

Faith Church Child Protection Policy—Condensed Version
Adopted: October 2022

God's Heart for the Vulnerable

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores their cries (Psalm 9:9, 12). Faith Church is committed to being a refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. Abuse is not a sin like any other sin. Abuse is a crime and a particularly grievous sin when someone in a position of power and trust violates or harms someone who is powerless to stop it (see Ecclesiastes 4:1).

As Christians, we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16). We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and uphold our policy. Jesus spoke about abuse using the metaphor of wolves, shepherds, and sheep. Jesus warned about “wolves in sheep’s clothing” who would prey upon the vulnerable (Matthew 7:15). The Bible affirms the value and dignity of children and all who are made in God’s image. God condemns abuse in all forms. Jesus calls every Christian and every church to walk in the light with him and “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

Sadly, child abuse is a common reality in our world and even our churches with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men being sexually abused in the U.S. before they turn 18. Other forms of child abuse are also common.¹ Jesus condemned anyone who would abuse a child in the strongest possible terms: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community educated on abuse, by clarifying appropriate boundaries, and by doing the hard work of holding each other accountable.

Definitions and Policy Foundations
(For more thorough definitions see the full policy)

Abuse: In general, abuse occurs when a person in a place of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, mentor, supervisor, teacher, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.

¹ According to the ACE Study 28% of children are physically abused, 11% of children are emotionally abused, 10% are physically neglected, and 15% are emotionally neglected in the US. See <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/index.html>

Child: Faith Church considers any person under the age of 18 years old or anyone in our student ministry to be a child for the purposes of this policy.

Indicators of Abuse: Because “the majority of children who are sexually abused will be moderately to severely symptomatic at some point in their life,”² Faith Church is familiar with and attentive to potential indicators of child sexual abuse. This will be a key aspect of training for our church. For a list of common indicators of abuse in children see Appendix I.

Perpetrators of Child Maltreatment: People who sexually abuse children utilize deception, authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. The vast majority of those who perpetrate abuse in any form are known by their victims. In a Christian community, offenders typically groom not only victims but caregivers and all in the community to establish a perception of themselves as someone who would never abuse a child.

Appropriate Boundaries with Children

Our entire community must take collective responsibility to promote healthy interactions and boundaries with children. Abuse prevention takes place not only during structured times of ministry but in our hallways, restrooms, parking lots, and homes. The following boundaries apply to all within our church and all of us are responsible for holding each other accountable. Any violation of the following boundaries or any other concern related to safety should be relayed to the Safety Team as soon as possible.

No one at Faith Church should be alone with a child who is not their own without express verbal or written parental permission. This includes times of structured ministry as well as unstructured times, whether on or off church property (including giving rides in vehicles).

No touching of any kind between an adult and a child is permitted unless the child is open and welcoming to it. Adults should always understand and respect that children do not always welcome touch. Pay attention to the child’s body language. If you are unsure if the child is consenting, just ask. Although most sexual offenses against children are committed in more isolated settings, some child sex offenders will seek to offend in the presence of other adults. **Faith Church also requires that all touch between an adult and a child is transparent, observable, and accountable to other adults.**

Faith Church prohibits the following:

- Sexually or physically abusive touch

² S. R. Dube, R. F. Anda, C. L. Whitfield, D. W. Brown, V. J. Felitti, M. Dong, and W. H. Giles, “Child Sexual Abuse: Consequences and Implications,” *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 24 (2005): 358-364. Retrieved from: www.medscape.com/viewarticle/731970_1; See also, S. R. Dube, et. al., “Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28 (2005): 430–438. Retrieved from [www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(05\)00078-4/fulltext](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(05)00078-4/fulltext).

- Any touch that is unwanted by a child
- Any touch not observable by others
- Touching a child's thighs, stomach, or lower back
- Any intimate touch such as massage, playing with hair, or any touch under clothing
- Tickling, piggyback rides, or other games involving lots of touch with children
- Lap sitting (except for holding children 5 and under during structured children's ministry activities)
- Full frontal hugs
- Corporal punishment

Faith Church desires to show healthy affection to its children through the following displays of affection when welcomed by the child and accountable to other adults:

- High-fives
- Pats on the shoulder
- Side-hugs

Faith Church acknowledges that sexual language is a common grooming tactic by offenders. As such, our community prohibits

- sexually suggestive language or slang, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits;
- uploading, downloading, sharing, or viewing pornography or any sexualized images; and
- music, videos games, and movies with sexual themes.

Any private communication between an adult and an unrelated child or between a child and an older child in a different stage of development is prohibited. This includes interaction via text, social media, or other forms of electronic communication that are private. Any private communication initiated by an adult toward a youth is a serious boundary violation. If a youth messages you privately, document it with a member of the Safety Team and gently remind the student of the policy and direct them to an appropriate way to connect soon. The Safety Team will follow up with any appropriate actions, such as informing parents.

