



HOUSTON'S FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Child Protection Policy (Revised May 16, 2019)

Houston's First Baptist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for children (birth – grade 5), youth (grade 6 – 12), and adults with special needs. We also seek to minimize any vulnerability to unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our church, volunteers, and employees may experience as they fulfill their ministerial duties. To fulfill these commitments as fully as possible, our Leadership has adopted the following procedures to be used, without exception, when selecting volunteers or new employees and in day-to-day operations of ministry. We feel this is an important document and ask that you read it in its entirety.

This policy is not intended to cover casual interaction with children. Examples include but are not limited to volunteers working for ministries such as the Faith Center Food or Clothing Pantries, Missions Trips, Men: Serve, Car Care Ministry, Fitness and Recreation Center Front Desk, Culinary or Corner Books that interact with children only on a temporary basis and interaction with the same child is infrequent. For casual interaction these ministry areas will be required to create policies and procedure relating to interaction with children.

Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Leaders

- 1) A ministry leader is defined as a volunteer with control/command/decision capability that also interacts personally with children, youth and adults with special needs.
- 2) Prior to consideration, all ministry leader candidates seeking a volunteer position that involves working with children, youth, or adults with special needs will complete and return a NextGen Volunteer Application, submit two references and complete two personal interviews with employed staff.
- 3) The employed staff member, or designee, will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position. The employed staff member will also store all application materials— the application form, background checks, reference check, notes from interviews, etc.—in a secure location.
- 4) If the individual appears to be an appropriate candidate for the ministry position, the employed staff member, or designee, will check at least two references to confirm the information that the candidate provided on the ministry application. The employed staff member also will conduct a criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
- 5) When indicated by reference and/or background checks, candidates who pose a threat to others, or have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, will be removed immediately from consideration for ministry positions anywhere within our church. From time to time however, you may have someone who has volunteered to serve but either fails the background check, for something other than for physical abuse or for a sexually related charge or indicates on their application something about a bad choice in their past. In either of these situations, it is imperative that we are as consistent as possible with how we handle this. It is also imperative that we remember grace and not unduly hold people responsible for actions made before they came to Christ. So please follow this procedure for either of these situations.
 - a) **A failed background check stops the application process.** If you feel that the offense is irrelevant because of the length of time since the offense or the lack of risk to children, you can ask your supervisor for approval to continue. The deciding factor should always be the risk they pose to children. If approval is given, please make note on that person's application.
 - b) **When dealing with poor decisions in someone's background,** it is good to ask the following questions:
 - i) Were these decisions made prior to coming to Christ?
 - ii) Has this individual demonstrated a different or changed attitude from that season of life?
 - iii) Do you believe they pose any real threat to children – either directly or as a bad influence?
 - c) Make sure that these issues are addressed in the interview portion of the process. Do not leave questions unasked!
 - d) If the person does become a volunteer, a ministry director should make a note to check on them after 90-days to ensure they are a good fit.

Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Helpers

1. A ministry helper is defined as a volunteer who does NOT have command/control/decision capability, but does interact personally with children, youth and adults with special needs as directed by a ministry leader. They are never to be outside the presence of a ministry leader or to give directions to children, youth or adults with disabilities. Two ministry helpers will not be acceptable in satisfying the two-person rule listed under supervision.
2. Prior to consideration, all ministry helper candidates seeking a volunteer position that involves working with children, youth, or adults with special needs will complete and return a NextGen Volunteer Application.
3. The employed staff member, or designee, will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position. The employed staff member also will store the application form in a secure location.
4. The employed staff member also will conduct a criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
5. Periodically Ministry Helper candidates will be chosen at random for reference checks.
6. Failed background check - See item number 5 above under Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Leaders

Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Observers

1. A ministry observer (a potential volunteer, parent or other adult) is defined as someone present only to observe the ministry activities. They do not have command/control/decision capabilities and they do not interact personally with children, youth or adults with special needs. They are never to be outside the presence of a ministry leader while observing. An observer is always to be identified through a label, lanyard or other clearly marked manner as a “guest.” An adult cannot serve as a Ministry Observer for more than 3 weeks.
2. The employed staff member will conduct a criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
3. Failed background check - See item number 5 above under Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Leaders

