

RIVERCHASE BAPTIST CHURCH

Policies and Procedures To Prevent Child Abuse In Children's And Youth Ministries

I. Policies

1. A person must attend Riverchase Baptist Church ("RBC") for six (6) months before he or she can volunteer to work with children and/or youth.¹
2. Prior to working with youth or children, a volunteer must be involved in the church to the extent that other adult members can provide a positive character reference for them.²
3. Every person who wishes to work with children and/or youth must complete a written application and agree to a background check and reference checks.³
4. The church, through its designated personnel, will conduct reference checks on all applicants to work in children and youth ministries.⁴
5. The church will have a background check of the applicant conducted by a third party.⁵
6. The church, through its designated personnel, will conduct a personal interview of the applicant.⁶
7. All workers will receive training in childcare and youth to be clear about RBC's mission, vision for children and youth, and to establish a common pattern of care.⁷

¹ This policy is to prevent predators from gaining quick access to potential victims. Six months provides a threshold of time for individuals to become better known, and gives an opportunity to evaluate their suitability for volunteer service. We do not want to give volunteers who are new and unknown immediate access to children. If someone transfers from another church who has a long history of working with children in a former church, it may be appropriate to reduce the threshold requirement as long as the church has conducted thorough background checks, reference checks, interviews, and training.

² This enables members to provide references that describe the potential volunteer's involvement in the church, level of commitment, and ability to serve well. This will become especially important as the congregation grows to the extent that staff members may not have a personal knowledge of every member.

³ The goal of the application is to screen potential workers for a past history that may exclude them from working with children and youth, and to demonstrate that the church has met the test of reasonable care.

⁴ If policies 1-3 are enforced, the application should indicate that the volunteer has attended the church for a minimum length of time, and the volunteer should list two or more other church members as references, plus any other references that may be available from other forms of service. The references should be contacted for input concerning the volunteer's qualifications for working with children or youth. This can be done in person, over the phone, or through a written form mailed to the reference. We must document in writing all efforts in collecting the references, and the information received. All information must be placed in a confidential folder and stored in a secure (locked) location.

⁵ A criminal-records check is required for all volunteers who will have unsupervised access to children, youth, the developmentally disabled, senior citizens, or who serve in a counseling position. RBC will use either (who do we use? _____), SecureSearch or Safe Hiring Solutions to conduct its searches. If a potential staff member or volunteer will drive a motor vehicle as part of his or her service, a motor vehicle records check should also be conducted. This check reveals the person's type or class of driver's license, any restrictions or violations, license revocations, auto insurance cancellations, accidents, full name, and the person's address at the time last renewal.

⁶ This interview is timed following the completed application and records check so that any issues that arise can be discussed. This interview provides a time to explore more fully why the candidate wants to work with children or youth. It is also a good time to review RBC's policies and procedures regarding the supervision of children and youth.

⁷ This is one way in which parents know their children are treated consistently by all workers.

8. RBC will have controlled access at the entrance to the nursery and pre-kindergarten areas.⁸
9. RBC will have child check-in and pick-up controls to protect children.⁹
10. RBC has a two, non-related adult rule. No child is ever to be alone with one adult.¹⁰
11. RBC has the following **Physical Contact Policy**:
 - a. **Forbidden Physical Behaviors**:
 - i. **Sexual abuse**: Any physical contact between a worker and a child that would provide, or is intended to provide, any form of sexual gratification is strictly prohibited. Relationships and contacts that are strictly prohibited between any worker and a child include dating, courting, time spent alone, giving massages, kissing, prolonged embracing, and so forth.
 - ii. **Physical abuse**: Any striking, spanking, shaking, slapping, or other violent behaviors are strictly prohibited.
 - iii. **Verbal/Mental abuse**: Any humiliating, degrading, threatening, or other abusive communication behaviors are strictly prohibited.
 - iv. **Dating**: At no time shall anyone working with youth pursue a dating relationship. Staff should be sensitive to youths with “crushes.” All workers are held responsible for confronting and discussing immediately with an appropriate leader any signs of possible violations of the above and/or victimization.
 - v. **Reporting**: All blatantly inappropriate behavior requires immediate reporting to the Children’s Ministry Director. In addition, any good-faith belief of physical, sexual, or mental abuse to a child eighteen years of age or younger must be reported to the proper state official (see “Procedures” for more details).
 - b. **Permissible Physical Contact**: Limited physical contact, such as a pat on the back or on the head, or a handshake, are permissible. Hugs are permissible within sight of others. Workers must avoid any prolonged hugs and must stop a hug immediately upon request by the child.
 - c. **Healthy Discipline**: No form of punishment that involves pain or physical discomfort may be used. Children may be restrained if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others. Disruptive children may be removed from the group to another part of the room.

