

BCBC Child Safety Policy

I. The Purpose of this Policy

Churches, teachers and those working with children must be aware of their own vulnerability with regard to interfacing with children. Alertness is mandatory in all cases for the protection of the church, the child, the teacher and worker. To assist in this regard, this policy is issued.

1. The purpose of this policy is to provide a useful and consistent written guideline for all paid staff, teachers and volunteers in BCBC-provided children's services.
2. Children attending BCBC-provided children's services must have the benefit of adult protection. This protection must cover a wide range of events from accident to abuse.
3. Paid staff and any adult or teen-ager volunteering to work with children must be protected from false allegations and accusations that could damage their reputation or standing in the church or community. Persons working with children must be aware that once accused, regardless of being innocent, their reputation will be permanently damaged.
4. Adults and teenagers working with children must do everything within their power to protect BCBC from any litigation or slander that would be damaging to the church's reputation or witness to the community.

A. Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined by the Texas Department of Child Protective Services to include:

1. Causing or permitting observable mental or emotional injury to a child.
2. Injury that results in harm to the child (excludes accidents or reasonable discipline).
3. Failure to make efforts to prevent child abuse.
4. Sexual abuse of any kind.
5. Causing, permitting or encouraging a child to use a controlled substance.

B. Why Churches are Vulnerable.

1. Trust: churches have a tendency to be overly trusting of people.
2. Lack of screening: because of a false sense of security, churches have been slow to require written applications with references and background checks from paid staff and volunteers.
3. Opportunity: youth work sometimes involves overnight activities or other opportunities for close contact with minors.
4. Access: Since other volunteer organizations and schools have complete safety programs in place to minimize opportunity for child abuse and many churches do not, child molesters are attracted to an institution in which they have immediate access to potential victims in an atmosphere of complete trust – the church.
5. Need: In some churches qualified volunteers for children's programs are often difficult to find. Lack of commitment and volunteer turn-over is high in these

churches. Because of this, churches are often pleased to find anyone who is willing to help out with children's programs.

II. Requirements for Service

The church's selection, supervision, training and reporting processes are critical to child safety. All BCBC staff and volunteers who are involved with minor children (birth through 17 years of age) must meet the following basic qualifications. Emergency exceptions to this policy are only with approval of a pastor or elder, and only on a one-time basis. Any emergency exceptions should be reported as soon as possible to the other pastors and elders.

A. Church Membership. Except for paid nursery workers, all staff and volunteers, adult and teenage, working with children must be Christians who agree with BCBC's doctrinal statement as required for membership. All adult children's workers who are in teaching roles must be BCBC members in good standing. A three month waiting period since starting to attend BCBC is suggested for all new volunteers before being permitted to work with children or serve in the nursery.

B. Application to serve. All paid staff and volunteers, adult and teenage, involved in regularly scheduled ministry with children must have completed and have an approved service application on file in the church office. For confidentiality, all applications and screening records will be placed in a locked file cabinet in the church office. Such applications will include permissions of the applicant to reference checks and criminal background checks. Minor children will need their parent's approval and signature.

C. Personal Interview. After an application is submitted, a personal interview may be conducted with all prospective children's paid staff and volunteers by the appropriate pastoral staff member or his designated representative, depending on position. The interview may include the following topics: ministry descriptions and responsibilities; appropriate ministry policies and procedures; previous experience with children's ministry; spiritual gifts and abilities; interests; start and ending dates; explanation and signed approval for reference and background checks; and other appropriate topics.

D. Reference and Criminal background checks. Any person seeking to serve on a regular basis in a BCBC children's ministry must be willing to undergo reference and background checks conducted by BCBC. The reference and background checks will be administered, reviewed and stored under the direction of a designated BCBC staff member. Any information obtained by the designated staff member will be held completely confidential. Records will be stored in a locked file cabinet set aside for this purpose in the church office. If BCBC hires nursery workers from a separate agency, a background check done by the agency may suffice.

E. Criminal background. Anyone with a criminal background involving children will not be eligible to serve in any area involving children. There are no exceptions.

III. Classroom and Nursery Structure

Each nursery and class through grade 4 at BCBC facilities will have at least two persons scheduled at all times to supervise minor children. This “two person” rule reduces the risk of child abuse, provides a witness to protect church staff and volunteers from any false allegations, and with two or more persons present there is less chance of an accidental injury to a child.

Any classroom or nursery should have either a hallway window for viewing or the room should have a dutch door with the upper half open, or a solid door propped open to the hallway. A “child gate” may also be used for crawlers.

