

# Grace Fellowship

## Child Protection Plan

**The safety and well-being of all children is of utmost importance to us. We want to take all suspected cases and allegations seriously to ensure the safety of the children involved with potential child abuse/neglect. We also are committed to doing all that we can as a church body to protect the children that are entrusted into our care, our guests and our members from any inappropriate situations.**

**Adrienne Pridgen-256-452-4334**

**DHR - Calhoun County - 256-240-2021**

### **How is Child Abuse Defined?**

**Abuse:** Under Alabama law, it is "harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare which can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse; sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation."

**Neglect:** Under Alabama law, it is "negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, clothing, or shelter: provided, however, that a parent or guardian legitimately practicing his religious beliefs who thereby does not provide specified medical treatment for a child, for that reason alone shall not be considered a negligent parent or guardian: however, such an exception shall not preclude a court from ordering that medical services be provided to the child, where his health requires it."

#### **Sexual abuse is defined as:**

- Employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing visual depiction of such conduct; or
- Rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children. There are many signs of child abuse. Any one sign may not mean anything, but if there are a number of signs, or they occur frequently, you may suspect maltreatment. Some signs are ...

### **Physical**

- Unusual bruises, welts, bumps, fractures, or bite marks
- Frequent injuries, always explained as accidental
- Wearing concealing clothing to hide injuries
- Seeming frightened
- Seeking affection from any adult
- Being unpleasant, hard to get along with, demanding,

frequently disobedient.

### **Emotional**

- Being apathetic, depressed, withdrawn, passive
- Seeming overly anxious when faced with new situations or people.
- Being disorganized, distrustful, or rigidly compulsive.
- Taking on adult or parent roles and responsibilities.
- Throwing tantrums or seeming impulsive, defiant, antisocial, aggressive, self-destructive
- Being fearful, hyper-alert, lack of creativity and exploration.

### **Sexual**

- Having torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- Experiencing pain or itching in genital areas
- Having an STD or venereal disease
- Appearing withdrawn or engaging in fantasy or baby-like behavior.
- Having a poor relationship with other children.
- Being unwilling to participate with other children.
- Stating that he or she has been sexually assaulted
- Acting like an adult, not a child.

### **How can I guard myself from accusation?**

*While appropriate physical contact with children can be an effective means of aiding communication, redirecting attention, calming restlessness, it can also be easily misinterpreted. Here are a few simple rules to abide by to Help protect yourself from accusation-whether you are serving in children's ministry or just interacting with kids in community:*

- Always remain in open sight of other adults.
  - Appropriate physical contact will vary according to the age of the child. What is appropriate for nursery children (holding, "rocking, sitting in laps, diapering, assisting in the potty, etc.) will not be appropriate for grade school children.
  - Follow diapering and toileting guidelines outlined in the general policies and procedures checklist.
  - Sitting on laps is only appropriate for ages zero through pre-Kindergarten, it is not appropriate for older children. It is not appropriate for a man to pick up or hold a child who is older than pre-K.
  - In some situations, a man will need to limit physical contact more than a woman in the same situation, especially when working with older children.
  - Only touch children in safe areas and for brief times, with no rubbing or massaging. Safe areas generally include hands, arms, shoulders, upper back, or gentle pats on the top of a child's head. Never touch a child on or near any region that is considered private or personal (on any part of their body that a swimsuit covers) unless changing diapers or assisting nursery children with potty.
  - • Never touch a child out of frustration or anger.
- Physical discipline is not an appropriate means of correcting someone else's child.

**What do I do if suspect that a child has been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused.**

• **Alert appropriate staff or church leaders immediately**

who will then follow guidelines for mandatory reporting. Give all the information you have.

- Do not attempt to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. Let the authorities do this.
- DO NOT DISCUSS WITH OTHER PARENTS OR CHILDCARE WORKERS. Do not discuss the situation with anyone other than the proper authorities and the appropriate staff or church leaders.
- Do not discuss the situation with the alleged or suspected abuser. This could compromise any investigation and could result in additional abuse, shame, etc. for the child. Again, let the authorities take care of this.

**Who is considered a mandatory reporter of child abuse and neglect?**

- In hearing of, witnessing, or suspecting abuse, a mandatory reporter is someone who by law must report it to police or DI-IR: "Those required, by Alabama law, to report include doctors, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, nurses, school teachers and officials, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, day care workers or employees, members of the clergy, and mental health professionals. Also required to report are persons called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of abuse or neglect." ( dhr.alabama.gov)
- Anyone is encouraged to make a report if he or she suspects a child is being abused or neglected.
- Non-mandatory reporters should contact appropriate staff or church leaders before making any reports. They will give guidance about reporting.

**How to Report Potential Abuse to Church Leaders/ Staff**

**#1 - In Person Report (for on-site reports)**

- Find an elder, deacon, or staff member to report
  - o Ask to speak privately before discussing specifics

**#2 - Phone Call (for off-site reports)**

- Call an elder, deacon, or staff member to report
  - o Have pertinent information ready to share

**#3 - Email or text a staff pastor**

If no one can be reached by phone then email or text a staff pastor to report the incident and ask that you have a conversation ASAP about an important issue.

Continue to call if no response is given.

**Contact Information for staff pastors**

Jason Winstead

jwinstead@grace-fellowship.com

256-504-1122

Cory Hughes

corvhughes633@gmail.com

256-453-7164

Carlton Weathers

Carlton1wea@yahoo.com

256-453-4627

**Calhoun County Department of Human Resources**  
256-240-2021

**Information needed when reporting to Grace Fellowship**

- Name of Child
- Name of parent, guardian or caretaker
- Description of the nature and extent of the injury or maltreatment
- Location of the suspected incident
  - o Did this occur offsite?
  - o Did this occur on GF property?
  - o If so, where?
    - Parking lot?
    - Playground?
    - Which room?
- Did anyone else witness the incident?
- Date and time of the suspected abuse
  - o If at the building, during what event?
  - o A worship service?
  - o Another event?
- Name of the suspected abuser

All of this information is helpful in understanding the situation and being able to record/report an accurate account of the suspected/witnessed abuse.

**By signing below you are stating that you have read, understand and agree to abide by the policies and guidelines of the Grace Fellowship Child Protection Plan.**

Children's Ministry Volunteer:

Print: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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