

# PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

*Updated Jan 2010*

One of our goals with our Children's and Youth Ministries is to help parents know that the Church has provided a safe environment for their children and youth\*. This policy reflects our desire to protect our children and youth from child abuse. Only workers who have completed the application process described in this policy will be considered certified workers. Youth up to the age of eighteen will work only under the supervision of a certified worker and will also be background checked.

Parents may choose to stay with their child(ren) without having to be certified. If a parent begins to work with other children they will need to be certified according to our procedures.

In the following sections, terms, guiding principles and procedure are stated.

\* Child(ren) will be defined as:      Infant thru 5<sup>th</sup> grade.  
Youth will be defined as:           6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Abuse:** For the purpose of this policy, child abuse is defined as bringing harm to a young person at one time or through accumulated effects over a period of time. There are four basic categories of abuse:

*Neglect:* Harm caused by withholding life's necessities. The ability to provide necessities, but failing to do so, separates neglect from the effects of poverty.

*Emotional:* Harm caused through devaluation. Examples include harsh treatment, name-calling, and threatening harm or injury.

*Physical:* Harm caused by bodily injury.

*Sexual:* Harm caused by any sexual activity between a young person and an adult, or between young people where there is an unequal distribution of power. This includes exposing a young person to sexual acts or materials.

**Guiding Principles:** The following principles form the foundation for our church's policy:

*Selection:* Use an established procedure in the selection of children's and youth workers that will minimize the risk of abuse.

*Education:* Educate workers, parents, children, youth, ministers, volunteers and employees about the risks and dangers of child abuse.

Training: Provide training for children's and youth workers that will sensitize them to the issues of abuse: definitions, guiding principles, prevention, detections, response and reporting.

Protection barriers: Follow procedures that will reduce the chance of child abuse.

Prompt reporting: Improper behavior must be reported to a church leader. The leader shall bring the matter to the attention of an Elder/Pastor.

Swift action: The Elder Board will evaluate the matter without delay to determine the merits of the complaint and the appropriate action. The action may include removing the alleged offender from contact with children and youth. In serious cases, the matter shall be discussed with local authorities.

### **Guidelines for working with children and youth:**

#### Workers:

- All workers must have an application on file. The applications will be approved by the Board of Elders.
- All workers should wear a nametag when on duty.
- Any unknown person wandering around should be approached as a visitor, and directed to the appropriate class.

#### Adult restroom procedures:

- Workers are never to take a child to the restroom alone. They must be accompanied by another adult or child.
- Workers may only accompany children of the same gender.
- Workers will remain outside the restroom while waiting for the child.
- Children ages five and under may be accompanied by an adult and assisted as necessary.
- Children six and older may be sent in same-gender pairs without supervision.
- Children should have as much privacy as possible. A stall should be entered only if necessary, and the door kept open while helping.

#### Nursery procedures:

- If bathroom assistance is needed, the bathroom door should be kept open.
- Diaper changing should be done in an open, visible area.
- Hall window curtains should be open except as required to protect the privacy of a nursing mother.

#### Classroom procedures:

- Keep physical contact to a minimum, and only in the presence of other people.

- No child should be alone with a worker. If a child arrives early, prop the door open.
- Window shades or blinds should be kept open except during a video presentation.
- Children should not sit on a worker's lap.
- It is safest to avoid any appearance of impropriety by refraining from kissing and embracing.

Approved Activities:

- Activities outside regularly scheduled programs must be pre-approved by the Family Pastor, Youth Pastor, AWANA Commander, or CrossTrainers Ministry Coordinator(s).
- At North Mason Bible Church a permission and medical release form is required for each child and youth for any off-campus activity.
- Parents are responsible for transporting their own children. If a child needs a ride home, the Family Pastor, Youth Pastor, AWANA Commander, or CrossTrainers Ministry Coordinator(s) must give their approval before a non-parent takes the child.
- A non-parent must not transport a child or youth of the opposite sex alone.
- Children must never be released to strangers or unauthorized person(s). If in doubt, ask a church leader for help.
- Workers should arrive 15 minutes early and keep watch over those in their care.

**Reporting Suspected Abuse:**

- Confront the person(s) at the time of the incident. Ask them what they are doing.
- If the behavior seems inappropriate, report the incident to an Elder/Pastor.
- If abuse at home or off the church campus is suspected, report it to an Elder/Pastor.
- Don't discuss the incident with anyone else.