

# Safe Kids / Safe Workers Policy

## Riverwood Bible Church

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**INTRODUCTION:** The Safe Kids / Safe Workers Policy of Riverwood Bible Church is one of zero tolerance. Children are a precious gift from God (Psalm 127:3), and the Elder Board desires to see these gifts safeguarded. While knowing that no policy can be enacted that will protect against every possible risk of danger, the Elder Board has sought to reduce certain risks as much as possible, and to this end, this Policy has been implemented.

**PURPOSE:** It is the purpose and intent of this policy to assist in structuring the nursery, children's and student ministries (collectively "Child" or "Children" or "Minor") of Riverwood Bible Church ("Church") for the purpose of establishing a safe, secure environment for our Children and for any Children who come as guests. This intent also applies to any ministries directed toward a Vulnerable Adult.

**GOAL:** Our goal is to protect such persons from physical abuse, mental abuse, or sexual abuse, by employees or volunteers in this Church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations of such conduct.

**DEFINITION OF CHILD ABUSE:** In accordance with Section 43-21-105 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, "Abused Child means a child whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, whether legally obligated to do so or not, has caused or allowed to be caused upon said child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, non-accidental physical injury or other maltreatment. Provided, however, that physical discipline, including spanking, performed on a child by a parent, guardian or custodian in a reasonable manner shall not be deemed abuse under this section."

In regard to physical abuse, it is important to understand that although parents, guardians and custodians are legally allowed to utilize corporal punishment, they are not allowed to cause bruises, marks, or other injuries to children when utilizing corporal punishment. Any evidence of such will constitute abuse by the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

The Church further defines abuse as physical abuse resulting from injury or death threatened or inflicted upon a Minor by a parent or caretaker or upon a Vulnerable Adult by a caretaker by other than accidental means, physical neglect or exploitation of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult; inappropriate physical discipline (unexplained bruises, marks, welts, lacerations, burns, fractures, abdominal injuries, human bites, or other physical injuries) of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult; and/or other physical maltreatment (violent or nonviolent) of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult. Further, abuse may occur in the home by a caretaker, in a day-care situation, in an organized ministry (whether a Church facility or away), or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the Minor or Vulnerable Adult (collectively "**Physical Abuse**").

Sexual abuse can be violent or nonviolent. It includes criminal behavior that involves Minors in sexual behavior. Sexual abuse can involve fondling or gratification of lust, sexual gratification, penetration of

the oral, genital, or anal areas, intercourse, forcible rape or other sexually-related physical assaults, and consensual statutory rape.

Other forms of sexual abuse can include sexually explicit, suggestive or obscene verbal comments, gestures or jokes; any exposure to pornographic or sexually-suggestive objects or images; obscene phone calls or other verbal abuse of a sexual nature; exhibitionism or voyeurism; allowing Minors to witness sexual activity; sexual exploitation (for financial gain, personal sexual stimulation, or other sexual purposes); other sexual molestation or abuse (violent or nonviolent, verbal or nonverbal); any criminal sexual offense, sexually-suggestive comments about an individual's body; or sexual flirtations, advances or propositions, whether welcome or unwelcome, and even if encouraged by the other individual (collectively "**Sexual Abuse**").

Sexual abuse does not include touching a Minor or Vulnerable Adult in a private, otherwise sexually related area necessary and incidental to caring for the personal hygiene and bodily function needs of such an individual who is unable to care for such needs himself/herself.

Mental abuse involves emotional abuse or non-accidental mental injury (resulting from non-physical or non-accidental physical injury). Mental abuse may be violent or nonviolent, including threatening behavior causing the person to fear physical injury or death or to fear for their physical safety, as well as neglect and exploitation for financial gain or other personal purposes (collectively "**Mental Abuse**").

The Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Mental Abuse defined above is collectively referred to in this Policy as "**Abuse.**" Abuse involving a Minor is referred to in this Policy as "**Child Abuse.**" Abuse can result from single or multiple incidents.

**DEFINITION OF A MINOR:** A Child who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday ("**Minor**")

**DEFINITION OF A VULNERABLE ADULT:** A person, whether a minor or adult, whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, or improper sexual content, is impaired due to a mental, emotional, physical, or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging ("**Vulnerable Adult**").

**PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR:** 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 or pain upon a Minor or Vulnerable Adult, other than by accidental means. This includes but is not limited to spanking.
- Committing any sexual offenses against a Minor or Vulnerable Adult, or engaging in any sexual contact with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult
- Making any kind of sexual advance, or making a request for one, or engaging in other verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any Church function

- The presence, possession, or being under the undue influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for Minors at the Church.

