

Moyock Baptist Church

Safety Policy for Children's Programs

Preamble

We believe that God has a special place in His heart for those who are the most vulnerable.

We believe that the children entrusted to our care, whatever the occasion, deserve our thoughtful and vigilant protection, that they may be protected from inappropriate behavior on the part of staff, volunteers, and peers.

We also believe that those serving in our ministries, whether paid or volunteer, deserve an environment in which they are protected from false accusations of misconduct.

Our purpose for establishing this Safety Policy and supporting procedures is to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and our determination to protect the reputation of those who who serve, and of the church as a whole.

This Safety Policy for Children's Programs reflects these beliefs and purposes. It cannot cover every scenario and, therefore, cannot replace good judgment. All staff, volunteers, and parents are encouraged to bring any concerns to the attention of church leadership.

Our promise

Moyock Baptist Church (MBC) promises to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety, and the spiritual growth, of our children and youth, as well as that of our workers (employees and volunteers) with children and youth.

We will follow reasonable safety and measures when selecting and recruiting workers.

We will implement prudent operational procedures in all areas of programming and care.

We will recruit staff and volunteers in sufficient numbers to exercise appropriate supervision of children, and to react properly to emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.

We will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies.

We will communicate completely and honestly with parents about our policies and procedures.

And, we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of North Carolina General Statutes.

General Provisions

The general provisions which follow apply to all ministries of the church, except where they are modified by policies or procedures specific to a given ministry.

Definitions

“Paid staff”, also known as “employees”, shall be defined as any person who receives financial compensation from the church for ministry or service. Examples include, but are not limited to, the Pastor, Summer Ministry Interns, Church Secretary, Custodian, and MBC Preschool employees.

“Volunteers” shall be defined as any person who serves, without monetary compensation, in a capacity with access to, or supervision of, preschoolers, children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Examples include, but are not limited to, Sunday School teachers, mission group leaders, nursery or children’s church workers, youth ministry workers, Vacation Bible School teachers and workers, and chaperones for youth or children’s off-campus events.

“Preschoolers” shall be defined as any child, age 6 or younger, who has not yet completed kindergarten.

“Children” shall be defined as any child, age 6-12, who has not yet completed the 5th grade.

“Youth” shall be defined as any child, age 12-17, who is in middle school or high school.

For the purposes of this policy, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise, the term “children” shall be inclusive of preschoolers, children, and youth as defined above.

Staff Service Guidelines

All paid staff and volunteers who work with preschoolers, children, and youth on behalf of Moyock Baptist Church shall be:

- at least 21 years old, except in the instance of an official undergraduate internship, and
- at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.

Enlistment and Recruitment of Staff

Paid staff shall be recruited by the committee designated for the purpose in the MBC bylaws. For instance,

- The pastor shall be recruited by the Pastor Search Committee.
- The secretary and custodian shall be recruited by the Church Council.
- The summer ministry intern shall be recruited by the Deacons.
- The preschool director and staff shall be recruited by the Preschool Committee.

A written employment application must be submitted by all candidates for paid staff positions, and at least one interview must be conducted by the committee responsible for that position. All interviews of paid staff will require a minimum of two interviewers, and at least one interview must be conducted in person.

All references submitted by the candidate will be contacted, with the goal of assessing the candidate's skills and character. No candidate shall be offered employment, nor begin work, until the background check described below has been completed, and the information returned to the church for the committee's review.

Volunteers shall be enlisted by the committee, director, or team leader responsible for that particular ministry. No volunteer shall be enlisted who has not been attending services or otherwise participating in the life of the church for at least six months.

Screening

All paid staff and volunteers will submit to a criminal background check selected by the church. At a minimum, the background check shall search the National Criminal Database and the National Sex Offender Registry. Additional checks of state and county level records shall be done at the discretion of the Pastor or the Deacons.

This background check will be repeated every two years, or at any time requested by the Pastor or the Deacons.

No one convicted of any crime with a child victim, nor any person listed on the national sex offender registry, may be employed or volunteer in any ministry position that involves preschoolers, children, or youth.

Any staff member or volunteer who will be driving preschoolers, children, or youth shall also submit to a motor vehicle driving record search. No individual who has been convicted of a serious moving violation within the last five years shall be allowed to drive children on behalf of the church.

Whenever a background check reveals anything other than "no records found", that information shall be reported to the Pastor and the chairman of the Deacons prior to the candidate beginning service. The Pastor and the chairman of the Deacons shall make a decision regarding the suitability of the candidate, and may interview the candidate prior to making that determination.

The decision of the Pastor and the chairman of the Deacons shall be final. In the event that they cannot agree, the matter shall be referred to the Deacon body for a final decision.

All background check reports and personal information shall be held in confidence.

