

Prattville Church of Christ Child Protection Policy

Purpose

Abuse is sadly a common reality in this world. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents, innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). We all must become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold this policy. It shall be the goal of Prattville Church of Christ to provide a safe environment for the physical and emotional well-being of all children participating in church activities whether on or off church property. The church’s goal is to inform workers and enforce policies to ensure that all children are safe and well protected while attending any church sponsored or planned event. The goal of this policy is to prevent abuse, molestation, and exploitation of both children and youth as well as to protect the workers and volunteers. Adoption of this policy will enable Prattville Church of Christ to provide a safe and secure environment for both members of our church family and guests who might participate with us. This policy applies to all, and all are responsible for upholding this policy.

Definitions/Terminology used in this policy

Abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual.

Emotional Abuse is when a person holding power and trust, uses pattern of controlling and domineering behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, or humiliating. Such a pattern has a substantial likelihood of causing harm to a child’s development.

Physical Abuse is a non-accidental injury because of physically harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for or power over the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse if it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Sexual Abuse is when a person in a place of power and/or trust, engages in sexual behavior with a child under their supervision, authority, mentoring, or spiritual care.

Spiritual Abuse is a form of emotional abuse, meaning a pattern of coercive or domineering behaviors using religion, usually by a person who holds power and trust. For example, invoking divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser.

Adults shall include all people 19 years of age or older.

Child/Children shall include all persons under the age of nineteen (19) years.

Church Sponsored/Planned Event on or Off Campus shall include any classes, devotionals, activities, or trips that involve children/youth that are planned and/or sponsored by members of the Prattville Church of Christ.

Elders/Shepherds are a group of specially appointed and scripturally qualified men who oversee, guide, and protect the members of the Prattville Church of Christ. These men feel strongly about protecting the children and youth of Prattville Church of Christ and, therefore, has produced this policy and each Elder/Shepherd has completed the online child abuse prevention training and criminal history check.

Safety Team is a group of individuals who are responsible for the security of the members of Prattville Church of Christ during regularly scheduled children's classes and worship services. This team will be the first to determine and react to any emergency or crisis.

Former child abuser/molester/sex offender is someone who was convicted, and therefore, cannot have any contact with children/youth at church sponsored events on or off church property. They may attend church services and fellowships but must be willing to let the Elders/Shepherds notify the church members of their previous conviction and abide by conditions that are deemed by the Elders.

Member is a believer who has been baptized according to scripture and has been in an ongoing relationship with Prattville Church of Christ shown by their attendance and/or participation.

Neglect is failing to see to the needs of a child emotionally, physically, or medically.

Parent/Guardian is the legal parent and/or guardian of a child or youth who brings the child or youth to a church sponsored/planned event, on or off church property.

Perpetrators of child maltreatment are people who sexually abuse children often utilize deception, authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. The vast majority of those who perpetrate abuse in any form are known by their victims. In a Christian environment, offenders typically groom not only victims, but caregivers and all in the church to establish a perception of themselves as someone who would never abuse a child.

Policy Agreement Form is a document stating that the person volunteering and/or who is a paid staff member has completed the online child abuse prevention training, cleared by

the elders/shepherds of their criminal history check, and has read and understood the Prattville Church of Christ Child Protection Policy.

Policy Team is a group who implements, monitors, and enforces the Child Protection Policy.

Primary Volunteer Worker is any person, nineteen years of age or older, who serves as a volunteer and/or paid worker. All paid staff members, including volunteers in roles with greater responsibility or risk are classified as primary volunteer workers and should meet the primary screening standards.

Secondary Volunteer Worker is any person, nineteen years of age or older, who occasionally interact with children in a less risky circumstance. For example, volunteers who interact with children only in a group setting or parents of participants who help supervise activities on or off church property.

Youth/Teen is anyone who is in grades 7th – 12th or 12 years through 18 years of age.

Youth/Teen Worker is any youth who volunteers to help, has been appropriately trained, and is supervised by an adult or primary volunteer worker.

