



The Church of God Child Protection Policy for Volunteers

June 2, 2025

Introduction

The Ministries of The Church of God, South Carolina seek to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect children from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

The Spiritual and Moral Responsibility of the Church

The Gospel of Mark records that when people brought little children to Jesus, He took them in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them. As a church, it is our desire to bring children to Jesus, too.

In the church, we recognize that we are a reflection of God's love to those in our care, and we take our responsibility to them seriously. In our ministry to children, we must follow carefully what the Scriptures teach:

1. "Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22 NIV).
2. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3 NIV).
3. "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 NIV).
4. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan . . ." (Matthew 18:15–17 NIV).

These guidelines are therefore set forth to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we can bring our children to the Savior. We seek to provide quality care and instruction in our ministry to the family. All of our guidelines are designed to protect and promote growth in God for each child and adult involved.

In making sure that the Church of God in South Carolina is a safe place, we endeavor to the following:

- Protect God's children—the creation of a secure, safe environment for our children/youth is of utmost importance (Matthew 18:1-6).
- Protect the workers from false accusation, litigation, and potential loss of ministry/career.
- Protect the congregations, State/regional Offices and General Headquarters.

Child, Youth, and Worker Protection Policy

The policy is intended to clearly state that The Church of God will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this policy not only reflects your concern about children's safety, but also your willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects. For the safety and protection of our children and workers, all people who participate in Church-sponsored activities with children will be required to comply with this policy.

Definitions

In this policy, the following definitions will apply:

1. **Child:** Any person under the age of 18.
2. **Special-Needs person:** Any adult or child requiring direct adult supervision as a result of mental or physical limitations.
3. **Adult:** Any person age 18 and over.
4. **Child abuse and neglect:** Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect of a child by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's welfare.
5. **Physical abuse:** Maltreatment that results in physical injury, including, but not limited to, bruises, cuts, welts, fractures, and internal injuries.
6. **Emotional abuse:** Maltreatment that results in impaired psychological growth and development, including, but not limited to, belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on child's performance, and isolation from normal social activities.
7. **Sexual abuse:** Maltreatment that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including, but not limited to, physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and non-physical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).
8. **Neglect:** Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and supervision.
9. **Compensated workers:** Hourly, salaried, part-time, or full-time employees who work with children at any Church-sponsored activity.
10. **Volunteer workers:** Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any Church-sponsored activity.
11. **Caregiver:** Any compensated or volunteer worker, seventh grade or older.
12. **Mandated reporter:** Mandated reporter: Any person with responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. If a caregiver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report or cause a report to be made to the Department of Children and Family Services or other comparable agency of the civil authorities. This will call for investigation of the controlling legal authority and the laws of the particular state or nation.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process, screening and required background checks are in effect as of June 2, 2025.

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

A. Recommended Six Month Church Attendance

It is recommended that persons be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been a member, regular attender, or known by established member of The Church of God for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

B. Written Application

Anyone seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by the church. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliations, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions.

The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the church office until the Background Check has been completed, at which time the application will be shredded so that confidential information (such as social security number, driver's license number, etc) isn't accessible.

C. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face (or phone) interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

D. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references should be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file in the church office.

E. Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteers as defined above. All volunteer and compensated workers shall be screened by a background check for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal history or abuse findings. This check must include the state sex offender's registry.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to complete online authorization form allowing The Church of God to run the check. (This is a legal requirement under the Fair Credit Reporting Act

(FCRA)). The FCRA dictates that you must disclose your intent to conduct a background check and obtain the individual's signed consent before proceeding.) If an individual declines to complete the authorization form, she/he will be unable to work with children.

This application and the results of any screening shall be kept confidential by authorized Church staff unless it is required to be released for legal reasons.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the State Presbytery on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. However, any adult member of the congregation, volunteer, or compensated worker who has been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult shall not provide service in any Church-sponsored activity or program for children or special needs persons.