⁸ Security devices or trained personnel must be put in place at the entrance to the nursery and pre-kindergarten area. Doors must be locked, and only those with an identification device should be allowed through the doors. Children must also be prevented from letting themselves out of the room.

⁹ Children need to have some form of identification for check-in and check-out. The children need to have their movement monitored at all times. They need to always be under the supervision of a childcare worker. One method is to have a number pinned to each child and a corresponding number given to each person who drops off the child so that only someone with the corresponding number can pick up the child. This could prevent a potential kidnapping of a child by a non-custodial parent. When class has ended, a team of volunteers must secure the doors. Parents must have their ID cards in order to enter the room. If they do not have their ID card, they are not allowed to enter the room until proper ID has been made. Once they get their child, another volunteer checks their ID with their child’s badge to make sure they both match.

¹⁰ This rule will help to protect children from potential abuse, and to protect workers from potential accusations of child abuse. By lowering isolation and increasing accountability, we lessen the risk of harm for everyone. If for some reason only one adult is with a child, the child and adult should be in full, public, view at all times.

- i. **Remove from Situation:** Children who are disruptive should be taken to another side of the room or, if necessary, into the hallway (leaving the door fully open and within sight of other people). The worker should explain to the child that a particular behavior is unacceptable.
 - ii. **Persistent Behavior:** If the disruptive behavior persists, the parents should be notified and asked to come and sit with the child in class the following week, and for as long as necessary until the child can control himself or herself. It may be suggested that a child attend the main worship service with his or her parents if it continues to be difficult for the student to control himself or herself. We are committed to working with children to find what they need in order to fully participate, but not to the detriment of other children in the class.
- 12. All children's classrooms must have a window in the door, or the door must be left open.
- 13. All adults in the nursery must wear name tags for identification.
- 14. Youth (under 18 years of age) are not allowed to volunteer with children and youth ministries more than twice per month on Sunday mornings.
- 15. Youth volunteers (under 18 years of age) should always be in a classroom with an adult.
- 16. Youth volunteers are not allowed to care for infants alone.
- 17. Youth volunteers are required to go through a short training class prior to working in the nursery.

II. Procedures

1. Two applications will be used to screen potential workers with children and youth: (1) an Adult Application to Work with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults; (2) an Underage Volunteer Application to Work with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.
2. RBC should initiate its follow-up with references by letter so that it can obtain a response letter that it can place in the applicant's file. The letter should state that the applicant has released and agreed to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information on the applicant. The letter should ask the reference if the applicant would be a good candidate to work with children/youth, and the letter should state that the applicant may not be permitted to begin serving with children/youth at RBC until a response is received from the applicant's references. If no response from the reference is given within two weeks, a follow-up phone call should be made to the reference. If there is still no response, an additional three (3) follow-up phone calls should be made to the reference. All contact with references should be documented through the interviewer's writings and placed in the applicant's file. If after five (5) attempts (including the letter) to contact the reference, there is no response, then a decision may be made based upon other references that have responded. The reason it is necessary to attempt to contact the reference so many times is so that the church might show that it exercised reasonable care to contact a reference. References from institutions should be weighed more heavily than references from individuals since some individual references may attempt to cover-up a person's behavior.

