

North Hills Church

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

Approved As Of: 2024



**NORTH HILLS
CHURCH**



INTRODUCTION

At North Hills Church we are excited about ministering to children and youth because Jesus was excited about ministering to them. He said those people who are greatest in his kingdom are the ones who have humbled themselves and become like children. In fact, Jesus went so far as to say that unless people become like little children, they will not even enter his kingdom.

Jesus went on to say that accepting and ministering to a child in his name is the same as doing it to him. He placed huge importance on the care and attention to children provided by his followers. He also said that to victimize one of these precious children is altogether unacceptable and sinful. In Jesus's words, it is better for an adult to have a huge rock tied around his or her neck and be thrown into the sea to drown than to hurt a child in the name of Christianity.

The truth is, the people of God (his church) have not always shared Jesus's position on protecting and caring for children and youth. Child abuse of all kinds has been minimized and covered while those people (even within the church) who are harming children are left in positions of access to them.

North Hills Church is committed not only to teach but also to do everything in our power to practice the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 18:1-6. We will value children and youth. We will seek to lead them to Jesus the Savior and Lord. We will view children and youth not as the future of the church but as a part of the church. And we will protect them from people who would want to take advantage of them and hurt them.

The Child Safety Policy that follows has been carefully developed with these aims in mind. We believe the guidelines in this policy will provide clear protection for all children and youth in our care and will serve well the many faithful volunteers who are motivated by the Lord to invest in young hearts. We also trust it will discourage and protect against anyone with ill intent.

It is our prayer that every child and youth who participates in our programs at NHC will experience the love of Jesus over and over again—and that not even one of them will be harmed while in our care. Thank you for joining us in this prayer and for being vigilant for the sake of the ones Jesus so values!

DEFINITIONS

- NHC – North Hills Church
- Screened Volunteer – A volunteer who has gone through the required steps of the screening and training process and has been approved to work with children
- Child/Children – Any person under 18 years of age participating in a church-sponsored program where NHC provides screened volunteer childcare (Please note that the parent or guardian is responsible for supervision and care in situations that fall outside of the parameters of this definition.)
- Staff Member – A paid employee of North Hills Church
- Child Abuse – Any wrongful treatment of a child which results in any non-accidental injury to the child, including physical, emotional, and/or sexual injury. Evidence of injury may include scars, bruises, wounds, medical findings, etc.
- Child Sexual Abuse – Committing, permitting, or encouraging the commission of any sexual act, touching, or contact, intercourse, or other sexual gratification, or exposing a child to any material that is sexually charged. This includes any physical sexual contact or non-physical exposure to sexually-charged behavior or material. (For more information on what types of activities are included in this definition, go to: <http://law.justia.com/codes/south-carolina/2012/title-16/chapter-15>.)
- Child Safety: Abuse Prevention Committee – Comprised of the Pastor of Connections and Communications (Ryan Ferguson), Director of Children’s Ministry (Ruthie Smith), Director of Student Ministries (Tim Wadsworth), Executive Director of Finance & Operations (Becca Crocker), and Executive Assistant of Operations and Staff Leadership (Heather Mikhail)
- Child Safety: Abuse Response Committee – comprised of the Director of Crisis Counseling (Lynn Adams), Pastor of Worship Arts and Communications (Ryan Ferguson), and Teaching Pastor (Peter Hubbard)

GENERAL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- NHC is subject to South Carolina law regarding the protection of children and the reporting of suspected child abuse in any form.
- NHC will endeavor to protect children by:
 - Ensuring volunteers and staff members are known to ministry leaders.
 - Maintaining high standards of screening.
 - Requiring interviews of any potential workers.
 - Creating opportunities for training.
 - Limiting opportunities for abuse to occur.

