

Hazelwood Baptist Church

Abuse Prevention and Response Plan

Disclaimer & Indemnity Statement

This policy is intended to assist in the prevention of organizational abuse. However, it must be noted that no system can guarantee prevention of abuse. When policies are implemented or maintained, the risk for abuse continues to exist, as the problem of abuse is pervasive and no system to date can assure complete safety.

Accordingly, those involved in designing this plan make no warranties, express or implied, regarding the success or failure of this policy in preventing or reducing the incidence of abuse. Anyone involved in this policy cannot be held responsible or liable for any damages, direct or indirect, which may arise from the use of this policy or from any representation or misrepresentation contained therein. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all acceptable safety and health measures are listed in this policy.

Some Uncomfortable Facts

Physical and sexual abuse isn't an abstract or potential problem for churches. Recent history and statistics show that churches are often the epicenter of the problem. Predators seek out trusting environments, where people assume the best about each other, in order to gain access to children or other vulnerable populations. Churches may reason that they are small or so tightly connected that a protection policy is unwarranted and would be cumbersome to a spirit of genuine fellowship. This is simply untrue. In fact, it's dangerous. The reality is that people who place their trust in a church should have that trust honored with systems of protection for their loved ones.

The statistics are sobering. As we look at our church communities, we are looking at many people who have been or will be abused.

Per the CDC (Oct 2024)

<https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/about-child-sexual-abuse.html>

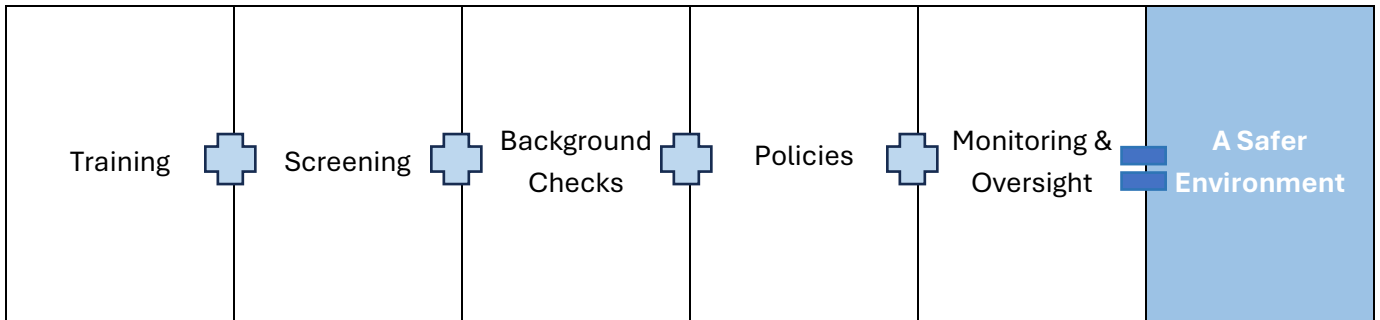
- Many children wait to report or never report child sexual abuse. Therefore, the numbers below likely underestimate the true impact of the problem. Although estimates vary across studies, research shows:
- At least one in four girls and one in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse.
- About 90% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known and trusted by the child or child's family members.

Child abuse has overreaching consequences, both for the individual, as well as those involved in the process and trauma of healing. Aside from the immediate consequences, people who have suffered child abuse are at a higher risk of heart disease, obesity, cancer, depression, PTSD, substance misuse, and an increased risk of suicidal ideation.

The risk of abuse does not stop with childhood and extends to young adults and at-risk adults. This policy is intended to create an environment where people know how to identify and raise awareness of risk, and when an incident occurs, everyone knows how to report and handle those situations.

Mission Statement

It is HBC's goal to provide a safe and secure environment for everyone who interact with our programs and activities. By implementing this policy, we will conduct ourselves in a manner that supports an atmosphere of servitude, creativity, spiritual growth, connectedness, openness, and accountability while maintaining a system that first and foremost aims to prevent any wrongdoing, and will respond appropriately should any acts of abuse, incidents of misconduct, inappropriate behavior, or false accusations occur.



When any piece of the framework above is missing, the risk of failure increases. By implementing these best practices in each of these operations, we determine that risks can be reduced or eliminated.

Definitions

(adapted from Praesidium, 2020)

A. Types of Abuse

- a. Physical Abuse is injury that is intentionally inflicted upon another person.
- b. Sexual Abuse is any contact of a sexual nature that is forced upon a person without their consent. This includes persuasion, exposing oneself to another, performing sexual acts in the presence of a non-consenting person, among others.
- c. Emotional Abuse is mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment of the victim's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
- d. Neglect is the failure to provide basic needs or the failure to protect from harm.

