and to teach them to know and love God. Through our children's ministry, we have a sacred task to help these young feet to find the path of faith, trust, justice, honor and righteousness. In these formative years, it is our pledge, to both God and parents, that from our example and our actions, children's lives will be blessed and like Jesus, they will grow "in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men".

Harmony Baptist Church is committed to providing an environment which is as safe and secure as possible for children and youth who attend the church or any church-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 in which opportunities for abuse and neglect are minimized by providing proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with our children and youth. 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.

#### **I. DEFINITIONS**

- A. A minor is any person under the age of eighteen (18) years of age and may also be referred to as a preschooler, child or a youth.
- B. Child abuse means any of the prohibited behaviors named in section II of this policy or any behavior named in O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 (b) (3).
- C. Sexual abuse means any of the prohibited behaviors named in section II of this policy or any behavior named in O.C.G.A §19-7-5 (b) (3.1).
- D. A "screened worker/volunteer/adult" is one who has undergone the enlistment and screening process outlined in section III of this policy.
- E. Child Advocacy Team: A standing committee of two (2) to three (3) persons appointed by the Body of Deacons and accountable to the Pastor for the purpose of performing the record keeping and administrative duties required by this Child Protection Policy. Maintaining confidentiality of the background checks and other confidential information provided by the volunteers and applicants is a key requirement of this team. The team members will serve as permanent members until the church is in a position to assign these duties to a paid pastoral staff person. When a team member resigns or is discharged for cause from the team, the deacons will appoint a replacement from a list of possible candidates provided by the Pastor.

#### **II. PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR**

- A. The following behaviors are prohibited for all paid employees and volunteers:
  - 1. Threatening or intentionally inflicting physical injury upon a minor.
  - 2. Committing any sexual offense against a minor, or engaging in any sexual contact with a minor.

3. 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.
4. Any prohibited behaviors named in O.C.G.A §19-7-5 (b).
5. All workers, volunteer or paid, are not to use, or permit the use of any cyber-communication methods to transmit materials, statements, conversations, pictures, etc. that allude to or contain sexual or immoral content, or otherwise unfit materials to any child. All workers volunteer or paid, are to protect a child from cyber bullying and from viewing or being exposed to any such materials as stated above.

Workers are to maintain high Christian moral standards in any and all methods of cyber-communication including email, text messaging, and on social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Digg, CampusFace or any other social networking and or communications systems and devices.

### **III. ENLISTMENT AND SCREENING**

- A. All volunteers considered for a position in the preschool, children and youth areas of ministry must be an actively involved member of Harmony Baptist Church for a minimum of six months before serving in these areas. Involvement may include worship attendance, and/or Sunday School attendance. Attendance must be regular and verifiable.
- B. Upon acceptance of this policy by the church, HBC will implement a confidential screening process that includes a personal interview, a criminal background check, a national sex offender registry check and personal reference check vetting process for all volunteers and workers, paid or unpaid, to work in the preschool, children and youth ministries of the church. All workers currently actively serving in the preschool, children and youth ministries will be exempt only from the personal interview process in view of their already acceptable service in these areas. All volunteers and workers, paid or unpaid, must complete orientation/training on child protection and abuse. Documentation of this training will be kept on file. Criminal background checks will be repeated every 3 years and Harmony Baptist Church reserves the right to conduct a criminal background check on any worker at any time while serving in any capacity at HBC, whether in a paid or volunteer position. A list of those persons approved for service will be maintained by the Child Advocacy Team and made available to ministry leaders upon request.
- C. Reference contact forms, criminal background checks and related documents will be maintained in a secure location within the church office, and all such documents shall be considered confidential and shall only be accessible to the pastor and the designated Child Advocacy team.
- D. All paid workers must undergo the normal pre-employment screening process including, but not limited to, reference checks and a criminal background check.
- E. All workers, volunteer or paid, will be asked to provide institutional and personal references on the Volunteer Application Form. At least two of these references will be checked with institutional references having priority over personal references. A Reference Contact Form will be completed for each reference contacted.
- F. Any person for whom the ministry staff or Child Advocacy Team has a valid reason to believe might endanger or harm children shall not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they will have contact with minors. Individuals who have been convicted of any of the following crimes shall not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they will have contact with minors: homicide; aggravated

