



**BAYOU  
CITY  
FELLOWSHIP**

# **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY & PROCEDURES**

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## OVERVIEW

We are radically focused on Jesus at Bayou City, which means we are deeply committed to honoring Jesus in every aspect of our mission. Jesus places children in a special position of honor due to their simple and authentic faith. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus encourages us to model our faith after the children. "He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'" (Matthew 18:2-5). For us to welcome children then is for us to welcome Jesus himself.

Jesus also issues a stern warning for not protecting these especially vulnerable young souls. "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

Sadly, in our culture, children are not always protected. Some estimate that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of eighteen. Sixty-seven percent of all sexual abuse reported by law enforcement in the United States is perpetrated against children.<sup>1</sup> We believe Jesus would have us create an environment that prioritizes the safety and protection of children and also seeks to bring redemption and reconciliation in the lives of adult survivors of abuse.

This policy and practices guide represents the desire on behalf of Bayou City leadership to carry out the directive of Jesus to both welcome and protect children in his name. We consider all those under age 18 to be vulnerable to abuse, so while some protection practices might vary by age, the policies are considered applicable to all minors. Also, since all of us are responsible for protecting children, we will make every effort to help all those who attend Bayou City become educated on the topic and have a shared sense of responsibility for identifying potential high-risk situations or policy violations, and for reporting to staff or the investigative authorities as directed by the policy.

Our goal is to be a church that leads in our proactive efforts to welcome and protect those whom Jesus said we should welcome and protect. Thank you for engaging in this important kingdom work.

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<sup>1</sup> Child Safeguarding Policy Guide p.11 - Tchividjian



## DEFINITIONS

It is important that we have a shared understanding of what constitutes abuse. Studies indicate that the majority children in abusive situations experience more than one type of abuse. Defining helps us identify signs of abuse in one area and might indicate other areas needing protection. The following definitions are provided by The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse and the Texas Department of Family Services (DFPS):

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is constituted through the sexual exploitation of a child by an older person as in rape, incest, fondling of the genitals, exhibitionism, or pornography. It may be done for the sexual gratification of the older person, out of a need for power, or for economic reasons (such as prostitution, etc.).

Sexual abuse according to the Texas Department of Family Services (DFPS) includes:

- Sexual indecency, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault.
- Failing to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct to a child.
- Using the child for the creation of obscene or pornographic material.

Sexual abuse includes "contact behavior" and "non-contact behavior". In addition to exposure to pornography, voyeurism and exhibitionism; non-contact behavior can include sexual communication by an adult to a minor who is intending to abuse, degrade, arouse, or gratify sexual desires.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury, which may include beatings, violent shaking, human bites, strangulation, suffocation, poisoning, or burns. The results may be bruises and welts, broken bones, scars, permanent disfigurement, long-lasting psychological damage, serious internal injuries, brain damage, or death.

Physical abuse according to the Texas Department of Family Services (DFPS) is deliberate actions resulting in injuries to a child, genuine threats of such actions, or concerns about physical injuries of an unexplained or suspicious nature.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that attacks a child's emotional development and a sense of self worth, such as constant criticizing, belittling, insulting, or manipulation.



## Physical/Emotional Neglect

Physical/Emotional neglect is the failure to provide a child with basic needs, including food, clothing, education, shelter, and medical care, also abandonment and inadequate supervision.

According to the Texas Department of Family Services (DFPS),

- Neglectful supervision means improper supervision of a child left alone which could have resulted in substantial harm.
- Medical neglect is failure to seek, obtain, or administer medical treatment that could result in substantial harm.
- Physical neglect is the failure to provide a child with the necessary food, clothing, and shelter to maintain a healthy life.
- Abandonment and refusal to accept parental responsibility are where the parent or caregiver left the child in a potentially harmful situation and did not plan to return for the child.
- Refusal to accept parental responsibility is when a child has been out of the home for any reason and parent/caregiver refuses to allow the child to return home.