SCREENING

NHC will implement safety measures by requiring the following:

- Potential volunteers are required to be a member of NHC for at least six months prior to serving with children. Exceptions to this requirement will be made for the following:
 - If an individual is under the age of 18, it is permissible for the membership requirement to be replaced by a recommendation from an NHC ministry leader (Elder, Pastor or Director, Life Group leader, or individual of similar ministry leadership).
 - A high school senior who has attended Alive Student Ministry at least one full semester before graduating has until the end of December to become a member, and the required six-month membership waiting period can be waived. This exception window closes after the November membership class.
- All potential staff members and any potential volunteers involved in the care of children must complete our confidential Employment Application or Child/Youth Worker Application, as applicable. This application asks questions related to criminal history and includes a request for personal references. Once completed, the application is submitted to the NHC leader responsible for the ministry area. NHC may also reach out to additional individuals as circumstances dictate.
- A national, criminal background screening will be performed on all staff members and any volunteers over 18 desiring to work with children.
 - Background screening will be conducted by Protect My Ministry, an independent, fee-based service. Oversight of the screening process will be performed by the Executive Assistant of Operations and Staff Leadership.
 - Background screening will be completed on a five-year rotation.

- If information is reported within the background screening which is a potential cause for concern, the NHC leader responsible for the ministry area will discuss that situation with the individual.
- The Child Safety: Abuse Response Committee will be responsible for making decisions on individuals with alerts noted on their background screening results. Adults who have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse are not permitted to provide supervisory services in any church-sponsored activity or program for children. In addition, known sex offenders are prohibited from entering designated child classrooms and areas.
- All staff members and any volunteer desiring to work with children will receive a copy of this policy. They will be asked to sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this policy.
- Interviews will be conducted with all potential staff members and any potential volunteer wanting to get involved in the care of children.
- Approval for hiring or volunteering is determined after all of the above steps are completed.
- Information obtained during the screening process will be kept confidential. Access will be limited to the Child Safety: Abuse Response Committee and NHC staff directly responsible for the ministry area in which the staff member or volunteer would be serving.

TRAINING

- Training for staff members and volunteers working with children will be both general and specific to the area in which they serve.
- Training is divided into three categories: prerequisite, supplemental, and ongoing training.
 - Prerequisite Training:
 - Online training will be provided through Protect My Ministry for individuals 18 years of age and older. This training is required to be completed one time, prior to the start of volunteering or within 30 days of employment, whichever is applicable.
 - Once this training has been completed, volunteers may begin working with children.
 - Supplemental Training:
 - NHC will provide church-wide training related to child safety on a regular rotation throughout the year. All volunteers working with children are required to attend this training.

- This training must be complete within one year of the volunteer's approval date.
- At this point the volunteer is referred to as a Screened Volunteer due to their completion of all screening and training requirements.
- Ongoing Training:
 - Each individual ministry area will hold annual trainings which will include training on the NHC Child Safety Policy and specific safety procedures by area.
 - NHC will provide screened volunteer training updates for staff members and screened volunteers as beneficial.
 - NHC will require repeat training every three years.

NOTE: A checklist will be utilized to ensure that all of the required steps noted under "Screening" and "Training" have been completed. A copy of this checklist is included as **Attachment A** to this policy.

SUPERVISION

- Individuals involved in the custody and care of children must observe the "two person rule." This rule prohibits one-on-one interaction between a staff member / screened volunteer and a child in secluded or isolated areas. See individual ministry worker manuals for further detail on how this requirement is implemented by age-group.
- All rooms used by adults and minors together should be accessible (unlocked doors) and have open visibility (a window in the door or the door left wide open).
- Ministry leaders and designated individuals will observe and periodically make unannounced visits to classrooms, small groups, and meeting areas involving children and screened volunteers.
- Parents or legal guardians are welcome to visit (1-2 times) any program involving their child; however, known sex offenders are prohibited from entering designated child classrooms. Visitors will be asked to wear an identifying marker noting their visitor status.
- Children in nursery through 4th grade will follow check-in / check-out procedures. A pick up tag matching the child's number is required for pick up. North Hills Church strongly encourages parents to pick up their own children, although parents may give their pick up tag to someone else to check out their child. In both instances, parents assume responsibility for their child after they are checked out.
- If assisting children with the bathroom, screened volunteers should not enter the bathroom with one child alone, but rather another adult or child must be present.

