

# **Wildlife Children's Church Ministry Handbook and Guidelines**



**January 2014**

## **Volunteer Screening Policies, Procedures, Guidelines**

**Our vision Statement** : To reach Children for Christ. To teach Children their value in God. To equip them to build a solid, stable foundation. To help them grow in their knowledge of the Bible.

**Core Values**: We are an interdependent team of volunteers determined to work together to deify the body of Christ, by doing our teaching with dedication and integrity.

### **I. Background Statement**

We live in an age where abuse of children and other vulnerable members of our society is a reality. The church must deal with this issue as a "good shepherd" by taking steps to protect our children, teenagers (youth) and individuals with special needs. Harmony Freewill Baptist Church has implemented this policy to safeguard our children, youth and individuals with special needs while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them. We pray for God's blessings and protection for these persons, parents and for those who work to minister to them through the ministries of our church.

### **Protecting our Children, Youth, Special Needs**

The greatest priority of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church programs for children, youth and individuals with special needs is to minister through the Gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ. As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we must strive to be worthy of a very high standard of trust. It is obvious that any sexual exploitation, abuse, or endangerment directly contradicts this priority and the values of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church. For this reason, every worker at Harmony Freewill Baptist Church must avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behavior. All workers must diligently avoid any conduct that appears wrong to a reasonable observer, even if no actual misconduct takes place. Employees, parents, volunteers and workers in children, youth and special needs ministries are expected to observe these policies and guidelines, as well as other Christian standards of moral behavior found in the Scriptures and adopted by the church membership.

### **Document History**

This policy was developed by the Children's Church Ministry and leaders of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church whose sole purpose was to create a volunteer screening policy. The policy was developed using sample policies and forms from neighboring churches, The Good Shepherd Program by Nexus Solutions and other similar programs.

### **II. Purpose and Policy Statement**

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

### **Purpose**

As a church, we believe that the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of children and other vulnerable members is vital. This policy is intended to ensure that church activities involving children, youth and special needs are consistent with the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the Christian tradition of nurturing vulnerable persons. The



primary purpose of this policy is to promote the safety and well-being of preschoolers, children, youth, special needs and the adults who serve by providing clear standards to guide our ministries. The members of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church sincerely request the cooperation of the adults, parents, youth, children and special needs in our church who must abide by the guidelines of this policy. This policy also serves to establish guidelines, practices and procedures for the prevention of child predatory practices in our preschool, children, student and special needs ministry programs. The establishment of proactive screening and monitoring practices contained herein is to ensure that no approved volunteer, staff member or church worker, while acting within the scope of their duties, is placed in a position where the abuse of a person under their care can be carried out.

### **Policy Statement**

It is the goal of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church to provide for the spiritual growth of our members, visitors and guests in a manner that will foster an atmosphere which proactively addresses personal safety issues related to preschool, children, youth and special needs ministries. Therefore, we establish these policies and guidelines to guide our efforts to recognize and prevent predatory practices and conditions within our ministries. If in the course of screening an applicant, information gives evidence that an individual has mistreated children, teenagers or a person with special needs, been convicted of a criminal offense (traffic violations will be examined in regard to the transportation of children, youth or special needs individuals), or otherwise indicates a risk to the welfare of children or the ministry of the church, that individual will not be authorized to serve in our ministries to preschoolers, children, youth, or special needs.

### **Activities Covered by This Policy**

The scope of this policy shall apply to all current as well as future ministry programs and activities that involve preschoolers, children, youth and special needs as directed by Harmony Freewill Baptist Church. Ministries included in this policy: Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Sunday School and Special Needs Ministry of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church.

### **III. A Glossary of Frequently Used Terms**

Abused or neglected child - a child whose mental or physical health is endangered or threatened by the actions or failure to act by people responsible for the child's care.