Bayou City Fellowship takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We are also aware that children who are maltreated in one way are at an increased risk of maltreatment in other areas; therefore, when our church has an indication or report of a child being maltreated in one area, we will take steps to protect the child from known risks and be extra attentive to and supportive of the child.

## INDICATORS & IMPACT

The majority of children who are abused will be symptomatic at some point. Bayou City is familiar with and will be attentive to indicators of childhood sexual abuse. These can include physical indicators like stained underclothing, injuries to genital areas, pain while using the bathroom, itching, or swelling in genital or vaginal areas. There are also emotional and behavioural indicators that would be otherwise atypical for children apart from some type of sexual abuse. Kids and Students ministry leaders at Bayou City have regular opportunities to observe behavior and are often privy to the details of their lives. As such, they are in a unique position to detect child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment and will be attentive to these indicators.



There are longer-term impacts that result from abuse. Understanding how child sexual abuse can traumatize the child and have lasting impact in the life of a surviving adult is a critical first step in preventing abuse and responding compassionately. Not every child will display the impact of their maltreatment and not every adult will experience the long-term consequence of their traumatic childhood experience but all are at increased risk. There is increasing evidence that there are real impacts on the emotional, physical, and spiritual health of people who suffer from these abuses as children.

## IDENTIFYING OFFENDERS

People who sexually abuse children use authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. Offenders can include strangers, acquaintances, or family members. A child is three times more likely to be abused by a recognized and trusted adult than by a stranger.<sup>2</sup> Most often, perpetrators gain access by building trust and then “groom” the victim and the victim’s caretakers before perpetrating the abuse. Grooming can include providing special gifts, attention, privileges, affection, etc. After gaining access, the abuser finds opportunities to isolate the victim and applies various means of control by leveraging a position of authority, physical force, or threats.

## PROTECTIVE SAFEGUARDS

There are several measures that are taken by Bayou City with the goal of maximizing child protection and safety. The first measure is making every effort to identify potential perpetrators before they serve in any capacity at church. This effort cannot be confined to criminal background checks since many perpetrators will have no prior criminal record. Meanwhile, a thorough screening process can prove most beneficial.

### Screening

Bayou City screens all staff and volunteers who work with minors. Volunteers with minors will have attended Bayou City for at least six months and will be members or planning to become members. These screening procedures include:

- The completion of a written application
- Contact with at least two character references who provide affirmation of the person’s capacity and trustworthiness with kids

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<sup>2</sup> Child Safeguarding Policy Guide p.52 - Tchividjian



- A background check with the following:
  - Identity Verification
  - Sex Offender Registry Check
  - Global Watchlist Check
  - National Criminal Records Check
  - County Criminal Records Check
- Social media screening

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child in any way or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may not work with children in any capacity. If through the screening process information is yielded indicating the person has been accused, convicted of a sexual or violent crime, or convicted of any other type of crime, Bayou City will contact its external certification specialist organization to assess the situation.

### **Safe Behaviors**

Upon successfully screening candidates, Bayou City is also committed to providing environments where safe behaviors are facilitated. Because most child abuse happens in isolated situations and because most adults seeking to harm a child prefer to do so in private, the following practices apply:

- At least two unrelated adults should be involved in environments when minors are present
- All interactions should be observable with clear line-of-site visibility to the adult and child through windows in doors, open doors, public meeting places, etc.
- During restroom breaks, two leaders must be present and the door left open. If an adult needs to use the restroom, the room should be clear before the adult is allowed to go inside.
- If a child requires a change of clothing, they must be changed by staff or paid childcare workers. Unpaid staff and volunteers are not allowed to change diapers or clothes.
- All interactions should be interruptible with open invitations to caregivers to visit the interactions and "interrupt" by dropping in unexpectedly during the activity or event.

### **Safe Touch**

Respect, safety, and appropriate boundaries are the guiding principles for physical contact between volunteers and children. The guidelines below are intended to avoid contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate. Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries.



