

First Baptist Church Carrollton

Child/Youth Protection Policy ¹

Revised 2026

Introduction

Then [Jesus] took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me..." "If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." -Mark 9:35-37, 42 (NRSV)

A goal of First Baptist Church Carrollton, GA (FBC) is to provide a safe, sacred, and secure environment for our children/youth. Effective policies and best practices, when embraced, followed, and enforced by the congregation as a whole, can greatly reduce the risk of abuse in the church environment. FBC seeks to minimize the risks of children and youth through adopting the following plan:

- A screening process for anyone who works or volunteers with children/youth;
- General and area-specific safety guidelines for all church-sponsored children/youth events;
- Outlining the required response and reporting for any incident, allegation, or disclosure of abuse;
- Training requirements for youth and children's workers and volunteers;
- A policy for known sexual offenders attending services of the congregation.

Definition of Abuse of Children/Youth

As a part of minimizing the risk to children/youth, FBC seeks to limit the opportunity for an abuser to victimize children/youth or to groom children/youth in order to be able to victimize them. Georgia law defines child abuse as:

- Physical injury or death inflicted upon a child by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or other person responsible for the care of such child by other than accidental means; provided, however, that physical forms of discipline may be used as long as there is no physical injury to the child;
- Neglect of a child by a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or other person responsible for the care of such child;
- Emotional abuse of a child;

¹ This policy draws heavily from a similar policy formulated by Boulevard Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Anderson, SC. First Baptist Carrollton is thankful for the work these churches put into their policies, and for their congregation's leadership on this essential work within our community.

- Sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child;
- Prenatal abuse of a child by a parent;
- An act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health; or
- Trafficking a child for labor servitude.

"Child" under this definition means any person under 18 years of age.²

Physical abuse of a child is a non-accidental injury inflicted on a child by a parent, caregiver, or other person having responsibility for the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable, causes no bodily injury to the child, and is associated with specific and timely correction.

Physical abuse:

- May include various physical injuries ranging from bruises, fractures, burns, scrapes or cuts, or death.
- May be the result of:
 - Punching, beating (with hands or another object), kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, or burning.

Neglect is abuse that is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect may be:

- Physical, such as failure to provide adequate food, necessary shelter, or appropriate supervision.
- Medical, such as failure to provide appropriate and timely medical treatment, necessary medication, or mental health treatment.
- Educational, such as failure to provide age-appropriate education or schooling, assurance of school attendance, or necessary special education support.
- Emotional, such as failure to provide attention to a child's emotional needs, psychological care, or supervision preventing alcohol or illegal drug use.³

Sexual abuse of a child is any sexual activity with a child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or a child. Additionally, child sexual abuse:

- May involve physical violence or emotional coercion as a means of exploiting the child's vulnerability and powerlessness;
- Could include touching a child or causing them to touch someone, and may include the following behaviors:
 - Inappropriate kissing; fondling; oral, genital, and/or anal penetration; intercourse; prostitution or trafficking.
- May include the following non-touching abuse:

² State of Georgia Mandated Reporter Law (O.C.G.A. §19-7-5) of 2021 (effective Jan. 1, 2022)

³ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

- Harassing comments; exposure to, or participating in, pornographic material; obscene phone, text, or other communication; exhibitionism (exposing oneself); allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Spiritual abuse of a child is any harmful action taken against them under the guise of religion.

Spiritual abuse may:

- Use religious ideology, language, precepts, traditions, or sacred texts to harm a child;
- Compel a child to engage in religious acts against their will;
- Occur in a religious context;
- Be perpetrated by a religious leader/authority;
- Use the invocation of divine authority to manipulate and harm a child.

Application and Screening Process

Any person serving the children/youth of FBC is required to complete a background check and screening process, consisting of a background check application through a third-party service and a screening process. Ministerial staff have the responsibility of setting up and authorizing background checks through First Baptist's online database management program. All digital applications are secured via the third-party background check service. Any confidential records related to background checks will be stored in a secure way.

