



Covenant Life Church Child, Youth & Worker Protection Overview of Plan

Core Beliefs & Principles

- Philosophy of Child, Youth and Worker Protection

Definition of Terms

- Definition of the words and terms used through the Child, Youth & and Worker Protection Plan

Policies

- Administrative rules for who works with kids & how we respond to situations that arise
- Who must comply? Staff & ministry leaders

Code of Conduct

- Rules & expectations in working with kids
- Who must comply? Staff & all volunteers working with kids

Procedures

- Steps describing how to implement plan in specific areas
- Who must comply? Staff & ministry leaders

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of Heaven." Matthew 19:14

Core Beliefs: Promote, Protect, Prevent

- We believe in **promoting** healthy relationships between adults and children.
- We believe that **protecting** children is an adult's responsibility.
- We believe in **preventing and responding** to abuse with training and accountability.

Principles

The following principles guide our code of conduct, procedures and policies:

- **An intergenerational church is God's covenant plan:** Covenant Life Church highly values the role that loving, Godly adults have in discipling and nurturing children and how children bless adults in the church. Our congregation vows, at a covenant child's baptism, to "undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child." (BCO 56-5)
- **Protecting children honors Christ:** Christ holds Covenant Life Church accountable for protecting our children, and calls us to follow his lead in loving children. Good policies, procedures, systems and structures facilitate mutual accountability as we submit to Christ.
- **We must proactively work to protect children:** Preventing and responding to child abuse takes a heavy investment of time, money and resources. However, child abuse's spiritual, emotional, physical and financial toll is far greater if passively allowed.
- **Up-to-date child protection is in everyone's best interest:** Churches that practice good child protection procedures protect children as well as adults who serve children because training and accountability will build trust among parents, volunteers and church staff.
- **Child protection requires humility:** As Christians, we confess our spiritual brokenness and sin, and therefore, we must all humbly submit to boundaries established around children. Moreover, those who have committed child sexual abuse and other crimes against children will not be allowed to serve with children.
- **The church is a place for sinners:** We want to be a church that is safe for hurting, broken people - both for those who have been the perpetrators and the victims of sexual abuse - to come and find grace, hope and healing. Prioritizing child protection creates an environment of humility and accountability where such healing can take place.
- **First-rate protection:** Because any setting where children are present may be sought out by those wishing to harm them, we aspire to be a place where parents walk in and sense that their children will be loved and safe. We also want to conform to the most up-to-date laws and research about child abuse and abuse prevention. In this way, Covenant Life Church can be known as the best place in Sarasota for children.
- **Protecting every child:** The following child protection documents apply to any child, eighteen and under, at any Covenant Life Church activity.



Covenant Life Church Child, Youth & Worker Protection Definitions

Definitions

The following represents definitions of the terms and terminology used throughout the Covenant Life Church Child, Youth and Worker Protection Plan:

Child Abuse: Any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual abuse, injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.¹

Neglect: Occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired.²

Child(ren): Any minor under age 18.

Adult: Any individual age 18 and over.

Staff / Employee: Any paid worker of the church.

Volunteer: Any unpaid worker serving with children.

Childcare Worker: Anyone, whether paid or unpaid, that works directly with children.

Regularly Attend: Involvement in worship services at least 3/4 of the time (generally 3 out of 4 Sundays in a month).

¹ Definition from <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/abuse-hotline/frequently-asked-questions>, retrieved 10/22/14

² Definition from <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/abuse-hotline/frequently-asked-questions>, retrieved 10/22/14

This policy document describes core policies involved with protecting children, primarily from an administrative perspective. All employees and ministry coordinators are expected to follow these policies.

Core Beliefs: Promote, Protect, Prevent

- We believe in **promoting** healthy relationships between adults and children.
- We believe that **protecting** children is an adult's responsibility.
- We believe in **preventing and responding** to abuse with training and accountability.

To this end, the following policies will guide those working, serving and worshipping at Covenant Life Church in areas regarding child protection.