Selection and Screening Process

To establish a safe and equitable care-giving environment, the Prattville Church of Christ will conduct a screening process for any member interested in working or volunteering with children or youth in any capacity. Any member seeking to work with children or youth, in any capacity, at Prattville Church of Christ must comply with the following screening procedure.

- Must be a member of the Prattville Church of Christ and approved by the Elders/Shepherds.
- Must be nineteen (19) years of age or older to be a primary or secondary volunteer worker. A younger person (12 – 18 years of age) may assist adults or a primary volunteer worker (with parental permission) but may not take the place of a primary volunteer worker.
- Any member or attendee of the Prattville Church of Christ who was convicted as a child abuser/molester/sex offender, should avoid the screening process and notify the Elders/Shepherds as soon as possible. Any member or attendee of the Prattville Church of Christ who has engaged in conduct defined as abuse or neglect as defined by law cannot engage in any function that might bring him/her into contact with children or youth.

- Any member who refuses to consent to the criminal history check will be disqualified from serving as either a volunteer worker or a paid staff member.
- Complete an online criminal history check. The criminal history check will be conducted at the church's expense and results will be treated as confidential. Members are reminded that previous convictions, misdemeanors, and felonies, as well as ongoing court cases are public information and Prattville Church of Christ cannot promise complete privacy relating to criminal history. The Elders/Shepherds will address any questionable matters deriving from the criminal history check. Any criminal history discovered on a primary or secondary volunteer worker by the Prattville Church of Christ elders/shepherds, which was not on the criminal history check, may be grounds for immediate disqualification from serving as a volunteer worker or a paid staff member.
- Criminal history checks must be approved by the Elders/Shepherds. The Elders/Shepherds will retain final discretion and have the authority to approve or disapprove of any person who has completed the criminal history check.
- Review the Child Protection Policy and sign the policy agreement form.
- All documentation will be maintained by the church office and be considered confidential.
- The Elders/Shepherds are responsible for establishing a procedure for notifying all ministers, deacons, and ministry leaders who oversee the various children's or youth activities when a member has been cleared by of their criminal history check, has read and understood the Prattville Church of Christ Child Protection Policy and signed the policy agreement form.

Supervision of Children (Infant – 6th Grade)

To achieve the goal of maximizing the safety and well-being of children and youth at Prattville Church of Christ, the following supervision policies define the responsibilities for all elders/shepherds, ministers, deacons, ministry leaders, teachers, and both primary and secondary volunteer workers.

- All elders/shepherds, deacons, ministers, ministry leaders, teachers, and both primary and secondary volunteer workers must complete the above screening process before having access to any children or youth on or off church property.
- Ideally, a minimum of two adults will be assigned to a classroom, function, or event. Youth workers may be helpers but do not count toward the two-adult rule. Depending on the age and number of children, additional secondary volunteers or youth workers will be needed.

- If two adults are not available for a classroom, function, or event, the parents should be notified as the children arrive, and one or more secondary volunteers should be sought out.
- Every teacher, primary, and secondary volunteer should be present 10 minutes early to receive children and greet guests.
- Each class will be held in a classroom with a window in the door. If the door does not have a window, the door will always remain open. All church functions and events whether on or off church property will be in a room or area with a door with a window or a door that remains open. Children should never be in a room or area where they cannot be seen or have a way out.
- An adult teacher, volunteer, or helper should never place themselves in a situation where they are alone with a child behind closed doors or out of view from the other volunteers or children. If a one-on-one situation arises between a child and an adult, the teacher, volunteer, or helper should inform another teacher, volunteer, or parent of the situation and have the conversation in a location that is private but in plain view of others.
- At times children will need to go to the restroom. Children's privacy should be maintained while helping the child to and from the restroom. Preschool and 1st and 2nd grade children should be escorted to the restroom at the end of the hall by a worker who will wait at the restroom door or outside the stall giving the child privacy. When possible, two workers should be present, or two children should be present if a worker must enter the restroom stall. Third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children do not have to be escorted but a worker must be aware that the child went to the restroom and monitored the time the child is gone. The security person in the lobby of the building will monitor who is going to and from the restrooms before and during class. To avoid interruptions with children going to the restroom, the teacher, volunteer, or helper needs to remind the children to go before class starts.
- All children in the fourth grade and younger should be picked up by the person whose name is written on the sheet by the child's name. No child will be released to someone who has not been authorized by their parent or legal guardian.
- It is the responsibility of every teacher and volunteer to make sure no child is left behind in the classroom or restroom. It is everyone's responsibility to make sure all children make it safely from the educational building to the main auditorium building.
- Teachers, volunteers, or helpers will not engage in inappropriate physical conduct with a child. It is the responsibility of the teacher, volunteer, or helper to know the proper display of affection in this policy.