Eligibility to serve in the youth ministry of FBC, is limited to persons over eighteen (18) years of age, who have been active in the ministry of First Baptist for no less than six (6) months. Persons under the age of eighteen (18) years of age may serve in the children's ministry of FBC under adult supervision, but may not be counted as a second adult under the two-adult rule.

For the purpose of child protection, church staff will be required to pass the same background check required of those listed above, and will be re-checked along the same time schedule as well. The Personnel Committee will review records of screenings for church staff. Obtaining and maintaining background checks for staff members falls under the responsibility of the Finance Administrator.

The Application

Any person serving the children/youth of First Baptist must submit a background check application through a third-party service to check, at minimum, a social security number match, national/state sex offender registry, and federal/state criminal history.

Screening

Upon completion of the background check, the appropriate minister will:

- Review the result of the background check to determine whether the applicant is eligible to serve in the children's/youth ministry.

- Ensure the applicant has been an active participant at First Baptist Carrollton for no less than six(6) months.
- Ensure the applicant completes sexual abuse prevention training.
- Re-submit the background check application every three years.

Safety Guidelines

Two-Adult Rule

During FBC events or service times, no child/youth shall be left unsupervised or in the care of a singular adult, except for that child's/youth's parent, guardian, parentally approved sibling, or other approved family member. Two adults who have completed the application and screening process for working with children/youth should be present at every activity. This rule should be applied in a way that separates spouses or other family members. If family members choose to serve together, a third non-related adult must be present.

In order to help ensure compliance with this rule, visibility should be maintained through open doors or closed doors with uncovered windows. When possible, the deacon on patrol and the off-duty police officer should monitor the hallways and classroom spaces.

Bathroom Guidelines

In the event a child (infant through PreK-aged) needs to use the restroom:

- All diaper changing is to be done in the presence and visibility of another screened adult;
- All diaper changing should follow proper hygienic protocols, including the use of gloves;
- Preschool children are not to go to the bathroom alone. Instead:
 - Two leaders will escort a group of children to the bathroom, or
 - One leader will escort a group of children to the bathroom with one hall monitor appointed to assist with bathroom and security duties.
 - If an adult needs to go into the restroom to assist a child, the door to the bathroom must remain open.
- No leader will ever be alone with a child in an unsupervised bathroom.

Check-in/Check-out Procedures

Every child fifth grade and younger must be checked-in by a parent or guardian. Older siblings (13 years or older) may check-in younger siblings if permission has been granted by their parent/ guardian. If someone other than the parent/guardian or approved older sibling is picking up your child, please let the classroom leader know.

Check-out Procedures:

Every child fifth grade and younger must be picked up from their classroom by a

parent/guardian or approved older sibling. If someone else is picking up your child, you must let the leader know when checking-in your child. Your child will NOT be released to someone else unless they have the permission of the child's parent/guardian.

The Children's Pastor/Youth Pastor should be made aware of any cases where a parent or other individual does not have permission to pick up your child.

Off-Campus/Overnight Activities

When children's/youth events take students off-campus, extreme care should be taken to protect participants from abuse. Activities and accommodations should be arranged to maximize the accountability of adults, minimize an adult's ability to isolate children/youth, and to make all parts of the event observable and interruptible.

Off-campus activities that do not require overnight accommodations require the same application of the two-adult rule as events that happen at First Baptist. This rule also applies during transportation to and from said events.

Off-campus activities that include overnight accommodations must include two adults. Rooming assignments should observe the following protocols:

- No adult should room with children/youth in a dormitory/hotel setting unless a parent is rooming with only their child/youth;
- Children/youth of the same sex and similar age should room together;
- Privacy for showering/bathroom use should be maintained;
- The two adult rule applies for lodging in a bunkhouse setting;
- Privacy and modesty should be maintained in a bunkhouse setting.

