



## **Family Ministry Code of Conduct for Child Safety**

### **What is a Code of Conduct?**

All staff and volunteers who work with children are expected to interact with children in a mature, capable, safe, caring, responsible manner, with a high level of accountability. This Code of Conduct describes how our student volunteers will interact with children and the boundaries they are expected to observe. By being vigilant in following the Code of Conduct, we will help protect children from abuse. The most effective way to reduce abuse of children is to be vigilant.

### **Accountability**

All adult staff and volunteers and all student volunteers are expected to maintain our high level of professionalism. As a volunteer with children, you agree to interact with the children by observing these principles. It is our expectation that you understand your responsibility to not only follow this Code of Conduct but to intervene when you see anyone crossing a child's safe boundary or violating the Code of Conduct. Such intervention may include:

- Remaining present with the child in order to provide him/her a sense of security;
- Redirecting the child to join other children in a different area;

In all cases violations of this Code of Conduct shall be reported to the director of children's ministry. Such a report shall be handled with the highest degree of confidentiality.

You also give permission to the other adults in our programs to take these intervening actions if you are seen crossing safe boundaries or violating this code of conduct.

### **Visibility**

All work with children shall be planned and carried out in a way that minimizes risks as far as possible. This includes being visible to other adults when working with children. Adults and student volunteers shall not be in a room alone with a child with the door closed, or in any area of our property that is secluded or hidden from view.

If a child with a disability is in need of assistance for personal hygiene or safety for the child or others there may be the need for the assigned "buddy" or caregiver to provide what the child needs. Such interactions should be as visible as possible. The adult should also inform a leader or another adult that they need to assist or care for the child and ask that someone remain nearby to provide as much accountability as possible.

### **Overcoming Isolation**

To protect our children, staff and volunteers, at no time during a program may an adult or student volunteer be alone with a single child where others cannot observe the interaction. We expect all adults and student volunteers to reduce isolation by having a minimum of two children present, informing the child's parent of any meeting you wish to have with the child, and doing it during a time and/or in a location where your interaction with the child is visible to others. Isolation could be overcome, for example, by taking two or more children

to the bathroom together rather than only one, dropping off siblings last in a carpool, or taking your own child or spouse along when providing rides. We expect an adequate number of adults to supervise youth events, especially overnight activities.

When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable:

- Always be accountable to other adults regarding your interactions with youth or children by informing the ministry leader and or parents when, where and for how long your one-on-one interaction will be.
- The activity must be in a public place that is visible to others, never in a private or secluded location, such as a room with the door closed or in a home alone with the child or student.
- Counseling or other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and willing to stay in the vicinity until it is completed; and
- Parents and/or supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activities with youth or children.

In an unexpected situation when you find yourself alone with a child, find someone to join you if at all possible, or notify any available adult.

### **Parent Involvement**

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents shall be informed of planned activities. Parents shall be encouraged to make unannounced visits to program activities as a way of reducing isolation and monitoring the interaction between adults and children.

### **Supervision**

Supervision reduces risk. Program administrators and leaders shall periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together.

### **Technology**

Technology should be used appropriately to protect children or youth from abuse and exploitation. Volunteers and staff shall not engage in social networking, texting or any other means of private communication with children and youth without the permission of the parents or guardian. All electronic communication must not be erased or deleted and made available for review upon request by the ministry leader or Pastor.

### **Discipline**

Discipline should be used to teach and correct rather than punish. It shall not include slapping, hitting, shaming, yelling at, or belittling a child.

### **Touch**

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children, but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Touch shall be open rather than secretive.

- A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch should be in response to the need of the child, and not the need of the adult.
- Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult.
- It should be with the child's permission and any resistance from the child should be respected.
- Touch should always communicate respect for the child.

Adults and student volunteers should avoid doing things of a personal nature for children that they are able to do for themselves, including personal hygiene and bathroom breaks, dressing, bathing, etc.

Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children. Some children with special needs may exhibit more aggression than other children as part of their developmental progress. When such aggression is exhibited by a child with a disability the behavior is likely not intentional or willful. Care will be given in these situations to make sure all children are safe and cared for.

There may be the occasion when the "buddy" or caregiver of a child with a disability will need the structure and care that appropriate touch can provide. Such touch should be supportive, caring and with the intent of helping the child return to a safe, secure and calm state.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts: verbal praise, side hugs, shoulder to shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate). For smaller children, touching their hands, faces, shoulders and arms, arms around their shoulders, hugs, or holding them when others are present.

The following behaviors between staff or volunteers and children are inappropriate and shall not be engaged in: touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs; showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child; sleeping in bed with a child; inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development; flirtatious or seductive looks; any form of affection that is unwanted by the child; showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually-suggestive games with any child; any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature.

Adult members shall monitor each other in the area of physical contact, helping each other by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

### **Showing Favoritism**

Adults and student volunteers shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to a particular child or youth to the exclusion of others.

Adults and student volunteers shall not give gifts to any child or youth without requesting and receiving permission from a parent or legal guardian.