B. Types of Bullying

- a. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
 - b. Physical bullying is when one person engages in physical force against another person, such as hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another.
 - c. Verbal bullying is when someone uses their words to hurt another, such as by belittling or calling another hurtful names.
 - d. Nonverbal bullying is when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, gossip, or intimidating someone with gestures.
 - e. Cyberbullying is the intentional and overt act of aggression towards another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings. This can include:
 - i. Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
 - ii. Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
 - iii. Pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad.
 - iv. Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
 - v. Hazing – an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.

Code of Conduct

(adapted from Praesidium, 2020)

The following codes are intended to assist employees and volunteers in making decisions about interacting with members of the church and the public. For clarification of any guideline, or to inquire about behaviors not addressed here, contact the Church Office.

Hazelwood Baptist Church seeks to provide our members and attenders with the highest quality services available. We are committed to creating an environment that is safe, nurturing, empowering, and that promotes growth and success.

No form of abuse will be tolerated and confirmed abuse will result appropriate disciplinary actions, up to and including termination of employment and/or excommunication from the church. All reports of suspicious or inappropriate behavior or allegations of abuse will be taken seriously. Our church will fully cooperate with legal authorities if allegations of abuse are made that require investigation.

The following Code of Conduct outlines specific expectations of everyone within our church as we strive to accomplish our mission together. Employees and volunteers who work with children or at-risk adults will be required to acknowledge and agree to this Code of Conduct.

1. Everyone will be always treated with respect.
2. Everyone will be treated fairly, whether they bring a complaint or are complained against, regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, age, or religious ideation.
3. Everyone will adhere to uniform standards of displaying affection as outlined by our church.
4. Everyone will adhere to uniform standards of appropriate and inappropriate verbal interactions as outlined by our church.
5. No one shall stare at or comment on anyone's bodies.
6. No one shall use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while serving in the church.
7. No one shall have sexually oriented materials, including printed or digital pornography, on our church's property.
8. No one is allowed to have secrets with children, young adults, and at-risk adults and will only give gifts with prior permission from the person or the child's parent.
9. Employees and volunteers will comply with our organization's policies regarding interactions with members of the church and the public even when outside of our programs.
10. No one shall engage in inappropriate electronic communication with members of the church or the public.
11. Everyone shall be prohibited from working one-on-one with children, young adults, and at-risk adults in a private setting. Everyone will use common areas when working one-on-one.
12. No one will abuse anyone in any way including (but not limited to) the following:
 - a. Physical abuse – hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints
 - b. Verbal abuse – degrading, threatening, cursing

- c. Sexual abuse – inappropriate touching, exposing oneself, sexually oriented conversations
 - d. Mental abuse – shaming, humiliation, cruelty
 - e. Neglect – withholding food, water, shelter
13. Our church will not tolerate the mistreatment or abuse of one church member or attender towards another. In addition, our church will not tolerate any behavior that is classified under the definition of bullying, and to the extent that such actions are disruptive, we will take steps needed to eliminate such behavior.
- a. Anyone who has seen bullying (physical, verbal, non-verbal, or cyberbullying) and encourages it, is engaging in bullying. This policy applies to all church members, employees, and volunteers.
14. All employees and volunteers must follow state specific mandatory reporting requirements. Employees and volunteers should be trained to be aware of and understand their legal and ethical obligation to recognize and report suspicions of mistreatment and abuse. Employees will:
- a. Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse.
 - b. Know and follow organization policies and procedures that protect children, young adults, and at-risk adults against abuse.
 - c. Report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities as required by state mandated reporter laws.
 - d. Follow up to ensure appropriate action has been taken.

Volunteer & Employee Screening

For brevity and clarity, volunteers will be split into two categories in this section. “Volunteer Type 1” will be volunteers who work with vulnerable people (children, young adults, and at-risk adults). “Volunteer Type 2” will be all other volunteers who will not come into contact with vulnerable people while performing their duties. A Volunteer Type 2 could be someone who helps in set-up and tear-down, sound and music equipment, maintenance, janitorial duties, special events, etc. Employees are paid workers, and they will need to comply with all the below requirements:

1. Our church will adhere to this screening policy for all employees and volunteers.
2. All employees and Volunteer Type 1 must adhere to a more in-depth process than Volunteer Type 2.
 - a. Exemptions from this policy will not be given to siblings, family members of other volunteers, or long-time members.
3. An application form for all employees and Volunteer Type 1 will be completed and kept on file.
4. Employees and Volunteer Type 1 should be regular attenders for at least six months and provide references who will attest that they are a person of good standing in the community before being considered.
 - a. If the individual is a new member of the church, before working with vulnerable populations, they must provide at least two (2) references. These references must include her/his previous pastor and may not be a family member.
 - b. References are always checked.
5. Employees and Volunteer Type 1 must complete an in-person interview.
6. Background records will be checked and documented for all new employees and Volunteer Type 1 and will be re-checked every three years at minimum. These records can include, but are not limited to, criminal records, sex offender registry, child abuse registry, etc.
7. Any person convicted of sexual or physical abuse will not be accepted as Volunteer Type 1 or employees.
 - a. Anyone whose record shows one of the following convictions will require additional interviews and attention. These are “red flag convictions” – a common plea bargain.
 - i. Exhibitionism, voyeurism, assault, providing alcohol/tobacco/porn to a minor, and any crime of a sexual nature.
 - b. Our organization will not accept self-reported explanations of any of the above convictions. We will need corroborating sources to allow for exceptions.
8. Our church provides annual training to all employees & Volunteer Type 1.
9. Employees and Volunteer Type 1 must sign a statement attesting that they have read and understood this policy.
10. Employees, Volunteer Type 1, and Volunteer Type 2 are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with church programs.

Quick-reference table:

	Employee	Volunteer Type 1	Volunteer Type 2
Background Check	Required	Required	Not Required
At least 2 References	Required	Required	Not Required
Child Protection Training	Required	Required	Not Required
Complete an Application	Required	Required	Not Required
Review Prior Experience	Required	Required	Not Required
Interview	Required	Required	Not Required
Adhere to Code of Conduct	Required	Required	Required

Volunteer Type 1 roles include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Preschool Ministry
- Children’s Ministry
- Student Ministry
- Safety Team
- Deacons
- Deacons in Training
- Ministry Leads
- Sunday School Teachers

When Working with Children

1. At least two non-related adults should be assigned to and be present at all church sponsored childcare (including Sunday school).
2. Any youth helper or youth teacher (under the age of 18) must provide written parental/guardian permission before being authorized to work with vulnerable people.
3. Children participating in indoor activities (i.e., Sunday School) should be visible from outside the classroom. If a door does not have a window, the door should remain open and gated if needed.
4. Employees and volunteers may not be alone one-on-one with vulnerable people.
 - a. If for some reason, it does occur that a volunteer is one-on-one with a vulnerable person, that person’s parent or guardian must be notified and have the situation explained.
5. Young children needing to use the bathroom will be accompanied by at least one adult. The adult may enter the bathroom (if there are stalls) if the child needs assistance, but they may not enter the stalls with the child unless there is an emergency. If there is an emergency, the stall door will remain open, and a second employee or Volunteer Type 1 must be present.
6. Our sign-in/sign-out procedure will be followed:

- a. Children in the church's care will be signed in and out by their parents/guardians. If the person picking up the child is unknown to the employee or Volunteer Type 1, a picture ID should be requested to verify the person's identity.
 - b. A child will not be released to a person who has not been previously authorized to pick them up.
7. In the nursery, there must always be two (2) non-related adults present when changing a diaper or children's clothing.
 - a. Logs of any diaper or clothing changes must be kept.

Monitoring High Risk Activities

1. Bathroom activities

Most incidents of peer-to-peer abuse occur in the bathrooms. Therefore, the following guidelines are enforced:

When supervising restroom use, employees or Volunteer Type 1 should first scan the bathroom before allowing their class to enter.

For group bathroom breaks:

- a. If the bathroom only has one stall, one child will enter at a time.
- b. If there are multiple stalls, the number of children who enter should match the number of stalls (ex. 3 kids and 3 stalls).
- c. Minimize children of different ages using the bathroom at the same time.

2. Changing Diapers

- a. The changing table should be in an open area where adult actions can be observed by others.
- b. Diapers can only be changed when at least two non-related adults are present.
- c. Inform parent/guardian if anything is out of the ordinary.
- d. A log will be kept of each diaper change.

3. Transition Times and Free Times

Transition times pose a high risk for incidents because during these times employees and Volunteer Type 1 may not be assigned a particular group of children to supervise. To decrease the risk on incidents, follow these procedures:

- a. Children must remain in sight.
- b. Be mindful of the adult-to-child ratio.
- c. Follow bathroom procedures.
- d. If free time covers an extended period of time, periodically make sure all children are still present.

Appropriate Vs. Inappropriate Behaviors & Interactions

(adapted Praesidium, 2020)

Our organization promotes a positive and nurturing environment for those we are serving while protecting church members, employees, and volunteers. We encourage appropriate contact and prohibit inappropriate displays of physical or verbal contact. Any act on the inappropriate lists must be reported to a supervisor immediately when witnessed and will result in an incident report.