3. All volunteers and paid workers with children and youth (who are under age 18) are legally required to make a good-faith report of non-accidental, actual and suspected child abuse or neglect. Ala. Code § 26-14-3.¹¹
 - a. Child abuse and neglect includes the following according to Ala. Code § 26-14-1:
 - i. **Abuse.** Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse or sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation. "Sexual abuse" includes the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or having a child assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of the conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of the conduct; or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children as those acts are defined by Alabama law. "Sexual exploitation" includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution and allowing, permitting, encouraging or engaging in the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child for commercial purposes.
 - ii. **Neglect.** Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, supervision, clothing, or shelter.
 - b. All workers and volunteers with children and youth must report child abuse or neglect to a "duly constituted authority" including:
 - i. The **chief of police** of a municipality or municipality and county; or
 - ii. The **sheriff**, if the observation of child abuse or neglect is made in an unincorporated territory; or
 - iii. The **Department of Human Resources**; or
 - iv. **Any person, organization, corporation, group, or agency authorized and designated by the Department of Human Resources to receive reports of child abuse and neglect**; provided, that a "duly constituted authority" shall not include an agency involved in the acts or omissions of the reported child abuse or neglect." Ala. Code § 26-14-1(4) (emphasis added).
 - c. The report shall first be made orally (by telephone) and then followed up with a written report within a prescribed period of time including:
 - i. The name of the child, (if known);
 - ii. The child's whereabouts;
 - iii. The names and address of the parents, guardian, or caretaker of the child;

¹¹ Alabama's designation of mandatory reports is as follows: "All hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, doctors, physicians, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, physical therapists, nurses, public and **private K-12 employees, school teachers and officials**, peace officers, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, **day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, employees of public and private institutions of postsecondary and higher education, members of the clergy** as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or **any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority.**" Ala. Code 26-14-3(a) (emphasis added).

- iv. The extent of the child’s injuries;
 - v. Any evidence of previous injuries to the child (if known);
 - vi. Any other pertinent information which might establish the cause of such injury or injuries; and
 - vii. The identity of the person or persons responsible for the injuries.
 - Ala. Code §§ 26-14-3(a); 26-14-5.
 - The website for Alabama Department of Human Services is: http://dhr.alabama.gov/services/Child_Protective_Services/Abuse_Neglect_Reporting.aspx
- d. The State of Alabama grants immunity from any liability, civil or criminal, for making a good-faith (as opposed to a “bad-faith” or false) report of child abuse or neglect. Ala. Code § 26-14-9.
4. A Family Intake Form should be completed by all parents, legal guardians, or adults who bring children to RBC’s children’s or youth ministries. From these forms ID cards can be created for the parents and the children. Then the paperwork for each child, or a computer program containing the information that is easily accessible by volunteers, should be available so that the information can be checked if needed. The ID Cards will allow workers at check-out to confirm whom the child belongs to, The Intake forms may also be a reference source if an emergency arises, and provides security for parents and adults who are leaving their children in the care of the church’s volunteers. In addition to general information, the form should include an emergency contact number.
 5. Training sessions will be available for all workers in the nursery, with children, and with youth. In addition to RBC-developed training that focuses on policies and procedures with children’s and youth ministry, there are also education webinars available to RBC through Safe Hiring Solutions <http://www.safehiringsolutions.com/>, SecureSearch, <https://www.securesearchpro.com/>, and the Boy Scouts of America, www.myscouting.org.
 6. Particular procedures for supervising children and youth are as follows:
 - a. Each program for children and youth must have a minimum of two adults, with a ratio of one additional adult for every ten youth.
 - b. Volunteers and church personnel (hereinafter “volunteers”) are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth or multiple children or youth where other adults cannot easily observe them.
 - c. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering, or diapering infants or children, volunteers will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.
 - d. At least two volunteers must supervise activities. When both boys and girls are participating, male and female adults must supervise.
 - e. Programs for infants and children under six (6) years old will have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.
 - f. Volunteers 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 programs or activities specifically for children or youth.