- No staff member or screened volunteer is ever to administer corporal punishment under any circumstances.
- No staff member or screened volunteer is ever to be in a car with only one child. There should always be another adult present or a group of children.
- We acknowledge that as our children get older, there is valuable discipleship and interaction that can take place with an adult. For this reason, parents assume responsibility for all meetings between their child and adult screened volunteers from Alive Student Ministry.
- In instances where meeting on campus would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate staff member may meet individually with a child with the knowledge of at least one other staff member. Meetings must be in an open area, in an office with the door open, or in an office with a closed door that has a window.

For further information related to the procedures of specific ministry areas and age-groups, click below:

- For student policies, click [here](#).
- For children's policies, click [here](#).

REPORTING

- South Carolina law requires that certain professionals report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. These individuals are known as "mandated reporters." Mandated reporters of child abuse or neglect in South Carolina include, but are not limited to: physicians, nurses, dentists, emergency medical services, mental health or allied health professionals, teachers, counselors, principals, school attendance officers, childcare workers, foster parents, police or law enforcement officers, undertakers, funeral home directors or their employees, film processors, computer technicians, judges, and clergy (subject to laws governing privileged communication).
- Suspected, Reported, Discovered – With reference to child abuse, child sexual abuse or neglect, a report must be made to the proper authorities when a mandated reporter has "reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect. A decision to report must be based upon a reasonable belief that a child has been or may be abused or neglected. Thus, mandatory reporters need not have conclusive proof that a child has been abused or neglected prior to reporting abuse or neglect to the proper authorities." (Information for Mandatory Reporters, November 2010, <http://childlaw.sc.edu>)

- While not every individual is a mandated reporter, the law encourages all persons to report, and the moral imperative to protect children extends to all situations where abuse is suspected, reported or discovered.
- The safety of our children is the responsibility of all staff members and screened volunteers who work with children. Both staff members and screened volunteers are responsible to report all suspected, reported or discovered cases of child abuse, including injury suspected to have occurred as a result of corporal punishment. Failure to do so endangers children and in some cases is a violation of South Carolina law.
- In the event of suspected, reported, or discovered child abuse, the following course of action should be taken:
 - **Listen**
 - Compassionately—The child has potentially been hurt to a great degree.
 - Carefully—Ask the person for permission to write down things in order to remember and attempt to record as much of the victim's actual words as is possible. Specifically—the role at this point is not of investigator. Focus on the following questions for a Minimal Facts Interview:
 - Who—child's name, age, date of birth, address, present location, names and ages of siblings, parent's name and address, reason(s) for concern, any known history of violence in the home, the name of the alleged perpetrator if known
 - What—What happened to the child? Do not ask leading questions. Rather, restate what the child is saying and then say things like, "Tell me more about that."
 - Where—Where did the alleged abuse occur?
 - **Think**
 - Does the information you have received lead you to suspect that abuse has or may happen? Remember, you are not required to have conclusive proof. The law states that you must only "have a reason to believe." If so, a report must be made.
 - If in doubt, contact the Julie Valentine Center (864-331-0560), the Department of Social Services (DSS) Child Abuse Hotline (864-467-7750), or law enforcement, as appropriate.
 - **Speak**
 - Do not communicate commitments or promises to the victim that cannot be kept. However, do tell them the situation will be taken seriously and their story will not be shared unless it keeps them safe.
 - Do communicate hope and continued care for them.
 - Do communicate that you have to report the abuse.

- **Do**
 - Immediately notify the staff member supervising your ministry area for assistance through the reporting process.
 - Promptly complete a Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form (see **Attachment B**) and turn it in to your supervising staff member within 24 hours.
 - If the alleged perpetrator is a parent, guardian, or person acting as a parent, report to DSS (864-467-7750). If the alleged perpetrator is any other person, inform local law enforcement (864-271-5210).
 - If you have any questions or concerns before calling to report, a staff member will gladly help.
 - Inform a member of the Child Safety: Abuse Response Committee of your report.