For children and adults with disabilities it is more natural that a child will form meaningful attachments to 1 or 2 individuals. The interaction or attention given by the adults a child has made a connection with could appear to be showing favoritism or singling out these children. When such attachments are created it is important to monitor those interactions to make sure proper boundaries are maintained.

## **Verbal Interaction**

Words can also be used to support and encourage a child, such as praise, positive reinforcement, and appropriate jokes. Inappropriate verbal interaction includes the following: shaming, belittling, humiliating, name calling, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate the child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about the child.

Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children.

## **Reporting of Abuse**

When anyone has reason to suspect, receives a disclosure of, or has knowledge of child abuse within the scope of Covenant Presbyterian Church's work and ministry, he or she must make a report according to our Reporting Protocol. This includes abuse that happens while engaged in church activities or abuse that takes place outside the church, such as at school or a youth serving organization. The Reporting Protocol is attached.

## **Children with Disabilities:**

Because our church is committed to ministering to children with disabilities, we have to take into consideration some of the challenges developmental difference creates for us. Therefore, we have to allow assigned "buddies" or caregivers the flexibility to address the need for care and safety when that time comes. For purposes of this Code of Conduct any such flexibility applies only to situations that involve a child who has a diagnosis of disability from a licensed professional. We understand that there will be occasions when caring for these children will require more individual interaction and attention. In some of those cases one person assisting the child may be the best way to help that child return to a safe, secure and calm state. There could be times when that interaction will be less visible for a brief period of time. When visibility may be restricted the adult must ensure a high level of accountability to others for the interaction. Those situations will be delineated throughout this document.

## **Reporting Protocol**

Alabama Law states that anyone whose profession brings them in contact with children on a daily basis is legally obligated to report signs of suspected child abuse or neglect. A mandated reporter is anyone who is required by law to report to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Failure to make a report of reasonable suspicion of abuse is a misdemeanor offense and punishable by a year in prison and a monetary fine.

The abuse of children is not only a sin, but it is a serious crime. When adults report suspected child abuse to the legal authorities, their report could save a child's life. In contrast, silence about suspected abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. Covenant Presbyterian Church encourages its members, both mandated reporters and not, to contact the authorities immediately when a child discloses abuse, when they witness child abuse, or when they observe signs of abuse. Therefore, at Covenant Presbyterian Church, all adults are required to report. We understand that when we assume the responsibility to train children, we commit ourselves to doing all we can to protect them.

Alabama Law states that the person who has direct knowledge of or suspicion of abuse or neglect must be the one to make the report.

### **Covenant Presbyterian Church has established the following Reporting Protocol:**

#### **What am I required to report?**

The minimum standard for a report to be made to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services is any "reasonable suspicion" of abuse. Reasonable suspicion does not mean you have proof that abuse has occurred.

There are three ways you will learn about abuse:

1. A child discloses abuse
2. You observe abuse
3. You have reasonable suspicion of abuse

When a child discloses abuse or you observe abuse, you must report the abuse by following the reporting protocol below.

Reasonable suspicion is harder to determine than receiving a disclosure or observing abuse. At Covenant Presbyterian Church, we have a Code of Conduct that describes the boundaries adults are to maintain when interacting with children. Every adult who works with children must sign our Code of Conduct, acknowledging they agree to abide by the Code of Conduct when interacting with children. When an adult agrees to our Code of Conduct, he/she gives permission to any adult who observes any inappropriate or questionable behavior to speak to him/her about what has been observed and to remind them of the commitment we have made to maintain safe boundaries between adults and children.

It is our expectation that you understand your responsibility to observe the interaction between adults and children and when you see interaction that is questionable, inappropriate or crossing a child's boundaries, you will intervene on behalf of the child. Such intervention may include:

- Remaining present with the child in order to provide him/her a sense of security;
- Redirecting the child to join other children in a different area;
- Speaking to the adult and stating the boundary violation you have observed and reminding them of the responsibility to abide by this code of conduct;

In all cases violations of this Code of Conduct shall be reported to the director of Children's Ministry or Pastor of Students and Families. Such a report shall be handled with the highest degree of confidentiality.

If there is reason to believe the child is at risk or the response by the adult when held accountable for their actions causes concern, a formal Incident Report described below must be completed.

It may also be determined that there is reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused outside of any church event, such as in the home. In such a case you are expected to report, even though the abuse is not related to a program or ministry of the church.

Making a report to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services does not constitute an accusation of abuse. Making a report means we are requesting that a professional service be performed to determine if a child is at risk and if abuse has occurred.

### **To whom in the Church is a report made?**

If the child is in immediate danger, call law enforcement or 911 immediately. Once law enforcement has been called, you then follow the reporting protocol below.

### **Reporting Protocol**

If you have received a **disclosure of abuse** or you have **observed abuse**, you must report immediately to Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services. Use the Incident Report to collect information that will be helpful for reporting to DHR. After reporting to DHR, immediately report to the ministry director or to the supervising Pastor.