**SCOPE OF THIS POLICY:** The Policy and related Procedure set forth below will apply to all people who give supervision or have custody of Minors or Vulnerable Adults, or who have opportunity to have contact with Minors or Vulnerable Adults, in Church facilities or Church-sponsored activities. Church-sponsored events or activities are those which are calendared on the Church calendar and should include a time of commencement and conclusion.

This policy will address five (5) areas that are critical for the protection of all affected individuals and our Church: Employee and volunteer selection process, Employee and volunteer training, Operating practices, Reporting of allegations, and Response to allegations.

Administration of the Safe Kids / Safe Workers Policy (“**Policy**”) is handled by the pastoral staff. All records are maintained in confidential files in such office. However, when necessary or required by law, these records will be shared with the Mississippi Department of Human Services and other appropriate state agencies and legal and law enforcement authorities in order to investigate allegations of Abuse.

## I. **SELECTION PROCESS**

A. **Employee** – anyone who is paid by the Church on a full-time or part-time basis whether or not they work directly with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.

1. All church employees will be required to complete a confidential application form, be interviewed by an Elder, have references checked, and give written permission for a criminal record and background check.
2. All records, forms, and reports regarding employees will be filed in the Church office.

B. **Volunteer** – anyone 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 Minors or Vulnerable Adults.

1. All volunteers will be required to complete a confidential application form which will be approved by a member of the pastoral staff, provide references, and give written permission for a criminal record and background check.
2. In addition to the above requirement, a volunteer must be a member of the Church or a regular attender for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet these requirements may serve only upon the recommendation and approval of the pastoral staff.
3. All records, forms, and reports regarding volunteers will be filed in the church office.

- C. **Minors** – anyone meeting the previously outlined definition of a Minor who desires to work with other Minors or with Vulnerable Adults
1. All minors will be required to complete (or have a parent or guardian complete) a confidential application form which will be approved by an appropriate Church staff person. Completion will indicate that the parent or guardian knows no reason why the Minor should not be allowed to serve in this capacity.
  2. Minors under the age of thirteen (13) should only serve alongside their parents. Male Minors over the age of ten (10) cannot serve in the nursery.
  3. Minors should be a regular attender for at least six (6) months prior to working with other Minors or with Vulnerable Adults. A minor who does not meet these requirements may serve only upon the recommendation and approval of the pastoral staff.
  4. All records, forms, and reports regarding volunteers will be filed in the church office.

## II. TRAINING

- A. **Orientation:** All new employees and volunteers will be given orientation training that includes reading this Policy fully, reviewing the definition of Abuse, identifying symptoms of Abuse, and understanding this Policy and its approach to safety, security, disciplining Minors, and reporting Abuse.
- B. **Annual Training:** Providing employees and volunteers with an orientation is not sufficient by itself. Effective learning can only be accomplished through repetition and reinforcement of previously learned material. Consequently, the Church will provide re-training to all employees and volunteers annually. Such re-training not only increases the awareness of protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, but also demonstrates the Church's commitment to ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable members.
- C. **Minors:** Minors who volunteer will not be provided with the same training as is provided to adults. Minors who volunteer will be given basic instruction about appropriate interaction with Children but will not receive instruction on Abuse.

## III. OPERATING PRACTICES

- A. **Video Surveillance:** Both of the Church's nursery and toddler spaces are equipped with video surveillance cameras which operate 24/7 and can be accessed and reviewed should there be a need to do so for security or for child safety purposes.
- B. **Two Adult Rule:** Pastors, elders, deacons, or the children's ministries coordinator will be present or nearby and available whenever Minors or Vulnerable Adults are present. A reasonable effort will be made to have two (2) adult workers present in the room, or nearby, with Minors or Vulnerable Adults during Church activities. It is acceptable for only one adult worker to be present during classroom situations if the door is kept open

or a window is available for the activities to be occasionally monitored. A husband and wife working the same room will typically be considered as two adults for purposes of this Policy.

No adult worker will drive a Minor to or from a church function alone without the verbal consent of a parent. Ideally, if two adults are not available, the parents should be contacted to bring or pick up their child.

If a Minor or Vulnerable Adult is able to attend to his or her own needs with respect to the use of a restroom, that individual is to be accorded his or her privacy. However, if restroom assistance is needed, the adult worker (female only) should enter either with another adult or with the door open.

- C. **View Windows / Open Doors:** Minors or Vulnerable Adults should be placed in rooms with view windows or open doors for all activities and/or blinds on windows should remain open at all times.
  