Eligibility to Work with Children

- Covenant Life Church wants adults who have a growing relationship with Jesus to work with and minister to children. Therefore, normally, volunteers must regularly attend the Covenant Life Church worship service for six months prior to working with children and continue to participate in corporate worship during their time of service.
- All volunteers and staff who work with children must attend abuse prevention training within their first year of service.
- All volunteers and staff who work with children are expected to follow and sign a commitment agreeing to the Code of Conduct.
- In order to prevent child abuse, Covenant Life Church addresses child safety through appropriate screening of all employees as well as any volunteers serving with children.
- All applicants, whether for an employed or volunteer position with Covenant Life Church involving work with children, will be required to grant permission to Covenant Life Church to conduct a background check, including acquiring any personal or public references or records.
- Any applicant whose references or records show that the applicant has been convicted of (including a withhold of adjudication), been determined to, or confessed to any conduct or act under the provisions of any law or statute of any state or country which act or conduct would constitute child abuse as defined under the provisions of Florida law and which act or conduct occurred at the time the applicant was 18 year of age or older shall not be eligible to work with children.
- Any applicant whose references or records show that the applicant has been convicted of (including a withhold of adjudication), been determined to, or confessed to any conduct or act under the provisions of any law or statute of any state or country which act or conduct would constitute child abuse as defined under the provisions of Florida Law and which act or conduct occurred at the time the applicant was less than 18 years of age shall not necessarily render the applicant ineligible to work with children. Other matters will be considered in determining the applicant's eligibility including, but not limited to, the applicant's age at the time of the incident, the victim's age at the time of the incident, the type of conduct involved, the applicant's understanding and appreciation of his conduct, and, treatment, if any, received by the applicant as the result of the incidents.



Covenant Life Church Child, Youth & Worker Protection Policies

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- Any applicant whose references or records show that the applicant has been convicted of (including a withhold of adjudication), been determined to, or confessed to any other crime (that is, not a crime against a child) shall be considered on a case-by-case basis. Such incidents will be considered to determine the applicant's eligibility including, but not limited to, the type of conduct involved, how recent the incident was, the applicant's understanding and appreciation of his conduct, and, treatment, if any, received by the applicant as a result of the incident.
 - Persons under the age of 18 may serve with children under the provisions listed in our policy, procedures, and code of conduct, and with parental consent.

Reporting

- Covenant Life Church will report all knowledge, disclosures, and reasonable suspicion of any kind of child abuse or neglect to proper authorities in accordance with Florida law.
- No adverse action will be taken by Covenant Life Church against anyone making a good faith report of suspected abuse.

Termination for Cause

- Any employee or volunteer whose dependent children have been determined to have committed child abuse or neglect will be asked to follow through with the action plan put in place to resolve the cause and effects of the abuse, taking into account such factors as age, age difference between offender victim(s), seriousness of the offense(s), acknowledgement of responsibility, and effective treatment. Failure to do so will lead to termination of their relationship with Covenant Life Church. Reapplication would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and involve effective treatment and other factors listed above.
- The Covenant Life Church Child, Youth and Worker Protection Plan will be utilized in determining appropriate administrative actions for anyone accused of or found to have committed child abuse or neglect. Those found guilty will not be permitted to serve with children in either a paid or unpaid capacity.
- If Covenant Life Church is asked for a reference, Covenant Life Church will generally disclose the reasons for termination when the termination involves abuse. Further, if Covenant Life Church becomes aware that a former employee or volunteer of Covenant Life Church becomes employed or volunteers with another organization where the individual has access to children, Covenant Life Church will normally make that organization aware of the reasons for Covenant Life Church's termination of employment of the individual.
- Failure to follow the Child Protection Plan will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. Anyone who works with children is responsible for following the Code of Conduct, and staff and church leadership are responsible following and enforcing the Child Protection Plan. (Church discipline? Most volunteers are not members so cannot be disciplined.)

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- If it is determined that a staff person has violated the Covenant Life Church Child Protection Plan, they will not be allowed to voluntarily resign but will have their employment terminated and the congregation will be informed as to the reason.
 - In cases where corroborating evidence shows that a person previously employed by Covenant Life Church committed child abuse while in the employ of Covenant Life Church, their personnel file will reflect such, and they will be considered ineligible for re-hire.

