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INTRODUCTION

Countryside Bible Church is committed to giving the highest level of care to minors. We take seriously their well-being and are committed to providing a safe and secure environment in which to minister to them. A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Countryside Bible Church.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of preschoolers, children, youth, and mentally handicapped persons.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. *Child, children, youth, and minor* shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) or whose mental capacity is that of a minor.
2. *Adult* shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
3. *Worker* shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors. All workers must have a clear profession of faith and be striving to live in obedience to Christ as defined by the Scriptures.
4. *Youth Worker* shall be defined as any worker at least twelve (12) years old and in the 7th grade, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of minors. All youth workers must have a clear profession of faith and be striving to live in obedience to Christ as defined by the Scriptures.
5. *Child Helper* shall be defined as any individual who is not yet at least twelve (12) years old and in the 7th grade who is assisting their parent/guardian with the care of minors.
6. *Child Abuse* shall be defined as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, or minor.
7. *Criminal Background Check* is the procedure used to check the background of adult volunteers for criminal activity.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse is 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 another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

WORKER ENLISTMENT

1. Every adult (18 and over) desiring to work with minors will also be required to complete a *Worker with Minors Application* and each youth (12 through 17) desiring to work with minors will also be required to complete a *Youth Volunteer Application*.
2. After an application is received, it will be reviewed and the prior 10 years of employment, volunteer service and personal references may be checked.
3. Any prospective worker that has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they would have contact with minors.

4. Criminal background checks will be performed on each adult applicant after the applicant has signed the Criminal Background Check authorization, and prior to being enlisted as a worker. All Criminal Background Check Reports will be kept strictly confidential and will only be viewed by an elder-approved person.
5. At the applicant's request, Countryside Bible Church will allow the applicant to review his/her criminal history record transcript at the church, but in no event will the applicant be allowed to retain and/or copy his/her transcript.
6. Criminal background checks will be performed on approved workers on an annual basis, and may also be performed randomly or as deemed necessary.
7. It is our normal practice that no volunteer will be allowed to work with minors until they have been a member or regular attendee of Countryside for a minimum of six (6) months. Special consideration may be given with the approval of an elder if there has been a history of faithful service at another church and once the proper paperwork is processed and approved.
8. Only approved adult or youth workers are allowed to serve in classrooms with minors with the following exceptions. A child helper may serve with their parent or guardian (who must be an approved adult worker) only with permission from the ministry leader or pastoral supervisor. Parents or others who desire to observe a class may do so only after having completed a background check and with permission from the ministry leader or family pastor. Approved workers should avoid being in the classrooms unless they are scheduled to serve by their ministry leader.
9. All paid employees of Countryside Bible Church working with minors will also be required to complete an Employment Application.

REGARDING APPLICATION FORMS

All employees and volunteers at activities or programs of Countryside Bible Church that involve minors will be required to complete one of the following: *Workers with Minors Application* (adults) or *Youth Volunteer Application*. There are no exceptions for substitutes or occasional volunteers – all workers must complete the entire process.

These application forms provide personal and confidential information necessary to perform criminal background checks (adults only) and reference checks (adults and youth) on each individual worker.

While this process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures.

All personal information voluntarily disclosed, and the results of all criminal background and reference checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of compliance with disclosure requirements, will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of a criminal background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activity or program involving minors:

Any past conviction for or recent pattern of:

- Sexual immorality
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual assault (rape or statutory rape)
- Aggravated sexual assault
- Injury to a child
- Incest
- Indecency with a child
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child
- Possession or promotion of child pornography
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
- Employment harmful to children
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure
- Enticing a child

All charges for these crimes or charges or convictions for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the designated leadership of Countryside Bible Church. Only qualified persons authorized by the elders of Countryside Bible Church may view information obtained through the criminal background checks.

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to the designated program staff, after the safety of the child, children, youth, or minor involved has been assured.

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.
- Physically abusive behavior or infliction of bodily injury to a minor.
- Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of Countryside Bible Church.
- Mental or emotional injury to a minor.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of Countryside Bible Church.
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
- The consumption of or being under the influence of illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at Countryside Bible Church.

WORKER SUPERVISION

1. The church has a two-adult policy, and will require a reasonable ratio of adult workers to be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children.
2. Church staff and volunteer directors will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.
3. An identification system shall be adopted regarding the secure release of a child to a parent or guardian (see age-specific guidelines).
4. In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a leader meeting privately with a minor. If two adults are present, then parental permission is not required. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) for their child to receive counseling from a particular minister.
5. All activities, including scheduled or impromptu counseling situations, will occur in an appropriate room or setting, where visibility of the session is maintained – either in a room with windows with the blinds open enough to provide visibility, or in some other setting providing appropriate visibility. If there is no window in the door of the room, then the door shall remain open.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

We desire to provide appropriate care and protection for those suspected of being abused or neglected. This requires involving appropriate authorities as mandated by Texas law.

