

March 21, 2005

Children and Youth Protection Policies At Oakland Baptist Church

1. MISSION STATEMENT

The children and youth ministries at Oakland Baptist Church provide opportunities and resources for children and youth to be involved in the church's mission of making disciples for Christ by demonstrating open hearts, open minds, open doors, and open arms.

These policies are to ensure that Oakland Baptist Church is a safe and loving place for children and youth to grow in their faith and in their knowledge of what it means to be a Christian and to live out our Christian mission. The basis of our faith, doctrine and church policies is scripture. Scripture provides the foundation for our ministries and is essential in developing our policies. The scriptures teach that children are a gift from God, wonderful and precious and are to be guarded and guided carefully. As a community of Christ's followers, we are responsible for helping to guide the children among us; we promise to do so as a congregation every time a child is dedicated in our church.

*Behold, children are a gift of the LORD;
The fruit of the womb is a reward. Psalms 127:3*

2. SOUTH CAROLINA'S CHILD ABUSE LAWS

Under South Carolina law Section 20-7-490, a child is a person under the age of eighteen.

Child abuse or neglect occurs when the physical or mental health or welfare of a child is harmed or threatened with harm by the persons responsible for the child's welfare. This includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF OAKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH

A. Oakland Baptist Church

As a provider of childcare and Christian Education, OBC is responsible for the safety and well-being of children and youth while they are in its care. We are responsible both to the parents of the children and youth and to the legal authorities for having our facilities meet appropriate standards of physical and emotional safety and due care.

As a body of followers of Jesus Christ, we are responsible for providing love, care and support that reflects God's own relationship with God's children, for providing Christian fellowship and education, and for providing loving outreach, to church

attendees-from the oldest to the youngest- of our worship services, Sunday School, activities and programs.

As an employer of childcare workers and as a group of caring volunteers, we strive to protect our staff, paid workers, and volunteers from being in a situation where they may be falsely accused of inappropriate behavior toward any child or teenager in our care.

Within our Christian mission, our policies are designed to provide protection to both the children, youth and the workers by having a policy that no worker is placed into a position where they are alone with the children or youth and that no worker uses violent or inappropriate discipline methods. With appropriate assistance and witnesses in place, no opportunity should arise for any worker to commit any act of abuse against our children or youth and if such act should occur, our policies will prevent such acts of abuse from continuing.

B. Staff

Staff refers to paid full and part-time employees and ministerial staff. Our staff is required to know the responsibilities of OBC toward its children and youth and toward the workers. They shall be trained in our policies and procedures. All new staff must complete an application and submit two institutional references. All new and current staff must pass a national criminal background check. Those members of the staff and leaders of the church constituting the local response team (see Section 5, Oakland Baptist Church Policy and Procedure for Reporting Child Abuse) or directly supervising paid childcare workers shall attend church training in child protection; shall be cognizant of their responsibilities in the event of an allegation of child abuse; and shall be trained in the conduct of their related duties.

C. Paid Childcare Workers

Our paid childcare workers are responsible for knowing both church policy and South Carolina law regarding child abuse and protection. They must submit an application and two institutional references. They must pass a national criminal background check and attend child protection training and be prepared to document any incidents which may indicate the presence of abuse. They shall be required to read, understand, acknowledge and sign this policy before beginning their duties at OBC. They are responsible for implementing and abiding by our written policies on child protection and classroom discipline.

D. Volunteer Workers in Children and Youth Ministries

Our volunteer workers in children and youth ministries are responsible for knowing these policies before being permitted to work with the children or youth. Volunteers must submit an application with two institutional references. In addition, volunteers participating in any overnight activities involving minors must pass a national criminal background check. Our volunteers should be aware that the potential for abuse exists and that they are part of our efforts at prevention. They are responsible for abiding by our written policy on child and youth protection and classroom discipline.

Our volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling to the children and youth ministry areas before participating in the work, so that no inappropriate behavior arises on their parts.

E. Day School

Oakland Baptist Church Day School is a ministry to the children and their families in our community and the church supports this program. We realize the value of quality weekday childcare. Therefore, staff in these programs are required to know and abide by these policies. Staff and volunteers who work directly with the children are also responsible for knowing and abiding by these policies and will attend training concerning these policies. They must also submit an application with two institutional references. All paid staff must pass a national criminal background check.

F. Community Groups Using OBC Facilities

Leaders/Representatives of community groups desiring to use our facilities and who have children in their program or who require childcare must read, agree to adhere to, and sign our Child and Youth Protection Policies before being permitted to use facilities belonging to OBC.

G. Sub-Contract Work

The Building and Grounds Committee will review each proposed contract with outside vendors who will perform work at OBC to determine the appropriate measures necessary to protect children and youth during the performance of the vendor's work.

