

October 14, 2008

Dear Members & Friends of Fork Shoals Baptist Church:

Child abuse is a growing moral and legal problem in America. Sadly though, it's even common in churches and church-related settings. According to scripture, we are encouraged to promote the spiritual development of our young people at Fork Shoals. If we are to fulfill this task, we must first take reasonable precautions to provide them with an environment in which they are protected from such abuse.

Accusations and actual incidents of child abuse have far-reaching effects. Child abuse can scar a child for life and devastate a family. Ministries are tarnished and some have been severely damaged by the legal and emotional fallout. I think you will agree that we need to take every reasonable precaution to prevent child abuse of any kind from happening in our church.

Our insurance provider, along with law enforcement and Christian attorneys, encourage churches to develop a child abuse prevention plan that includes screening of all employees and those volunteers who come in contact with children and youth. A program of this type is the best way for us to protect our young people. It also demonstrates that we have taken reasonable measures to prevent abuse should an allegation or incident of child abuse occur.

As a team, we have accepted these recommendations and have developed a child abuse prevention plan. The plan includes screening of all church staff and volunteers working in the children's and youth ministries of our church, as well as training and communication.

Some in the congregation may find it difficult to talk about child abuse, thinking that it couldn't happen here or be committed by someone you know. The fact is; 85% of child abuse cases came by the child knowing their perpetrator. One in three assault victims are under the age of 12, and 43% of those are 6 and younger. We can astound you with the facts all day long, but if we don't act then our church could end up as a statistic.

If you have any questions concerning our new child abuse prevention policy, you can contact any of the team members. We would be glad to discuss our program with you in greater detail. We urge you to support our efforts in protecting our children and the church from incidents of child abuse. The problem is nationwide, but we must do our part here at Fork Shoals for the sake of our children and the ministry of our church.

Sincerely,

The Child Protection Team

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Child Protection Policy

The ministry of Fork Shoals Baptist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for those participating in our ministry activities for our children and youth. We also seek to minimize any vulnerability to unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our church volunteers and staff may experience as they fulfill their ministerial duties. In order to fulfill these commitments as fully as possible, the following procedures will be used, without exception, when selecting ministry volunteers and new staff members.

Staff Screening Procedures

1. Any staff that is involved working with children or youth in any capacity will complete and return a ministry application.
2. The Pastor along with the church council and/or search committee will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position. The church will store the application form, any background checks, reference checks, etc. in a locked file cabinet or other secure location.
3. If the individual appears to be an appropriate candidate for the ministry position, the proper committee will check at least two references to confirm that the information that the candidate provided is accurate. The committee will also conduct a required criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
4. When indicated by our reference check and/or background checks, candidates who pose a threat to others, or have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, will be removed from consideration immediately for ministry positions within our church.

Volunteer Screening Procedures

1. Any volunteer who desires to work with children or youth in any capacity will complete and return a ministry application.
2. The ministry leader/committee will carefully review the application, ensuring that the individual is an appropriate match in the particular ministry selected. The ministry leader will store the application form, any background checks, reference checks, etc. in a locked file cabinet or other secure location.
3. If the individual appears to be an appropriate match for the ministry, then the ministry leader/ committee will check at least two references to confirm that the information that the candidate provided is accurate. A criminal background check is not required unless the ministry leader/committee deems necessary.
4. When indicated by our reference check and/or background checks, candidates who pose a threat to others, or have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, will be removed from consideration immediately for ministry positions within our church.

Waiting Period

1. All volunteer candidates should be regularly involved in our church. Before they will be considered for any ministry leadership position involving contact with children or youth, the committee will review their application qualifications and deem the individual eligible to serve.
2. New-believers are encouraged to grow as Christians and participate in regular church activities for a minimum of 6 months before applying to be a volunteer.

Supervision

1. At least two adults should be present at every function or program involving children or youth. This includes each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area. One or more of the adults should be 25 years of age or older. For larger groups, the number of adult supervision must increase in accordance with state student/teacher ratio requirements. The following table will serve as a suggested guide:

Infants 0-6m	Crawlers 6-12m	Toddlers 12-18m	Walkers 18-36m	3-4 yrs.	4-5 yrs.	5-6 yrs.	Grades 1-6
2:1	3:1	4:1	5:1	6:1	8:1	10:1	15:1

2. Two or more adults should be present to supervise any children or youth activities that take place outside the premises of the church. The adults who supervise must have been through our ministry screening process.
3. Workers should arrive 10 minutes before a scheduled activity. They must also be prepared to remain until all individuals in their care have been picked up and accounted for. No children or youth should be released to find their parents or wait unattended for transportation.

Counseling

1. If the need should arise for spiritual/emotional counseling, we encourage team counseling by two screened adults if available. If only one screened individual conducts the counseling session, it should be conducted in view of another screened worker through a window or open door. Under no circumstance should counseling be done one on one in a closed room!
2. Time should be considered and carefully watched to limit the amount of exposure in a counseling session. Try to limit each counseling session to 30 minutes or less. If more time is needed, reschedule another appointment.
3. Written permission from parents/guardians is recommended if the session is planned in advance. The ministry leader should also be aware of any counseling that is occurring on church property.

Work Restrictions

1. For children age 6 or older, at least one adult female should take girls to the restroom, and one adult male should take boys to the restroom. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe and then wait outside the restroom for the children.

