

Circle of Faith
Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

Circle of Faith desires to be a safe place for all children and adults who attend any Church sponsored activity. By fostering awareness of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in the presence of minors, Circle of Faith, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another. To this end, all paid staff and volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults will undergo an interview, an authorized background check, and required training before being approved.

Each year children and vulnerable adults are victimized by individuals they know and trust. The Church is not immune to the potential for such abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults, either by its members or by those in leadership positions. Incidents of child and vulnerable adult abuse or neglect cut across every racial, social, economic and religious boundary. This Child/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy reflects the Church's commitment to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm.

Circle of Faith will not tolerate child or vulnerable adult abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this policy not only reflects your concern about children's and vulnerable adult'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, vulnerable adults, and workers, all volunteers and paid staff of Circle of Faith who participate in Church-sponsored activities with children or vulnerable adults will be required to comply with this policy and its procedures.

DEFINITIONS:

Child: Any person under the age of 18.

Special Needs Child: Any child requiring specific adult supervision or care as a result of mental or physical limitations.

Adult: Any person age 18 and over.

Child abuse and neglect: Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect of a child by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's welfare.

Physical abuse: Maltreatment which results in physical injury, including, but not limited to bruises, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.

Emotional abuse: Maltreatment which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including, but not limited to, belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on the child's performance and isolation from normal social activities.

Sexual abuse: Maltreatment which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child or vulnerable adult, including, but not limited to, physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and non-physical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).

Neglect: Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child or vulnerable adult's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and supervision.

Paid Staff: Hourly, salaried, part-time, full-time employees, including ministerial staff, who work with children or vulnerable adults at any Church-sponsored activity.

Volunteer workers: Any non-compensated individual who works with children or vulnerable adults at any Church-sponsored activity.

Caregiver: Any paid or volunteer worker who has been interviewed, had a background check completed, trained and approved to work with our children or vulnerable adults.

Mandated reporter: Any person with responsibility for the care of children or vulnerable adults at Circle of Faith is a mandated reporter, including all staff and the leadership team at all times.

Vulnerable adult: Any person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection, is impaired due to mental, emotional, long-term physical or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging.

Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult: Any willful act or threatened act by a relative, caregiver, or household member which causes or is likely to cause significant impairment to a vulnerable adult's physical, mental, or emotional health.

Youth Volunteer: A high school student who has been interviewed, trained, and approved by the appropriate staff person or volunteer to assist an adult leader.

Procedures

Appropriate Touch:

“Good touch” is important to each of us. Children and vulnerable adults do not grow and thrive without the good touch of others. Touch was important to Jesus as he healed people and comforted them. Our Christian tradition is to share love with each other through hugs, placing an arm around another's shoulders or squeezing a hand to say, “You are loved.”

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 upon a child or vulnerable adult, other than by accidental means.

Committing any sexual offense against a child or vulnerable adult, or engaging in any sexual contact with a child or vulnerable adult.

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.

The presence or possession of pornographic materials at any church function.

The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in any function for minors.

Florida Laws Relating to Reporting Child Abuse, Neglect, Abandonment and Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults:

Law Relating to Children:

Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandates that any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline of the Department of Children and Families.

Law Relating to Vulnerable Adults:

Chapter 415 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.) governs the Florida Department of Children and Families and how they detect and correct abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults who, because of their age or disability, may be unable to adequately provide for their own care or protection.

Background Screening Procedures for Volunteer and Paid Workers:

The following procedures reflect our commitment to provide protective care for all children and caregivers that participate in Church-sponsored activities:

All applicants for paid staff and volunteer positions will complete a Circle of Faith application/screening form and an authorization form to conduct background checks by name and social security number. All volunteer applicants will be interviewed by the Department Pastor or Director. References will be checked by the Pastor or Director responsible for the department.

All volunteer workers who apply to work with minors or vulnerable adults must have been participating at Circle of Faith for a minimum of six months before they will be permitted to work in any children's or vulnerable adult's ministry. Older youth volunteers (age 16 and 17) may be approved by the Department Pastor or Director to work in children ministries under the direct supervision of at least one approved adult (Caregiver) at all times.

All paid staff and volunteer workers who work with children or vulnerable adults, including bus and van drivers, must have successfully passed a background check conducted by Circle of Faith through an outside third party. In addition, they must have completed an interview by the Pastor or Director of the department, and have completed the required training for the position. Only then will the individual be considered a Caregiver.

