



Bridgewater Baptist Church Abuse & Protection Policy

The mobilization of volunteers for ministry is essential to a healthy, growing church. Scripture teaches that God has equipped every believer for ministry in the church. When everyone is doing his or her part, a church normally grows spiritually and numerically. (Ephesians 4:16) Therefore, a healthy church utilizes a large number of volunteers in a variety of ways both within and outside the church.

Encouraging believers to get involved in church ministry is a spiritual service. Church leaders have been given the assignment “to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:21)

The following Scriptures must be kept in mind as the following policy is read:

*Stay away from every kind of evil. **1 Thessalonians 5:22***

*Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. **Ephesians 5:3***

*But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the seas. **Matthew 18:6***

February 2017

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Statement

Bridgewater Baptist Church is concerned for the safety of all God's children. At the same time, we are concerned about the safety and reputation of all who volunteer and who make our ministries possible. Bridgewater Baptist Church recognizes its spiritual, moral and legal obligation to provide secure environment for all who participate in church programs and come under the authority of the church. Abuse is a violation of God's moral law within the context of trusted relationships. It is criminal behavior that causes emotional, physical and spiritual trauma to victims, and has destructive consequences for abusers. It also undermines the credibility of a church's ministries and defames the Name of Christ. Such threats make it essential that all appropriate steps be taken to prevent abusive incidents from occurring. Therefore, the following procedures have been developed to help prevent the possibility of abuse taking place within the ministries of the Bridgewater Baptist Church.

Definitions of Abuse

Abuse means physical, sexual, or emotional maltreatment of a person.

Physical abuse means any physical force or action, which results in or may potentially result in a non-accidental injury within the church, exceeding that which could be considered reasonable discipline.

Sexual abuse means any sexual exploitation, whether consensual or not. It includes touching of a sexual nature, and sexual intercourse, and may include any behavior of a sexual nature. In determining whether behavior is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether an observer, looking at the behavior in its context, would conclude that is. This would exclude normal, affectionate behavior and normal health or hygiene care.

Sexual activity may constitute sexual abuse if the difference in age or power is so significant that the older or more powerful individual is clearly taking sexual advantage of the younger or less powerful individual. This would exclude developmentally appropriate activity where there is no significant difference in age or power.

Emotional abuse means acts or omissions of those responsible for the care of a child, which are likely to produce long term and serious emotional disorders. This might include effects such as serious anxiety, depression or withdrawal, serious behavioral disturbance and more.

Child abuse is defined as a non-accidental physical or mental injury or mistreatment caused by the acts or omissions of the child's parents or caretakers. Along with the above aspects, child abuse may also include neglect.

Neglect means the failure of those responsible for the care of the child to meet the physical, emotional or medical needs of a child to the extent that the child's health, development, or safety is endangered.

Abuse is legally defined in the Church's insurance policy as follows:

"Abuse" means, but is not limited to, any act or threat involving molestation, harassment, corporal punishment, assault or battery or any other form of sexual, physical, mental, psychological or emotional abuse"

Definition of Touching

Touch is normally an essential component in nurturing lives. Volunteers must be aware and sensitive to differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, personalities, and special needs. Physical contact should be age and developmentally appropriate.

Appropriate touch can be a genuine and positive display of God's love.

The following forms of touching are generally regarded as being appropriate when ministering to children:

1. Taking a child's hand to lead him to an activity.
2. Patting on the head, hand, shoulder, or back for affirmations.
3. Putting an arm around the shoulder for comfort or quieting.
4. Holding by the shoulder or hand to keep her attention while redirecting her behavior.
5. Holding a preschooler who is crying.

Inappropriate touch can be described as:

1. Kissing a child or coaxing a child to kiss you.
2. Extended hugging or tickling.
3. Touching in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit.
4. Carrying older children or having them sit in your lap.

Inappropriate contact

should a volunteer, for any reason, be unintentionally and temporarily alone with a child in a confined area, then any form of touching in such circumstances is generally deemed inappropriate.

Recruitment Procedures

Volunteers will be recruited by the pastoral team and/or volunteers helping to administer a particular ministry.

1. Screening

In cases where children, youth, or vulnerable adults are to be supervised by volunteers, the names of the volunteers will be brought to the pastoral team and/or Board of deacons before they are approached regarding a ministry assignment. If anyone involved in helping to screen volunteers has concern regarding the suitability of an individual being considered for a volunteer position, further investigation will take place and final approval or denial of the name will be made.

