



**Protecting our Children:
Reducing the Risk of Child
Sexual Abuse in our Church**

Policy and Procedure

6th edition: September 2024

5th edition: December 2020

4th edition: April 2020

3rd edition: October 2015

2nd edition: May 2006

1st edition: June 1998

Table of Contents

Definitions and Terms	page 4
First Baptist Greenville's Policy	page 6
Principles of Supervision	page 7
Specific Examples for Bathrooms and Overnight Events	page 9
Specific Policy Regarding the Use of Social Media and Online Interactions with Minors	page 10
Specific Policies for Interaction with Children and Youth Outside of FBG Events	page 11
Reporting Procedures for Church Workers	page 12
Reporting Obligations for Church Workers	page 14
Appendices (or Resources)	
Suspected POC Violation Report	
Risk Evaluation Checklist	
Understanding Child Sexual Abuse	
Chaperone Reminders	
Registered Sex Offender Church Participation Program	

Definitions and Terms

ACS - Automated Church Software - church membership database.

Allegation - Any reported incident that involves an accusation of abuse or harassment.

Child - Individual under the age of 18.

Child Sexual Abuse - *“Any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent or other child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.”* (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992).

Church Participation - Including, but not limited to, Sunday School involvement, small group participation, general service and volunteering, or consistent worship attendance.

Church Member - An individual whose membership status in ACS is “church member”.

Clergy - An employee of the church who has been ordained.

DSS - Department of Social Services - local agency to which reports of abuse may be made; responsible for child welfare.

Employee - A church worker who is compensated by the church for their services.

General supervision - care and oversight of children appropriate for low risk activities where the potential for a serious accident or injury is low. The primary focus of general supervision is on the group at large, rather than on specific individuals or actions. Common examples of general supervision at a church include teaching a Sunday School class, monitoring youth during a meal, or supervising a volleyball game.

Incident - Any instance or pattern of behavior that is the basis for filing a report with the POC Administrator.

Minister - An employee of the church who serves in a pastoral capacity, but has not been ordained.

POC - Protecting Our Children - the policy by which FBG attempts to minimize the risk of abuse and create a safe and healthy environment for all of God’s children.

POC Management Team - POC Administrator, Preschool Minister, Minister to Children, Minister to Youth, Spiritual Formation Minister, Senior Minister.

Redundancy - The condition of more than one risk reduction principle or safety measure in place at one time.

Specific supervision - care and oversight of children that is more direct and focused, and that requires higher levels of understanding, training, skill, observation, and feedback.

Violation - Any incident or pattern of behavior that goes against policy, but which does not involve abuse.

Volunteer - A church worker who is not compensated by the church for their services.

Worker - Any representative of the church, paid or unpaid, who is responsible for the supervision of minors or responsible for areas where minors might be.

Statement of Policy

First Baptist Greenville (FBG) is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment where children can learn about and experience God's love. It is the goal of the church to provide appropriate supervision for all church sponsored activities involving children and to minimize risk in all church spaces where children might be. Therefore, all church employees¹ and all church volunteers² who work with children in church sponsored programming must be approved prior to beginning their duties and responsibilities. The approval process requires that each condition below be verified and recorded by the POC Administrator.

1. **Applicant is listed in ACS (church database) as “church member”, “watchcare member”, “Sunday School member”, or “family member” in the same household as a member (volunteers only).**
2. **Active church participation for at least six months has been confirmed by a staff member (volunteers only).³**
3. **Appropriate background checks are approved.**
4. **Applicant has completed the required online POC programming.**
5. **Character references provided by the applicant (minimum of three) are acceptable.**
6. **All required paperwork has been completed and signed by the applicant.**

If any one of the above conditions has not been satisfied, the applicant will not be approved for employment with the church or to volunteer with children until the POC Administrator has completed all steps.

Additional recertification including, but not limited to, background checks and character references will be conducted as often as deemed necessary by the POC Management Team. POC approval automatically expires at the end of three years with no recertification.

POC policy updates may be made by the POC Management Team at their discretion. POC approved adults will receive an email when policy changes are made. A current policy is available on the church website.

Registered sex offenders will not be approved for POC but are able to participate in worship according to the guidelines of our Registered Sex Offender program (see Appendix).