assault; possession and/or use of drugs or controlled substances within the past five (5) years; sale of drugs or controlled substances; sexual abuse; sexual assault(rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; any sex crime involving a minor; possession or promotion of child pornography; sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; endangerment of a child; kidnapping; public lewdness; indecent exposure; enticing a child. In addition, individuals who have been convicted of, or who have entered a plea of guilty or a plea of "no contest" (nolo contendere) to, any crime under any state or federal law involving sexual abuse, physical abuse or neglect of children, or which constitute a felony (of any nature), or which involve violence, threats of violence, or moral turpitude (including misdemeanors) shall not be permitted to serve or be employed for any church-sponsored activity or program involving the supervision, custody, or training of children.

- H. All volunteers and employees must sign a written acknowledgement receipt form indicating they have read and understand the church's Child Protection Policy. All paid and volunteer workers and staff will be asked to read and understand this policy when applying for service, and to review the policy every August while continuing to serve. Instruction will be offered at least annually at normal training sessions or via computer training for teachers and workers on the nature of child abuse and the evidences of child abuse.
- I. Names of all potential workers, volunteer or paid will be submitted to the ministerial staff as an additional screening procedure.
- J. It is the responsibility of the pastor/director or ministry leader responsible for that particular ministry area to interview all potential volunteers for their ministry area.
- K. Approval from the Child Advocacy Team, indicating the employee or volunteer has been completely vetted, must be received prior to any person serving with minors.

#### **IV. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS & STAFF OF PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

##### **A. Volunteer & Staff Conduct**

1. Under no circumstances, shall a volunteer or staff member be alone with a child behind a closed door. Two mature, responsible adults must always be present in each room where children are present.
2. Classroom doors without glass inserts should be kept open whenever possible or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door should be kept open.
3. Classes shall remain in the assigned spaces. If there is to be a change, the ministry leader responsible for that particular ministry area must be informed and approve the change.
4. Each room shall maintain a sign-in-sheet or class roll. Any special information provided by the parent shall be kept on the proper form. This sign-in-sheet and/or class roll should 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.
5. Care should be taken by volunteers so that young children do not leave the classroom unattended.
6. Classroom doors should never be locked while occupied.

7. Volunteers should always wear their assigned name tags while on duty.
8. With preschool and kindergarten children, only a parent/guardian or other person specifically designated by the parent/guardian may pick up preschoolers. No one under the age of eighteen will be permitted to pick up a child. Parents/guardians are requested to provide the Pastor or Director with any special information regarding a possible child custody dispute where leadership should pay particular attention to who picks up the child.
9. Preschool children under five (5) years old will be required to wear a name tag to allow easy identification.
10. Touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Children in first grade or older should not sit in the lap of volunteers. Volunteers 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.
11. Precautionary measures for dealing with dirty diapers, blood, vomit and the like, such as the use of protective gloves should be communicated to the volunteers. Any items needed for the precautionary measures will be provided by the church.
12. Either male or female volunteers may change diapers if it is done in open view.
13. Male volunteers are allowed only to take boys to the bathroom and are not permitted to use the bathroom themselves when taking the children. When a child is taken to a bathroom outside the room, someone must check the bathroom before the child is permitted to enter to ensure it is safe. School-age children through grade 5 shall go to the bathroom in pairs and be directed to remain together. A teacher will watch from the door and request assistance from another adult if the child needs help while in the bathroom.
14. All but one entrance door in the Fellowship Hall and Genesis building will be locked while children are present in the building during the worship hour. Only the front main entrance doors and the main office doors of the sanctuary building will be unlocked during the worship service.

