

Otter Creek Church of Christ
Brentwood, Tennessee

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

August 4, 2005

Revised Receipt Form 5-5-06

Revised Policy 7-27-06

Revised Policy 5-29-08

Revised 01-07-09

Purpose and Commitment

Otter Creek's purpose for establishing this Child Protection Policy is to demonstrate our absolute, unwavering commitment to the physical and emotional safety and to the spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

Our commitment to this purpose includes the adoption and enforcement of this policy on child protection. This policy applies to all adults (adult defined as anyone 18 or older) who work with children in any paid or voluntary capacity. All adults who regularly interact with children or youth must read, be in agreement with, and sign this policy, and affirm that they have not resigned or been terminated from a position or leadership role for reasons related to misconduct.

Application, Selection and Screening

We believe that appropriate personal relationships between adult leaders and the children and youth of the Church foster the community of Christ. Common expressions of affection (e.g., hugs), affirmation (e.g., pats on the back), support (e.g., prayer) and physical caretaking (e.g., changing diapers) are appropriate in our community of caring Christians. Care will be taken, however, to ensure that adults do not behave in inappropriate ways during any Church-sponsored activities.

One of three security level designations will be assigned to all volunteer positions that involve interaction with children and/or youth. Appropriate security requirements will be associated with each level based on the type of interaction the position holders would typically have with children and youth. Following are the descriptions and requirements for each level:

Level I – Includes non-supervisory positions and those which rarely, if ever, require the position holder to be alone with a child or youth (e.g., nursery workers and day-trip chaperones).

Following are the requirements for Level I positions:

1. Must submit an application form
2. Must sign the Agreement and Acknowledgement of Receipt form indicating understanding of and agreement to adhere to Otter Creek's Child Protection Policies and Procedures.
3. Must be subject to criminal history checks and reference checks; therefore, applicants must provide written authorization for the church to conduct these checks.

Level II – Includes all supervisory positions and those that have regular and consistent interaction with children in on site activities (e.g., teachers). Following are the requirements for Level II positions:

1. Must complete the requirements for Level I positions.

2. Must be a baptized believer.
3. Must have been a member of Otter Creek for at least six months prior to beginning work and plan to remain an active member of Otter Creek.
4. May be subject to criminal history checks and reference checks; therefore, applicants must provide written authorization for the church to conduct these checks.
5. Should attend an annual orientation which will include an explanation of the child protection policies and training in the implementation of those policies and procedures.

Level III – Includes all positions which require interaction for extended periods of time and/or those who will be on overnight trips with children or youth. (e.g., Covenant group leaders, camp counselors, and overnight trip chaperones). Following are the requirements for Level III positions:

1. Must meet all requirements for Level I and II positions.
2. Must pass a criminal history check and reference checks successfully. These individuals will be subject to rechecking as often as deemed necessary, but at least every seven years.

The Elders may approve a waiver of the above requirements, if requested.

All paid staff will be required to pass a criminal history check.

All applicant information will be kept confidential and in a secure location.

Procedures

Parental Responsibility – Parents are responsible for their children when they are at Otter Creek facilities or off-site events and no official child or youth supervision is provided. Parents should refer to church communications (e.g., website, bulletin, e-mail) for information about events and activities for which there is Church-provided childcare.

Classrooms for Children and Youth – All classrooms designated for children and youth activities should have a door with a window, if at all practicable. Doors to classrooms or offices in which meetings may take place should remain open or have windows that prevent total privacy.

Two-Adult Rule – It is the goal of the Church that two screened adults be present with children at all Church-sponsored activities. In those circumstances where an adult must be alone with children or youth for a brief time, he/she may only do so when subject to being visually observed at all times, such as through an open door or door with a window. In situations where the two-adult rule is not practical, adult “roamers” will be assigned to move about the church to view the children or youth activities.

Drivers and Travel Events – No fewer than three persons, one of them an adult, should occupy a vehicle traveling to an event unless express parental permission has been given beforehand. Only adults will transport youth. Drivers will be expected to adhere to all traffic laws.

Overnight Event Chaperones – Every sleeping unit (motel room, camp cabin, etc.) must have either two adults of the same gender as the children or youth, or no adults assigned to it. Sleeping units are subject to unannounced visits by a monitor. Lock-in hours will be observed for overnight events and adults are not allowed to share a bed with a child or youth unless it is their own child.