- The above-mentioned also applies to any church sponsored babysitting whether on or off Church property.

Supervision of Youth (7th-12th grade)

To achieve the goal of maximizing the safety and well-being of the youth of the Prattville Church of Christ, the following supervision policies define the responsibilities for all elders/shepherds, ministers, deacons, ministry leaders, teachers, and both primary and secondary volunteer workers.

- All elders/shepherds, ministers, deacons, ministry leaders, teachers, and both primary and secondary volunteer workers must complete the above screening process before having access to any children or youth on or off church property.
- Ideally, a minimum of two adults will be assigned to a classroom, function, or event. Older youth workers may be helpers but do not count toward the two-adult rule. Depending on the age and number of youths, additional secondary volunteers or workers will be needed.
- Every teacher, primary, and secondary volunteer should be present 10 minutes early to receive the youth and greet guest.
- Each class will be held in a classroom with a window in the door. If the door does not have a window, the door will always remain open. All church functions and events whether on or off church property will be in a room or area with a door with a window or a door that remains open. Youth should never be in a room or area where they cannot be seen or have a way out.
- An adult teacher, volunteer, or helper should never place themselves in a situation where they are alone with a youth behind closed doors or out of view from the other volunteers or youth. If a one-on-one situation arises between a youth and an adult, the teacher, volunteer, or worker should inform another teacher, volunteer, or parent of the situation and have the conversation in a location that is private but in plain view of others.
- Youth do not have to be escorted to the restroom, but the teacher or volunteer workers must be aware when the youth went to the restroom and monitored the time he or she is gone. The security person in the lobby of the building will monitor who is going to and from the restrooms before and during bible class. To avoid interruptions with young people going to the restroom, the teacher needs to remind them to go before class starts.
- It is the responsibility of the teacher and volunteer worker to make sure no youth is left behind in the classroom or restroom. It is everyone's responsibility to make

sure all youth make it safely from the educational building to the main auditorium building.

- Teachers, volunteers, or helpers will not engage in inappropriate physical conduct with a youth. It is the responsibility of the teacher, volunteer, or helper to know the proper display of affection in this policy.

Proper Display of Affection

Physical touch is an important element in the communication of love and care. It is an essential part of the nurturing process that should be a characteristic of ministry with children and youth. Elders/shepherds, ministers, deacons, ministry leaders, teachers, and volunteer workers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the special and differing needs and preferences of everyone. Physical contact should be age appropriate and appropriately made whether in private or public.

Appropriate Touch

The following guidelines are recommended as pure, genuine and positive displays of love.

- A warm hug can show support, comfort, and affection. With youth, only a side-to-side hug should be done.
- A gentle pat on the back, a touch to the shoulder or hand is an example of safe touch.
- Briefly holding hands can create feelings of closeness, encouragement, and unity.
- A brief arm around the shoulder, high fives, fist bumps, and handshakes can show appreciation.

Inappropriate Touch

The following types of touch must be avoided.

- Any touch is inappropriate if the child or youth makes a verbal or nonverbal indication that it is not welcomed.
- Hugging the opposite sex face-to-face or giving a full contact, body-to-body hug. Extended hugging, tickling, or prolonged physical contact of any kind.
- Kissing a child or youth or coaxing a child or youth to kiss you.
- Have an older child or youth sit on your lap.

- Touching a child or youth in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit. The only exception to this would be changing a diaper for infants and toddlers or possibly someone receiving medical attention due to an emergency.