If you have reasonable **suspicion of abuse**, you must report by using one of the following methods:

1. Report suspicion of abuse to the ministry director or supervising pastor who may advise and assist through the reporting process
2. Report suspicion of abuse directly to Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services

The person making the report will be referred to here as the "Reporter." If neither the ministry director nor the Pastor is on site to hear the verbal report, then the verbal report must be given to the individual in charge of the event.

### **The Incident Report**

After the verbal report has been made, the Reporter must complete an Incident Report (provided by the ministry director or Pastor—also available on the church website) and submit the completed, signed and dated form to the person to whom it was verbally reported. The Incident Report must be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than 6 hours after the verbal report was made.

--If the verbal report was given to the individual in charge of the event (if neither the ministry director nor the Pastor was on site to receive the verbal report), the

Reporter then is responsible, as soon as practically possible, to contact the ministry director or Pastor as well, to initiate the Incident Report completion.

The Reporter and the person receiving the Incident Report (ministry director or Pastor) must each sign the Incident Report, noting the dates and times the Incident Report was signed. Both the Reporter and the person receiving the report must retain a copy of the Incident Report with both signatures showing dates and times.

Any ministry director who receives an Incident Report must forward the original Incident Report to the Pastor (or the person designated by the Pastor to receive these reports). The Pastor must sign the Incident Report, indicating the time/date signed.

All Incident Reports received by the Pastor or his designee MUST be reported to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services. The Pastor does not have the option of bypassing this step of making the report to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services. The date and time the incident was reported to the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services or law enforcement must be noted on the Incident Report, which will be kept in the church office in a secure file.

Alabama Law states that reports must be made immediately after suspicion that child abuse or neglect is occurring or has occurred by the person who has direct knowledge of or suspicion of abuse or neglect. A report can be made by either telephone or direct contact. Mandatory reporters must follow up with a written report to the Department of Human Resources. Reports may also be made to [lbama.gov/child-protective-services/](http://lbama.gov/child-protective-services/)

You must report immediately by telephone or in person. The law also requires you to follow your oral report with a written one. The Department of Human Resources has a form for your written report.

**Service to Family:** The Assistant Pastor, Youth and Families (or the Senior Pastor) will make all attempts to ensure the initial communications between the church and the affected family are open. If the incident remains unresolved for an extended period of time the Assistant Pastor, Youth shall seek advice from those listed above (in the initial report section) on how best to serve the family.

**Service to Accused:** The accused party will be presumed innocent until proven guilty. In an appropriate case, an accused party may be placed on paid or non-paid leave where there are no witnesses, other than the accused and the accuser. However, where two adults were present at the time of the alleged incident, one of whom was the accused, and the other adult states in writing that he or she observed no incident to occur, then the accused employee or volunteer shall remain as a church employee or volunteer throughout the investigative process.

**Service to the Congregation/Community:** Communication of an incident may be made to the congregation upon the determination of the Session.

If an incident report results in media attention or attention from the general public, only the Pastor or his designee shall be the "official spokesperson." Only the official spokesperson shall respond to media inquiries or make any public statement. Everyone should refrain from making a public statement and should refer any questions to this spokesperson. The use of the official spokesperson will minimize misinformation which can harm the victim and family and will help protect the privacy and confidentiality of the minor.

**Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**Incident Report Form**

---

**CONFIDENTIAL**

1. Name of staff or volunteer observing or receiving disclosure of child abuse: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you reporting a disclosure or suspicion of abuse?  
o Disclosure  
o Suspicion

**INCIDENT INFORMATION**

***Disclosure:***

CHILD'S INFORMATION:

2. Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
3. Child's Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
4. Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
5. Class grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
6. Date you received the disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_  
7. Where did you receive the disclosure:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. How did the child disclose to you (verbally, text message, etc): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



9. Time of day you received the disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Provide the child's statement if you received a disclosure (as best as you remember, use the exact words the child said or communicated; continue on back of page if necessary. If the child communicated electronically, please provide a copy of the communication):

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Name of person accused of the abuse: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of accused to child (Paid staff, volunteer, family member, other (specify)):

---

Contact information of the accused:

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CONTACT THE ACCUSED!**

**SUSPICION:**

Name of the adult you suspect:

---

How is this person engaged in ministry at Covenant Presbyterian : (Paid staff, volunteer, family member, other (specify)):

---

If the person suspected is not engaged in the ministry at Covenant, what is this person's relationship to the child: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Contact information of the accused:

---

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Describe in detail the behavior you observed or the boundary violation of our Code of Conduct that causes your suspicion:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CONTACT THIS ADULT!**

---

**Report Information**

Name of the person receiving the report: \_\_\_\_\_

Position held in the church: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of this Report: \_\_\_\_\_

Time this Incident Report was received: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the reporter: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the one receiving the report: \_\_\_\_\_

**How is a report made to the Jefferson County DHR Protective services?**

To make a report, call the Jefferson County DHR Child Protective Services at **(205) 423-4850**. (after hours number is 205-324-2135).  
<https://dhr.alabama.gov/child-protective-services/>

You must report immediately by telephone or in person. The law also requires you to follow your oral report with a written one. The Department of Human Resources has a form for your written report.

Time this Incident Report was made to Jefferson County DHR Protective Services:

\_\_\_\_\_