

CHILDREN FIRST PROGRAM



CHILD SAFETY POLICY for

**Richmond Hill
Baptist Church**

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"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

- Mark 10:14

OTHER GUIDELINES

The following additional guidelines have been established as part of the Children First Program.

TWO CLEARED PERSON RULE

It is the position of the Church that a reasonable effort will be made to ensure that at least two deared volunteers are supervising each group (room) of children during all children's activities. At the discretion of the Senior Pastor or applicable Children's Rep, non-deared persons may assist the cleared volunteers in supervising the children.

Provided that the Two Cleared Volunteer Rule is adhered to, it is acceptable for activity room doors to be closed.

PARENTAL PERMISSION

Parental permission and release of the Church from liability is required for each child attending Church-sponsored off-site events and certain other in-Church events as designated by the Senior Pastor or Children's Reps.

VEHICLE SAFETY

Children's Reps shall ensure that anyone driving children from the Church to Church-sponsored activities must complete a "Vehicle Safety Certification Form".

REPORTING A SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF ABUSE

All Church staff and volunteers are required to follow provincial and federal law and when appropriate, staff, volunteers, or the Children First Board, as applicable, shall contact the appropriate authorities, or legal counsel, to determine what actions, if any, are appropriate.

A volunteer who is engaged in any activity conducted on the Church premises or under the supervision of the Church and has cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected by child abuse or neglect, **should immediately report their suspicion to the Senior Pastor or the head of the ministry.** The Senior Pastor or the head of the ministry, as the case may be, shall immediately complete a "Suspected Abuse Report Form" and provide such form to the Senior Pastor or the Children First Board.

Once the report has been provided to the Senior Pastor or member of the Children First Board, the Pastor, or the Board member, as the case may be, shall determine the appropriate course of action. Such action may include, but is not limited to, immediately reporting the incident to the police or the provincial Child Welfare Services, contacting legal counsel for advice and convening a meeting of the Children First Board to decide the appropriate action. Such action taken by the Children First Board shall be documented on the "Follow-Up Suspected Abuse Report Form".

AT NO TIME SHALL ANY PERSON, EITHER STAFF OR VOLUNTEER, ATTEMPT TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION EITHER THROUGH INVESTIGATION OR INTERROGATION OF A CHILD BEYOND THAT INFORMATION NECESSARY TO CAUSE SUCH A PERSON TO HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT A CHILD HAS BEEN ABUSED OR NEGLECTED.

SUSPENSION OF DUTIES

Upon any report against a volunteer regarding alleged child abuse, the Senior Pastor or Children's Rep shall suspend such person from all Church-related duties involving children until such time as the accusation(s) of abuse or neglect is resolved. The reinstatement of such individual will be at the sole discretion of the Children First Board. Upon notification of suspension, the Senior Pastor may also appoint a separate Church member to care for the suspended individual and another Church member to care for the alleged victim.

PURPOSE & GOALS

Our Church believes it is very important to provide a safe and secure environment for the Christian teaching and nurture of our children (for the purpose of this Program, a child is defined as any person under 18 years old). The Children First Program applies to all of the activities for children conducted by our Church, in our Church, and to all of the Church Staff and volunteers who participate in these ministries.

The Program is a proactive initiative intended to reflect a number of our Church's goals regarding Children's ministries:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for all children;
2. Protect children from the possibility of mental, physical or sexual abuse;
3. Educate and train our staff and volunteers to guard against child abuse; and
4. Reduce the possibility of false accusations against volunteers and Church staff.

CHILDREN FIRST BOARD

The Church determined that the Program would be implemented and maintained through a Church Committee, the Children First Board. The Children First Board shall consist of the Senior Pastor, at least two representatives from Children's Ministries (the "Children's Reps") and at least two Deacons (as appointed by the Deacons). The Children's Reps will be appointed annually, at a regularly constituted meeting of the Church. The Children First Board shall report annually to the Church. The Children First Board shall delegate the administrative duties of the Program as it deems appropriate. In addition, if determined appropriate by the Board, it may appoint or consult with people with the appropriate expertise, to advise the Board in matters of prevention of child abuse or to train staff and volunteers. The Children First Board may also recommend to the Church to add additional persons to the Board.

The purposes of the Children First Board are as follows:

1. **VOLUNTEER APPROVAL:** Review and approve applications and make final determinations regarding the eligibility of those individuals who do not meet all of the initial volunteer requirements. As part of the review process, the Board will coordinate with government agencies to conduct background checks.
2. **PROGRAM OVERSIGHT:** Create and implement Children First Program forms including, but not limited to: the volunteer application form, the vehicle safety certification form, incident report forms, the medical information and liability release form, the reference check form and the release of information and criminal records release consent forms.
3. **TRAINING:** Oversee training of all church volunteers to ensure they can recognize and prevent child abuse, including, but not limited to, making presentations and providing information to volunteers.
4. **COMPLIANCE** Monitor compliance with the Children First Program including the review of applications to be a child volunteer and setting and maintaining the volunteer requirements.
5. **AMENDMENTS:** Periodically review and, if appropriate, recommend amendments to the Children First Program to the Church for approval.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

In order to become a deared volunteer working with children in the Church, the volunteer must meet the following requirements:

1. Complete a Volunteer Application Form.
2. Submit to a criminal background check.
3. Be approved by the Children First Board.

All Church staff and volunteers who participate in children's activities will be screened by a member of the Board or a Board designee. Screening will include a review of the application form and the criminal background report. In its discretion, the Board may also require a Child Welfare Services background check to be completed. Follow-up criminal background checks will be conducted at the discretion of the Children First Board. At the sole discretion of the Board, screening may also include an interview with the applicant and/or the applicant's personal references.

The individual, or individuals who review the application will advise the Board of its recommendation for clearance or non-clearance. The Board shall then formally accept each volunteer for clearance or notify the applicant that he or she has been determined not suitable as a volunteer.

Should the Children First Board determine that the applicant is not suitable to serve as a volunteer, the Children First Board will inform the applicant of the reasons for its decision and the appeals process.

For special events, such as Vacation Bible School, the Children First Board may deem an individual to be a deared volunteer, for such event, if the individual provides satisfactory evidence that he or she has been deared to work with children in his or her home church.

IN CONNECTION WITH THE SCREENING PROCESS THE CHILDREN FIRST BOARD WILL ACT WITH INTEGRITY, HONESTY AND WILL TREAT SCREENING MATTERS WITH UTMOST CONFIDENTIALITY.

Any person who applies and is not deared, or any volunteer who is suspended for any reason, has the right to appeal. If non-clearance is due to the background check, the applicant, upon request, will be given the opportunity to meet confidentially with the Children First Board and discuss the application.

If non-clearance is based upon the interview process the applicant, upon request, shall have the right to request a second interview. Subject to Section VII (Disputes and Discipline) of the Church's Constitution, the Board's decision regarding the appeal will be final.

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