



# Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Revised 9/25/2017

## Purpose and Commitment

Otter Creek's purpose for establishing this Child Protection Policy is to demonstrate our absolute, unwavering commitment to the physical and emotional safety and to the spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

Our commitment to this purpose includes the adoption and enforcement of this policy on child protection. This policy applies to all adults and youth who work in Children's Ministry or Otter Creek Youth Group in any paid or voluntary capacity. These policies do not extend to college and young adult events.

## Application, Selection and Screening

We believe that appropriate personal relationships between adult leaders and the children and youth of the Church foster the community of Christ. Common expressions of affection (e.g., hugs), affirmation (e.g., pats on the back), support (e.g., prayer) and physical caretaking (e.g., changing diapers) are appropriate in our community of caring Christians. Care will be taken, however, to ensure that adults do not behave in inappropriate ways during any Church-sponsored activities.

One of three security level designations will be assigned to all volunteer and staff positions that involve interaction with children and/or youth. Appropriate security requirements will be associated with each level based on the type of interaction the position holders would typically have with children and youth. Following are the descriptions and requirements for each level:

**Level I** – Includes non-supervisory positions and those which rarely, if ever, require the position holder to be alone with a child or youth (e.g., nursery workers). Following are the requirements for Level I positions:

### Adults: (Defined as 18 or older)

1. Must submit an application form
2. Must sign the Agreement and Acknowledgement of Receipt form indicating understanding of, and agreement to, adhere to Otter Creek's Child Protection Policies and Procedures, and affirm that they have not resigned, been terminated or removed from a position or leadership role, either volunteer or paid, for reasons related to misconduct. If they cannot affirm this statement, full disclosure must be offered.
3. Are subject to criminal history checks and reference checks; therefore, applicants must provide written authorization for the church to conduct these checks.

### Children's Ministry Youth Workers:

1. Students and their parents must sign the Children's Ministry Youth Worker Policy and the Youth Worker Application.
2. Must be approved by a Children's Minister

**Level II** – Includes all supervisory positions and those that have regular and consistent interaction with children older than nursery age in onsite activities (e.g., teachers). Those serving in teaching positions at the nursery level will be designated at Level I. Following are the requirements for Level II positions:

Adults:

1. Must complete the requirements for Level I positions.
2. Must be a baptized believer.
3. Must have been a member of Otter Creek for at least six months prior to beginning work and plan to remain an active member of Otter Creek.
4. Will review and consider all email communications, or otherwise, sent on at least an annual basis that include an explanation of the child protection policies and any information regarding the implementation of those policies and procedures.

Student Volunteers:

1. Must submit an application form.
2. Must be an active participant of the Otter Creek Youth Group for at least six months prior to beginning work.
3. Both students and their parents must sign the Agreement and Acknowledgement of Receipt Form indicating understanding of, and agreement to, adhere to Otter Creek's Child Protection Policies and Procedures, and declare that there is no history of misconduct on the part of the student that would make their service unsuitable. Student and parents will commit to review and consider all email communications, or otherwise, sent on at least an annual basis that include an explanation of the child protection policies and any information regarding the implementation of those policies and procedures.

**Level III** – Includes all positions which require interaction for extended periods of time and/or those who will be on overnight trips with children or youth (e.g., Covenant group leaders, camp counselors, and overnight trip chaperones). Following are the requirements for Level III positions:

Adults:

1. Must meet all requirements for Level II positions, and must pass a criminal history check and reference checks successfully. These individuals will be subject to rechecking as often as deemed necessary.

Student volunteers (restricted to juniors and seniors at this level)

1. Must meet all the requirements of Level II
2. Provide a Student Reference Supplement in addition to the standard volunteer application form.

The Elders may approve a waiver of the above requirements, if requested, after all background and references have been checked and cleared.

All paid staff are required to pass a criminal history check.

All applicant information will be kept confidential and in a secure location.

## Procedures

Parental Responsibility – Parents are responsible for their children when they are at Otter Creek facilities or off-site events where no official child or youth supervision is provided. Non-church sponsored activities, even if they occur on the Otter Creek Church property, or are sponsored by Otter Creek Church families do not under the scope of this policy. This would include life group gatherings, birthday parties, AA meetings, etc. Parents should refer to church communications (e.g., website, bulletin, e-mail) for information about events and activities for which there is Church-provided childcare.

Precautionary Policies–All volunteers and employees are expected to avoid any situation in which they would be alone, unobserved, and uninterrupted with children and youth. Children's and youth events will take place at Otter Creek in rooms where there is clear glass in the door, and nothing impedes vision through the glass.

Two-adult rule--For activities where continued observation is not possible, there should be two volunteers present. A married couple does not fulfill the two-adult rule; a 3<sup>rd</sup> approved adult should be included when a married couple volunteers. On Children's Ministry, Middle School events or trips, and camp, Level 3 *Student Volunteers* serving alongside an approved adult, may fulfill the two-adult requirement.

Drivers and Travel Events – No fewer than three persons, one of them an approved adult, should occupy a vehicle traveling to an event unless express parental permission has been given beforehand. Only approved adults will transport youth. Drivers will be expected to adhere to all traffic laws.