Volunteer Screening Procedures – Minor Helpers

1. A Minor Helper is defined as a volunteer under the age of 18 that assists in ministry to children, students or adults with special needs.
2. Prior to consideration, a minor should complete the NextGen Volunteer Application for Minors AND have the recommendation of the ministry leader of the division in which they attend Life Bible Study (i.e. Children or Student Minister).
3. Minor volunteers must:
 - a. Be at least 11 years of age (or 5th grade) and be an active HFBC attender for a period of six months prior to ministry event.
 - b. Be considered to have the same duties as a Ministry Helper and serve under the direction of a Ministry Leader.
 - c. NOT be outside the presence of a Ministry Leader or to give directions to children, youth or adults with special needs.
 - d. NOT be in a room in which there are no adult volunteers or employees.
 - e. NOT take any child to the restroom or to enter a restroom with children in a ministry in which they volunteer without the assistance of an approved adult volunteer or employee.
 - f. NEVER spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Disciplinary problems should be reported to ministry staff or an adult volunteer.
 - g. NOT attempt to provide medical care to an injured or ill person, but immediately contact an adult volunteer or employee.

Volunteer Screening Procedures – Non-Church Attender (Those filling volunteer roles such as HFBC Ministry Centers, Missions, Or Houston 1:8 events that involve direct ministry involvement with children.)

1. Must be an active attender of a like-minded church for a period of six months prior to ministry event.

2. Prior to consideration, all volunteer candidates seeking to serve in ministry opportunities that involves working with children, youth, or adults with disabilities will complete and return a NextGen Volunteer Application and complete a personal interview with a staff member or ministry leader.
3. A staff member, or designee, will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry opportunity.
4. A staff member, or designee, will check at least two references to confirm the information that the candidate provided on the ministry application. The staff member also will initiate a request for a criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
5. Failed background check - See item number 5 above under Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Leaders
6. The staff member will also store all application materials— the application form, background checks, reference check, notes from interviews, etc.—in a secure location.

Employee Screening Procedures

1. An employee is defined as an adult employed and compensated by the church with command/control/decision capability who also interacts personally with children, youth and adults with special needs.
2. Prior to consideration, all employee candidates seeking a paid position that involves working with children, youth, or adults with special needs will complete and return both an Employment Application and Employment Supplemental Application, complete two personal interviews with staff, and submit to a background check.
3. A staff member, or designee, will carefully review both applications, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position.
4. A staff member, or designee, will check at least two references to confirm the information that the candidate provided on the ministry application. The staff member also will make a request to the Human Resources department to conduct a criminal background check through a state law enforcement agency or other provider of such services.
5. Failed background check - See item number 5 above under Volunteer Screening Procedures – Ministry Leaders
6. The staff member also will store all application materials— the application form, background checks, reference check, notes from interviews, etc.—in a secure location.

Church Membership

1. All NextGen volunteer candidates must have been regularly involved in our church for six months or more, and become church members, to be considered for any ministry position involving regular contact with children, youth, or adults with special needs.
2. Membership exceptions include:
 - a. College students identified by Membership Services as Watchcare members qualify as church members. To meet the requirements of Watchcare Membership an actively enrolled college students must meet the six-month requirement of being actively involved at a HFBC Campus, but instead of meeting the membership requirement at HFBC they may show they are an active member of their home church.
 - i. To meet the requirement the following must occur.
 1. The student must be presently enrolled in a college or university and must be a current member of their home church.
 2. A Connection Card must be completed and turned in to Membership Services indicating the student desires Watchcare Membership. Membership Services will verify their home church membership.
 3. Church membership is part of the HFBC culture but not required by many churches today. If the college student comes from a church that does not require membership, or the student has chosen not to become a member of their home church, they will be required to become a member of HFBC to serve with NextGen.
 4. All applicable volunteer screening procedures must be followed.
 - b. Volunteers under that age of 18 may serve at the discretion of ministry leadership in the area in which they are active, and in the area in which they wish to serve. i.e. A high school student serving in Vacation Bible School must have approval of a HUB leader and VBS leader. (See Volunteer Screening Procedures – Minor Helpers).