2. Children age 5 or younger (boys and girls) should be assisted as needed in the restroom by an adult female.
3. Never touch a child's private areas except when necessary, as in the case of changing a diaper.
4. Workers should avoid the appearance of impropriety – such as sitting older children on their lap, kissing, or embracing others, etc.
5. Workers are to release children in their care only to parents, guardians, or persons specifically authorized to pick up the child, unless otherwise directed by the parent/guardian personally.

Discipline

1. Discipline is taken from the word disciple, which is a Christian duty. We should always do our best to imitate Christ in the means of discipling children or youth.
2. Workers are **never** to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Physical restraint should only be used in a situation where it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming himself or another individual.
3. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the ministry leader, activity coordinator, or to a parent/guardian.

Injuries or Illness

1. Persons who are ill (w/ a fever, or communicable disease that can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity.
2. Participants should be returned to their parent/guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If immediate return is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that allows an adult worker to monitor the participant until he/she can be returned to a parent/guardian.
3. When the ministry leader or activity coordinator become aware of an injury to a worker or participant will take steps to ensure that proper medical attention is given to the injured person and provide for continued monitoring of the remaining activity participants.
4. Persons who have received a minor injury should be given first aid as needed at the time of the injury. The individual's parent/guardian should be notified of the injury when they pick up the injured person.
5. Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parents/guardians should be notified immediately, along with the ministry leader/activity coordinator. If warranted, emergency medical personnel may then be contacted.
6. Ministry workers should complete an *Injury Form* whenever an injury occurs during a ministry function. The form should be given to the ministry leader to keep on file for future reference if needed.

Notice of Injury or Abuse

1. Volunteer or paid staff who become aware of any injury or abuse occurring within any ministry activity must immediately inform the ministry leader or activity coordinator. The ministry leader or activity coordinator should then complete an *Injury Form*.

2. If the ministry leader or volunteer becomes aware of possible abuse by a staff member or volunteer, then the parent or guardian should be immediately informed that possible abuse has occurred. The ministry leader or pastor will then contact law enforcement authorities. The ministry leader or pastor will then insure that an attorney is immediately contacted to provide a written opinion to law enforcement authorities. The written opinion should be obtained within 24 hours after the ministry leader first becomes aware of the situation.
3. If the ministry leader or volunteer becomes aware of possible abuse by a parent/guardian, the ministry leader or pastor will evaluate the allegation report and determine if further action is necessary. After which, the ministry leader or pastor will then contact law enforcement authorities. An *Allegation Form* should be completed and the ministry leader or pastor will contact an attorney to provide a written opinion within 24 hours of the incident.
4. Sound judgment and caution should be used at all times when accusations of parents or guardians are involved. A thorough investigation should be taken to ensure any false accusation from surfacing.

Violation of Policy or Procedures

1. Volunteers must promptly notify their ministry leader when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.
2. In the process of ensuring compliance with this policy, it may become necessary to remove workers from their positions.
3. When a violation or allegation occurs, it should be documented and each situation will be fully investigated by ministry leaders, and, if needed, with the assistance of legal counsel or civil authorities.
4. Staff members who are the subject of an investigation will be removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Staff members who admit to the abuse will be terminated consistent with the established employment practices of the church.
5. Volunteers who are subjects of investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.

Annual Review

1. Each year, we will conduct a review meeting. At that time, the procedures mandated by this policy will be reviewed with all volunteers, staff, and the leadership of the church.
2. Anyone who desires to continue work with the children or youth ministries will complete a brief *Renewal Application* annually.
3. The leadership of this ministry will regularly review this policy and the procedures established within it. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified in accordance with the bylaws of the church. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all those affected by the policy changes.

Children/Youth Worker Release

I recognize that Fork Shoals Baptist Church is relying on the accuracy of the information I provide on the Children/Youth Application form. I attest and affirm that the information I have provided is absolutely true and correct.

I authorize the church to contact any person listed on the Children/Youth Application form, and I further authorize any such person to provide the church with information, opinions, and impressions relating to my background or qualifications.

I voluntarily release the church and any such person listed on the Children/Youth Application form from liability involving the communication of information relating to my background or qualifications. I further authorize the church to conduct a criminal background investigation if such a check is deemed necessary.

I have carefully read the policy and procedures of the church, and I agree to abide by them and to protect the health and safety of the children or youth assigned to my care at all times.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

(Please read this document carefully before you sign it.)

Children/Youth Worker Application

Name: _____

Daytime Telephone(s): _____

Address: _____

Age: _____

In which children/youth ministries do you want to be involved? _____

What skills would you bring to this ministry? _____

Do you have prior experience in working with children/youth? If so, please list.

Organization	Program	Dates	Contact
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Have you at any time ever:

- Been arrested for any reason? __ Yes __ No
- Engaged in or been accused of child abuse of any nature? __ Yes __ No
- Been convicted or plead guilty to any crime? __ Yes __ No
- Are you aware of any traits that could pose a threat to children, youth, or others? __ Yes __ No

If you answered yes to any questions above, please explain.

Are there any reasons why you should not work with children or youth? If yes, please explain.

Churches you have attended in the past five years?

Church Name	Pastor's Name	Years Attended
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Please include any references (Other than relatives). Please provide at least two.

Name/Relationship	Address	Phone
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____