Overnight Event Chaperones – It is the goal of the Church that every sleeping unit (motel room, camp cabin, etc.) will have either two approved adults of the same gender as the children or youth, or no adults assigned to it. Sleeping units are subject to unannounced visits by a monitor. Lock-in hours will be observed for overnight events and adults are not allowed to share a bed with a child or youth unless it is their own child.

Pick-up After Events – Upon return from a travel event, children and youth will be released only to their parent or guardian unless the person in charge of the event has been notified in advance by the parent or guardian.

Adult-Child/Youth Ratios for Travel and Off-Site Activities– The following ratios are recommended for off-site activities and for events requiring travel:

Children, ages 0-5	1 adult to 3-4 children
Children, grades 1-5	1 adult to 4-6 children
Youth, grades 6-8	1 adult to 8 youth
Youth, grades 9-12	1 adult to 10 youth

Diaper Changing/Restroom Assistance – Diapers should be changed at diaper changing stations only by approved volunteers. Likewise, only an approved adult should accompany a child to the restroom with the door to remain open.

Check-in/Check-out – All young children (babies through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) will follow a secure check-in and check-out procedure. Specific information regarding these procedures will be provided by the Children's Ministers.

## Prohibited Acts

Prohibited conduct includes any form of physical, emotional, sexual, or mental abuse of a child. Prohibited conduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of sexual conduct towards a youth or child;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a protected minor;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an older child and a younger child;
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a minor;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor;
- Spanking;
- Possessing obscene or pornographic materials at any Church activity;
- Possession or being under the influence of any illegal substances;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol, or giving alcohol to a child or youth, while leading or participating in a function of the Children's or Youth Ministries;
- Carrying any type of weapon while leading or participating in a function of the Children's or Youth Ministries; (Specific approval is granted for students and teachers, typically fifth grade, to bring their knives to a specific lesson on the Word of God as a two-edged sword.)
- Giving of gifts to an individual child in a secretive manner, or any other behavior that could be interpreted as "grooming", is not appropriate. If a child has a particular need, a gift can be made on behalf of the church, and given to the parent.

## Response Procedures

### Reports of Child Abuse

- From the Department of Children's Services website ([state.tn.us/youth](http://state.tn.us/youth)):  
*According to Tennessee law, all persons (including doctors, mental health professionals, child care providers, dentists, family members and friends) must report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Failure to report child abuse or neglect is a violation of the law.*  
**If you believe a child has been abused or neglected, call 877-237-0004 to report it.**
- The first person to learn of an incident of misconduct toward a child during a Church – sponsored activity should first secure the safety of the child, children or youth and then immediately report this incident to the Minister in charge or to one of the Elders. This individual should not leave the child, children, or youth alone to report the incident and should not personally confront the alleged violator of the policy.
- The individual reporting the incident will be required to fill out an Incident Report Form as soon as possible – ideally, immediately after the initial, verbal reporting of the incident. This written report is extremely important - the information provided will be critical to the investigation of the incident.
- Two individuals - the person in charge and the Minister, or the Minister and an Elder – will respond to inform and support the child's parents and family as needed.
- The Minister or Elder will alert the Child Protection Team which will assist with the investigation of the situation and determination of appropriate actions to be taken.
- The person against whom allegations have been brought will immediately be suspended from all duties involving children or youth until a full investigation has been completed and a determination has been made.

- The Elder on the Team will be responsible for promptly informing the entire Eldership and the Executive Minister.
- The incident must be reported to the Tennessee Department for Children's Services (DCS) as soon as reasonable suspicion has been confirmed. The Church Administrator should then contact the Church's liability insurance carrier.
- All persons involved with the report and investigation shall keep the information in strictest confidence.

#### Cooperation with Civil Authorities

The Church will cooperate with DCS and all other civil authorities in the investigation of an alleged incident of child abuse. Whenever possible, an appropriate staff person should be involved during all interviews of the child and/or the accused.

#### Response to the Media

The Elders will name an individual who will be responsible for all media inquiries about the alleged incident.

#### Response to the Congregation

If and when it is deemed appropriate by the Team and the Elders, a brief statement will be given to the congregation regarding the alleged incident without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns.

#### Response to the Individuals Involved

The Church will take appropriate steps to provide for the immediate needs of the alleged victim, the person against whom allegations have been brought, alleged abuser and any other individuals affected by the alleged misconduct. This may include, but will not be limited to, counseling.

#### Records of Alleged Child Abuse

Every effort will be made to keep all conversations and written records pertaining to the alleged incident of child abuse in strictest confidence. Documentation will be kept in a locked file.

**Child Protection Policies and Procedures  
Agreement and Acknowledgement of Receipt**

*I have received, read and retained a copy of the Otter Creek Church of Christ Child Protection Policies and Procedures. I acknowledge that these policies and procedures are for the protection of our children and that my compliance with them is expected. Failure to comply may result in loss of privileges to serve the children and youth at OCC. I am aware this policy is subject to change periodically and an updated copy is available for review at ottercreek.org.*

*I affirm I have not resigned, been terminated or removed from a position or leadership role (paid or volunteer) for reasons related to misconduct.*

Name (printed)\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

If under age 18, the signature of a parent is also required:

Parent's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

And, unless otherwise provided, two NON-FAMILY references with email addresses and telephone #s are needed for the under 18 volunteer:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_