



## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION PROCEDURE

### Child Abuse Prevention Procedure Purpose

The purpose of the Augusta Worship Center (AWC) Child Abuse Prevention Procedure is to assist us in providing a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of church life. AWC desires to be a safe zone for all children and adults who attend our services, or any church related activity. AWC recognizes there are individuals in the world who do not conform to the values of our church or scripture, and they victimize children. Although no organization or individual can assure complete protection, the AWC Child Abuse Prevention Procedure's aim is to prevent any occurrence of child abuse.

This procedure applies to all members and participating visitors/guests of the Augusta Worship Center. AWC will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this commitment not only reflects your concern about our children's safety, but your concern to stop child abuse and its damaging effects. For the safety and protection of our children and members who participate in church-sponsored activities with children, the guidelines provided in this procedure apply.

### Guidelines for Reporting an Complaint/Allegation

1. AWC will treat any person who makes a complaint under this procedure with the utmost respect and will fully handle all complaints swiftly and confidentially and consider the need to take appropriate corrective action when necessary.
2. Filing a complaint will not be used against the complainant under any circumstance, alleged victims are strongly encouraged to use this protective procedure.
3. AWC will pray for the unity of the church and all persons affected by the allegation and will attempt to assure the safety and protection of persons who have been harmed.
4. If AWC receives an allegation of child abuse, we will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or anyone making such an allegation.
5. The alleged accused will be treated with dignity throughout the investigative process
6. AWC will assume that such complaints are made in good faith however, if any complaint is intended to be malicious, this will be considered an abuse of procedure and will be handled accordingly.

### The Pastoral Responsibilities

1. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary in providing care to the alleged victim and the accused and their families and show care and comfort for the alleged victim.
  - a. The pastor should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an investigation.
  - b. The pastor should not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.
2. The pastor should maintain confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised otherwise.
3. The pastor should not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.
4. The pastor should not prejudge the situation but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the alleged victim and his or her family. Remembering that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority.

### Media Or Other Written Communication

If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the pastor.

1. Only the pastor or his designee should make comments about the allegations. The pastor will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation.
2. **The prepared statement shall be made only after consultation with the church's attorney and will include the steps the church has taken to protect children.**
3. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved shall continue to be of primary concern.

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### Retaliation For Filing

No hardship, loss, or penalty may be imposed on a complainant, member(s) of complainant, or victim(s) in response to:

- a. Filing or responding to a bona fide complaint/allegation of any of the below definitions.
- b. Appearing as a witness in the investigation of a complaint.
- c. Serving as an investigator of a complaint.

Retaliation or attempted retaliation in response to filing a complaint or invoking the complaint process is a violation of this procedure. Any person who is found to have violated this aspect will be subject to disciplinary actions.

### Confidentiality

During the complaint process, the privacy of the information received, the privacy of the individuals involved, and allegations will be protected to the highest degree possible. This protection will commence on the day that the complainant submits a written, signed and dated complaint statement. Confidentiality will be considered based on the (1) context of the complaint, (2) any legal obligations of the church to act on the charge, and (3) the right of the accused to obtain information.

### Definitions

In this procedure the following definitions apply: **Adult**—Any person aged 18 or older. - **Child or Youth**: Any person under the age of 18.

**Child Abuse**: Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The law typically uses the following definitions and explanations in determining whether abuse of a child has occurred.

**Physical Abuse**: A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, and stabbing wounds.

**Physical Neglect**: The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.

**Sexual Abuse**: Abuse that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, voyeurism).

**Mental Abuse/Neglect**: A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harms to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

**Corporal Punishment**: Any punishment applied to the body but not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching, pulling, or squeezing.

**Church Worker**: Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.

**Mandated Reporter**: Any persons with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. Mandated reporting is the **early recognition** of child maltreatment with the goal of preventing further abuse from occurring. Many



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mandated reporters have professional relationships with children that make it possible for children to disclose abuse or for the mandated reporter to identify maltreatment. If the pastor or church staff fail to act on the report, the designee Shall Make The Report To Law Enforcement.

**Reasonable Suspicion:** means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse, or neglect has occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child

### Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

To create the safest possible environment within Augusta Worship Center, several abuse prevention measures will be used. These measures include screening all church workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to members, use of the two-adult rule, standards for appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

Church members who are also workers with children must have been members (of good standing) of **Augusta Worship Center** for at **least six months** prior to the time they begin serving with children in church-sponsored activities. There is an exception to the six-month guideline.

1. **Staff Screening**—The following procedures reflect Augusta Worship Center's commitment to provide protective care for all children and workers who participate in church sponsored activities.
2. All church workers must complete the following procedures before participating in any church sponsored child/youth activities:
  - a. Complete a standard application and disclosure form, including two references.
  - b. Participate in an interview conducted by the staff person responsible for the area of ministry.
  - c. Complete orientation/training activities appropriate to the level of the worker involvement.
  - d. Sign a written acknowledgement stating they have received and reviewed a copy of the Augusta Worship Center - Child Abuse Prevention Policy.
3. No adult members of the congregation who have been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult, will provide services in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
4. All church workers are subject to background checks for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal history or child abuse findings.
5. Applications and the results of any screening will be kept confidential by authorized church staff.

Nursery workers will be assigned in teams of two or more. Christian education instructors for youth classes will be assigned in teams of two or more or observed via a classroom monitor.