- D. **Appropriate Touch:** Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives, and the following guidelines should be observed in order to promote proper, genuine, and positive displays of God's love.
  - 1. Hugs should be one-arm side hugs.
  - 2. Lap sitting may occur with kindergarten and younger children. School age children should not sit on an adult's lap or another Minor's lap.
  - 3. Adults should not kiss Minor's at all, nor should Minor's ever kiss other Minors.
  
- E. **Out-of-Town Activities:** All Minor participants should have written parental consent and a medical release form in order to participate in out-of-town activities. Consent forms must be completed for each trip. Medical release information may be completed for one-year periods and renewed annually. All employees and volunteers will be required to comply with all Church policies (including, but not limited to, those outlined in this Policy) during Church-sponsored out-of-town activities. Rooms used for sleeping should be easily accessible and must be separated between male and female Minors with male and female adult chaperones present in the respective rooms.

#### IV. **REPORTING PROCEDURES**

Observed or reported Abuse or suspicion of Abuse, molestation, or any type of observed or suspicious inappropriate behavior or conduct possibly constituting Abuse should be reported immediately to a pastoral staff member, and he will immediately notify the Elder Board.

The reporter shall inform the pastoral staff member of all relevant facts with respect to the incident of suspected Abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of suspected Abuse, the pastoral staff member receiving the report shall complete the written

Incident Reporting Form. However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is a member of the pastoral staff, the reporter shall go directly to a non-staff member of the Elder Board.

V. **RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS**

- A. Reporting Abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family of a Minor or Vulnerable Adult as well as the accused, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. However, failing to report Abuse can have severe consequences to a Minor or Vulnerable Adult at risk. Consequently, if you have reasonable cause to suspect Abuse, you should talk with a pastoral staff member to see what steps can and should be taken to protect the Minor or Vulnerable Adult, to help the family, and to attempt to avoid erroneous actions.
- B. All allegation of Abuse will be taken seriously and investigated as deemed appropriate, provided however, an individual accused of Abuse shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty. The Church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. The Church will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.
- C. The appropriate Church staff member will then take appropriate action to report allegations in accordance with this Policy, the reporting requirements of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, insurance policy requirements, and advice of legal counsel.
- D. The official spokesperson for the Church will be the Chairman of the Elder Board or his appointee. No other staff members, elders, deacons, or church members shall speak to the media regarding such matters.
- E. The Church staff will thoroughly document all efforts in handling any incident.

VI. **GENERAL GUIDELINES:**

➤ **QUICK RULES TO REMEMBER:**

- Molesters and abusers seldom look like criminals.
- Report anything that looks like Abuse, seems suspicious, or makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Strive to be with at least one other adult when working with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- All teachers and helpers should be screened. Do not allow visitors or parents who have not been screened to remain in the classroom by themselves with Minors or Vulnerable Adults.
- Make certain that touch is age-appropriate and is only for the purposes of encouragement and affirmation.
- Follow additional policies of ministry in which you are serving.

- Diapers should be changed by women, not men.

➤ **SITUATIONS TO AVOID:**

- Releasing a Minor to an adult who is not the parent that properly checked in the Child in the preschool or nursery areas
- Physically restraining a Minor unless the restraint is necessary to prevent the Minor from harming himself or herself or others or is required by an immediate need to maintain safety in a particular setting
- Touching a Minor or Vulnerable Adult inappropriately – do not slap, push, or touch a Minor or Vulnerable Adult in a private area
- Going behind closed doors with a Minor or Vulnerable Adult or take a Minor or Vulnerable Adult into an area of a room that is not fully visible to other workers

**VII. AMENDMENT OF POLICY**

The Elder Board may amend these policies as they see fit, provided however, that this Policy shall, at all times at a minimum, be subject to and in accordance with Mississippi state laws.

**VIII. CONCLUSION**

None of the above is to be construed to limit the teaching of the truths of the Christian faith to children, and instruction in the same shall not constitute harassment or abuse, or a violation of this Policy; nor shall any of the above infringe on the Church's right and obligation to assert that discipline necessary to protect the safety and well-being of the children or the integrity of the services, ministries, and programs of the Church.

Any parent who sends a child to a Riverwood-sponsored activity should recognize that the purpose of the Church is to present the Gospel and teach the Word of God, and that the Church must maintain an environment conducive to the attainment of these ends, which environment may require the application of certain rules of conduct and decorum. Accordingly, any parent who places a child into a Riverwood program or sponsored activity shall by doing so signify his or her agreement that the Church has the right to manage the program or activity as it thinks best.

This policy shall be publicly posted in the church offices at Riverwood Bible Church and shall be deemed to be in effect and incorporated into all Riverwood ministries and activities, on campus and off, as of August 22, 2017.

**Enacted by Unanimous Vote of the Elders  
August 22, 2017**