Boundaries - Property boundaries are the limits or dividing lines between pieces of real estate. Likewise, people have boundaries that guide our physical and emotional relations. Personal boundaries are like fences, separating appropriate behavior from inappropriate behavior. The lines change according to the child's age and the relationship between the child and the adult. In a physical sense, boundaries govern appropriate behavior. For example, it is acceptable for a four year old to sit on the lap of her Sunday School teacher, but not for her 14-year-old sister to sit on the lap of her youth ministry sponsor. Any child with weak boundaries is more vulnerable to sexual molestation. Healthy boundaries enable a child to recognize and reject inappropriate behavior.

Child molester - a person who has sexually violated children.

Child sexual abuse - includes but is not limited to any contact or interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an

adult is always considered forced whether or not consent is given by the child or youth or whether initiated by the child or youth.

Children and/or youth - generally anyone less than 18 years of age. This category may also include persons over 18 years of age who are not able to fully protect themselves from exploitation or give consent for sexual activity (due to age, intellectual or physical impairments, or other incapacities).

Further interpretation of these policies is guided by these specific definitions:

Children/Children's Ministry – Children ages 0 to 6th Grade

Youth Ministry – A student in Grades 7-12

Special Needs Ministry – regardless of gender or age, an individual that has been identified or has identified themselves as having a special need and as such may not be able to fully protect themselves from exploitation or give consent for sexual activity (due to age, intellectual or physical impairments, or other incapacities.)

#### **IV. General Qualifications**

Every volunteer and staff person who works with preschoolers, children, youth and special needs shall:

1. Confess Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord
2. Be a member in good standing and/ or a regular attendee for at least six months
3. Be approved in accordance with these policies
4. Evidence the skills, attitude and Christian maturity appropriate to the ministry with preschoolers, children, youth or special needs
5. Agree to adhere to the church's ministry philosophies, policies and guidelines for work with children, youth and special needs
6. Have no history of being an abuser or have a criminal record inconsistent with the ministry responsibility

#### **Church Membership/Attendance Requirement**

All Children's Church workers must be a member in good standing and/or a regular attendee for at least six months prior to applying for a volunteer position. This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the applicant allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of an applicant. In some situations this rule is not feasible and may be waived. If the six month rule is waived, it must be approved by the Pastor and Elders.. All other steps in the screening process must be followed.

#### **Criminal Record Check**

A Criminal Record Check is required for all applicants. The Criminal Record Check will cover a minimum of the preceding five (5) years of the applicant's residence. An online check of the State Sex Offender Registry for the applicant's state of residency for the ten years prior to hiring shall be accessed and searched. In addition, all volunteers and staff are subject to regularly scheduled (every 3 years) Criminal Records Check reviews to ensure the safety of our children, youth, special needs.

Applicants discovered to have had documented or known incidents of sexual misconduct, or who have a criminal background which may have a negative impact on our ministry, may not be



a Ministry Leader (volunteer or employee) or serve in any capacity of the Preschool/Children/Youth/Special Needs Ministry at Harmony Freewill Church Baptist Church. If any derogatory information about the applicant is found on the background check, the application package will be reviewed by the four staff person review panel. The review panel is the Pastor, The Elders, the Children's Church Director and Children's Church Assistant Director. In the event an application is not accepted, the Pastor will notify you in a confidential meeting.

### **Confidentiality of Information**

The church will keep confidential all information received. Application information will be marked as such and stored with limited access afforded only to Pastor, Elder, Children's Church Director and Assistant. The details discovered during the screening process will remain confidential; only an approval will be communicated to ministry leaders. Information that is a matter of public record is not considered confidential under these guidelines.

### **V. General Guidelines for our Ministries**

These guidelines are provided to reduce the risk of child abuse, to assure the parents of children and youth of a safe environment, and to protect workers from false allegations or unwarranted suspicions.

#### **Supervision**

Church staff members, children's workers and volunteers who supervise youth and/or children and/or special needs are charged with the diligent enforcement of these policies. Program leaders and all youth/children's/special needs workers who suspect any unhealthy or abusive activity must promptly discuss their suspicion with the Children's Church Directors, who will then immediately contact the Pastor. Violation of these policies is considered grounds for immediate dismissal from work in the children and/or youth and/or special needs ministries.

#### **Touching Guidelines**

This policy includes guidelines on touching that will safeguard our children/youth/special needs while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them. The guidelines below are to be carefully followed by anyone working with children, youth, or special needs.

