

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY & PROCEDURES

For Kids & Students Volunteers of Bayou City Fellowship



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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 (defined as those under 18) are not always protected. Research and experts estimate that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are 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 children¹. 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 the age of 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

¹ Child Safeguarding Policy Guide p.11 - Tchividjian

this important kingdom work.

DEFINITIONS

It is important that we have a shared understanding of what constitutes abuse. Studies indicate that the majority of 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 when 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 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 the 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. In younger children, 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. In older children and teenagers, physical indicators may include unexplained bruises and injuries, depression, withdrawal from normal activities, sudden changes in self-care and appearance, and/or self-harm. There are also emotional and behavioral 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 a lasting impact on 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 stranger². 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

² Child Safeguarding Policy Guide p.52 - Tchividjian

potential perpetrators before they serve with Kids and Students 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
- MinistrySafe Certification: a training that equips staff members and volunteers to understand the facts and misconceptions related to child sexual abuse.
- A background check with the following:
 - Identity Verification
 - Sex Offender Registry Check
 - Global Watchlist Check
 - National Criminal Records Check
 - County Criminal Records Check
- Contact with at least two character references who provide affirmation of the person’s capacity and trustworthiness with kids or students
- 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.

Safe Behaviors for Kids Volunteers

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 where 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 Behaviors for Students Volunteers

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:

- To ensure that adults are never alone with one student, volunteers should follow the **Rule of Three**: there should always be two unrelated adults with one student, or one adult with two students (who are not related to the adult).
- 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.
- If volunteers are hosting students in their home, they must follow the guidelines below:
 - In all ways strive to be above reproach. If you think it is questionable, reach out to a Students Staff member and ask, or don't do it.
 - There must be at least three people present the entire time (Rule of Three). It should never be just one adult and one student. Instead, there should be at least two unrelated adults and one student or two students and one unrelated adult.
 - Permission must be granted by a parent of each student.
 - All Students gatherings in the homes of volunteers must be approved by a Students Staff member.
 - In an unforeseen circumstance where one student is dropped off early or needs to stay late, the adult should step outside into a public area with line-of-site until another student or adult arrives. If waiting outside proves to be difficult due to weather or other circumstances, the adult should call the parent/guardian of the student and remain on the phone until another student or adult arrives.
- All interactions should be interruptible with open invitations to caregivers to visit the interactions and “interrupt” by dropping in unexpectedly during the

activity or gathering.

- At gatherings (ex. Sunday mornings, midweek, discipleship groups, junior high, or high school, etc.), there must be at least one adult for 10 students. On Outreach Trips, the ratio must be one adult for five students.
- For overnight gatherings, specific instructions will be given based on location and space, but, in general, we will follow:
 - Sleeping Arrangements: Volunteers will never share a bed with a student. If volunteers and students sleep in the same room, there must be two unrelated adults present. In the event of the overnight arrangements not including standard beds, each staff, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a “one-person-to-one bag or blanket” rule will be observed.
 - Nudity: Staff and volunteers are prohibited from being nude in the presence of minors in their care. Staff and volunteers will also prevent situations where minors are nude in the presence of others. If any gathering requires minors to change clothes, there must be a plan for adequate privacy (individual bathroom stalls, closed doors, etc.).
- A dating, romantic, or sexual relationship between an adult volunteer or staff member and a student is always inappropriate and will result in immediate disciplinary and legal action taken.

Safe Touch for Kids Volunteers

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, tickling or piggyback rides
- Any type of massage

Safe Touch for Students Volunteers

Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but it is vital that staff members and volunteer leaders do not blur or cross the lines. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the student, and never based upon *your* emotional needs.
- Your personal behavior must foster trust at all times.
- Pat a hand only on the shoulder or back when doing so in an encouraging manner.
- When hugging someone of the opposite gender, hugs should be limited to side hugs. They should be brief and in public view.
- Look for opportunities to give plenty of "high fives" and "fist bumps," unless this makes a student feel uncomfortable.
- Shake hands or only briefly put an arm around the student's shoulder.

AVOID the following interactions:

- A sexual relationship with a student is never acceptable.
- Never touch a student in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals), even if a student has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- No sitting on laps.
- No hand-holding, unless part of a worship/prayer gathering or a group game.

- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as romantically or sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a student between the navel and the knees.
- Never carry a student piggyback or on your shoulders.
- Never kiss a student or give (or receive) massages.
- Never place hands beneath a student's clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in "horse-play," or wrestle with a student.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint for the protection of the child or others.

A student's preference *not* to be touched must be respected.

Physical contact and affection should be given only when able to be observed or when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

Appropriate Attire for Volunteers

As ministers, our appearance should reflect and protect the reputation of the Gospel; therefore, staff and volunteers are expected to dress in this way and encourage students to do the same.

Never be nude in the presence of students in ministry programs. For retreats, Outreach trips, and special events, adult leaders are to be completely dressed before coming out of the bathroom after showering.

Dress appropriately and modestly at all times, according to the nature of the event or activity.