- c. Volunteers active in like-minded churches desiring to serve with Houston 1:8, participate in a HFBC sponsored mission trip, or other unique ministry event (See Volunteer Screening Procedures – Non-HFBC Attender).

Supervision

1. At least two adults must be present at every function or program involving children or adults with special needs. This includes each classroom, off-site event, or other enclosed area. One or more of these adults must be 21 years of age or older and meet ministry leader qualifications. For youth functions, there must be two adults present according to the same guidelines as above or one adult with multiple students. One adult and one youth is not acceptable.
2. Two or more adults must be assigned to monitor children's, youth and adults with disabilities activities in areas outside the location of a ministry service or event that is in progress. The adults assigned must have been previously approved through our ministry screening process as a ministry leader or helper.
3. Workers (adults serving as volunteers or employees) should arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled activity. They must remain at their assigned post until all people in their care have been picked up by an authorized person. Children and youth 4th grade and older may be released from normal weekly activities to find their parents. No children or youth will be unattended while waiting for transportation.

Counseling

1. Workers are not to counsel with minors except in situations where an immediate response is warranted. Staff should be notified of all counseling involving a minor. Adults counseling minors must be of the same gender as the minor and we encourage team counseling by two screened adults. If only one screened adult conducts the counseling session, it should be conducted in view of another screened worker.
2. All counseling sessions should be limited to three occasions for no more than 30 minutes at a time. If more counseling is required, a referral to our counseling center or a staff minister is recommended.

Work Restrictions

1. Children in K or younger (boys and girls) should be assisted as needed in the restroom by an adult female.
2. For children in grades 1 – 3, at least one adult female should take girls to the restroom, and one adult male should take boys to the restroom. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe and then wait outside the restroom for the children. The presence of a second adult escort is also recommended—perhaps a premises monitor.
3. For children and youth in grades 4 and up, an adult female for girls and an adult male for boys should monitor hallways and ensure the child or student returns to appropriate programming.
4. Never touch a person's private areas except when necessary, as in the case of changing a diaper.
5. Workers should avoid the appearance of impropriety— such as sitting older children on their lap, kissing, or embracing others, etc.
6. All adults interacting with children, youth or adults with disabilities in the ways described above must be screened and approved as ministry leaders.

Discipline

1. Workers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Physical restraint should only be used in a situation where it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming himself or another individual.
2. Disciplinary problems should be reported to ministry staff and to a parent or guardian.

Injuries or Illness

1. Persons who pose a health or hygiene risk to others will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity.
2. A suitable worker—one who has been previously approved through our ministry screening process—must be used to take the place of a worker who is ill.
3. Participants should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If immediate return is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that allows an adult worker to monitor the participant until he/she can be returned to a parent or guardian.
4. Take reasonable steps to avoid contact with blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids.

5. Ministry leaders or helpers who become aware of an injury to a worker or participant will take steps to ensure that proper medical attention is given to the injured person and provide for continued monitoring of the remaining activity participants.
6. Persons who have received an injury that is obviously minor should be given first aid as needed at the time of injury. The individual's parents or guardians should be notified of the injury when they pick up the injured person.
7. Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parents or guardians of the injured person should be notified immediately, along with the ministry worker's coordinator or supervisor. If warranted by the injury, emergency medical personnel should be called.

Recordkeeping

1. All ministry functions involving children, youth, and adults with disabilities should maintain an attendance list for every function. Record the date of the function, along with the names of all participants, ministry coordinators, and supervisors.
2. Ministry workers should prepare a written Notice of Injury report whenever an injury occurs during a ministry function. Promptly forward the incident report to ministry staff and the NextGen Minister.