## **B. Discipline of Children**

1. 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.
2. The behavior of a child who is a constant disruption to a class should be discussed with his or her parents and the Pastor or Director. In appropriate circumstances, the parents can be asked to attend class to observe or control the problem behavior. If the behavior persists, the child may be removed from the class. A child who is a danger to other children shall be removed immediately.

## **C. Communication with Parents**

1. Volunteers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.
2. All children who attend must be registered. The registration form will include information on special needs, disabilities, and medications such as an inhaler for asthma, EPI pin, etc. and will be updated annually or as circumstances necessitate.

3. Parents shall always be permitted to observe a classroom, if done through the glass door, although the parent may be told that his or her presence may be disruptive to the child. Parents may enter their child's room with the approval of the Pastor or Director of that ministry area.
4. Parents should be given a summary of the guidelines which have an impact on them.
5. Parents shall be clearly advised as to where to report suspected abuse or other concerns regarding a classroom situation and be assured that they will not be retaliated against for making a report.
6. Parents should be encouraged to pick up their preschool children no later than ten (10) minutes after the service or event is over unless special arrangements are made with the ministry director or teachers in charge of the service or event.
7. Parents should be encouraged to change diapers and take children to the bathroom before class.
8. Under no circumstances should parents leave a child if the child has a fever or other severe illness.
9. Parents must advise the volunteers if the child is on medication.
10. Parent Responsibilities. Any child on the church premises is assumed to be present to participate in programs or activities scheduled for his/her age group. Church workers and teachers will assume supervision and custody of a child only when he/she is in the designated area for such program or activity. Parents or guardians are responsible for the supervision, custody, and control of their children at all other times, including, but not limited to, whenever a child is given permission to leave early from, or not to attend, a church program or activity. Parents should keep children with them if they are not in an activity or program supervised by church workers or teachers. Unsupervised children should not be left unattended after programs or activities have ended to wait for a parent or guardian who is not on the church premises. Parents should remember that the goal of HBC's Child Protection Policy is the protection of our children and families, our Church employees, workers, teachers, and staff, and our entire Church family, and achieving this goal requires the involvement and commitment of every member of HBC's congregation.

#### **D. Staffing of the Children's Program**

1. There shall be a minimum of two (2) adult screened volunteers assigned to each class, and a minimum of one (1) assigned to each "break-out group" which is part of a larger class. In preschool rooms, at least one (1) of the volunteers must be female.
2. Our goal is to have a ratio of volunteers-to-children of not less than 1:10 for preschool classrooms and 1:10 for school-age classrooms.
3. During any event there shall always be a screened worker on duty making roving checks of all classrooms from time to time.
4. Teenagers between the ages of fifteen (15) and eighteen (18), who have undergone the screening process in section III of these policies, may assist under the direction of screened adults.
5. To ensure that there shall be sufficient substitutes available when the regular volunteer cannot attend, parents should be encouraged to undergo the volunteer screening process to be available on a standby basis.

## **V. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS OF YOUTH PROGRAMS**

### **A. Physical Contact**

1. Inappropriate displays of affection are unacceptable. Affection shown should be such that a reasonable and prudent person would consider it appropriate.
2. Side-by-side hugs are recommended between workers and youth in lieu of full body contact. Touching need not be completely avoided, but staff and volunteers must be aware of how it looks and how the person being touched may interpret the contact. Unwelcomed touching of any kind is not allowed.

### **B. Staffing Considerations for All Activities and Events**

1. A minimum of two screened adult workers are required to be present for all activities. A specific ratio of leaders-to-youth is not suggested; instead, the ratio should be appropriate for the activity being undertaken.
2. Any one-on-one meeting involving an adult and youth must be conducted in view of another screened adult through an open door or window.
3. One-on-one meetings of any kind outside the church facilities should not occur.

