



HIGHPOINTE

BAPTIST CHURCH

PROTECTION POLICY

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

(Nursery—5th Grade)

3rd edition

December, 2022

We exist to see all peoples become whole-hearted followers of Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

Dear High Pointe Children's Ministry Volunteer or Staff Member,

High Pointe Baptist Church (HPBC) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. At this time, the disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of students has claimed the attention of our nation and society. Churches that have children's programs are not insulated from this trend.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe it is our responsibility to protect the children in our care. Children and parents need to know that we have taken every reasonable step to ensure the children's safety in our ministry. We believe it is also our responsibility to protect staff and volunteer workers in our ministry from false accusations of physical or sexual misconduct. To this end, we have screening, trainings, and supervision policies in place.

CLARIFYING RESPONSIBILITY

Staff and volunteers represent High Pointe Baptist Church and are therefore under the guidelines of our Child Protection Policy while participating in church-related events, functions, and meetings occurring on church premises.

PERSONNEL SUMMARY

Staff is defined as all paid employees of the church, as well as non-paid elders. All staff members are required to complete all required child protection training and background screening procedures, regardless of whether they have direct contact with children or students.

Volunteers include children and student ministry workers and teachers, safety team members, and anyone else who serves the children or youth of the church but is not paid church staff.

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WHAT WE REQUIRE

- **Six-month rule**

Volunteers are required to be members of HPBC for a minimum of six months. The elders may approve exceptions in unusual and appropriate circumstances. The purpose of this rule is to make HPBC a more difficult place for predators to gain access to children. Six months provides a threshold of time for individuals to become better known and gives an opportunity to evaluate their suitability for volunteer service.

- **Application**

We require a Volunteer Screening Application to help us screen volunteers before approving them for service in our children's ministry.

- **Reference checks**

We conduct reference checks. Applicants should list two or more prior service references, preferably from churches or youth organizations, plus personal references from at least one church member.

- **Background checks**

We conduct criminal records checks for all staff, pastors, and volunteers who will have access to children.

- **Training**

All staff and volunteers must successfully complete all required child protection trainings. Staff members and volunteers should have a growing understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors.

- **Policies and Procedures**

Staff members and volunteers are required to carefully review the policies contained in this packet and sign the last page indicating that they have read and understood the material and agree to comply with its policy requirements.

REPORTING ABUSE AND/OR POLICY VIOLATION

- **Abuse Tolerance**

Our church has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer at this church to act in the best interest of the children in every program or event.

In the event staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (ex. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations to their immediate supervisor, the Children's Director or one of the elders of HPBC.

- **Reporting Protocols**

Our church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency, and to one of the elders.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or one of the elders of HPBC. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor or an elder.

It is the responsibility of every elder, staff member, and volunteer to be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies, or worse, actual abuse. All questions or concerns regarding reporting should be directed to the Children's Director or to one of the elders.

- **Texas Reporting Law**

Texas law requires that any person having cause to believe a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency pursuant to Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code. If the staff member or volunteer prefers, the staff

member or volunteer may request reporting assistance from the Children's Ministry Director or any elder; together they will make a report to the appropriate authorities. If the staff member or volunteer makes a report regarding a suspicion of abuse or neglect without assistance, the staff member or volunteer will immediately notify the Children's Ministry Director or an elder. In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate Texas authorities.

- **Where to report**

***911 or your local law enforcement (512-974-2000) if the child is experiencing an emergency or life-threatening situation that must be dealt with immediately.**

***Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (1-800-252-5400) for non-emergency reporting.**

***Child Protective Services (817-321-8680).**

- **Response to a Report of Abuse**

The elders of HPBC will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs.

- **Consequences of Abuse**

Per High Pointe Baptist Church's zero tolerance for abuse (detailed on page 5), any person accused of committing abuse will be prohibited from participation in any area of ministry involving children and teenagers. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed abuse, along with any legal steps that will take place, will also be prohibited from any future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children, teenagers, or

vulnerable populations at our church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct will result in termination of employment from HPBC.

- **Consequences of Policy Violation**

While abuse always correlates to policy violation, policy violation does not always correlate to abuse. Example: a volunteer or staff member inappropriately touching a child is abuse and is clearly a HPBC Children's Ministry policy violation; however, a staff member or volunteer expecting a child to hug him/her prior to leaving class (as prohibited by this policy) does not guarantee abuse. Therefore, policy violations should be reported to an elder or the Children's Ministry Director and each policy violation will be taken on a case-by-case basis. Those with repeat policy violations will be temporarily suspended or indefinitely prohibited from participation in activities and programming involving children, teenagers, or vulnerable populations at HPBC. For further explanation please speak with an elder or the Children's Ministry Director.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

- **Touching**

No child should ever feel uncomfortable in the way they are being touched. Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. Physical contact, such as hugs or pats on the back, should be for the benefit of the child, and never based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.

Appropriate touching means offering a gentle touch on the shoulders, hands, arms, head, or upper back. Inappropriate touching includes kissing anywhere, demanding hugs, touching or suggestive tickling (chest, waist, stomach, bottom, or private areas), or any physical contact that could be deemed as violating.

Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should immediately be reported to an elder or the Children's Ministry Director. Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.