2. Recruitment

a. Volunteer Ministry Covenant

In cases where children, youth, or vulnerable adults are to be supervised by volunteers, the volunteer will file a signed "Volunteer Ministry Covenant" as established by the church.

b. Record Checks

The following record checks shall be required of all volunteers whose (a) names have been accepted after the initial screening review but who (b) yet need to be officially approved to work with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults: Criminal Record Check (CRC), Vulnerable Sector Check (VSC), and Child Abuse Register Check (CAR). All paid staff will submit to the same three checks for their own protection, and for the protection of the church. All records will be kept confidential in the Church Office with access only by the pastoral team, Board of Deacons, and C.E. & A. Committee. Any individual who declines to submit to this requirement will be ineligible to serve as a volunteer with children, youth, and vulnerable adults within the church. Minors under 18 years of age are exempt from this requirement for record checks.

If the record checks do not flag any past record or incident, the volunteer may be considered for ongoing service in the church. If the record checks do flag a past record

or incident, the pastoral team and Board of Deacons will discuss the matter to determine if the issues are of such a nature that it is not advisable for the individual to be approved for volunteer ministry where children, youth, or vulnerable adults are being supervised.

Record checks will normally be considered current for at least three years, but have a maximum time limit of five years for the purpose of this policy. It is strongly recommended that such checks be renewed every three years. After five years, such record checks will no longer be considered valid for the purposes of this policy, and an individual will no longer be listed as a volunteer approved to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

If, within the approved time frame of three to five years, members of the pastoral team, Board of Deacons, or Christian Education and Action Committee become privy to information of such a nature as to create doubt regarding any volunteer, The Church reserves the right to request immediate renewal of all record checks of anyone currently listed as a volunteer approved to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

c. “Abuse” Training

It is the responsibility of the church to provide training for all volunteers and paid staff regarding definitions of abuse and to have procedures in place that help to reduce the potential of an incident occurring. All volunteers must attend a training session conducted by the church or approved by the church that helps volunteers to understand potential risks and acquaints them with processes and procedures detailed in this policy. Discussion and questions will be part of the session. All volunteers must read the Abuse & Protection Policy and sign a form affirming they have done so. A record will be kept as evidence that volunteers have completed the training session. Once a year every volunteer needs to attend a session to review the policy. This is to ensure that the policy is up to date, as well as to refresh knowledge and understanding of the policy.

3. Approval

Approval will be documented by the pastoral team and/or Board of Deacons when all aspects of the above process have been completed.

Classroom Protection Procedures

Bridgewater Baptist Church desires to provide a safe, loving classroom environment where children, youth and vulnerable adults feel comfortable and where learning can take place. Workers should always conduct themselves in a godly manner and be examples of obedience, respect, and honesty to young believers. Therefore, the following standards shall apply:

- The church shall seek to have two or more adults (18 years of age or older) in any room with children, youth and vulnerable adults, with added help provided depending on group dynamics, class size and age. This standard assists in providing a safe and loving classroom environment and provides volunteers with more encouragement, creativity and flexibility.
- When there is only one adult in a room, to allow for visual monitoring, the door is to remain slightly open unless the door has a window.

Where possible, there should be 2 adults for every 4-6 pre-school children (ages 3- primary) and 2 adults for every 8-10 children in Grades 1-6. Pre-school rooms will be staffed with at least one female (see washroom guidelines).

Nursery and Washroom Protection Procedures

Diaper changing and assisting children with the use of washroom facilities requires extra sensitivity due to the vulnerability involved for both the child and helper. The following standards have been developed to establish clear protocols:

1. Nursery Diaper Changing

-Diaper shall be done by the parents.

2. Pre-schoolers

A. Non-Emergency Situations

If possible two (2) individuals – teacher, assistant or volunteer shall accompany the child. The washroom door should remain open a reasonable space. If the child calls out for help, the teacher, assistant or volunteer may enter the washroom to assist the child and all attempts should be made to assist the child with the same – gender teacher, assistant or volunteer if possible.

B. Emergency Situations

1. Health Issues

If a child appears to have a serious health issue such as choking, seizures, falling to the floor unconscious, an asthmatic, etc. a teacher, assistant or volunteer shall immediately enter the washroom to assist the child.

If a child is in what appears to be a serious health situation – 911 should be called immediately and then the parent or guardian should be sought/notified. Also, teachers, assistants or volunteers may seek whatever professional health assistance may be immediately from on-site members of the congregation.

2. Fire

In the case of fire, the teacher, assistant or volunteer and anyone in the area realizing that there is a child in the washroom, should immediately remove the child from the washroom and then follow the fire evacuation procedure.