¹ The minimum age for employment at FBG is 16.

² Volunteers who work with children must be at least 6th grade. Elementary age children may assist in the presence of a parent.

³ Active church participation includes, but is not limited to, Sunday School involvement, small group participation, general service and volunteering, and consistent worship attendance.

Principles of Supervision

Principle 1: As risk increases, supervision should also increase.

Key point: *General supervision is appropriate for low risk activities.*

- As the risk increases, the supervision should become more direct and focused, and require higher levels of understanding, training, skill, observation, and feedback.
- Supervisors must understand the risks that are present, know how to reduce those risks, engage in direct and focused observation, and provide necessary feedback or intervention to avoid accidents or injuries.
- Consider the ratio of church workers⁴ to children for all activities.

Example:

-While general supervision is appropriate for monitoring children eating a meal, specific supervision is needed for children cooking a meal.

Principle 2: Risk increases as isolation increases.

Key point: *Avoid isolation with any child or children.*

- Treat any activity that is located off of church property, or any activity that is located on church property, but at a time or location that is isolated, as higher risk.

Example:

-If you find yourself alone with a child, try to locate another POC approved adult to join you. Also ensure that a door is open, a window is in the room or line-of-sight or line-of sound can be obtained.

-POC approved adults are encouraged to make themselves available as a second adult if they observe a lack of adequate supervision.

Principle 3: Risk increases as accountability decreases.

Key point: *Accountability involves justifying one's actions.*

- The personal character and integrity of the adult worker: evaluated through FBG's screening process.
- The number of people present: having multiple adults present for any activity decreases the risk of isolation and helps maintain a balance of power and control.
- The degree of openness and approval associated with an activity: Church leaders should obtain advance approval before any activity can be sponsored in the name of the church or on the church property.

Example:

-All children events operate under an open door policy: any staff member or parent has the right to observe any event at any time, with or without advance notice.

Principle 4: Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence, and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim.

Key Point: *Children are vulnerable to sexual predators due to an imbalance of power related to age, size, strength, control and authority.*

⁴ Church worker includes paid staff and volunteers unless otherwise noted throughout the document.

- Risk increases when there is an age separation of five years or more.
- Abuse is less likely to occur when a balance of power exists.
- Adequate policies and an adequate number of adults (preferably unrelated) lower the risk.

Example:

-A senior in high school is not recommended as a roommate with an eight grade student because of this imbalance of power.

-Two or more adult Sunday school teachers in a classroom minimizes the imbalance of power.

Principle 5: Risk increases when adults who have not been POC approved are present.

Key point: *Adults who are not approved to work with children should not be allowed to remain in the area of the activity.*

- Since there is no family obligation or ministry related reason for the adult to be there, risk would unnecessarily increase if the adult were allowed to remain.
- In low risk situations where general supervision is applied, the parent may stay to support or observe their child as long as they do not work with any other children or assume a leadership role in any way.
- Any POC approved adult (leader or chaperone) should feel comfortable in asking an unfamiliar person about their presence at an event.

Example:

-A non-POC approved parent may want to stay with their child for all or part of an activity if they feel their child needs support.

-A non-POC approved adult may want to observe a practice; but this adult should not be leading or coaching in any way.

Specific examples for Bathrooms and Overnight Events

Bathroom assistance for preschoolers and children

- If a bathroom is not attached to the supervised classroom take children to the bathroom in groups if possible.
- Ensure the restroom is not occupied before allowing children in the restroom.
- Line-of-sound instead of line-of-sight is maintained while children are using the facilities. (ie. The worker should be able to hear the children not see them.)
- Bathroom doors should remain open.
- If workers need to assist children, stall doors must remain open.

Overnight events

Segregating adults reduces risk of adult on child abuse but increases the risk of child on child abuse.

All housing arrangements will be submitted to the POC Administrator prior to the event.

Dormitory or hotel style sleeping rooms:

Adults should have separate sleeping quarters but still be able to supervise youth rooms.

Children of same gender and similar ages should room together.

Privacy for showering/bathroom use should be maintained.

A minimum of two adults should be present for bed and room checks.