Appropriate Physical Interactions	Inappropriate Physical Interactions
Side hugs Shoulder-to-shoulder hugs Pats on the shoulder Handshakes High-fives Pats on the head Touching hands, shoulders, and arms Arms around shoulders Holding hands (in escorting situations)	Full-frontal hug Kisses Showing affection in isolated areas Lap-sitting Piggyback rides Wrestling Tickling Massages Any affection that is not wanted

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
Positive reinforcement Appropriate jokes Encouragement Praise	Name calling Discussing sexual encounters Sexual jokes Secrets Cursing Shaming Belittling Derogatory remarks Harsh language

Gift Giving

(adapted Praesidium, 2020)

Abusers routinely groom their victims by giving gifts, thereby endearing themselves to their victim. They might instruct someone to keep their gift a secret, which then starts teaching the victim to keep secrets from parents/guardians. For this reason, employees and volunteers should only give gifts to groups and only under the following circumstances:

1. Administration is aware of and approves the gift.
2. Parents and guardians are notified.

Procedures for Dealing with Known and/or Registered Sex Offender

Any known or registered sex offender as the result of a sexual misconduct or molestation offense will be allowed to attend church services and activities under the following conditions:

1. The conditions of their parole or probation allow them to do so.
2. They agree to periodic meetings with the church member designated for the purpose of enforcing the rules and reviewing compliance.
3. They agree to be accompanied (chaperoned) by an assigned member whenever on church property.
4. They are not allowed to use the church restrooms unless accompanied by the assigned member.
5. They are not allowed at any church off-premises social interactions with vulnerable populations without an approved chaperone.
6. They are not allowed to have church keys in their possession.
7. It is understood that they will never be hired as an employee or a Volunteer Type 1.
8. They are to be presented with a written copy of their restrictions and must sign agreeing to abide by the conditions. It is also understood that if they violate any of these conditions, their attendance privileges may be revoked.

Incident Reporting

(adapted Praesidium, 2020)

How an organization responds to inappropriate actions, policy violations, and incidents/allegations of abuse can dramatically affect the harm to the individuals involved and the damage to the organization. Once an allegation has been voiced or an incident observed, our response must be swift to reduce any subsequent damage. Because we have zero tolerance for abuse, it is imperative that every person participate in the proper protection and response for those in our care. All reports will be taken seriously. Our procedures will be carefully followed to ensure that the rights of all those involved are protected.

1. Employee and Volunteer Response

If a suspicious or inappropriate behavior or policy violation is witnessed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interrupt the behavior.• Report the behavior to a supervisor, director, or other authority.• Reports can be made anonymously.• If the report is about a supervisor, go to the next level of leadership.• Document the report, but do not conduct the investigation.• Keep reporting until appropriate action is taken.

2. Supervisor and Administrator Response

When reported to, supervisors must do the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report to the next level of leadership and determine the appropriate response.• Speak with the person who has been reported.• Review the person's file to determine if similar complaints have been made.• Document the report.• If a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the authorities.• If applicable, notify the parents.• Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.• Review procedures to see if any improvements can be made.• Notify your insurance carrier.

1. All allegations of incidents involving improper touching, physical abuse, or sexual abuse of a vulnerable person during all church sponsored activities must be immediately brought to the supervisor's attention.
2. The church will immediately remove any person charged with improper sexual or physical abuse from contact with all vulnerable people. This period of contact restraint will continue until the investigation of the charge has been concluded. If the charge is determined to be sufficiently serious, the incident will be reported to the local authorities and the period of contact restraint will remain in effect.
3. All allegations of sexual misconduct will be fully and fairly investigated and corrective and/or disciplinary action taken as needed.
4. If the complaint involves any kind of physical or sexual abuse or implies a potential crime may have been committed, the church will not attempt to perform a detailed investigation internally and on our own but will instead invite in and cooperate fully with all legal entities involved.

Examples of Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors:

- Violation of this policy.
- Trying to get private time or one-on-one time with children or at-risk adults.
- Buying gifts for individual children.
- Making suggestive comments.

Procedure for Caring for Survivors

If someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

If the person is UNDER 18 years of age:

1. Notify the parent(s) or guardian(s).
2. Notify the authorities:
 - Contact Children’s Division of Missouri Department of Social Services (800.392.3728)
 - Call National Child Abuse Helpline (800.422.4453)
 - Call Child Welfare Information Gateway (800.394.3366)
3. Notifying the church:
 - Contact the church office and, if applicable, Children’s Ministry Director.
 - Church Office contacts: Insurance company and Church Leadership Team including the Lead Pastor.
 - Lead Pastor meets with family of survivor.
 - Accused is removed from leadership position(s) throughout the investigation.
 - If needed, Lead Pastor contacts other families affected by the incident.

If the person is OVER 18 years of age:

1. Ask if the person wants to file a report:
 - If yes, assist with contacting local authorities and connect the person with counseling and support ministries.
 - If no, connect the person with counseling and support ministries.

Exception is if the person is a disabled or elderly adult. Contact the Missouri Adult Abuse & Neglect Hotline: 800.392.0210.