

# Child/Youth Protection Policy for Bethlehem Christian Church

## General Purpose Statement

**BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH** seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children/youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of **BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH** from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

## Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” or “youth” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone involved in a day care or school, in overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

## Selection of Workers

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

**a) Six Month Rule/Interview process**

All persons considered for any LEAD TEACHER position involving contact with minors will be involved with BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH for a minimum of six (6) months and/or undergo an interview process to determine suitability for working with children. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

**b) Sponsored by a Member**

Prospective volunteers who are not members of BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH and/or have not been members for the minimum length of time, must be sponsored by a MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING who is responsible for him/her while working with children.

**c) Personal Interview**

A face-to-face 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 will 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 at church.

**e) Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required yearly for all employees (regardless of position) and “volunteers” as defined above.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to complete an online authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by **Pastor, Youth Pastor, Children's Director**, as applicable, on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be securely maintained in confidence online in the Protect My Ministry database. No persons from Bethlehem Christian Church has access to confidential information, such as social security number, through this website.

**f) Child Protection Training**

Upon completion of background check, applicants will be required to complete yearly online Child Protection Training. Link to be sent in a separate email.

Upon satisfactory completion of Child Protection Training, applicants should download a copy of the completed certificate for their records AND/OR print a copy for **YOUTH/CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR**, if requested by the director.

## **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 and 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.

## **Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

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.

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 **Appropriate Director** for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

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

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct 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 civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.

4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. The organization 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.
6. 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.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

## 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:

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

## Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below fourth grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be checked in by a parent or guardian. Children will only be released from our care to an authorized parent or guardian previously registered. Identification may be required.

Children released to Children's Church during the service must be registered using the attached form or by visiting the online registration by scanning the QR code with their phone. The above check-out procedures apply.

## Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at **BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH**. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

## Medications Policy

It is the policy of **BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH** not to administer either prescription or nonprescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with **CHILD CARE LEADER** to develop a plan of action.

## Discipline Policy

It is the policy of **BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH** 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 **YOUTH/CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR** 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 a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children 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 workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

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.

## 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

**BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH** will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual and ongoing basis, as needed. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.