RESPONSE

- The care and safety of the victim is our first priority. We will not confront the accused without the approval of the local child protection service or law enforcement authorities.
- We will not prejudge any person accused, but we will take any allegation of child abuse seriously and will reach out in love and support to the victim and the victim's family, extending whatever resources are needed. We will fully cooperate with any authorities investigating an allegation of child abuse.
- We will treat the accused with dignity and respect. If the accused is a screened volunteer, that person will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties during the investigation. If cleared by authorities, the individual may be able to resume regular ministry service. If the accused is a staff member of NHC, the individual will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties; however, compensation will be maintained during the investigation process. The staff member may be able to return to work once cleared by authorities. In both cases NHC reserves the right to discontinue service regardless of law enforcement decision.
- The Pastor of Worship Arts and Communications (Ryan Ferguson) will be the official spokesperson of NHC. All inquiries or requests for information from the media, attorneys, or any other parties shall be referred to the official spokesperson. No third party other than the official spokesperson is to release any information regarding any alleged incident of child abuse without the express approval of the official spokesperson.

- All communication by the official spokesperson to the media, congregation, and public will protect the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. All efforts in responding to the alleged incident of child abuse shall be documented by the official spokesperson and maintained in a secure and confidential file.

MISSION TRIPS

NHC recognizes the importance and value of short-term mission trips. In an effort to make these trips safe, we require the following:

1. Anyone participating from NHC must be a member.
2. If anyone participating is not a screened volunteer, they must complete a background check and the online training.
3. Anyone under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
4. Participants from other churches must provide detailed information about their own child safety process. This will be reviewed by the Child Safety Prevention Committee. Upon review, non-NHC participants may be asked to complete the background check and online training.

This specifically means that all participants must complete the Safe and Sound live training before they depart on their mission trip.

POLICY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have received and read the Child Safety Policy of North Hills Church. I understand the importance of the material included in this policy. I support and will choose to honor this policy while serving or working at NHC.

Name (please print)

Date

Signature

Attachment A



NORTH HILLS CHURCH

Staff Member & Screened Volunteer Checklist

Name: _____

Date: _____

Ministry Area: _____

Required Prior to Service:

☐ Member for 6 months

Date Joined: _____

Or ☐ If under 18, Receipt of Ministry Leader Recommendation

Name: _____

☐ Parent or Guardian Reference

Date: _____

Or ☐ If graduating HS senior, member after 6 months Alive involvement

Alive Involvement Verified: _____

Date Joined: _____

☐ Application Completed

Date: _____

☐ Policy Acknowledgement Received

Date: _____

☐ Personal Reference #1 Received

Date: _____

☐ Personal Reference #2 Received

Date: _____

☐ Criminal Background Check Completed (*18 or older*)

Date: _____

☐ Online Training Completed (*18 or older*)

Date: _____

☐ Interview Performed

Conducted By: _____

Date: _____

☐ Approved (email sent for addition to PCO)

Date: _____

Supplemental Training Requirement:

☐ NHC Child Safety Training Attended

Date: _____

Checklist Completed:

Signature: _____

Date: _____



Attachment B

Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

Today's Date: _____

- Please fill out a separate form for each victim.
- Do NOT ask leading questions of the child. Use simple WHO, WHAT, WHERE questions.
- This form should be filled out immediately after incident or report was taken.
- Return completed form to Lynn Adams.

(Please Print All Information)

1. Your Name: _____ Your Role at NHC: _____

2. Victim's Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Age: _____ Date of Birth, if known (M/D/Y): _____

3. Date & place of initial conversation with/report from victim: _____

4. Location in which the incident occurred: _____

5. Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here using the victim's own words wherever possible): _____

6. Name of person accused of abuse: _____

Address, if known: _____

7. Relationship of accused to victim (staff member, screened volunteer, family member):

8. Reported to what other NHC Staff member: _____ Date/time: _____

Summary: _____



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9. Call to victim's parent/guardian if not the accused:

Name and relationship to victim: _____

Date/time: _____ Summary: _____

10. Call to local Department of Social Services (DSS) – 864-467-7750:

Date/time: _____ Spoke With: _____

Summary: _____

11. Call to local law enforcement (24/7 non-emergency dispatch) – 864-271-5210:

Date/time: _____ Spoke With: _____

Summary: _____

12. Other Contacts Name: _____

Date/time: _____ Relationship to Victim: _____

Summary: _____

Signature of person filling out this form: _____