Special Event & Overnight Protection Procedures

Leaders are encouraged to have special events in their homes and involve their groups in service projects and field trips. To protect all parties, the following standards will apply:

1. Overnight and Special Events

- Overnight events and activities conducted away from the church must be pre-approved by the pastoral team and/or the Board of deacons.
- Parents should be notified at least one week prior to the event.
- Proper written consent and a medical release form are required for each individual participating.

2. Supervision and Transportation

- All overnight and other events must be supervised by a minimum of 2 approved leaders. If the event/activity includes both male and female children, youth

and/or vulnerable adults, then both male and female leaders are required to supervise the event.

- All drivers must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance. All drivers must be 21 years of age and above and have at least 3 years of driving experience. Normally, seniors over the age of 75 will not be used as volunteer drivers for events and trips outside the Town of Bridgewater.
- The number of persons per vehicle must never exceed the number of seatbelts.

Incident Reporting Procedures

If anyone has concerns or has witnessed an incident regarding the safety of a child, youth and vulnerable adult, it should be reported immediately to the pastoral team. The following list indicates who to contact, in order of precedence and responsibility, except when the allegation is against the Senior Pastor or other full-time Ministry Staff Member:

- Senior Pastor
- Associate Pastor/Director of Youth & Young Families
- Chair of Deacons
- Chair of Elders

The Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches must also be advised when a pastor is named in the allegation.

When the complainant first comes, be sure to take his/her word seriously. Stay calm and listen to the individual, give emotional support, and remind the person that she/he is not at fault. **Never promise that no one will be told about the accusation, and never interview the child in detail or suggest that the individual has been abused.**

*****Failure to report an incident of abuse involving a child, youth and/or vulnerable adult is an offence. A person who knowingly fails to report such an incident is in violation of the law and may be found to have committed an offence.**

1. When an Incident is Reported or Allegation Made

- a. The incident as shared with the volunteer must be reported immediately to the pastoral team and/or Board of Deacons.

- b. The incident (*) must be reported immediately to the Bridgewater Police Service (902-543-2462 or 911) for investigation if the incident or allegation includes, or appears to include, abuse as defined within this policy. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation as this should be left to the professionals who are familiar with these cases. Any subsequent requests for further information from investigating authorities must be in person, with the official showing proper photo identification. (*) Wherein a volunteer becomes aware of or suspicious of abuse of a child that may be occurring in the home or elsewhere, even though the volunteer has not observed an act of abuse against the child, the matter must be reported to the local Community Services – Child Welfare Office at 99 High Street, Bridgewater (902-543-4554) for investigation.
- c. Do not pre-judge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Showing care and support helps to prevent further hurt. Offer whatever pastoral resources are available.
- d. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid employee, arrangements should be made to maintain or suspend her or his income until the allegation is cleared or substantiated.

2. Confidentiality

It is important to keep information of any incident or allegation restricted to those who need to be advised. The only claim of confidentiality, which overrides the legal duty to report, is solicitor-client privilege. Thus physicians, clergymen, and others who consider their professional relationships confidential for certain purposes are not exempt from the duty to report child abuse or neglect.

3. Report Follow-up

The pastoral team and/or Board of deacons must write a report with conclusions, action taken and recommendations for follow-up action. These reports are to be kept in a confidential file with records of the workers’ application, references and screening forms. Records must be maintained indefinitely if an allegation is substantiated. Records held indefinitely can be destroyed upon notification of the death of the individual involved.

4. Church Follow-Up and Discipline

If it is found that abuse by a member of the church has taken place, the church will practice discipline according to Matthew 18:15-17. The church should maintain frequent

communication and supportive relationships with those suspected or guilty so long as those persons exhibit a willingness to listen, change and look to Christ for help. This does not exclude the need for hurting individuals to seek professional counselling.

5. Spokesperson

One person in leadership (normally the Senior Pastor) shall be designated as the **ONLY** spokesperson for any allegation**. Everyone involved will normally be advised of who the spokesperson is. If required, the spokesperson will speak to the media and the congregation regarding the matter in a discreet, informed, truthful, and diplomatic way.

Normally, the Senior Pastor or the Senior Pastor designate shall act as the designated spokesperson to make any statement regarding the allegation. Only the designated spokesperson is to act in this role and all inquiries regarding the allegation are to be referred to this person.

**If the allegation is against the Senior Pastor, the Chair of the Board of Deacons or the Chair's designate shall act as the spokesperson.

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| | Amended February 11, 2015 |
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| | Amended February 8, 2017 |

***If the allegation is against the Senior/Lead Pastor, the Chair of the Board of Deacons or the Chair's designate shall act as the spokesperson.