

Mercy Baptist Church: Child Protection Policy

1. The Mission and Vision of Children's Ministry
 - 1.1. The children's ministry of Mercy Baptist Church (MBC) aims to glorify God by creating and maintaining a safe environment for all children who attend, supporting and encouraging all parents and guardians who are primarily responsible for teaching biblical truths to the children entrusted to them by God (Ephesians 6:4), making all of Scripture known to children with special emphasis on the gospel (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Romans 1:16-17), as well as being Christ like examples of the faith especially through our prayer lives knowing that only the power of the Holy Spirit can change their hearts to love God and His word (Romans 10:1; Ephesians 2:4-10; Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1).
2. Policy Parameters
 - 2.1. Mercy Baptist Church seeks to provide a *safe* and *secure* environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities.
 - 2.2. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of MBC from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.
3. Personnel Summary
 - 3.1. For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. Nursery services are available for those under the age of 3 with exceptions granted by the children's ministry coordinator.
 - 3.2. *Staff* are paid employees of the church. All church staff are required to receive a background check regardless of whether or not they have direct contact with children.
 - 3.3. *Volunteers* are those who work with children and are not in the employment of the church. All volunteers must be members in good standing of MBC. All volunteers who serve in children's ministry are required to go through *both* the children's ministry training and screening procedures before they serve. Volunteers include childcare workers, hall monitors, teachers, and anyone

else who serves the children. The term “volunteer” will be used throughout this policy manual as an all encompassing term for anyone who serves the children and is not church staff.

- 3.4. *Visitors* are those who are not children, staff, volunteers, such as parents/guardians dropping off or picking up children from the church’s care, grandparents, older siblings, etc. (See “Visitor Policy” for more details.)

4. Expectations of All Staff and Volunteers

- 4.1. All children’s ministry staff and volunteers share a responsibility for loving children as Christ loves them and for setting an example of proper Christian conduct in the way we live our lives.
- 4.2. All volunteers in dependence on the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God are to be faithful and dependable in this ministry, to seek to learn more about ministering to children as information and training are available, to faithfully pray for the children who are under their care, to commit themselves to continuing personal spiritual growth, and to knowing when they are scheduled to serve and arriving to serve on time.

5. Visitor policy

- 5.1. Visitors are not allowed in the nursery or children’s rooms during any church event or service. They must wait outside the room for their child(ren), or, if an item from the room needs to be obtained, they may ask a staff member or volunteer.
- 5.2. Exceptions may be granted for nursing mothers, discipline issues, or bathroom assistance.

6. Training and Screening Procedures

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

6.2. **Six Month Rule**

- 6.2.1. No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until s/he has been a part of MBC for at least six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

6.3. Written Application

6.3.1. All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by the church. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file with the church.

6.4. Personal Interview

6.4.1. Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

6.5. Reference Checks

6.5.1. 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, such as organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past.

6.5.2. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at the church.

6.6. Criminal Background Check

6.6.1. A national criminal background check is required for all staff (regardless of position) and "volunteers" as defined above.

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

6.6.3. A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the elders¹ on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances.

6.6.4. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our

¹ In the event there is only one elder, any section of this document that requires the elders (plural) to decide on an issue will be decided by the elder and the children's ministry coordinator.

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.

- 6.6.5. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file with the church.

7. Guidelines, Standards, and Policies

7.1. Two-Adult Standard

- 7.1.1. Our goal is a minimum of two adult workers who are not immediate family or romantically linked, one of whom *must* be female, in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities.
- 7.1.2. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session.
- 7.1.3. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity.

7.2. Adult-to-Child Ratio

- 7.2.1. There will be at least one adult per seven children.

7.3. Open Door/Window Policy

- 7.3.1. Classroom door may only be closed if there is a window in the door. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

7.4. Physical Touch

- 7.4.1. While appropriate physical contact with children can be an effective means of aiding in communication, redirecting attention, calming restlessness, or showing godly love and care, it can also be misinterpreted. Particularly in our interaction with children, we want to be blameless and above reproach.
 - 7.4.1.1. Always remain in open sight of other adults.
 - 7.4.1.2. Appropriate touch is positive physical contact that nurtures children and develops a sense of emotional security and maturity in their interactions with adults. Appropriate touch is applied to meet the needs of children and not the adults.
 - 7.4.1.3. Appropriate physical contact will vary according to the age of the child. What is appropriate for nursery

children (holding, rocking, sitting on laps, etc.) will not be appropriate for grade school children.

7.4.1.4. Inappropriate touch involves, but is not limited to coercion or other forms of physical contact which exploits the child's lack of knowledge, satisfies adult physical needs at the expense of the child, violates laws against sexual or physical contact between adult and child, and any attempt to modify child behavior with physical force.

7.4.1.5. If a child needs to use the restroom, we ask a parent/guardian take the child him-/herself, but if that is not possible, then "Restroom Guidelines" below apply.