4. GUIDELINES OF CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION AT OAKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH

To create a safe environment for children at Oakland Baptist Church, we will continue to follow physical safety policies and will use additional protection measures as follows.

A. Six Month Rule

Oakland Baptist Church requires that volunteer church workers in children or youth programs attend the church for at least six months or be actively involved in the church for six months before beginning responsibilities. We make every effort to place new workers with longtime, experienced leadership volunteers. Paid workers, while not required to be members of OBC, will be supervised by experienced leaders, program staff members, or experienced volunteer leaders.

B. Worker Screening

Paid Childcare Workers: Before beginning employment, paid childcare workers will be asked to sign a Screening form containing a statement that they have never been convicted of child abuse as an adult or juvenile nor had such a conviction expunged. Applicants refusing to sign the Screening Form will not be hired. In addition, applicants for paid childcare positions will undergo a national criminal background check, complete an application and submit two institutional references. They will not

be hired if they have been convicted of any sexual or violent crimes or any offense against a minor. They must also read, sign, and comply with these Children and Youth Protection Policies.

Volunteers: In order to ensure that we have responsible and appropriate people working in any area of the life of the church, volunteers are asked to prayerfully consider their calling toward a given ministry before committing to such service. The Nominating Committee also approaches filling positions by first praying for responsible and appropriate people to do the work. In this way, we trust that the volunteers working in children and youth programs feel the Lord calls them to this ministry and are prepared for and suited to the work.

Notwithstanding the above, volunteer workers in our children and youth ministry shall read, sign and comply with these Children and Youth Protection Policies and any modifications or amendments made to these policies. Volunteers will also submit an application with two institutional references and sign the Screening Form.

C. Child Protection Training

Before beginning their paid or volunteer service, workers with children and youth will be required to read the church's Children and Youth Protection Policies and sign the Policies Acknowledgment Form indicating that they have read, understand the policies, and agree to abide by them. Persons will not be permitted to serve until the policies have been read and the form signed. Periodically (no less than once per year and preferably more frequently), training sessions related to the Children and Youth Protection Policies will be offered. Paid childcare and youth workers, church staff members and all children and youth volunteers will be required to attend at least one training session per year.

D. Adult Supervision Policies

Two Worker Rule

Workers in our children and youth programs shall not be alone with children at any time, for the protection of both the children and the workers. Teachers and leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more per classroom and for church activities involving children and youth.

Supervision of Mixed Gender Groups

When a group includes both boys and girls, and if the group 1) stays overnight at the church, or 2) leaves the premises for overnight trips, both male and female leaders must be present.

Field Trip Policy

The provisions of these Children and Youth Protection Policies apply to all field trips under the auspices of Oakland Baptist Church.

- Field trips will be supervised at a ratio of at least 1 adult to every 7 children or youth, with a minimum of 2 adults present at all times. In

- addition, a signed parental consent form with authorization for emergency medical care is required for such trips.
- When field trips are overnight events and adults must share a room with the children or youth, the adult must have his or her own bed (unless the adult is sharing bed w/ own child).
 - For all field trips, children and youth must ride in vehicles driven by authorized adults.

E. Group Management Policies

Oakland Baptist Church is committed to providing children and families with a safe and caring environment for learning to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Positive learning experiences enable children to develop a strong sense of self worth. The following guidelines are intended to facilitate such learning experiences.

- 1) Effective leaders serve as role models for children/youth, showing God's love in all actions and interactions.
- 2) Being respectful of children, their experiences, and feelings, encourages children to interact positively.
- 3) Well-planned, varied hands-on, age appropriate activities provide a positive learning experience, often avoiding conflict.
- 4) Reinforce appropriate behavior with praise. Distraction is a very useful tool to avoid conflict.
- 5) Consistency in setting and following group rules helps maintain group integrity.
- 6) No Corporal Punishment.

If a child/youth's behavior is inappropriate, and after the above guidelines have been followed, the child/youth should be removed from the group and an OBC minister should be consulted. When appropriate, the parents will be informed of the inappropriate behavior.

F. Consequences For Policy Violations

If any action is observed, not constituting abuse, but in violation of our stated supervisory or disciplinary policies, the following consequences may be applied:

A volunteer acting in such a manner may be 1) taken aside and reminded of the Children and Youth Protection Policy, 2) approached and reminded of the Children and Youth Protection Policy and (if necessary) counseled on appropriate anger management, 3) removed from his/her position with the children or youth ministries

and barred from participating in such ministries until he/she attends a Child Protection training session, or 4) permanently barred from contact with children or youth ministries. The staff minister in charge of the program, in consultation with the Senior Minister, will decide which consequence to carry out. If a staff minister is the violator, the Senior Minister, in consultation with the Personnel Committee, will choose the consequence. If the Senior Minister is the violator, the Personnel Committee, in consultation with the Chair of the Fellowship of Deacons, will choose the consequence. If the violation happens in Day School, the Day School Director, in consultation with the Day School Committee, will choose the consequence. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense.