Those who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse can be forgiven for and cleansed of their sin. However, sin does have consequences, and while such persons may serve in certain other areas of ministry, they will be prohibited from serving in the children's and special-needs ministries

Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form, or any failure to disclose accusations of, participation in, or convictions of any sexual misconduct will be disqualifying for participation in child ministry programs.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Commonly Asked Questions

Is a criminal background check really necessary?

Sadly, the culture in which we live dictates that we must take drastic preventive measures to protect the children and youth whose care we've been entrusted with. Furthermore, there are litigation issues: A Church that hasn't performed background checks faces the risk of catastrophic financial penalties in the event that an allegation of abuse within the Church leads to a conviction or out-of-court settlement.

Who needs to submit a Children's and Youth Workers Application and a Permission to Obtain a Background Check form?

Any Church employee or volunteer who will have direct contact with any child or youth (less than 18 years of age), either on or off the Church sites, during any Church-related ministries must complete both of these forms.

Once I complete and sign these forms, to whom do I give them?

Give your completed forms to the director of Children's Ministries/director of Youth Ministries or pastor.

I'm concerned about confidentiality and privacy issues. Who will see my application, and, more importantly, who will see the results of my background check?

Only those individuals listed above, along with our Church's administrative support staff, will see your application and the results of your criminal background check. It will be noted that a background check was performed, and the application and further documents pertaining to the check will be destroyed once reviewed.

I am not presently involved in any Church volunteer work that involves young people. Should I submit an application and give permission for a background check?

Because the addition of programs to minister to these young people is ongoing, the demand for volunteers is always on the increase. Even though you may not be currently involved in such a ministry, it's a good idea to go ahead and submit your forms now. In the event that you do volunteer work at some point in the future, we'll already have your forms on file and can do the background check right before the volunteer work begins.

What is a "U.S. Criminal Record Indicator" database search?

The U.S. Criminal Record Indicator is the most comprehensive and current search available in the United States. The U.S. Criminal Record Indicator database search examines the Department of Public Safety, Department of Corrections, Administrative Office of the Courts, Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, and/or the Department of Criminal Justice files and records, and other applicable government agencies where available. Currently, this search includes information from 39 states plus multiple online county records.

BACKGROUND CHECKS (Cont.)

Why do I have to list my Social Security Number (SSN)?

There are a couple of reasons. The first is that your SSN is the primary key for all databases affiliated with a background check. The second reason is that your SSN is used to verify the following crucial information:

- Whether the SSN is validly issued
- To whom the SSN belongs
- In which year and state the SSN was issued
- The current and other known or previous addresses to that SSN

The SSN verification process can reveal that the number belongs to another individual, has more than one name associated with it (i.e., produces other aliases) including maiden and divorced names, is associated with fraud, is not a validly issued SSN, belongs to a deceased person, produces additional addresses not stated by the application/request form, or if that individual has other SSNs.

Anyone can give a false identification by using another person's Social Security number. This search ensures that the individual is who he or she says. The Social Security search is provided in the Basic Search along with the National Criminal Indicator search.

What criteria from the background check will determine whether or not someone is approved for volunteer or paid staff work? Who makes that decision?

The background check will cite felony and misdemeanor convictions listed in the National Criminal Database Search. The most obvious reason that someone is denied the opportunity to do volunteer work in our Church is any prior conviction pertaining to an offense against a child. It's quite unlikely, though, that a person with such a conviction would even submit an application.

Misdemeanor convictions, and even some felony convictions, would have little or no negative impact in determining a person's worthiness as a Church volunteer. To put it another way, the only determining factor in evaluating someone's criminal record is the likelihood of him or her posing a threat to our young people.

In the event a felony conviction turns up on the report, the pastor, with the appropriate state/national overseer, will decide whether the person is allowed to work as a volunteer or paid staff.