Bunkhouse style sleeping rooms:

Two adults of the same gender will be housed with children in this setting.

Privacy for showering/bathroom use should be maintained.

Privacy and modesty should be maintained in a bunkhouse setting.

Specific Policy Regarding the Use of Social Media and Online Interactions with Minors

As many children and youth now communicate through phones, social media, and other forms of technology, it is important that our staff and volunteers maintain healthy boundaries with students that leave no room for doubt that there is transparency and the communication is appropriate. Staff and volunteers will observe the following guidelines when it comes to communicating with children or youth:

- Any one-on-one DM “direct messaging” with students is discouraged as is private electronic communication on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, instant messaging, texting, etc. Private message chains are prohibited, and staff and volunteers will need to recognize this and then include supervisors or parents in any of these situations.
- Replying to any communication (emails, text messages, DMs,) from children and youth by a staff or volunteer is appropriate ONLY when copying in a colleague or the child’s parent/guardian.
- Communicating through “organizational group pages” on Facebook or other public platforms in a public forum is acceptable but it is not appropriate to have harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating comments on any of First Baptist Greenville’s social media platforms.
- Staff and volunteers should be cautious about what they post on their personal social media websites particularly if any of their friends or followers is a minor.
- Staff and volunteers ideally should not send requests to “follow” or “friend” students they do not already know and have an established relationship with. Even for students that staff and volunteers know, it is recommended that they allow students to initiate the request.

Specific Policies for Interaction with Children and Youth Outside of First Baptist Greenville Events (mentoring, coaching, babysitting, etc.)

First Baptist Greenville strongly recommends that staff and volunteers do not have outside contact with children and youth. If off-site contacts are unavoidable, some are more appropriate and consistent with Protecting Our Children. Others are not.

Examples of interactions that are appropriate would be any event where parents and guardians are *aware* and *present* of the interaction such as a sports function or home gatherings or home lessons. Inappropriate interactions would include taking a child or youth on an outing without the parent's or guardian's written permission, visiting a child or youth at their home without a parent or guardian present, entertaining a child or youth at their home without the parents or guardians present.

If an outside contact is unavoidable, it is safest and best practice to make sure that a staffer's supervisor is aware that there is contact and permission from the parent or guardian has been obtained.

Reporting Procedures for Church Workers

What to do when a violation of POC that is not abuse is reported or observed

1. Inform your direct supervisor and/or POC Administrator of the violation.⁵
2. Fill out and file a Suspected POC Violation Report⁶ with POC Administrator.
3. Per the Report of Suspected POC Violation, POC Administrator meets with the POC Management Team to follow up on the report. A follow-up plan will be established and recorded.

What to do if abuse is reported, suspected, known, or observed

1. Inform your direct supervisor and/or POC Administrator of the abuse.
2. Report abuse to DSS or to local law enforcement.⁷
3. Fill out and file a Suspected POC Violation Report with POC Administrator.
4. Per the Report of Suspected POC Violation, POC Administrator meets with the POC Management Team to follow up on the report. Any other supervisory staff will also be included. A follow-up plan will be established and recorded to include assigned communication needs.
5. Follow advice of local law enforcement/DSS moving forward.

Staff Responsibilities once a report has been made to DSS

1. Do not confront the accused. Never interview the victim or attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are trained and familiar with these kinds of situations.
2. Staff will report the incident to the church insurance company, attorney and any others who need to be included in the follow-up. Do not try to handle the situation without professional outside assistance.
3. If an external investigation is determined necessary, FBG should work with law enforcement/DSS as necessary.
4. Document all efforts at handling the incident.
5. Do not prejudge the situation. Take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. The care and safety of the victim are the first priority.
6. Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is finished.
7. The church will designate a person(s) to be the spokesperson(s) for the church to the media. That person and that person only, will communicate with the press. Every precaution will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

⁵ Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. Church workers should understand that reporting reflects caring and is not disloyalty.

⁶ Any and all Suspected POC Violation Reports are retained by POC Administrator for duration of employment and/or church membership. Administrative Assistant – Personnel & Office services will also retain copy of Report and any additional documentation for paid employees.

⁷ Contact information: DSS - 1-800-422-4453; Law Enforcement 9-1-1.