Child Safety Training

Paid staff and volunteers shall complete an initial child safety training course, and an annual refresher course, selected by the Deacons and the Preschool Committee.

All paid staff and volunteers will receive a copy of the safety policy and be required to sign acknowledging they have received, read, and will abide by this policy. They will also sign that they have completed the required child safety training.

Guidelines for Supervision of Children

Two non-related adults will be present at all times for activities in or out of classrooms.

- When unexpected absences leave only one adult in the classroom, then the door to the classroom will remain open at all times, such that others in the church building may check on the classroom at random times. If no other adults are present in the church building to provide this oversight, then the class or event must be postponed or canceled.
- While we acknowledge that adult leaders may need to leave the classroom for brief periods of time, to make copies, visit the restroom, retrieve supplies, etc., it is expected that these absences will be brief, and that for the majority of the time, both adults will be physically present in the classroom.
- Only adults, age 18 and older, count as a “non-related adults”. While we want to encourage and mentor our youth under 18 into positions of leadership and trust, we cannot count them as an adult for the purposes of maintaining safety protocols.
- Any one-on-one interactions with children will be with an open door and visibility to others. One-on-one interaction will be avoided, and should not ever be a regular, routine, or accepted way to conduct any activity.

While we acknowledge that many of our classes are open to all who wish to attend, and that attendance cannot be accurately predicted in all instances, we will strive to maintain the following ratios of adult leaders to children in our ministry.

- Preschoolers – two adults for the first twelve preschoolers, and one additional adult for each additional six preschoolers (or fraction thereof).
- Children – two adults for the first sixteen children, and one additional adult for each additional eight children (or fraction thereof).
- Youth – two adults for the first twenty youth, and one additional adult for each additional ten youth (or fraction thereof).

Teachers and leaders of children shall collect, or be provided with, the cell phone number of at least one parent of each child attending the class or event which they are supervising.

At the conclusion of an activity or class,

- Preschoolers and children shall be released directly to their parents, guardians, or designees.
- Youth may be dismissed from class “on their own”, but leaders shall ensure that youth do not leave the church campus except with parents or those authorized by parents.
- Youth old enough to drive may drive themselves, their siblings, and other youth to and from on-campus activities, with permission from the parents of all involved.

Whenever MBC sponsors an activity involving children, any member or parent may visit and observe the event or activity, at any time, unannounced. All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while the room is occupied by children or youth. The windows in those doors must remain unobscured by decorations and signs.

Children and youth will have access to a phone, and will be permitted to make phone calls to their parents at any time.

Diapering and Restroom

While diapering infants, the door to the bathroom in the nursery or preschool room shall remain open.

Children age 3 and older shall be allowed privacy while changing clothes or toileting. A staff person will stand at the door of the bathroom and assist only if necessary.

Any children requiring assistance with changing clothes or toileting will be identified, and that information will be shared with the other teacher(s), and discussed with the parent when the child is picked up at the end of the class.

Off-Campus Events

Events that take place away from the church campus are often important for the spiritual development of children.

Chaperones

For off-campus activities that do not involve an overnight stay, two non-related adults shall must be present to serve as chaperones, and a sufficient number of chaperones shall be present to meet the supervision guidelines described above.

For off-campus activities involving an overnight stay, two non-related adults of each gender must be present to serve as chaperones. If the children involved are all of the same gender, then only two adults of that gender need be present.

- If a parent is present for each of the children involved, then the provision of having two adults of each gender does not apply.
- Sleeping accommodations shall be single gender, with males and females in separate rooms.
- If sleeping accommodations are shared between children and adults, at least two adults shall be in the room. Under no circumstances shall a single adult share a room with children or youth.
- If youth are sleeping in a room without adults, then the adult chaperones shall take reasonable steps to insure that the youth remain in their room throughout the night.
- It is preferred that each individual child, youth or adult have a bed of his/her own. The use of double beds is to be discouraged.
- Under no circumstances shall an adult share a bed with a child or youth, except in the case of an adult chaperone with his/her own child.

In the event of off-campus activities hosted by another entity (Caswell, Camp Cale, etc.), the Youth Ministry Committee or the Deacons shall review the child safety protocols, and the sleeping arrangements provided, to ensure that they meet the spirit and intent of this policy. Any discrepancies shall be communicated with parents prior to the event.

Parental Permission

Prior to any off-campus event, leaders shall distribute to parents a “fact sheet” describing the nature of the event, the departure and return times, and the transportation plan.

Leaders shall collect written permission from the parent for any child participating in an off-campus event. Children shall not be taken from the church campus without parental permission.

Transportation by Church Bus

The church bus, driven by a qualified driver, is the preferred means of transporting large groups of children to and from off-campus events.