Additional Important Considerations

- No individual can amend any portion of this Policy or Code of Conduct, nor can any individual grant permission to deviate from the Policy or Code of Conduct. The Covenant Life Church session must grant approval for any change to this Policy or Code of Conduct. Ministry leaders, with the Executive Pastor's approval, may amend Procedures that fall within their area of direct oversight.
- Anyone attending Covenant Life Church whose references or records show that the attendee has been convicted of (including a withhold of adjudication), been determined to, or confessed to any conduct or act that would constitute child abuse will work with the pastoral staff to develop a personal plan including appropriate boundaries and accountability when on the church property for the purposes of protecting both the individual and the children.
- The Covenant Life Church Child, Youth and Worker Protection Plan in its full is to be followed by all church programs, activities and ministries occurring on church property.
- Outside ministries and organizations that use the Covenant Life Church property shall provide verification of their organization's child protection policy, or agree in writing to abide by the Covenant Life Church protection plan. Additionally, all outside organizations shall provide verification that Covenant Life Church has been named as an additional insured on the organization's liability insurance policy.
- Covenant Life Church distinguishes between the phrase "childcare provided" and other similar phrases such as "family-friendly", "children welcome" and "groups will coordinate childcare." The phrase "childcare provided" means that Covenant Life Church is coordinating the care of children and the Covenant Life Church Child, Youth and Worker Protection Plan is being implemented for that program. Other phrases such as "family-friendly" are meant to suggest that families with children are invited to attend and participate, but at all times it is the parent(s) who maintain responsibility for watching and protecting their children. Examples include small groups that meet off-site in someone's home or churchwide events such as Fall Festival.
- All media contact must be referred to the Executive Pastor as the authorized spokesperson for Covenant Life Church.



Covenant Life Church Child, Youth & Worker Protection Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct describes expected guidelines for behavior and conduct for all who work with children, including both employees and volunteers within the scope of the work and ministry of Covenant Life Church.

Visibility

Visibility is a primary way to protect children and minimize risk. All events and activities will be planned with high levels of visibility to other, accountable adults.

Overcoming Isolation

Because most abuse happens in one-on-one settings, we strive to always have at least two adults present when working with children. When this is not possible, reduce isolation by having a minimum of two children present, informing the child's parents of your meeting, or meeting during a time and in a location where any interaction with the child is visible to others. In the rare occasion where a child is alone with an adult, the parent *will* be notified as soon as is reasonably possible.

Isolation could be overcome in the following examples:

- Taking two or more children to the bathroom together rather than only one
- Dropping off siblings last in a carpool
- Taking one's own child or spouse along when providing rides
- Having an adequate number of adults supervising youth events, especially overnight activities.

Accountability

Adult staff and volunteers working with children shall monitor each other to ensure that the provisions of Covenant Life Church's Code of Conduct are being followed. When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable.

Counseling and other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and willing to stay in the vicinity until it is completed. Such meetings should only be conducted by the pastors, ministry staff or those under the direct supervision of the ministry staff.

Parents and supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activities with youth or children. For example, before transporting a youth to an event or keeping a child after a youth activity or event.

In an emergency situation, find someone to go with you if at all possible, or notify whomever is available.

Parental Involvement

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents shall be informed of planned activities (e.g. trips, overnights, etc) and asked to sign a consent form. Covenant Life

Church encourages parents to make unannounced visits to program activities, as this also reduces the risk of abuse.

Supervision

Supervision also reduces risk. Program administrators shall periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas, and other areas where children and adults are together.

Technology

Technology should be used appropriately to protect children or youth from abuse and exploitation. For example, no pornographic content may be downloaded from or uploaded to the Internet and appropriate safeguards to prevent such must be used. All staff and volunteers must prevent access to inappropriate communications via emails, chat rooms, or movies. All Code of Conduct requirements must be followed whether interactions with children and students occur in person or through technology.

Discipline

Biblical discipline is marked by drawing children to grace through teaching, guiding, and correcting rather than punishment. It should not include slapping, hitting, spanking, shaming, yelling at, withholding food, or belittling a child in the church setting.

Touch

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Healthy touch is:
 - In response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult
 - Age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult
 - Open rather than secretive
 - With the child's permission and any resistance from the child should be respected
 - Communicating respect for the child and concern for the child's well-being
- The following types of touch are generally appropriate:
 - Brief, non-sexual hugs
 - Pats on the shoulders or back
 - Holding smaller children when others are present
- The following behaviors between adults and children are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate and shall not be engaged in:
 - Touching buttocks, chests, genital areas or thighs
 - Showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child
 - Sleeping in bed with a child
 - Inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development
 - Flirtatious or seductive looks
 - Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child
 - Showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually suggestive games with any child

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- Any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature

Verbal Interaction

Words can be used to support and encourage a child or to tear a child down.