Pick-up After Events – Upon return from a travel event, children and youth will be released only to their parent or guardian unless the person in charge of the event has been notified in advance by the parent or guardian.

Adult-Child/Youth Ratios for Travel and Off-Site Activities – The following ratios are recommended for off-site activities and for events requiring travel:

Children, ages 0-5	1 adult to 3-4 children
Children, grades 1-6	1 adult to 4-6 children
Youth, grades 7-8	1 adult to 8 youth
Youth, grades 9-12	1 adult to 10 youth

Diaper Changing/Restroom Assistance – Diapers should be changed at diaper changing stations only by screened adults. Two screened adults should be in the room or the door should remain open. Likewise, only a screened adult should accompany a child to the restroom with the door to remain open.

Check-in/Check-out – All young children (babies through 2nd grade) will follow a secure check-in and check-out procedure. Specific information regarding these procedures will be provided by the Children's Ministers.

Prohibited Acts

Prohibited conduct includes any form of physical, emotional, sexual, or mental abuse of a child. Prohibited conduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of sexual conduct towards a youth or child;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a protected minor;
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between an older child and a younger child;
- Any kind of verbal remarks with sexual connotations, overtones, or innuendo directed to or about a minor;
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor;
- Spanking;
- Possessing obscene or pornographic materials at any Church activity;
- Possession or being under the influence of any illegal substances;
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol, or giving alcohol to a child or youth, while leading or participating in a function of the Children's or Youth Ministries;
- Carrying any type of weapon on Church property.
- Giving of gifts to an individual child in a secretive manner is not appropriate. If a child has a particular need, a gift can be made on behalf of the church, and given to the parent.

Response Procedures

Reports of Child Abuse

- All persons who suspect neglect or abuse toward a child should report that to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services as they deem necessary.
- The first person to learn of an incident of misconduct toward a child during a Church – sponsored activity should first secure the safety of the child, children or youth and then immediately report this incident to the Minister in charge or to one of the Elders. This individual should not leave the child, children, or youth alone to report the incident and should not personally confront the alleged violator of the policy.

- The individual reporting the incident will be required to fill out an Incident Report Form as soon as possible – ideally, immediately after the initial, verbal reporting of the incident. This written report is extremely important - the information provided will be critical to the investigation of the incident.
- Two individuals - the person in charge and the Minister, or the Minister and an Elder – will respond to inform and support the child’s parents and family as needed.
- The Minister or Elder will alert the Child Protection Team which will assist with the investigation of the situation and determination of appropriate actions to be taken.
- The person against whom allegations have been brought will immediately be suspended from all duties involving children or youth until a full investigation has been completed and a determination has been made.
- The Elder on the Team will be responsible for promptly informing the entire Eldership and the Director of Ministries.
- The incident must be reported to the Tennessee Department for Children’s Services (DCS) as soon as reasonable suspicion has been confirmed. The Church Administrator should then contact the Church’s liability insurance carrier.
- All persons involved with the report and investigation shall keep the information in strictest confidence.

Cooperation with Civil Authorities

The Church will cooperate with DCS and all other civil authorities in the investigation of an alleged incident of child abuse. Whenever possible, an appropriate staff person should be involved during all interviews of the child and/or the accused.

Response to the Media

The Elders will name an individual who will be responsible for all media inquiries about the alleged incident.

Response to the Congregation

If and when it is deemed appropriate by the Team and the Elders, a brief statement will be given to the congregation regarding the alleged incident without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim’s privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns.

Response to the Individuals Involved

The Church will take appropriate steps to provide for the immediate needs of the alleged victim, the person against whom allegations have been brought, alleged abuser and any other individuals affected by the alleged misconduct. This may include, but will not be limited to, counseling.

Records of Alleged Child Abuse

Every effort will be made to keep all conversations and written records pertaining to the alleged incident of child abuse in strictest confidence. Documentation will be kept in a locked file.

**Child Protection Policies and Procedures
Agreement and Acknowledgement of Receipt**

I have received and retained a copy of the Otter Creek Church of Christ Child Protection Policies and Procedures and have read and understand them. I acknowledge that these policies and procedures are for the protection of our children and that my compliance with them is expected.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____