1. Hugging and other forms of appropriate physical affection between workers and children/youth/special needs are important for wholesome development and are generally suitable in our church setting.
2. Physical affection shall be appropriate to the age of the child, youth or special needs. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four year old to sit in a preschool worker's lap, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and student leader to behave this way.)
3. Touching should be initiated as a response to the child/youth/special needs person's need for comforting and encouragement. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.
4. Touching and affection should be given when in the presence of other children's ministry, youth or special needs workers. It is much less likely that a touch will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the

touching is open to observation.

5. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

6. A child/youth/special needs preference not to be touched shall be respected.

7. All workers are responsible for protecting children/youth/special needs under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

8. All workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with ministry leaders

### **Two Adult Rule**

Two approved workers shall be present in all programs and activities involving children, youth and specials ministry adults – preferably not from the same immediate family. This shall apply to classes, transportation, and other activities. In the absence of two workers, the classes shall be combined, or meet in a common larger room, or cancelled.

### **Confidentiality**

Children's Ministry Leaders must report to the Children's Church Director and Assistant Director any time a minor or special needs adult discusses harming himself or others, committing a crime, or being abused. There are limits to confidentiality when working with minors and special needs adults. Questions about such cases or other issues of confidentiality should be discussed promptly with the appropriate staff.. Any serious issues discussed in confidence shall be reviewed with the pastor, who will also protect the confidential nature of the discussion to the best of their ability. Conferring with a minister, medical or mental health professional on sensitive issues is not considered breaking a confidence.

### **General Principles**

When responding to allegations of abuse, the church and its representatives will keep several key principles in mind:

1. Reports shall be taken seriously.
2. Allegations should be handled with sensitivity for people's privacy and confidentiality.
3. During a criminal investigation the church shall cooperate with law enforcement and social services as directed by its legal counsel. (An attorney will be retained to guide the church in this area.)
4. The alleged victim/accuser/accused will not be blamed.
5. The church should seek to provide support as appropriate for alleged victims, alleged offenders, and their families during this period of great stress.
6. The insurance carrier shall be contacted as soon as possible.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, sign and affirm I read the above Protection Policy for Children, Youth, Special Needs, in its entirety, and that I will faithfully follow and abide by all policies, procedures and guidelines pertaining to ministry leadership of children, youth and/or special needs individuals and the ministry role I am assigned. I understand that the church does not provide any insurance or legal representation to me in the event that I am personally accused of any sexual abuse or misconduct.

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Signature

First name / Last name

Date

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PRINTED NAME FIRST/LAST

DATE



## **REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK AND AUTHORIZATION**

Harmony Freewill Baptist Church  
Hampton, TN 37654

### **NOTICE TO VOLUNTEERS REGARDING BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION**

I understand that, if I am approved for volunteer service by Harmony Freewill Baptist Church, this background check authorization will be kept on file and may be used at any time during my service to procure further information when, in the judgment of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church, such may be necessary.

I hereby release and discharge to the extent permitted by law, Harmony Freewill Baptist Church, its employees, any individual or agency obtaining information for Harmony Freewill Baptist Church, and any personal or professional reference, from any and all claims, damages, losses, liabilities, costs, or other expenses arising from the retrieving, reporting and/or disclosure of information in connection with this background investigation.

I understand that I am volunteering my services and declare in no way shall I be considered an employee or subcontractor or independent contractor of Harmony Freewill Baptist Church.

By signing below, I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read, understand and consent to the above. I further authorize that a photographic copy or a telephonic facsimile of this document shall be valid for purposes present and future. My signature below certifies that all information I have provided in connection with this background check is true, accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that I have specific prescribed rights as a consumer under the Fair Credit Reporting Act and may have additional rights under relevant state laws.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name (last, first, middle)**

**Male/Female** (Circle One)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Social Security Number**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date of Birth (MM/DD/YYYY)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Drivers License Number**  
**(For ID Purposes Only)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Drivers License State of Issue**

**Any other names I have been known by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, County

**Previous Addresses** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_