Final Thoughts

Please know that the intent of the background check is to protect the children in our Church. Its purpose is not to cause personal embarrassment by dredging up past mistakes or wrong choices. Regrettably, it's impossible to implement a viable screening plan without a bit of scrutiny into some personal background information. Throughout the entire process of developing the Child, Youth, and Worker Protection Policy for our Church, a tremendous amount of concern and sensitivity has been shown in regard to matters of confidentiality. Much effort has been put into implementing screening procedures that limit the number of people who have visible access to private information. Please know that as the screening process evolves during the next several years, the leadership of The Church of God will remain committed to the task of administering screening procedures with utmost regard to your privacy.

POLICY AND CARE GUIDELINES

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open. It is a best practice that there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation (not opposite sex).

Special Situations

Field Trips off Campus: Adult chaperones are needed when children leave the property for a church activity. Two adults are required and at least one male and one female are preferred. Parent signed permission forms delegating authority to act on behalf of the parents in the case of a child emergency are required for each trip. Drivers must have a valid drivers' license and vehicle insurance, and it is strongly suggested that drivers with previous Drive While Impaired (DWI) convictions should not be authorized to transport children.

Field Trips-Overnight and Mission Trips: In addition to following standard field trip procedures other requirements apply to overnight stays. Bunk rooms in large retreat facilities are ideal and allow for males and females to be housed separately. Further, often adults are segregated within the bunk house facilities. Occasionally, hotel rooms are the only available option and adults will maintain separate accommodations from children whenever possible.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Should be at least age 14.
- Over 16 years old must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of The Church of God, South Carolina not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with program director, youth pastor, or lead pastor if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Guidelines

Children **five years of age and younger** should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort children to the hallway bathroom and stay outside of the bathroom. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the child inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the worker should ask for help from another chaperone to witness, prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. If at all possible, ask the child's parent to come to assist instead.

For children **over the age of five**, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Technology Guidelines

To protect both youth and adults, all communication between church staff/volunteers and minors must be transparent, appropriate, and accountable.

- **Direct Communication:** Staff and volunteers should not text, private message, email, or communicate one-on-one via social media with minors. All communications should be through approved, group-based platforms with parental oversight. This protects youth from inappropriate contact and protects adults from misunderstandings or accusations.
- **Photos/Videos:** Taking photos or videos of minors should be done with extreme caution. They should never be shared online without express permission from a parent or guardian. This helps protect the privacy and dignity of the child and reduces the risk of images being misused.
- **Use of Personal Devices:** Allowing youth to use a staff member's or volunteer's personal phone, tablet, or other device should be rare and always supervised. Caution is needed to prevent accidental exposure to inappropriate content, access to private files or messages, or creating an impression of favoritism or secrecy.

All interactions – digital or otherwise – should reflect the same standards of respect, safety, and accountability we uphold in person.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

The Church of God, South Carolina will provide training on this child protection policy and strategies for detecting abuse to all new childcare workers, volunteers and coaches. The church requires that all workers complete training prior to working with children and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

CHILD ABUSE

Recognizing Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined as physical, sexual or psychological mistreatment, or neglect of a child or children, and is usually due to actions or failure to act as a parent or caregiver. While child abuse may be a rare occurrence at The Church of God, SC all staff and volunteers need to be alert to the possible signs.

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** - any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** - emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse**- any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** - depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

For the purposes of these procedures, any reference to a child or youth means a person less than 18 year of age.

Symptoms of Child Abuse

Symptoms of abuse vary widely and are dependent on the age and environment of the child. The list that follows are red flags that, when observed, cannot be ignored. The child...

- Withdraws from friends or usual activities.
- Has changes in behavior such as aggression, anger, hostility or hyperactivity.
- Exhibits depression, anxiety, unusual fears, or sudden loss of self-confidence.
- Has an apparent lack of supervision.
- Is reluctant to leave church or does not want to go home.
- Attempts to run away.
- Exhibits rebellious or defiant behavior.
- Attempts suicide.
- Shows evidence of unusual bruises or is in obvious pain when moving or being hugged.
- Demonstrates sexual behavior or knowledge that is inappropriate for his or her age.
- Says things that suggest he or she has been sexually abused or touched inappropriately.
- Has trouble walking or sitting.
- Abuses other children sexually.
- Desperately seeks affection.
- Shows poor hygiene.
- Lacks appropriate clothing or excessively worn clothing.
- Demonstrates emotional swings that are inappropriate or out of context to the situation.
- Shows indifference.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the program director, youth pastor, or lead pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as mandated by state law.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse: What is probable cause?