A paid employee observed in the same actions may be 1) verbally reprimanded 2) reprimanded in writing with a copy to the employee's file, 3) suspended from employment until undergoing additional training in Child Protection policies and procedures, or 4) dismissed with or without notice. The staff minister in charge of the program, in consultation with the Senior Minister, will decide which consequence to carry out. If a staff minister is the violator, the Senior Minister, in consultation with the Personnel Committee, will choose the consequence. If the Senior Minister is the violator, the Personnel Committee, in consultation with the Chair of the Fellowship of Deacons, will choose the consequence. If the violation happens in Day School, the Day School Director, in consultation with the Day School Committee, will choose the consequence. The choice of consequences will reflect the severity of the offense and whether such action is a repeated offense.

G. Open Classroom Policy

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be viewed from outside the door at any time, without prior notice by church staff, parents, grandparents, guardian, or other volunteer church workers. However, visitors must be invited into the classroom by a class leader before entering. Visitors are requested to avoid causing disruption to the students/participants. No doors that have windows can be covered. Childcare workers or volunteers concerned about discipline, facilities, or any tensions, injury or incident may also request a meeting with a minister.

5. OAKLAND BAPTIST'S CHURCH POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

There are two possible situations requiring immediate action on the part of Oakland Baptist Church, its members, staff and volunteers. If there should be allegations of child abuse at Oakland Baptist Church or if a child coming to Oakland Baptist Church exhibits signs of abuse occurring away from the church setting, the procedures below shall be followed. Due to the serious, sensitive nature of such a crisis, and the potential harmful effects both to the child and to the accused of false accusations and unrestrained gossip, the strictest confidentiality will be observed throughout the reporting process.

In order to minimize confusion and talk, anyone associated with Oakland Baptist Church children or youth programs who observes or has reason to suspect abuse, should report these observations/suspicions directly to a minister. Paid nursery workers, because the Preschool Coordinator is the head of their program and their direct supervisor, have the additional alternative of reporting to only the Preschool Coordinator, who must then report to a minister. In the context of the Day School, any reports should be brought directly and only to the Director of the Oakland Baptist Day School. The Day School Director is responsible for informing a minister and following the procedures outlined below. If an associate minister is the one accused, the head of the relevant program will report the allegation to the Senior Minister. If the Senior Minister is the one accused, the head of the program will report directly to the Chair of the Personnel Committee.

1. Treat any allegation of child abuse seriously; do not ignore the issue in the hope that it will go away. Any individual observing acts of abuse occurring at OBC or suspecting that abuse has occurred, even if away from OBC, should report the suspected abuse.
2. After a minister has been informed, the allegations will then be reported to the remaining ministerial staff.
3. The individual reporting the abuse shall document the incident and the minister shall document procedures observed in handling the allegation.
4. The local church response team (all ministers and the chair of the Personnel Committee) shall meet immediately and will request documentation concerning the incident and determine the merit of the documentation. Factors that will help determine the merit of the incident include whether the incident is hear say and/or whether signs of physical abuse are present. After determining the merit of the documentation, the response team will then make other appropriate notifications, which could include the church's insurance company and the South Carolina Department of Social Services.
5. Individuals involved in reporting the suspected abuse or the local church response team should not confront any person affected by the allegations.
6. However, if the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, the accused person must be temporarily reassigned relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded.
7. It is appropriate to show care, comfort and reassurance for all persons affected and to pray for an atmosphere of healing in the church.
8. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused throughout the investigation.
9. Public inquiries will be directed to the Senior Minister or to the Personnel Committee Chairperson.

6. POLICY REVIEW

The Children and Youth Protection Policies at Oakland Baptist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Preschool and Day School Committees.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Programs of the church involving children or youth will implement these policies. These policies do not take the place of or invalidate existing policies concerning additional physical safety procedures (fire safety and evacuation policy, playground safety policy, nursery cleaning/sterilizing policy, etc.) used in our children and youth programs.

These policies will go into effect immediately upon passage by the Preschool and Day School Committees. Staff, paid childcare workers, youth program workers, and volunteers in the children or youth programs will be given a copy of these policies and requested to sign the Policies Acknowledgement Form within one month of the policies effective date. Within two months of the policies effective date, background checks will be initiated on paid workers who have not yet undergone such an investigation.