

Buford First United Methodist Church

Policy for Reporting & Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

Submitted: November 30, 1999

Updated: October 11, 2005

(Revisions by Heather Hagler, Director of Children and Family Ministries, August 15, 2012. Church Board approval pending.)

Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide a written policy statement that is applicable to our local church and that will, upon implementation, reduce or eliminate the risk of child abuse in our church. An additional purpose is to fulfill the goals and requirements set forth in the Task Force Report on this issue to the North Georgia Annual Conference, 1997.

Applicability:

The guidelines contained in this document apply to any and all church sponsored events and programs. This includes functions that may take place off-campus, but are church sponsored. Exempt are meetings of civic groups and other organizations that take place at the church.

Definitions:

- ❖ Child: any child or youth under the age of eighteen.
- ❖ Responsible Staff Member: this will vary according to the ministry involved and will be ultimately at the discretion of the Senior Pastor.
- ❖ Physical Abuse: Non accidental injury, which may include beatings, violent shaking, human bites, strangulation, suffocation, poisoning and burns. The results may be bruises and welts, broken bones, scars, permanent disfigurement, long lasting psychological damage, serious internal injuries, brain damage and death.
- ❖ Neglect: The failure to provide a child with basic needs to include food, clothing, education, shelter, and medical care; also abandonment and inadequate supervision.
- ❖ Sexual Abuse: The sexual exploitation of a child by and older person, as in rape, incest, fondling of genitals, exhibitionism, or pornography. It may be done for the sexual gratification of the older person, out of a need for power, or for economic reasons.

Selection of Staff:

All persons *employed* by the church to serve in ministry to children shall:

- ❖ Be at least 18 years of age.
- ❖ Complete an application form. (copy attached)
- ❖ Be interviewed by the Responsible Staff Member and/or a representative of the SPRC.
- ❖ Complete a permission form for a Criminal Background Check for filing with the appropriate law enforcement agency prior to employment.
- ❖ Receive a satisfactory background check before unsupervised contact with the children of the church.

The Responsible Staff Member, prior to hiring new staff, will:

- ❖ Check the references available on the application form.
- ❖ Forward the Criminal Background Check form to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- ❖ Request interviews by additional staff members if appropriate.

Selection of Volunteers:

All persons serving in a *voluntary* capacity in ministry to children shall:

- ❖ Be a member or constituent of Buford First United Methodist Church
- ❖ Be recommended by at least two of the following:
 - Senior Pastor
 - Assistant to the Pastor
 - Director of Children & Family Ministry
 - Youth Minister
 - Music Minister
 - Children's Work Area Committee
 - Elected Church Leader
- ❖ Receive a satisfactory background check from the appropriate law enforcement agency.

Prevention Guidelines:

A written copy of this policy is available to all church members. All meetings of children shall be governed by the following guidelines:

- ❖ Two or more adults shall be present at all times in the building when children are present.
- ❖ Two or more adults shall be present with all groups for off-campus and/or overnight on campus activities. On overnight activities, if both genders are represented in a group of children or youth, a minimum of one male and one female supervisor (who are not married to each other) is required.
- ❖ Written permission shall be obtained from parents/guardians before groups leave the church property for each outing. The **only** exception is regularly scheduled, ongoing outings for which only one permission slip must be obtained and maintained in church records.

- ❖ No adult shall be alone with one or more children in an area that is not readily accessible by others. (For example, adult supervisors should leave the door slightly ajar when accompanying children to the restroom, during classroom instruction, etc.)
- ❖ Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain with any group of children.
- ❖ Children shall not be allowed to leave their designated meeting area without permission and supervision appropriate to their age.

Training of Staff:

There shall be an annual training session offered to all staff members and volunteers. Continuing staff shall attend a session biannually for review and update. Training sessions shall include explanations and discussion of behaviors which signal problems, guidelines for prevention, and procedures for reporting of alleged or suspected abuse. A copy of this policy shall be provided to each staff member and volunteer.

Procedures for Reporting Alleged and/or Suspected Abuse:

Should an adult supervisor suspect abuse, or a child report abuse by any employed or volunteer member of the church staff, or any person at a church sponsored meeting or activity, or by anyone outside the church, the following procedure shall apply:

The adult to whom the alleged abuse is reported or who suspects abuse, shall, within 24 hours, fully document the report of the incident or the incident(s) regarding the suspicion to the Senior Pastor and two of the persons referenced in "Selection of Staff", last paragraph. If the allegation or suspicion involves the Senior Pastor, the District Superintendent shall be notified immediately. If reasonable cause is established, the Senior Pastor shall notify the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services, the District Superintendent, and the insurance carrier. The Pastor may also notify an attorney and/or pastoral care consultant.

All allegations and/or suspicions will be taken seriously. Respect for the privacy and confidentiality of all persons, including the accused, will be maintained. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities. The Senior Pastor or his/her designee shall be the church's sole spokesperson with the media.

Educating the Congregation:

The responsibility for educating the congregation related to this policy shall be that of the Director of Children & Family Ministry and the Children's Work Area Committee. Educational opportunities may include but are not be limited to:

- ❖ Congregation: Presentations designed to develop awareness of the problem of child abuse and to share the church's prevention plan; presentations designed to heighten awareness of the Christian's responsibility toward child abuse problems not only within the church but also within society.
- ❖ Parents: Classes and presentations that focus on parenting skills, sexuality education and abuse prevention.

Updated by Action of the Church Board on _____

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