7.4.1.6. Children sitting on laps of adults is only appropriate for ages 0 to 5.

7.4.1.7. Volunteers should refrain from rough-housing, wrestling, shoulder or piggy-back rides, rubbing, massaging, or any physical activity that might make a child feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

7.4.1.8. Only touch children in "safe" areas and for brief time. "Safe" areas generally include hands, arms, shoulders, upper back, or gentle pats on the top of the head. Never touch a child on or near any region that is private or personal, unless (females only) when necessary while assisting in a restroom visit.

7.4.1.9. Never touch a child out of frustration or anger. Physical discipline is not an appropriate means of correcting someone else's child.

7.5. Diaper Changing Guidelines

7.5.1. Parents of children who wear diapers are asked to change their children prior to signing them into the church.

7.5.2. When a child needs his/her diaper changed, the parent(s) will be notified and asked to change the child's diaper.

7.5.3. Volunteers and staff do not change childrens' diapers.

7.6. Restroom Guidelines

7.6.1. Potty-trained children

- 7.6.1.1. Parents are asked to have their children visit the restroom prior to each class.
- 7.6.1.2. However, if a restroom visit is needed, volunteers will escort children to the restroom in a group (see 6.3.1.5), never taking a child to the restroom alone. The workers should check the restroom first to make sure that it is unoccupied, and then allow the group inside. A female volunteer will help the child use the restroom.
- 7.6.1.3. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, a volunteer should open the restroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the volunteers should leave open the stall door to assist the child.
- 7.6.2. Children in the process of being potty-trained
 - 7.6.2.1. Parents of children in the process of potty training who desire for a volunteer to help their child use the bathroom should give permission beforehand.
 - 7.6.2.2. Parents who do not desire for a volunteer to help their child use the restroom can choose to be notified instead.
- 7.6.3. Any parent(s)—regardless of the child's age—may choose to be electronically notified when their child needs to go to the bathroom, so that the parent(s) him- or herself may accompany the child if desired.

8. Discipline Policy

- 8.1. No staff or volunteer will administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested it or given permission for it.
- 8.2. There will be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children.
- 8.3. When verbal correction is needed, children should never be alone with a volunteer even for correction (please reference the “Two-Adult Standard”). Verbal correction must be done in a calm and loving manner. Always make sure the child understands what he/she did wrong and gently point them back to scripture for their correction.

- 8.4. If the child(ren) are considered to be violent or a threat to the other children, volunteers should consult with the children's ministry coordinator and/or an elder if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

9. Sick Child Policy

- 9.1. It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all the children at MBC. 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:
 - 9.1.1. Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours
 - 9.1.2. Green or yellow runny nose
 - 9.1.3. Eye or skin infections
 - 9.1.4. Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease
- 9.2. Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted and requested to pick up the child for the day.

10. Medications Policy

- 10.1. It is the policy of MBC *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.
- 10.2. 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 the children's ministry coordinator to develop a plan of action while the child is in MBC's care.

11. Check-In and Check-Out Procedure

- 11.1. For all children a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. Only the individual(s) that checked in the child may check out a child (e.g., siblings cannot check out their brother/sister).
- 11.2. In the event that a parent or guardian is unable to present the "child check," the children's ministry coordinator will be contacted. The children's ministry coordinator will be responsible

for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.

12. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

- 12.1. 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:
 - 12.1.1. *Physical abuse* – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
 - 12.1.2. *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.
 - 12.1.3. *Child sexual abuse* – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
 - 12.1.4. *Neglect* – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.
- 12.2. Volunteers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care.
 - 12.2.1. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at MBC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the children’s ministry coordinator *and* the elders for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.
- 12.3. In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at MBC or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:
 - 12.3.1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
 - 12.3.2. The volunteer or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from volunteering 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.

- 12.3.3. 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.
- 12.3.4. 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.
- 12.3.5. A pastoral visit by one or more of the elders 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.
- 12.3.6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.
- 12.4. Volunteers and staff will follow the Ohio state guidelines for mandatory reporting.

13. Sexual offenders in the church

- 13.1. MBC may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation but they must adhere to specific guidelines.
 - 13.1.1. First, the offender's probation/parole officer will be contacted regarding any restrictions regarding attending services or other functions where children are present.
 - 13.1.2. Second, the probation/parole officer will put any restrictions in writing. If restrictions don't prohibit participation, the following guidelines will be implemented.
- 13.2. A known sexual offender cannot participate in any service opportunities or events concerning children.

- 13.3. A known sexual offender must never be alone with a minor at any time. When in proximity to minors, he or she should be accompanied by another adult.
 - 13.4. If the offense has been adjudicated within the last ten years of the offender's involvement with the church, then the congregation will be made aware of the identity of the sexual offender. If the time span is more than ten years from the last offense, then the church officers will be made aware of the identity of the offender, and they may deem it appropriate to withhold the identity from the congregation.
 - 13.5. If there is a known sexual offender in the church, parents/guardians will accompany minors to the restroom.
14. Accidental Injuries to Children
- 14.1. In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:
 - 14.1.1. 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.
 - 14.1.2. 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.
 - 14.1.3. 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.
15. Training
- 15.1. MBC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare volunteers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All volunteers are expected to attend these training events.