Pastoral Care

Ministers should engage in pastoral care of the congregation related to spiritual matters and personal crises in line with the extent of their training. Ministers must refer congregants to licensed counselors for matters requiring extended counseling or psychological evaluation. For ministers meeting with children/youth for spiritual care that requires confidentiality, the following protocols will be in place:

- Either a parent, ministry supervisor, or staff colleague will be informed prior to one-on-one meetings with a child/youth;
- Meetings held on the campus of First Baptist will occur during regular office hours or service times, or;
- If the meeting is scheduled outside of regular office hours or service/event times, they should be held in the presence of parent, supervisor, or colleague in the vicinity; and occur with doors open and/or windows uncovered.
- Meetings held off of First Baptist's campus should be in public settings (such as coffee shops or restaurants).

Guidelines for Reporting Abuse

Any person having a reason to believe that a child/youth has been abused should follow these guidelines for reporting abuse. A “reason to believe” does not rise to the level of proof or certainty that abuse has taken place, but rather suggests there is reasonable evidence that a person could conclude abuse occurred. Observation of physical signs of abuse, a trustworthy person suspecting abuse, or the disclosure of a child regarding abuse all satisfy a “reason to believe” for reporting abuse.

Georgia law considers clergy acting in the regular course of their work mandatory reporters for incidents of child abuse. The state enacts penalties for clergy who fail to report. Though not mandatory reporters by law, all children/youth volunteers and workers at First Baptist Church will be considered mandatory reporters by this policy.

Reporting Abuse

In the event a child or youth discloses abuse or abuse is suspected, DO NOT QUESTION THE CHILD OR YOUTH ABOUT THE EVENT. Act to ensure the child/youth is safe. Then report following these steps:

- Call 911 and the Carroll County Department of Social Services (1-888-227-3487) to report the abuse or suspicion of abuse (reports may be made anonymously).
- Make verbal contact with the Senior Pastor (unless he/she is the source of abuse/suspicion in which case contact the Chair of Deacons). If the Senior Pastor is contacted, he/she will then contact the Chair of Deacons.
- Submit a written report to the Senior Pastor and Chair of Deacons within 24 hours of the disclosure. This report is to be kept confidential and not to be shared with anyone else.
- Protecting the child/youth from abuse is the priority when making a report. Follow any and all instructions from law enforcement/Social Services, and maintain strict confidentiality. Allow law enforcement or Social Services to contact others, including the parents, involved in the report or investigation. DO NOT CONTACT PARENTS OR OTHERS INVOLVED IN THE INCIDENT.

Local law enforcement and the Department of Social Services will investigate the allegation of abuse and make recommendations for further action in accordance with their investigation and authority. The staff and ministry workers of First Baptist will cooperate fully with the investigation by all involved authorities.

As soon as practical, the senior pastor will consult with appropriate legal counsel for help in determining a legal course of action in regard to the alleged abuse, and the church insurance company to notify them that a report has been filed and what actions have been taken.

The pastor, or the pastor’s designee, will act as the official spokesperson for the church, and will

perform or designate all other actions necessary to resolve the allegation satisfactorily, possibly including providing spiritual care or emotional support for those involved, and their families. If the abuse occurred at a church event, the pastor (or designee) should also review necessary policies or procedures to discover deficiencies that may have allowed the abuse to take place.

Abuse Reported Against a First Baptist Employee or Ministry Volunteer

Any allegation against an employee or ministry volunteer will be taken seriously and reported in accordance with the above policy. Additionally, the accused person will be removed from their position, with pay, if applicable, pending the completion of the investigation. Any employee who admits to or is found guilty of abuse will be terminated from employment. Any ministry volunteer will be dismissed from their duties with children/youth.

Training for the Church

The staff and deacons of First Baptist will undergo training regarding the recognition, prevention, and reporting of child abuse. The training will include:

- Sexual abuse prevention training;
- Procedures for reporting abuse; and
- Review of the relevant policies and procedures of First Baptist.

Training for the staff and deacons shall take place on a triennial basis. Ministerial staff of First Baptist will be required to maintain first aid, CPR, and AED certification.