When a church-sponsored children's youth group has both male and female participants, both male and female adult sponsors must also be present.

### Classroom/ Nursery/Toddler Discipline: If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker should:

1. (Unsure about methodologies used to deal with inappropriate behavior and children)
2. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other children
3. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child must be taken to the parents.
4. No corporal discipline or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.

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**Open Classrooms**—Classrooms or childcare rooms will be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other church workers. Assigned teachers will conduct brief observations of childcare rooms and classrooms of children or youth during youth Christian education and other meeting hours to the extent possible.

**Driving Policies**—The designated leader of the event must know each person designated to provide automobile or van transportation to or from church. The driver must:

1. Be at least 18 years old.
2. Have a valid state driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated.
3. Have no record of convictions for the past five years for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license or reckless endangerment.
4. Have proof of insurance; and
5. Never be alone in a vehicle with a child **not his own**.

**Gifts**—No church members are to give personal gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible leadership. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

**Overnight Trips**—Situations where church members are taking children or young people out of the area for long periods of time or for overnight trips meetings are to be carefully planned. Only known, proven staff will be permitted to sponsor/chaperone the trips. New church members may be used as additional sponsors but shall not be left alone with the children or young people in a situation where there are no other staff to observe. **In no circumstance will one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing.**

### **AGE-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN**

#### **Nursery**

1. A minimum of two nursery workers must be present in each nursery regardless of how few children are in attendance. A married couple does not count as two caregivers. At least one caregiver must be over the age of 18.
2. The windows of the nursery will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. Church nursery workers who change diapers must adhere to the following procedures.
  1. Always wear latex gloves.
  2. Always use latex gloves when applying lotion or powder.
4. Children will be released to parents or designated person when that person bears the necessary paperwork to pick up the child.
5. Only assigned workers are allowed to stay in the nursery or to be in the nursery area during sessions.
6. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**

#### **Toddlers Through Kindergarten**

1. A minimum of two caregivers (one being an adult) must be present with each group of children regardless of how many children are in attendance.
2. \*The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child.
4. Children will be released to parents at the door of the nursery. Persons other than the children's parents or guardians must be authorized to pick up the children.
5. When children are taken out of the classroom (playground, etc.) the teachers are to take a count of the children to insure all are present.
6. Only assigned workers are allowed to stay in preschool rooms or to be in the preschool area during sessions.

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7. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
8. The pastor (or the designee to do so) by him/her must approve any children's activities that are held off-site.
  - a. Parental permission will be secured for off-site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present.
  - b. All activities of children either on or off the church must be scheduled on the official church calendar.

### First Through Sixth Grades

1. A minimum of two caregivers (one being an adult) must be present with each group of children regardless of how few children are in attendance.
2. The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms will remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
3. When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. If assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child.
4. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
5. The pastor (or the designee to do so) by him/her must approve any children's activities that are held off-site.
  - c. Parental permission will be secured for off-site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present.
  - d. All activities of children either on or off the church must be scheduled on the official church calendar.

### Seventh Grade Through Age 17

1. A minimum of two adults should be present (whenever possible) regardless of how few students are in attendance.
2. Organized events should be staffed with a minimum of 1:10 adult to students.
3. The pastor or one delegated to do so by him/her should be informed in advance of all activities.
4. Parental permission will be secured for off- site activities and there will be a minimum of two adults present. All activities for students, on or off the church campus, must be scheduled on the official church calendar.
5. Overnight events that are attended by students of both genders must also be chaperoned by adults of both genders. At least one adult will be present in each sleeping area.
6. A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. **Corporal discipline is never allowed.**
7. It is recognized that certain counseling and ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two adults and that the general guidelines for supervision of workers should not restrict situations where individual counsel and guidance is necessary. However, such counseling should only take place in a room where interior windows allow a clear view of the activities in the room.

### Past Sexual Offenders at Augusta Worship Center

**Augusta Worship Center** 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.

1. First, the offender's probation/parole officer will be contacted regarding any restrictions regarding attending services or other functions where children are present.
2. Second, the probation/ parole officer will put any restrictions in writing. If restrictions don't prohibit participation, the following guidelines will be implemented.
  - A known sexual offender cannot participate in any of the child or youth programs in any way.
  - A known sexual offender can only participate in a predetermined service each week.
  - 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.



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- If the offense has been adjudicated within the last ten years of the offender's involvement with Augusta Worship Center, 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. \*

### Reasonable Suspicion Defined

Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse, or neglect has occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

### Important Contacts and Their Phone Numbers

- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD
- Georgia DFCS Child Protective Services: 1.855.GACHILD (+1 855-422-4453)
- Richmond County Police Department: (706) 821-1000 or 911 in case of emergency

### GEORGIA LAW O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5

Georgia law, **O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5**, requires certain persons to report suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities. In addition to contacting the police department, Mandatory Reporters must also report suspected neglect or abuse to the Georgia Department of Human Services by calling 1-855-GACHILD (422-4453).

### How to Report

- A report must be made **within 24 hours** by phone or electronically:
  - DFCS' centralized intake is available 24/7 by calling: **1-855-GACHILD (1-855-422-4453)** or reporting **online** (requires online training prior to report)
- If the child is in immediate danger, report to law enforcement (911).
- **What if a child or family just needs resources or support?**
  - Call 1-800-CHILDREN (**1-800-244-5373**) to speak with a resource navigator or search the online resource map.