Probable cause means that the available facts, when viewed in the light of the surrounding circumstances, would cause a reasonable person to believe a child was abused or neglected. A report based on probable cause *does not require proof* that abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

Because we believe children are our most important concern, The Church of God, SC has adopted the following guidelines for reporting suspected abuse:

1. Upon observing or suspecting abuse, the caregiver shall immediately do the following:
 - a. Make sure the child's safety and comfort are secured.
 - b. Make sure the suspected abuser is safely away from the children.
2. Report the abuse or neglect promptly to the pastor or director of Children's Ministries and/or the director of Youth Ministries. To preserve confidentiality, it is important to discuss the incident initially only with any of these four individuals.

Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse

The Church of God has determined that it is the responsibility of the pastoral staff to report all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper legal authorities with 24 hours of it being discovered. When it becomes necessary to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the protection of children must be the most important concern. The state/national overseer must be notified immediately.

As a caregiver, you are a mandated reporter of child abuse or neglect. It is the legal responsibility of a mandated reporter to report all cases of child abuse or neglect he or she observes, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse or neglect. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the Church, the observer, or both.

The confidentiality of the pastor/attendee relationship is very important. Reporting probable cause of child abuse or neglect has the potential for helping individuals receive help for a previous problem and may prevent further harm to self and others.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during one of our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. If a worker or church member is alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct, they will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. **All allegations of abuse should be reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.** The church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse in accordance with existing law. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by law enforcement authorities.
4. Contact your State Bishop, who will notify General Headquarters of the incident.
5. The insurance company **will be** notified, and the church will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect.

The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.

7. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Response of The Church of God

The primary function of The Church of God in responding to allegations of sexual abuse or neglect is:

- to attempt to provide pastoral care to all who are affected
- attempt to ensure the safety and protection of persons who have been or may be harmed
- seek healing by providing pastoral care and other needed assistance to all who are affected
- to the extent possible, respect the privacy and rights of the parties involved and the confidentiality of communications.

If the Church of God receives an allegation of child abuse or neglect, the pastors will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation.

The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, The Church of God will assume that such complaints are made in good faith.

Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that The Church of God takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

If an alleged abuser contacts the Church officials about a complaint, The Church of God personnel may confirm that they have received such a complaint only if they are certain the alleged abuser already knows this. They should avoid discussing the allegations or making any further comments until the proper authorities have an opportunity to conduct their investigation.

They should not identify the alleged victim or complainant during an investigation.

If the media or other parties contact a Church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the pastor. Only the pastor or his designee shall make comments about the allegation.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Responsibilities of The Church of God Pastoral Staff

In accordance with the Church's position that child abuse and neglect shall not be tolerated, the pastoral staff shall do the following:

1. Take all allegations of child abuse and/or neglect seriously.
2. Document all efforts at handling the incident.
3. Contact the Department of Children and Family Services or its equivalent agency within 24 hours. In many cases, the governing law enforcement agencies may have investigators specifically designated to investigate such claims. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases. **NOTE: Every state in the U.S. has mandated reporting laws for child abuse, meaning there isn't a state that doesn't require certain individuals to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, and many states require "any person" to report suspected abuse.*
4. If the incident involves church staff/volunteers, occurred on church property, or at a church-sponsored event, report the incident immediately to the church insurance company and attorney.
5. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
6. Notify the parents or guardians (unless the suspected abuse happened at home).
7. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or special-needs person is secured.
8. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously, and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support will help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
9. Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a caregiver, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished.
10. Use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. Be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.