- **Lap Sitting**

Pre-K children, age 3 years old and older, are not allowed to sit in your lap. Instead, require this age child to sit beside you. Children under 3 years of age are allowed to sit in your lap for comforting and/or feeding purposes (ex. comforting a crying or sleepy child or feeding a baby his bottle).

TWO-PERSON RULE

One worker must never be alone with children, 5th grade and under. Adults working with children should never be in one-on-one situations with an individual child.

No child will ever be left unattended in the children's classrooms, nursery area, or any area of the church building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself or herself alone with a single child, that adult will immediately take the child to a room occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

- **"Be Seen, Seeing"**

After every event, Children's Ministry staff and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving. On the playground, staff and volunteers are to circulate, constantly watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to the areas which are not as easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under the slide, in corners, behind structures).

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another more open, easily viewed area. Our motto as staff and volunteers should be to, "Be seen, seeing". These rules are for the protection of our children, as well as for protecting our workers from false accusations.

CHILD TO WORKER RATIO

High Pointe Baptist Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following approved worker to child ratios will be observed:

Age of Children	Number of Children per Approved Worker
Infants (0-6 months)	2
Crawlers (6-12 months)	3
Toddlers (12-18 months)	4
Walkers (18-36 months)	5-6
Pre K (3-4 years)	6-9
Pre K (4-5 years)	8-10
K (5-6 years)	10-12
1st – 5 th grade	15

If a worker is “out of ratio” it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the supervisor or the Children's Ministry Director. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers or close the room to additional children to immediately bring child to worker ratios into compliance with our church policy.

Note: The ratios listed above are HPBC minimum requirements. Where supervision is concerned, more is generally better.

DISCIPLINE

It is our church's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children who are not their own. No form of physical discipline is acceptable while caring for other's children. The prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing these procedures, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

- Before beginning class, or your planned activity, clearly explain your behavior expectations to the children. Let them know what will happen if they choose not to follow the behavior guidelines.
- Warn the child of his/her specific misbehavior that will not be tolerated and verbally redirect the child.
- If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child away from the location of the misbehavior, usually to a corner or chair in the same classroom for a time-out (Remember: Avoid being alone with one child).
- Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with clear explanation of your expectations. ("Billy, you didn't stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for five minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
- Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a "spot" to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until the time-out is complete.
- Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child's life (3 yrs. old = 3 minutes). As a last resort, a worker may physically remove a child from a setting where the unruly child may be harming or may potentially harm another person.
- Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep him on track. ("Billy, you're doing a great job of sitting quietly – just two more minutes.")

- Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and reward him/her with being able to rejoin the group. Remind the child that repeating the initial behavior will result in further time-out.
- Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to the appropriate supervisor who will determine when to contact the child's parents. The parents may be asked to pick up the child until this behavior issue is resolved.

CONTACTING PARENTS

Parents who leave a child in the care of our staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministry activities.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit the ministries their children are involved in at HPBC. Parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with Children's Ministry activities are expected to complete our volunteer screening process required for all approved volunteers. Unscreened adults are not allowed to interact with the other children in the classroom or to act as a volunteer in any way. Our nursery classrooms have exceptions to this policy, related to check out times and unscreened members. (See HPBC's Nursery Policies and Procedures Handbook for more information.)

INTOXICANTS

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or an illegal drug while in any of our church facilities, or while working with or supervising children. HPBC requires staff and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products while in the facility, and while in the presence of children or their parents. Our church is a tobacco-free facility.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Each time a child is entrusted to our staff or volunteers, HPBC incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Nursery-age children will only be released to the

visiting parent/guardian presenting the appropriate claim tag or the member/regular guest whose name/picture corresponds to the child in our check in/out system.

Children, K-5th, will be released to the appropriate parent/guardian. It is assumed that this age child can be picked up by the adult who dropped him/her off.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in sexually oriented conversations with children and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities with any child. Staff members and volunteers are also prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, images, cards, videos, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

NUDITY

Staff members and volunteers in High Pointe's Children's Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children in their care.

RESTROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

- **Nursery Children**

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom needs, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diaper Changing

- 1) Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- 2) Workers are required to check a child's name tag before beginning to change any child's diaper to be sure we have parental permission to diaper the child.
- 3) Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
- 4) Children should be changed on changing stations only and will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- 5) Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.

- 6) Workers should change gloves or wash hands and the changing table between diaper changes.

Restrooms

- 1) Only female nursery workers or a child's parents/guardian are allowed to assist with toilet needs of children of either sex.
- 2) When children are taken into restrooms the door will be left partially open. As an additional safeguard, another worker will move into the line of sight of the restroom and the worker helping in the restroom, while continuing to monitor the other children.
- 3) Young children will never be left completely unattended in restrooms.
- 4) The female worker should assist in straightening the child's clothing as needed before returning to the classroom with other children.
- 5) The worker should assist the child in handwashing prior to joining the class.

- **School age children**

Adult workers should not enter restrooms with children. Workers will check restrooms prior to children's use to confirm that they are empty and wait outside until all children leave the restroom. Be sure to always keep count of the number of children in the restroom. Children requiring assistance should be cared for by a female worker with another worker accompanying her to serve as a witness.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. HPBC staff and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

Notes

This Child Protection Policy has been developed and adapted for High Pointe Baptist Church from Ministry Safe Conferences as well as policy suggestions from like-minded churches. This is the 3rd update, December, 2022.