Notice of Injury, Abuse, or Molestation

1. Volunteer or paid ministry workers who become aware of any injury, abuse, or molestation occurring within any ministry activity must immediately inform their activity coordinator, supervisor, or ministry leader.
2. Activity coordinators and supervisors who become aware of any injury, abuse, or molestation connected with a ministry activity must immediately inform ministry staff about it. The ministry leader should then complete a Notice of Injury form.
3. Ministry leaders who become aware of possible abuse or molestation of a participant must ensure that the participant's parent or guardian is immediately informed that possible abuse or molestation has occurred. The only exception to parent/guardian notification is if the parent/guardian is the suspected source of the abuse, injury or molestation.
4. Ministry leaders must promptly notify our ministry's insurance carrier (general or professional liability insurance) upon notice of abuse or molestation.
5. **Please Note:** Texas Family Code now mandates that "A person must make a report to the authorities when a person has cause to believe that an adult was a victim of abuse or neglect as a child and the person believes that disclosure of the abuse is necessary to protect another child."
6. If an accusation or suspicion of abuse towards a participant is deemed unfounded or insufficient to report, **OR** is disclosed by an adult during the volunteer or potential employee screening process the ministry leader will ensure that an attorney is immediately contacted to provide a written opinion as to whether the organization should report the neglect, abuse or molestation to law enforcement authorities. The written opinion should be obtained within 24 hours after the ministry leader first becomes aware of the situation. The attorney's advice should be acted upon immediately, including reporting the incident to the authorities.

Communication/Contact with Minors

1. Staff and volunteers interacting with kids under the age of 18 are expected to reflect the high standards and accountability expressed below. All communication with minors should be limited to a ministry purpose. When a need exists for non-ministry communication (i.e. babysitting request), the standards and expectations below should still be met:
 - a. Any electronic communication shall include at least three people. The third person must be an adult not related to the sender. This expectation is not necessary if a student's parent is included in the communication.
 - b. Parents should be encouraged to monitor their child's communications with volunteers and staff and report any concerns to a Staff Minister.
 - c. Adult volunteers and staff should meet with students only in a public place, with parent(s) prior knowledge and not with a student of the opposite sex.
2. Communication with a minor that may be construed as inappropriate may result in discipline up to and including dismissal.

Violation of Policy or Procedures

1. Ministry workers must promptly notify their ministry coordinator or supervisor when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.
2. Ministry coordinators, supervisors, and ministry leaders who become aware of a violation of the procedures set by this policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with them. In the process of ensuring compliance with this policy, it may become necessary to remove workers from their positions.

Internal Investigation

1. This ministry organization considers any allegation of abuse or molestation a serious matter. Each situation will receive full cooperation by ministry leaders with legal counsel and civil authorities.
2. Employees who are the subject of an investigation will be removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Employees who admit to the abuse or molestation will be terminated consistent with the established employment practices of this ministry.
3. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
4. This ministry will permanently remove any employees or volunteers from their ministerial duties within the organization if they are found guilty of abuse or molestation. Whenever termination of employment is a factor, we also will consult with legal counsel.

Dealing with Law Enforcement, News Media

1. All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers of this ministry will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.
2. The leadership of this ministry will seek legal counsel as soon as possible after we receive notice of possible abuse or molestation within the organization. Advice from legal counsel will be the basis for our response to the allegations.
3. A member of the Communications office, a ministry leader, or our attorney—will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. Our spokesperson will be the only person to convey information concerning the situation, doing so in a prudent manner to avoid compromising an ongoing investigation and to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved.

Annual Review

1. Each year, we will conduct a review meeting. At that time, the procedures mandated by this policy will be reviewed with all volunteers, employees, ministry coordinators and supervisors, and the leadership of the organization.
2. Paid ministry employees and all volunteers working in any capacity with children, youth, or adults with disabilities will complete a brief renewal application annually.
3. Should the renewal application indicate that any employees or volunteers have become unsuitable for working with children, youth, or adults with disabilities, they will be removed immediately from their current position. They will not be considered for positions involving work with other similar groups.

Periodic Resubmission of Background Checks

1. A resubmission of background check must be conducted every 5 years of service for both volunteers and employees.

Revision of Policy and Procedures

The leadership of this ministry, with the assistance of legal counsel, will regularly review this policy and the procedures established within it. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified in accordance with the bylaws of the organization. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all employees and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