There will be times when topics of sexuality are approved by the Session for instructional and/or discipleship purposes. Parents will be notified ahead of time. These lessons may include aspects of prevention, including appropriate boundaries and consent.

When the correction of children is necessary, adults should avoid any form of harsh language, including shaming or yelling. Any serious issues of misconduct by kids should be brought to the attention of parents. Faith Church encourages positive verbal interactions, including

- redirection,

- encouragement,
- kind words,
- positive reinforcement, or
- appropriate jokes.

See Appendix III on the discipline policy for more information.

Because a large percentage of child abuse occurs in isolation from others, **Faith Church requires a minimum of two unrelated adults to supervise all ministry involving preschool children or one adult with multiple children approximately the same age.** This policy applies to church-based and off-site activities. Our ratios for the supervision of young children will follow the recommended guidelines of our state. All adults serving in our ministry with children and youth should set an example to bring transparency and accountability to any close interactions with children.

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from displaying favoritism towards a child or group of children. They may not give gifts to individual children unless the gifts are

- able to be given to other children at other times for similar reasons (e.g., gifts to graduating seniors; a new Bible for students entering middle school; end of the year thank you gifts to older children who volunteered in the nursery);
- signed from the church rather than the individual staff member; and
- given together with another staff member.

All diapering shall be done by parents or a female adult nursery volunteer in plain view of other nursery volunteers. Any nursery volunteer diapering a child will wear gloves to prevent skin to skin contact and promote good hygiene.

Two female adult volunteers should take children from the nursery/preschool classroom to the bathroom. If two volunteers are not available, then the worker accompanying the child(ren) must remain in the propped open doorway of the restroom in plain view of the hallway. Any clothing adjustments that require a volunteer's assistance should be made outside the stall. If a child needs help in a stall, then the parent should be asked to come assist if feasible. If the parent is unavailable, then any assistance in the stall should be done with the stall door open and the assistance observed by the second female nursery worker. The Sunday school greeter will monitor bathroom usage and either check the bathroom or ask someone of the appropriate gender to do so if it seems warranted.

Faith Church requires all church staff, leadership, and volunteers to sign an annual online affirmation that they have read and agree to abide by the terms of the Condensed Policy, including holding others accountable. All members of the church are encouraged to read the condensed policy annually. Furthermore, all staff, leadership, and volunteers will attend an

annual training on child maltreatment and this policy. All members are encouraged to attend this training.

Screening

In keeping with our values of protecting the children in our care, Faith Church requires any volunteer working with the church's children or youth ministry to have a background check. Background checks will be repeated every three years.

Policy Violations and Concerns

Faith Church takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to child safety. **Any person—staff, volunteer, parent, or church member—who witnesses a violation is expected to intervene (if possible or at least get help) and report the violation to at least two leaders responsible for receiving these reports as soon as possible.** (These include the children's ministry coordinator, the nursery team leaders, or any of the elders including the pastor.) Any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of two of these individuals as soon as possible. The individuals receiving reports shall individually document all concerns or policy violations and submit them to the Session. At least two elders will deliver a letter and discuss the policy violation with the offender.

Reporting Child Abuse

The abuse of a child is not only an egregious sin but a serious crime. Reporting could save a child immeasurable suffering. Silence in the face of abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. **Faith Church encourages all adults to consider it their moral duty to report the abuse of children to the proper authorities.**

All adults at Faith Church are morally and legally³ required to report witnessed abuse, any disclosure of child abuse (e.g. by a child or a perpetrator), consistent or egregious indicators of abuse, or any reports or rumors a child is being abused. When you report abuse, you are not personally accusing someone of abuse. You are simply giving information that may prove vital to the protection of children to professionals who are trained to respond in a variety of appropriate ways.

Reports should be made as soon as possible and certainly within 24 hours. Reports can be made by phone **(301-600-2464)** or online **([www. Childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org))**. You can also contact the **Frederick County Sheriff's Office (301-600-2071)**.

³ Mandated reporters such as social workers, teachers, medical professionals, etc. are also legally required to report child abuse.

The closest child advocacy center to Faith Church is the **Child Advocacy Center of Frederick (301-600-1758)**. If anyone has questions concerning a child's safety or about indicators of abuse, Faith Church encourages that person to reach out to the child advocacy center.

After a church member has reported abuse, Faith Church asks that they notify **two** members of the Session as soon as possible. Do not inform anyone who is suspected of abuse (or anyone else within the household if the suspected abuser is within the household) that a report has been made.

Signature Page

I understand the Faith Church Condensed Child Protection Policy and Discipline Policy and procedures and agree to abide by these procedures to the best of my ability.

I understand that failure to abide by these policies and procedures may result in my removal from any positions involving the care of children and/or criminal charges where applicable.

If for some reason I change my mind and can no longer abide by these policies and procedures, I will immediately notify a member of the safety team and immediately cease to work with the children of Faith church.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____