## **VI. GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS OF ALL PROGRAMS INVOLVING MINORS**

### **A. Driving Rules**

1. Only qualified, screened adults may drive. All drivers must have a valid driver's license and auto insurance. The number of persons per vehicle must not exceed the number of seat belts, and all occupants must wear seat belts.
2. Regarding the use of a church owned vehicle, if the bus is to be used, the driver must be a qualified driver on the churches Approved Drivers List and if the van is to be used, the driver must check with the Church office to verify a valid driver's license and obtain keys to the van.
3. A minimum of two screened adult workers be present in all vehicles.

### **B. Overnight and Trip Rules**

1. Written Permission and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to the trip. The total number of adults on each trip must be adjusted according to the requirement of the planned activities. Two or more children of the same gender may sleep in the same room without an adult being present. If adults are to sleep in the room with children, there must be a minimum of two screened adults of the same gender as the children. However, an adult may share a room with his/her child(ren) alone.
2. All Children and workers/volunteers are to be instructed to remain in the assigned group area or room and not to leave without permission of the ministry leader.
3. The two adult rule (see section IV, A) must be followed throughout the trip.

## **VII. REPORTING AND INVESTIGATIONS**

### **A. Reporting Requirements**

1. All volunteers and employed children or youth workers shall immediately report and document any incident of abuse or violation of the two-adult or open door policy of which they have knowledge or which they have observed. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.
2. Although most church staff members and volunteers are not required by law to report suspected child abuse, it is the policy of Harmony Baptist Church to file a report with the appropriate authorities when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused.
3. Certain individuals, by virtue of their profession, may be legally required by law to report suspected child abuse. (O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 contains a complete list of mandatory reporters)

### **B. Incident of Abuse Defined**

1. An "incident of abuse" means any occurrence in which any person:
  - a) Has threatened or inflicted physical injury upon a child, or youth other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
  - b) Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a child, or youth or engages in any sexual contact with a child, youth or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
  - c) With respect to if a child, or youth, makes any kind of sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors, or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or engages in other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
2. Any behavior named in O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 (b) (3), (3.1) is considered abuse.

### **C. Reporting Procedure**

1. The person reporting an incident of abuse shall contact the Pastor or his designated person or in their absence, the Deacon Chairman for reporting.
2. The Pastor should be notified in all cases of reported abuse and given all the relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse.

### **D. Imminent Threat**

In all cases where an imminent threat of abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact a Police Officer or call 911 and request that an officer be sent to take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. The worker should take steps to protect the alleged victim if he/she can do so safely. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the person witnessing the incident of abuse shall report it as outlined above.

## **E. Obligation to Report to the Child Abuse Investigators**

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, after first consulting with the Pastor or his designee make a report to the local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators.

## **F. Responding to the Report**

1. After receiving a report of abuse the Pastor or his designee shall:
  - a) Immediately take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the alleged victim.
  - b) Conduct an investigation and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the abuse may have occurred.
  - c) Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
  - d) Take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with children or youth pending the investigation.

## **VIII. CRISIS RESPONSE**

### **A. General Guidelines**

1. After consultation with legal counsel the Pastor shall act as spokesman to handle dissemination of information to staff, media and congregation. Unless prior authorization is given, no one else should disseminate information concerning the situation.
2. Have ready for release a clear position statement stating Harmony Baptist Church's policy regarding sexual abuse of minors and established safeguards.
3. Select outside Legal Counsel (if necessary) who will be present with the spokesperson while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.
4. Use text or prepared public statement to answer press and inform congregation. At all times, the church will maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all those involved.
5. Use careful judgment so as not to compromise an ongoing investigation or place the church in unnecessary jeopardy.

## **IX. AMENDMENT OF POLICY:**

The Pastor, in conjunction with a committee of at least three (3) persons selected by the deacons, may amend these policies and inform the church, ministry volunteers and workers of the changes.