- g. Volunteers will never give tobacco, alcohol, or unauthorized drugs to children or youth.
- h. Volunteers will never use tobacco products while in the presence of children or youth.
- i. Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before volunteers transport children and youth for a church sponsored activity or for any purpose.
 - i. Driving alone with a child or youth should be avoided at all times.
 - ii. However, if riding or driving alone with a child or youth cannot be avoided, special care should be taken:
 - 1. Do not sit close to one another in the car;
 - 2. Do not come into physical contact with each other.
 - 3. Do not stop the car to talk.
 - 4. If you must stop, turn on the inside light of the car.
 - 5. Avoid physical contact (hugs and kisses) when saying goodbye.
 - 6. Be aware of the time you depart and arrive. Mark those times in your diary or record.
- j. Volunteers will respond to children and youth with respect, consideration, and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, culture, or socio-economic status. Volunteers will portray a positive role model for children and youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity. They will avoid even the appearance of favoritism.
- k. One-to-one counseling with children or youth will be done in an open or public or other place where private conversations are possible but occur in full view of others.
- l. No dating relationships will take place between those who minister with youth and those they supervise at any time. Such a relationship blurs the ministry being performed, and is easily and predictably misunderstood. Volunteers who violate this policy will be immediately and permanently removed from their ministerial position.
- m. Volunteers are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child or youth.
- n. Volunteers are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized education program.
- o. Volunteers are prohibited from using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.
- p. Volunteers are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the Internet, with children or youth.
- q. Volunteers are required to remain in a common sleeping area with children and youth in order to provide immediate adult supervision. When common sleeping areas are used at least two adult volunteers of the same gender will be assigned to reside in the sleeping area. When boys and girls sleep in a common area together, adults of each gender must be present.

- r. Volunteers are prohibited from dressing, undressing, bathing, or showering in the presence of children or youth.
- s. Volunteers are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, shaking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth, or others.
- t. Volunteers are prohibited from using harsh language, improper punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.
- u. Volunteers are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities relating to children's or youth ministry or camp activities.
- v. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.
 - i. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:
 1. Asking permission before touching;
 2. Pats on the shoulder or back;
 3. Handshakes;
 4. "High-fives" and hand slapping;
 5. Verbal praise;
 6. Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth;
 7. Arms around shoulders;
 8. Holding hands while walking with small children;
 9. Sitting beside small children;
 10. Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children;
 11. Holding hands during prayer;
 12. Pats on the head when culturally appropriate (this gesture should be typically avoided in some Asian communities).
 - ii. Some inappropriate forms of affection are listed below:
 1. Inappropriate or lengthy embraces;
 2. Kisses on the mouth;
 3. Holding children over three years old on the lap;
 4. Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers;
 5. Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas, or other private rooms;
 6. Occupying a bed with a child or youth;
 7. Wrestling with children or youth;
 8. Tickling children or youth;
 9. Piggyback rides;
 10. Any type of massage;
 11. Any form of unwanted affection;
 12. Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, "You sure are developing," or "You look really hot in those jeans."

These standards for communication or conduct of relationships apply to electronic media including internet access, email, chat rooms, phone conversations, photos, and pictures.

13. Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touching of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing;
 14. Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth;
 15. Private meals with individual children or youth;
 16. Touching or hugging from behind;
 17. Games involved in inappropriate touching.
- w. Volunteers should never swear or use foul or abusive language in the presence of those being served in ministry.

Signature Page

Please sign your understanding and agreement to uphold the policies and procedures of Riverchase Baptist's Policies and Procedures to Prevent Child Abuse in Children and Youth Ministries by initialing each statement, signing and dating, and returning to the church office.

_____ I have read and understand Riverchase Baptist's Policies and Procedures to Prevent Child Abuse in Children and Youth Ministries.

_____ I agree to abide by and operate within the procedures defined in Riverchase Baptist's Policies and Procedures to Prevent Child Abuse in Children and Youth Ministries.

APPLICANT SIGNATURE

DATE