Guys

- Undergarments must always be covered by outer garments
- No revealing or form-fitting clothing.
- Sleeveless shirts must have sides to them and not cut open to the waist.
- Length of shorts should be at least mid-thigh.
- For water activities, board shorts and swim trunks are permitted. Swim trunks must be of appropriate length, at least mid-thigh. Jammers,

speedos, and other similar form-fitting swimwear are only permitted under appropriately lengthed swimsuits.

- Shirts must be worn, unless at the beach, swimming, or participating in water activities.
- Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn. Sleeping in just underwear or boxers is not considered "modest" and therefore not appropriate.

Girls

- Undergarments must always be covered by outer garments.
- No revealing or form-fitting clothing.
- Length of shorts/skirts/dresses should be at least mid-thigh.
- No shirts with low necklines or that show midriff.
- For water activities, one-piece suits and conservative tankini-type suits that cover the midriff are permitted. Two-piece bikinis are not permitted.
- Shirts and shorts must be worn, unless at the beach, swimming, or participating in water activities.
- Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn. Sleeping in just undergarments is not considered "modest" and therefore not appropriate.

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.

Sex/Sexuality Conversations with Students

A student may have questions/struggles in the area of sex/sexuality and desire to confide in a trusted adult leader for guidance. Please proceed with great caution, teaching with sensitivity and from a biblical perspective. Always inform a Students Staff member.

- Avoid discussing anything of a sexual nature with students of the opposite gender.
- If a student's questions or comments on a sexual matter become too detailed

or explicit in a group setting, the leader should use discretion and set up another time to meet with this student. For any follow-up meetings, inform a Students Staff member *first* and meet in a public, easily observed location.

- These conversations should never be held over electronic communication (ex. text, email, social media).
- If the adult leader feels uncomfortable or ill-equipped to address the topic or conversation, please stop the conversation immediately and reach out to a Students Staff member.
- When in doubt as to whether a conversation could be interpreted as a “sexually oriented conversation,” treat the conversation as such and follow this policy. When possible, clarify the question/topic with a Students Staff member.

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 for Kids Volunteers

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 communication 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.

Electronic Communication & Social Media for Students Volunteers

All communication with students must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication (texting, emails, social media DM's, etc.) should be readily available to share with the Students Staff or a parent.

Texting between ministry leaders and students is permissible only as outlined below. In general, texts should occur in “group” form, whenever possible. If texting one-on-one with a student is occurring, they must follow the guidelines below:

- All communication should be beneficial for the student, and devoid of crude and offensive language and content.

- Be granted permission by each student's parent.
- When sending texts, emails, social media DM's, etc., write it as if their parents are reading it. You should be able to copy their parents, the Students Staff, and Elders on any message you send out.
- Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts.
- Do not share photos and/or videos of a sexual or suggestive nature. Refer to the "Sex/Sexuality Conversations with Students" section to navigate topics via texting/electronic communication.

As a volunteer in the Students ministry, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in the Students ministry at Bayou City Fellowship. Be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect the Gospel well. All social media posts should be above reproach, beneficial for the student, and devoid of crude and offensive language and content. Do not comment or reply to a student's post that is inappropriate or questionable. All interactions should be above reproach and reflect the integrity and values of Bayou City Fellowship's Students Ministry.

- The use of Snapchat (or other similar applications) with students is not permitted.
- Applications that allow anonymous messaging are not permitted.

Transportation:

Adults should not transport minors alone. With proper planning, the **Rule of Three:** (two unrelated adults with one student, or one adult with two students) can be followed when transporting students to and from gatherings when parents are not available for transportation. You must have permission granted from the parents to transport students. The following guidelines must also be followed:

- Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops in a non-public place must be avoided.
- Absent of an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation apps for directions).
- Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
- No one should be double-buckled.

ONGOING PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Kids 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 with the best opportunity to create a safe and secure environment.

Upon registration, all minors must be "checked-in" to the gathering at which they are registered. They will 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.

Students & Students Volunteers Registration & Check-In

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

On Sundays, Wednesdays, and other gathering times, all students and volunteers must "check-in." This helps us identify our students and ensure everyone is accounted for while attending. Volunteers are also asked to check in. This allows Students Staff to easily identify screened workers. Volunteers are required to wear a Bayou City Students nametag to help students and other volunteers identify them.

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.

An 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 in Kids and Students 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 Staff, depending on the ministry area. Reports can also be made to the Campus Pastor, if applicable. 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. 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.

RECEIPT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Child Protection Policy and Procedure is an important document in helping assure Bayou City Kids and Students are safe and protected. The contents of this policy may be changed at any time at the discretion of Bayou City Fellowship leadership. Please read the following statements and sign below to indicate your receipt and acknowledgment of the Bayou City Fellowship Child Protection Policy and Procedure.

- I understand that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand the above statements and have received a copy of the Bayou City Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- I understand that I must comply with the policies described in the Bayou City Fellowship Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- I understand that all adults are responsible for the protection of children and that I have a responsibility to report any policy violations to a staff member and report suspected abuse to the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS).

Signature

Printed Name

Date