All background check data will be treated as confidential and will only be accessible by authorized Church Staff and the Leadership Team. The Pastor of the department will submit any authorization forms to the third party for the check, and review all background check reports upon receipt. If any issues are surfaced, then the Pastor will review those with the Lead Pastor, and in the absence of a Lead Pastor, with the Leadership Team.

In the event a background check discloses a criminal history, the Pastor of the department and Lead Pastor, or in the absence of a Lead Pastor, the Leadership Team, shall review the data and make a decision as to the suitability of the volunteer to work with children or vulnerable adults. If the record indicates a prior conviction of sexual abuse or other sexual crime, the volunteer will not be permitted to work with our children or vulnerable adults. All felony convictions must be more than five years old for a volunteer to be permitted to work as a

Caregiver. All convictions of a violent nature must be more than five years old and will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the Lead Pastor, or in the absence of a Lead Pastor, the Leadership Team.

All background check reports will be maintained by the Ministry Staff or Church Clerk.

General Guidelines:

Caregivers shall not engage in any form of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect.

A minimum of two Caregivers (one being an adult) must be present with each group or class, regardless of how few children or vulnerable adults are in attendance. This means that under no circumstances shall a single Caregiver be alone with a class or activity. If two Caregivers are not available, the Pastor or Director of that department must be notified immediately and if another Caregiver cannot be located, then the class/ activity must either be merged with another class or cancelled.

Middle and High School students may have one-on-one meetings with their leaders in a place where they can be easily seen by others, and with the knowledge and consent of their parent or guardian. Infants, preschoolers, and elementary age children should not be alone with a Caregiver who is not also their parent or guardian at any time or for any reason.

No background checks will be authorized for a youth under the age of 18. Authorized high school students can participate in children's or vulnerable adult's activities as volunteers as long as at least one Caregiver is present at all times. These authorized youth must have been interviewed, received training, and been approved by a Pastor or Director of that department. A Youth volunteer of high school age can count as the second Caregiver for the purposes of two adult rules, but this configuration is not preferred.

When possible, two members of the same family should not be the only Caregivers involved with a particular class or activity.

The windows of classroom and play areas shall remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities. If doors have windows, those windows will also remain uncovered to allow someone on the outside to see inside.

When possible, children or vulnerable adults are to be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, another adult should be present and the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while assisting the child or vulnerable adult.

Children shall be released to parents or guardians at the reception counters or door/entrance. Persons other than the child's parents or guardians must be authorized to pick up the child.

When children are taken out of the classroom/playground, the Caregivers shall take a count of the children upon leaving and upon return, to ensure all are present.

A positive approach to discipline shall be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. Using physical restraint is prohibited unless that child is a danger to themselves or to others.

The appropriate Ministerial Staff person must approve any preschool, children's or vulnerable adult's activities held off site from the Church. Parent or guardian permission shall be obtained on proper forms and there shall be a minimum of two adult Caregivers present.

Background checks for approved Caregivers and volunteers are to be renewed every two years.

Mandatory training is required for every Caregiver, Youth Volunteer, and Paid Staff Member who works with children or vulnerable adults – when they start the position, and annually thereafter.

These procedures and guidelines will be reviewed annually and revised as needed.

All volunteers and paid staff receiving training under this policy must sign a statement that he or she has read and understands the policy, procedures, and guidelines and has received the required training. These signed statements will be maintained by the church clerk.

In the case of suspected abuse in a family or by a Caregiver approved by the church, the person with knowledge or reasonable suspicion of abuse should call the Florida Child Abuse Hotline immediately. They may also, at their discretion, alert the Lead Pastor to their suspicion. No volunteer or church staff is obligated to alert the pastors or leadership team if they fear reprisal, bad faith, or conflict of interest.

In the case that the ministry staff or approved Caregiver is in receipt of information leading to a reasonable suspicion (not necessarily a credible report) of child abuse or neglect, they are obligated under this policy to report to the Florida Child Abuse Hotline immediately or to help the person with more direct knowledge immediately make a report. They may also, at their discretion, alert the Lead Pastor.

In the event that immediate reporting procedures have not been followed, it is the responsibility of every church staff member and volunteer to immediately report suspected abuse when they are in receipt of such knowledge. No one is exempt from reporting requirements at any time or for any reason. There is no pastoral confidentiality in the case of child abuse.