

TWO DEEP – Child Protection Policy
the Church of Grady County
CAIRO, GEORGIA

I. INTRODUCTION

Our children and youth are our most valuable assets. This policy is aimed at protecting our children and youth and reducing the risk of child abuse in the church.

“Jesus said, Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5).

Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our invitation – they are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones. . . it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6).

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. We, as the Church of Grady County, believe that :

“ . . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites, ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Many churches can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church, and its leaders.

Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God called us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

Thus, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

A. Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

B. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith, the Church of Grady County pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways to assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting suspected incidents of abuse that conform to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

C. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be “. . . surrounded by steadfast love. . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal”.

II. DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse – any act committed by a person in a position of trust (parent, caregiver, Life Group facilitator, pastor, staff member, or other) which harms or threatens to harm a child’s welfare, physical, spiritual, or mental health.

We recognize child abuse may fall into four categories:

1. Physical Abuse – Inflicting bodily harm to minors constitutes physical abuse. Instances of physical abuse include any physical act of undue force such as assault with a knife, strap, or other implement; burns, fractures and bruises resulting from being beaten, pushed down, shaken, pinched, slapped, or thrown. Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks.
2. Sexual Abuse – Any time a minor is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older minor, abuse has occurred. The minor is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of pornography or prostitution and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.
3. Emotional Abuse – Emotional abuse deeply affects a minor’s self-esteem by submitting him/her to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. It does not always involve injuries we can see. The minor receives the message that he/she is not good and never will be. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, use of profanity, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.
4. Neglect – Not hearing or addressing a minor’s basic needs for health, welfare, or safety resulting in harm to the minor. It can include any of the following acts of negligence or maltreatment:
 - Failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing
 - Abandonment
 - Refusal to seek treatment for illness
 - Inadequate supervision
 - Health hazards in the home, school, or church
 - Ignoring a minor’s need for contact, affirmation, stimulation, and nurture

III. STANDARDS

A. Minimum Age

The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the Authority Figure’s role. The Church adopts the following standard for Authority Figures and Assistants.

1. AUTHORITY FIGURES – the primary leaders of youth and children’s activities.
 - (a) To work with youth (grades 6th and above), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
 - (b) To work with children (infant – 5th grade), the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 18 years of age.

2. ASSISTANTS – persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and act at the direction of the Authority Figure, including volunteers. Whether working with youth or children, Assistants must be:
 - (a) A minimum of 12 years of age; and
 - (b) In the judgment of a Church staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

B. Two Adult Rule

Two adults, not related or married, are to be present during all church sponsored programming with children and youth. All adult/child ratios must be followed.

(See III. C.) Where it is impossible to staff two adults in every room, an additional adult must serve as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas.

While mentoring and counseling are encouraged and supported, adults and authority figures should take every precaution to avoid being alone with a child or youth in inaccessible areas. This can include, but is not limited to:

- An automobile while taking a child home
- A classroom with windowless/locked doors
- A cabin at camp

Conversations regarding personal issues (including those conducted via email, texting, direct messaging, social media, or any form of electronically originated exchanges) should not be conducted without two adults being included in the exchanges. Dealing with personal matters.

C. Adult to Child Ratios

1. Nursery/Child Care

An adult is defined as an Authority Figure/Assistant who is also at least 18 years of age. Adults must meet the Authority Figure/Assistant guidelines. (See A. 1. & 2.)

For these programs, the Church adheres to the following minimum standards:

- Nursery – 1 Adult to 6 children
- Children – 1 Adult to 10 children

Church Events – These are our preferred ratios. They are meant to be guidelines that will be followed at all possible times for on-site activities.

- Children – 1 Adult to 10 Children
- Youth – 1 Adult to 25 Youth

2. Participants with Special Needs

In the judgment of Church staff, and in consultation with the parent, the above ratios may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of the participant's special needs.

D. Rooming

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent, or similar situation, there must be two adults that are not related. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth.

E. Six Month Rule

All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children and youth of our church must have participated in the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with another trained adult. The Pastor will consider exceptions to this rule.

F. Policy Instruction

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction before working with children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session. All volunteers and staff are required annually to review this policy and sign a new participation statement kept on file at the church.

G. Written Record of Departure

Any written record of any departure from this policy will be kept on file by the Church. Authority figures are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible.

IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES

An essential component of preventing abuse by Authority Figures, Assistants, and Staff is careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of an overwhelming number of the persons with discerned calling to ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable persons, we realize that abuse may occur in the church. Therefore, we believe that all Authority Figures, Assistants, and all Employees must be properly screened. It will be the responsibility of the Children's Director, Youth Director, Education Coordinator, and the Pastor to ensure compliance.

The following steps are used for screening volunteer and paid applicants:

A. Complete an application form

A completed application form will be required for Authority Figures, Assistants, and all employees and will be kept on file.

B. Complete Background Checks

Background checks include, but are not limited to:

Criminal histories

Registered sexual offenders

The background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Pastor, Education Coordinator, Children's Director, and/or Youth Director. Concerns will be reported to the Pastor who in turn will decide how the situation will be handled.

C. The requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment or child abuse must be complied with, and in any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. The policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment and child abuse.

V. REPORTING ABUSE/ALLEGED ABUSE

All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Senior Pastor and/or Grady County protection agents at 250 N. Broad St. In the event the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Senior Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Senior Pastor, reports may also be made to the Advisory Board Chairperson.

VI. INVESTIGATION

Whenever child abuse is suspected, the following information should be obtained and reported to the Senior Pastor and/or Advisory Board Chairperson:

- (1) Names, ages, addresses, and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused
- (2) The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible
- (3) The factual details of the report
- (4) The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received.

The Senior Pastor and/or Advisory Board Chair shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in conjunction with the Two Deep Committee. Interim measures may be taken during the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may include termination of employment.

VII. TWO DEEP COMMITTEE

The Two Deep Committee will consist of at least the individuals in the following positions: Pastor, Vice-Chair of Advisory Board, Education Coordinator, Children's Ministry Team Leader, Youth Ministry Team Leader, and Safety Team Leader. The Committee's responsibilities include:

1. Educating Authority Figures, Assistants, and all employees about the policy
2. Answering questions about the policy
3. Ensuring compliance with the policy
4. Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances
5. Assisting, as needed, with investigations
6. Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed
7. Evaluating board function
8. Other duties as needed