No classroom or nursery should be left unattended or with only one children’s worker. In the event of a problem in this area, help is available from the appropriate ministry coordinator, an usher, deacon, elder, staff member or pastor. Obviously, there will be emergency situations where one worker will have to momentarily leave the classroom. Such absences should be very brief and avoided if at all possible.

IV. Restroom Procedures

Restroom procedures for children can present a problem when considering the requirement for having two adults present. The following are restroom procedures that must be followed for children younger than 3rd grade:

If a teacher or assistant is alone when taking a child to the restroom, it is appropriate to stand outside the restroom door and wait for the child. However, unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable in restrooms. Before a child enters the restroom alone, have an appropriate person open the door to see who might be in the restroom with the child. It may be necessary to have the child wait until the restroom is empty before going in alone. Never accompany a child alone into the restroom; another responsible adult or child should be present. If this is not possible, or if the child needs assistance in the restroom, contact the appropriate ministry coordinator, an usher, deacon, elder, staff member or pastor for assistance, as practical.

Children ought to have as much privacy as possible. If a child needs assistance in the restroom, assistance is to be given by someone of the child’s own gender. An adult should enter a child’s restroom stall only when absolutely necessary to assist a child, and should do so only with the presence of another adult.

Children in grades 3 and 4 may be sent in pairs to the restroom without adult supervision. A teacher, ministry coordinator, or an usher must be monitoring the hallway for the safety of the children. Teachers must monitor this situation closely.

V. Sign in and Sign out Procedures

The following procedures apply to all children from new-born through grade 4 who are attending children's ministry events at BCBC facilities.

When a child arrives at the classroom, the parent or guardian must either sign in on the form provided or have filled out a security card. If someone other than the parent is to pick up the child after class, that person should be designated on the form, or must be in possession of the other half of the filled out security card.

Upon release from the class, the person taking the child must sign the form provided or present the security card. There can be no exception to this rule.

In the unlikely event that a child is not picked up by the parent, guardian, or designated person, the child should be taken to the appropriate ministry coordinator, elder or pastoral staff.

VI. Classroom Procedures

Under no circumstances should children's staff administer physical punishment in any fashion. Should a discipline situation arise that cannot be handled in the classroom, the parent, appropriate ministry coordinator or pastoral staff member should be contacted.

While many children, especially young children, are free in expressing physical affection, those serving within children's ministries must be cautious in their response and use of physical affection with children. Physical contact with a child should be held to a minimum and only in the presence of another adult. Appropriate touch should be limited to handshakes, "high fives", brief hugs or a brief touch on the shoulder. In the case of walking the hallway, the child's hand may be held. While young children often crawl into laps uninvited, this should only be allowed for brief moments, in well-lighted rooms, and in the presence of another adult.

For the safety and security of the children, parents and guardians should know where their children are and who they are with before, during and after BCBC events.

VII. Off-Campus Ministry Activities

The appropriate pastoral staff member must approve of all BCBC-related ministry activities occurring away from the church facility.

During a ministry event a child may not be taken off-campus without the approval of the appropriate ministry coordinator, pastoral staff member and parent. An adult should never be alone with a child, and the "two-person" rule applies to any BCBC-related activity occurring off campus involving children grade 4 and below.

VIII. Training

Each adult or teenager serving with children grade 4 and below will receive adequate training in child safety, classroom safety, appropriate ministry policies and emergency procedures.

IX. Abuse Reporting

Any suspected case of abuse must be reported to the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor or appropriate ministry coordinator. Classroom staff must not attempt to handle the situation themselves or question the child.

X. Accident Reporting

If a child is injured during a BCBC-related ministry activity, a parent or guardian should be located and notified as soon as possible. For minor injuries such as cuts and scrapes, first aid kits are located in the Nurseries, Kitchen, and Resource Room. If an injury requires more extensive treatment, a ministry coordinator or pastoral staff member is to be contacted immediately. An Accident and Injury Form must be completed and given to the appropriate ministry coordinator.

XI. Medical Emergencies

If a child experiences a medical emergency during a BCBC-related ministry activity, seek the immediate assistance of an usher, ministry coordinator or pastoral staff member.

XII. Evacuation Procedures

In the event of a weather-related or facility emergency, follow the instructions of your ministry coordinator, an usher, or pastoral staff member. If you must evacuate the building immediately and no instruction is available, take the children under your care out the nearest exterior door and lead them to a safe and visible location outside the building. Stay with the children in your care until you receive further instructions or assistance.