Section 261.101 of the Texas Family Code mandates that anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect must report it immediately. The report may be made to (1.) any local or state law enforcement agency; or (2.) the Department of Family and Protective Services.

Texas law broadly defines "abuse" and "neglect" so that every action in which a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected is potentially covered. The statute explicitly excludes an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent or guardian that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm.

Any time a worker gains knowledge of suspected child abuse or neglect at a church-related activity or program, the following procedure should be followed:

1. Intervene as necessary to halt the suspected abuse if it is observed as occurring at that time.
2. Immediately report the suspected abuse to:
 - a. The local or state law enforcement agency; or the Department of Family and Protective Services and
 - b. One of the pastoral staff of Countryside Bible Church

CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES: AGE-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

| Age | Tag / Release Policy | Supervision | Diaper / Bathroom / Contact Policy |
|--------------|---|---|---|
| 0 - 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign in • Security tag given to parent or guardian • Parent or guardian must have the security tag in order to pick up child • A child may only be released without the security tag by the Nursery Director, Assistant Nursery Director, or Pastoral Supervisor. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two approved adults always present in classroom • In the event one of the adults must leave the classroom, another adult must be summoned to be present during their absence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bathroom in the nursery must be used • No adult should ever be in the bathroom with a child and the door closed • All diapers must be changed by female workers at the diaper station |
| 2 - K | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in in foyer • Parent or guardian receive security tag at check-in • Parent or guardian must have the security tag in order to pick up child • Absolutely no release w/o security tag unless a parent or guardian has received a signed form from the welcome center verifying they are approved to pick up the child or with permission from the pastoral supervisor (direct parents to welcome center in the event of a lost security tag). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two approved adults always present in classroom • In the event one of the adults must leave the classroom, another adult must be summoned to be present during their absence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For bathroom breaks at the main restrooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The teachers will make certain that no one is in the bathroom. ○ The door will be propped open. ○ One adult will be in the hall with the students waiting. ○ One female adult will be in the bathroom assisting children as needed. • In the event a child needs to make an unscheduled bathroom break, female workers can assist in the restroom off of the classroom as needed. • Keep physical contact to appropriate levels. • Lap sitting is discouraged for male workers. |

| Age | Tag / Release Policy | Supervision | Diaper / Bathroom / Contact Policy |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1st – 5th Grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in in foyer • Parent or guardian receive security tag at check-in • Parent or guardian must have the security tag in order to pick up child • Absolutely no release w/o security tag unless a parent or guardian has received a signed form from the welcome center verifying they are approved to pick up the child or with permission from the pastoral supervisor (direct parents to welcome center in the event of a lost security tag). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two approved adults always present in classroom • In the event one of the adults must leave the classroom, another adult must be summoned to be present during their absence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddy system for bathroom breaks • Keep physical contact to appropriate levels. • Lap sitting is discouraged for male workers. |
| 6th - 12th Grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No sign in • Free release | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one approved adult always present in classroom • One adult should never be alone in a room with one child without direct parental consent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restriction • Keep physical contact to appropriate levels. |

| Age | Tag / Release Policy | Supervision | Diaper / Bathroom / Contact Policy |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| AWANA All Ages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check-in in foyer • Parent or guardian receive security tag at check-in • Parent or guardian must have the security tag in order to pick up child. • Absolutely no release w/o security tag unless a parent or guardian has received a signed form from the welcome center verifying they are approved to pick up the child or with permission from the pastoral supervisor (direct parents to welcome center in the event of a lost security tag). | <p>** FOR AWANA BOOK TIME:</p> <p>During AWANA Book Time, instead of two adults in the room it is acceptable for one approved adult plus two youth workers to be in the room with the children. This exception may also be utilized in other similar ministry contexts with permission from the pastoral supervisor i.e. VBS shepherding groups, etc.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See above for age-appropriate guidelines. |

*The electronic check-in system will be used for all major children’s ministry programs and events (Sunday School, Awana, Children’s Choir, VBS, Conferences, etc.). Smaller events and programs that do not use the electronic check-in system may issue manual security tags or may release only to the parent/guardian who dropped off their child. Any unique circumstances or procedures must be approved by the pastoral supervisor.