What to do if an allegation is not litigated by the courts

If the incident is not litigated, the church must decide steps forward for the employee or volunteer. These steps are not meant to prove guilt or innocence of the accuser or of the accused, but are meant to assist in determining disciplinary action for the employee or volunteer. The allegation may be:

- Substantiated – this means there is adequate evidence to uphold the allegation
- Unsubstantiated – this does not mean the allegation is false; only that there is not enough evidence to prove or disprove the allegation
- False – this means there is adequate evidence to disprove the allegation
- Malicious – this finding would indicate there is adequate evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been an intentional effort to deceive
- Unfounded – this would reflect cases where there is no evidence or basis which supports the allegation being made. It might indicate that the person making the allegation misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what they saw.

State Compliance for Mandatory Reporting

In South Carolina certain persons are required by law to report to the County Department of Social Services or to law enforcement agency in the county where the child is found when in the person's professional capacity the person has received information that a child has been abused or neglected. 20-7-510 (A) of the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976 as amended provides as follows: (A) A physician, nurse, dentist, optometrist, medical examiner, or coroner, or an employee of a county medical examiner's or coroner's office, or any other medical, emergency medical services, mental health, or allied health professional, member of the clergy including a Christian Science Practitioner or religious healer, school teacher, counselor, principal, social or public assistance worker, substance treatment staff, or childcare worker in a childcare center or foster care facility, police or law enforcement office, undertaker, funeral home director or employee of a funeral home, persons responsible for processing films, computer technician, or a judge must report in accordance with this section when in the person's professional capacity the person has received information which gives the person reason to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected as defined in Section 20-7-490. If you are one of such persons, you have mandatory reporting obligation separate and apart from your duties to report set forth in this booklet. As a church worker, you must report any abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate department head or ministry leader.

If you are a member of the clergy, you may be exempt from reporting "when information is received from the alleged perpetrator of the abuse and neglect during a communication that is protected by the clergy and penitent privilege as defined in Section 19-11-90." (20-7-550). Section 19-11-90 limits the priest-penitent exemption to "regular or duly ordained minister, priest or rabbi." All members of the clergy are advised to consult with legal counsel as to whether you must report or whether you are exempt because of the privilege.

Any and all mandated reporters must report to the proper authorities. The mandated reporter making the report should indicate other mandated reporters who are aware of the situation to include them in the initial report. This lessens the risk of duplicate reporting. In most instances, the Department of Social Services (DSS) receives the report.

Reporting Obligations for Church Workers

FBG will not take any action in retaliation against any church worker who, in good faith and with a genuine belief that child sexual abuse has occurred, brings or voices a complaint pursuant to this policy or otherwise opposes child sexual abuse. In addition, FBG will not tolerate any retaliatory acts by other individuals.

Retaliation is a serious violation of FBG policy and applicable law. If you believe you have been subjected to retaliation in violation of this policy, you should report your complaint immediately to your ministry area leader/supervisor. Individuals will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination if they are found to have retaliated against an individual because such individual (1) in good faith and with a genuine belief that child sexual abuse has occurred, made an honest complaint about such conduct, (2) participated honestly and in good faith in any investigation into a child sexual abuse complaint, and/or (3) in good faith opposed acts of child sexual abuse.

Mutual Accountability – A Church Obligation

A sound reporting procedure promotes accountability among church workers. Questionable or inappropriate behavior often precedes acts of child molestation. Church workers should be trained to identify inappropriate behavior with children. Workers should be encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed. Questionable behaviors should be reported to the proper individuals. Such a policy, if implemented with care and sensitivity, can help to avoid actual instances of abuse or molestation.

Personal Responsibility – A Moral Obligation

Workers may not report a suspected incidence of child sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. Some may want to avoid embarrassing situations. Who wants to be a tattle tale? A fear of possible personal and legal recrimination may exist. Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. Church workers should understand that reporting reflects caring and is not disloyalty.

Volunteer Responsibilities

The report or accusation should be made to the appropriate staff member or supervisor. The staff member or supervisor will then decide the appropriate response and enlist the help of appropriate legal and social authorities. Never interview the victim on your own. This can lead to contaminated testimony.