Appropriate verbal interaction includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Praising
- Encouraging
- Positively reinforcing
- Appropriately joking

Inappropriate verbal interaction includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Shaming, belittling
- Humiliating, name calling
- Using harsh language that may frighten
- Threatening or humiliating the child
- Cursing and making derogatory remarks about the child
- Telling secrets
- Telling off-color or sexual jokes
- Making sexually suggestive comments

Engaging the topic of sexuality can be done in a healthy, productive, age-appropriate, and gospel-centered way. Sexuality can also be addressed in unhealthy, unproductive and inappropriate ways. Any discussion of sexuality, sexual encounters, or sexual desires must be handled carefully and with parental knowledge when possible.

Favoritism

Adults shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to particular children or youth to the exclusion of others.

Reporting of Abuse

When anyone has reason to suspect or knowledge of child abuse, he or she must make a report according to our reporting protocol. The initial report will be made either in-person, by telephone, or email as soon as possible. No other action or any preliminary investigation should be performed.

Media Response

All media contact in relations to allegations of abuse as relevant to Covenant Life Church should be referred to the Executive Pastor as the authorized spokesperson for Covenant Life Church.



Covenant Life Church Child Protection Acknowledgement & Agreement

As an adult participant working directly with children through Covenant Life Church's nursery, children's, student ministries or Little Explorers Preschool, I acknowledge that I have read and understand Covenant Life Church's Child Protection Code of Conduct and Reporting Document. I agree to personally abide by their guidelines and help with their enforcement while I serve. I agree to read and abide by further updates to this Code of Conduct, re-sign this agreement form, and resubmit my background check information upon request during the time that I serve.

Furthermore, I agree to comply with Florida Statutes Chapter 39 regarding my responsibility to report any suspicions or knowledge of child abuse.

Signature _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

In the event that abuse is seen taking place, a child discloses abuse or signs of abuse are seen in a child, please follow the following steps. Florida law requires any person who has knowledge of, or reasonable suspicion that, a child is being abused or neglected to report that information to the Florida Abuse Hotline.

Step 1

- **Secure the child's safety**
- Ensure suspected abuser does not have access to the child
- Note details you see or hear, but do not investigate

Step 2

- **Report abuse or suspicion to Florida Abuse Hotline**
- Phone: 800.962.2873 | <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>
- Report must be made within 24 hours of incident

Step 3

- **Notify a pastor**
- Church phone: 941.926.4777
- Church emergency line: 941.487.0011

Step 4

- **Fill out "Suspicion of Abuse Reporting Form"**
- Submit completed form to the church office.
- Copies available in nursery, children's area and the office



Covenant Life Church Child, Youth and Worker Protection Suspicion of Abuse Reporting Form

Before filling out this form, please be sure that you have already reported the suspicion of abuse to the Florida Abuse Hotline (800.962.2873) and notified one of the pastors. Fill out the following report with as much detail as possible. Turn it into the church office.

1. Your Name:
2. Victim's Name:
3. Victim's Age/Date of Birth:
4. Date/place of initial conversation with/report from victim:
5. Victim's statement or abuse signs observed (give your detailed summary here, use back of page if you need extra space):
6. Name of person suspected of abuse:
7. Relationship of accused to victim:
8. Reported to Florida Abuse Hotline: [] Yes [] No
 - a. If yes...
 - i. When did you make the report (time and date)?
 - ii. How did you make the report?
 - iii. Was the report taken? If so, what was the reporter ID and name?
 - b. If no, for assistance in fulfilling this legal obligation, please contact the church at 941-926-4777 and ask for one of our pastors. If after hours, call for emergency assistance at 941-487-0011. If you are unable to get a hold of pastor, it is still your legal obligation to report to the Florida Abuse Hotline within 24 hours.
9. Reported to a pastor: [] Yes [] No
 - a. If yes,
 - i. To whom did you report?
 - ii. When and how did you report?
 - iii. Summary of the conversation:
 - b. If no, contact a pastor as soon as possible or fill out the form
10. [For Ministry Staff Only] Call to the child's parent/guardian:
 - a. Date/Time:
 - b. Spoke with:
 - c. Summary of conversation:
11. Any other actions taken?

I understand that confidentiality in this matter is of the utmost importance, and I agree not to speak of the details written in this form with anyone except legal authorities and the ministry leadership of Covenant Life Church.

Name of person making this report: _____ Date & Time: _____

Signature: _____