Examples of **positive** and appropriate forms of affection:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder, back, or head
- Handshakes, high-fives, hand slapping, and fist taps
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, or arms of children (arms around shoulders)
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer

Examples of **negative** and inappropriate forms of affection (many of these behaviors that child molesters use to groom children or can be, in and of themselves, sexual abuse):

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces or any form of unwanted affection
- Kisses
- Holding children over four years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting needs
- Touching knees or legs
- Wrestling or tickling or piggyback rides
- Any type of massage

### **Sexual Language**

Bayou City recognizes that sexual language is more than mere jokes. It is a serious boundary violation. As such, sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendos, or descriptions of sexual experiences or habits is prohibited, along with the use of sexually suggestive music and media.

### **Extra Attention**

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from displaying favoritism toward a child by providing special gifts, favors, attention, or special acts of service not offered to other children.

### **Electronic Communications & Social Media**

The policies that apply to personal interactions between adults and kids apply likewise online. Communications through messaging apps, text, email, etc. should meet the best practice of having at least two adults included. Online interactions should not be secretive. One-on-one communications between adults and minors should be minimized and relate





primarily to communicating logistical details, etc. Group text, email, and group social apps should be preferred where interactions are both observable and interruptible.

### **Transportation**

Adults should not transport minors alone. With proper planning, two adults can be present when transporting kids to and from events when parents are not available for transportation.

## **ONGOING PROTECTIVE MEASURES**

### **Registration, Check-In, & Check-Out**

Bayou City requires that all children be registered in the church management system when they attend activities and events. This system allows parents to provide their key contact information and special instructions, allergies, etc., providing Bayou City the best opportunity to create a safe and secure environment.

Upon registration, all minors must be "checked-in" to the event at which they are registered. They receive a name badge with a security code and the parent/guardian receives a sticker with the same code. When the kids are picked up by parents/guardians, they display the matching sticker. If the parent pick up tag is lost, the parents display their driver's license. If the child's tag is lost, the child identifies their parents and parents provide first and last name along with their driver's license.

All volunteers also register and check-in with this system. This allows Bayou City to easily identify screened workers. Volunteers are also required to wear Kids Team t-shirts so they are easily identifiable.

### **Facility Security & Staff**

Bayou City makes a special effort to ensure our spaces for kids are safe and secure while also being an excellent environment for ministry. Clear visibility into each room is a high priority with windows in doors and the capacity to easily leave doors open. Effort is also made to provide all ministry to kids in sections of buildings that can be separately segregated and secured so that visitors cannot access the area without proper identification.

Security personnel are stationed at kids ministry areas with the responsibility to identify any high-risk situations and respond accordingly. These can be volunteers and off-duty police officers who are trained to spot and respond to high-risk situations. Bayou City also uses security cameras to provide information on the source of any issues to the appropriate authorities.



## POLICY VIOLATIONS

Bayou City takes policy violations seriously. Any staff, volunteer, parent, or attendee who witnesses a violation is expected to respond. A bystander who witnesses a potential violation can redirect or remind the potential offender about the activity that may be in question. Clear violations of the policy should be reported to the campus Kids or Students Pastor, depending on the ministry area. Reports can also be made to the campus Executive Pastor. Bayou City staff will enforce the policy, document the violation, and determine what other actions are required based on any prior circumstances and the nature of the violation.

## REPORTING ABUSE

It is the responsibility of the entire church to serve as active observers and reporters of potential abuse. Texas law requires anyone who thinks a child is being abused, neglected, or exploited to report it to the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS). A person who reports abuse in good faith is immune from civil or criminal liability. Anyone who does not report suspected abuse can be held liable for a misdemeanor or felony.

If you suspect a child has been abused, report to DFPS at **1-800-252-5400** or use the Texas Abuse Hotline website at [txabusehotline.org](http://txabusehotline.org). The DFPS representative will help determine if abuse has occurred and whether it should be investigated by the local authorities. If you need assistance reporting, immediately notify Bayou City Staff for assistance. Do not interview the child regarding the suspected abuse as this could be considered leading the child. Do not discuss the suspected abuse with others. All information regarding the child should be kept confidential with DFPS authorities and the Bayou City staff member who may be assisting you..