A qualified driver is an adult with a current Commercial Driver’s License (CDL), with the Passenger (P) endorsement, who has completed the background check process with a driving history check. No other individual shall operate the church bus. All laws and regulations regarding the operation of a commercial motor vehicle shall be followed.

At least one other adult, other than the driver, shall ride on the bus to provide supervision of children while the bus is being driven to and from the event.

If the church bus is the official mode of travel to and from the event, all children must travel on the bus.

- We acknowledge that, on some occasions, it may be more convenient for parents to make other transportation arrangements, and we will work with parents to accommodate their needs.
- Exceptions to this provision must be requested in advance. Examples of such exceptions are, but not limited to:
 - a youth is working, and will be coming to the event at a later time
 - the parent chooses to transport the child directly,
 - the child has a medical appointment, or some other obligation, that would make it more convenient to travel directly to the event.
- A request for an exception should be communicated in writing by the parent(s) to the adults responsible for the event.

Transportation By Private Vehicle

If the church bus is not being used as the primary means of transportation, then transportation will be done by private vehicle.

- All adults who will be driving must have a valid driver's license, proper insurance, and submit to a background check and a driving history check, as described above.
- No one under the age of 18 may transport children on behalf of the church.
- At least two adults shall be in each vehicle, except in the case of a parent transporting his/her own children (and those from whom the driver has obtained specific written permission from the child's parent).

Special Provisions for Particular Ministries or Events

The general provisions described above are modified for particular ministries or events, as follows:

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School is a one-time annual event that is unique in its need for a large staffing contingent. It is not unusual to recruit one-time volunteers among parents of children and others who have no other role at our church, and may not attend our church or any church at all.

With that in mind we have allowed the following exceptions, with the goal of providing adequate supervision for the large number of children in attendance, while in no way compromising our commitment to safety for our children.

- Adults who do not attend MBC, or have not attended for the required six months, may nonetheless serve as VBS teachers and workers.
- All adult staff must submit their information to complete a background check prior to volunteering, even if those background check results may not be received prior to the beginning of their volunteer assignments.
- These volunteers will be paired in a given class with at least one adult who does meet our policy requirements for attendance and/or membership, and who has completed the background check and child safety training described above.
- Youth under 18 may assist with classes, but at no time will they be the only person present in a classroom.

MBC Preschool

The church operates a week-day preschool program under the supervision of our Preschool Committee. Employees of the MBC Preschool shall abide by the protocols set forth in this policy.

Additional guidelines and protocols related to child safety are found in the MBC Preschool Parent Handbook and Employee Handbook.

Private Use of Our Facilities

Occasionally the church approves the use of the facilities by private individuals for use for events not sponsored by the church. Examples of such activities include, but are not limited to, Boy Scout or Girl Scout meetings, home school gathering or classes, private music lessons, or private birthday party.

If these activities serve children, each parent of each child must sign an acknowledgment that they understand that the activity is not sponsored by the church, the adults providing the event have not been vetted by the church, and that they will hold the church harmless in the event of any injury or misconduct.

Reporting A Suspected Incident of Child Abuse or Neglect

North Carolina requires that any allegation of child abuse or neglect be reported to the Department of Social Services or the Sheriff's Department.

It is not the job of the church, its paid staff, or its volunteers, to assess the truth or reasonableness of the allegation. We acknowledge that we do not have the power to exonerate anyone.

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at, or is revealed to, a paid staff member or volunteer at MBC, that individual will immediately take the following steps, in this order:

- ensure the safety of the child, if the child is at that moment under the supervision of the adult in question, which may include calling 911 to report that a child is in immediate danger,
- report the incident to the Currituck County Department of Social Services, or to the Currituck County Sheriff's Department,
- if permitted by the Currituck County Department of Social Services or the Sheriff's Department, contact the pastor or his designee, (unless that would be in conflict with protecting the child, in which case, the call would be made to the Chairman of the Deacons.)

Under no circumstances, unless specifically authorized by the representative of the Department of Social Services, shall the adult contact or discuss the matter with anyone else, including the child's parent(s).

The church, its officers, paid staff, and volunteers shall cooperate fully and transparently with representatives of the Department of Social Services and with law enforcement agencies and officers as requested.

Acknowledgments

The church gratefully acknowledges the following agencies which provided or published materials used to create this policy and its protocols.

“Safety and Security in your Ministry” produced by Ministry Safe, an online publication

“Protecting our Church and Children: What church Leaders must know”, compiled by Jill B. Carter and published by Childhood Ministry, Baptist State convention

“The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries”, by Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits, published by New Growth Press

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy

“Caring Well: A Report from the SBC Sexual Abuse Advisory Group,” SBC

“Sample policy- Small membership church,”, The United Methodist church publication, General Resolution 1996