Known Sexual Offenders Attending Church Services

First Baptist desires to be a safe place for anyone who attends. To achieve this goal, individuals who must register as sexual offenders must comply with the following policy in order to participate in the congregational life of First Baptist.

First Baptist retains the right to deny attendance, participation, and/or membership to any individual who fails to comply with this policy. Furthermore, First Baptist retains the sole discretion to deny attendance, participation, and/or membership to any person whose behavior, criminal conviction, and/or sexual offender status gives reason to believe that person would endanger others, regardless of policy compliance. Failure to comply with the church's request to vacate the premises or activity will result in contacting local law enforcement for criminal trespassing.

When a known child abuse offender seeks participation with First Baptist, the senior pastor will consult a specialist to evaluate the participation request and put together a ministry plan. The proposed plan must include notification to the congregation of the presence of the known offender and the protocols being put into place.

Under no circumstances will an individual be allowed to join the church body if the offender's victim attends as well. If deemed appropriate, the ministerial staff will provide the offender

assistance with finding another faith body and will work to properly inform said faith body as to the information known about the offender.

General Safety Guidelines

For the safety and protection of children and youth, First Baptist has implemented the following general safety guidelines, as outlined in our FBC Safety Plan. Volunteers should be trained on these guidelines yearly.

Fire Safety

The church will maintain working and accessible fire extinguishers in each area regularly occupied by children/youth. Each room in a child/youth designated area should have prominently placed notices of evacuation routes in the event of a fire.

Tornado Safety

The church will identify tornado shelters located near each area regularly used by children or youth. Each room in a child/youth designated area should have clear markings directing occupants to the nearest tornado shelter.

Allergen Safety

To prevent accidental exposure to food allergens, no person shall be allowed to distribute food, candy, or other snacks to children without prior approval of the Children's and/or Youth Pastor. Each room used by children's/youth ministry should have a list of children/youth with allergies and any protocols needed if someone has an allergic reaction.

Social Media Safety

First Baptist will not post images of a child to social media and/or the website, if a parent/guardian has denied permission for images of their child to be used. Volunteers should not post images to social media without the consent of a parent/guardian.

Medication Safety

If a child/youth is required to take medication while at a church event, a parent/guardian must administer the medication or fill out a Medication Form giving permission for medicine to be administered by an approved volunteer or ministerial staff. If the parent is not administering the medication, these guidelines must be followed:

- All medications (prescription and non-prescription) must be given to the adult in charge of dispensing medication by the parent/guardian.
- All medications (prescription and non-prescription) must be in their original containers.
- Before giving medication, the approved volunteer or minister must have another adult check that the dosage is correct before medication is administered.
- The approved volunteer or minister and the second adult checking dosage must sign off on the administration of medicine on the Medication Form.

Reporting Violations of the Child/Youth Protection Policy or other Child Safety Concerns

Protecting children is the responsibility of adults. All First Baptist members, staff, and volunteers play an important role in this protection, and agree to follow this policy, and to report violations of this policy. Additionally, members, employees, and volunteers should report environments, situations, or incidents that raise safety concerns for children whether or not these concerns are explicitly provided for in this policy.

When an individual observes an act or environment in violation of the Policy or any concern regarding child safety, they must:

1. Act to bring the situation or individual in compliance with the policy, if possible;
2. Note the date, time, and individuals (both adult and children) involved in the violation or concern;
3. Report at the earliest possible moment the violation event or concern to the senior pastor or associate pastor.

Upon receiving a report of a violation, the ministerial staff will:

1. Seek assurance that the policy violation or concern has been corrected, if possible;
2. Submit a written report to the Children's Ministry Team or Youth Development team;
3. When necessary, review these policies, guidelines, and trainings to reduce future violations or concerns;
4. Document in volunteer or personnel files the individuals involved, the violation, and its resolution.

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STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This is to acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Child/Youth Protection Policy. I understand that it is my responsibility as a volunteer in the children's/youth ministry to read, understand, become familiar with, and comply with the guidelines/policies that have been established.

Volunteer's Name (Please Print)

Volunteer's Signature

Date