Communication

Appropriate Communication

When the correction of children is necessary, adults should avoid any form of harsh language including shaming, humiliation, or yelling. No physical punishment is allowed. Any serious issues of misconduct should be brought to the attention of parents/guardians and the church leaders. This policy encourages positive verbal interactions, including encouragement, kind words, positive reinforcement and appreciation.

Inappropriate Communication

We acknowledge that sexual communication and sharing sexual content is a common grooming tactic by offenders. As such, this policy prohibits the following, not only towards children and youth but to anyone.

- Sexually suggestive language or slang, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits.
- Sharing or displaying of any sexual images, videos, or other content in any form.
- Music, video games, and movies with inappropriate sexual themes or content.

Transportation

Anyone transporting children or youth must refer to the following policies.

- Persons who drive Church-owned or privately-owned vehicles for transporting children or youth must maintain a valid driver license or CDL and provide proof of insurance.
- Any child or youth being transported must have the consent of a parent or guardian and must sign a Liability Release Form before participating in the activity away.
- Any person driving a church-owned or privately owned vehicle must avoid transporting a child or youth by themselves.

If a situation arises that is not in this policy, the course of action should be to protect the child/children.

Reporting and Responding to Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect

Reporting Obligation

Alabama law, section 26-14-3, requires mandatory reporting when any child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, and shall be followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority.

Reporting Policy

It is the policy of Prattville Church of Christ to report any incident of abuse or neglect toward any child or youth whether on or off church property. The following policies are as follows.

- If you witness a child or youth being abused or neglected whether on or off church property, call 911 or the local law enforcement officials immediately. Notify the Elders/Shepherds of the church as soon as possible.
- If you suspect or are made aware of a child or youth that has been abused or neglected whether on or off church property, notify the Elders/Shepherds immediately.
- An investigation will begin immediately by confirming with the victim and the victim's family. Once there is confirmation of child abuse or neglect, the Elders/Shepherds will notify local authorities (Child Protective Services) and may seek legal counsel. The elders making the report will provide the name and address of the child, the name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child, and any other information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.
- The victim and the victim's family will be informed of the steps that will be taken during the investigation. The victim's family will be asked what action they would like to take and fully cooperate to address their requests within the bounds of legal procedure.
- If a staff member is the person in question, he or she will be suspended from their duties immediately until the investigation has been completed. Any person accused of child abuse or neglect will be suspended from all church related duties involving children or youth.
- The initial investigation will include interviewing all parties involved including the victim, their guardian, and the accused. Statements will be taken from all parties concerning the allegation. If the accused refuses to provide a written or verbal statement, the Elders/Shepherds reserve the right to permanently

dismiss a paid staff worker or permanently remove the person from all children and youth activities.

- All allegations and reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged situation to any person except as necessary to cooperate with any official investigation by authorities.

Follow-up to Allegations, Accusations or Suspected Child Abuse

This policy emphasizes prevention as the primary safeguard for our children and youth. However, in the unlikely event that an allegation, accusation, or suspicion of abuse occurs, the church is committed to adopting a proactive stance in ministering to the victim, the victim's family, the accused, the family of the accused, and the congregation, as appropriate. Typically, follow-up will involve shepherds and ministers developing a course of action that provides follow-through to the various individuals involved. The general approach will contain the following elements:

- The Elders/Shepherds will offer, to the extent possible, counsel and ministry to the emotional and spiritual needs of the victim and their family. This may include arrangements for professional therapy as required.
- The Elders/Shepherds will offer, to the extent possible, counsel and ministry to the spiritual needs of the accused and their family. This may include arrangements for professional treatment and therapy as required.
- Should investigation by authorities be required, the Elders/Shepherds and ministers will cooperate fully with any investigation and legal actions that may result.

Code of Alabama – Section 26-14-1 - Definitions

(1) ABUSE. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse includes the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or having a child assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of the conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of the conduct; or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children as those acts are defined by Alabama law. Sexual exploitation includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution and allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child for commercial purposes.

(2) NEGLECT. Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, supervision, clothing, or shelter.

(3) CHILD. Either of the following:

a. A person under the age of 18 years.

b. A person under the age of 19 years who is in need of protective services and does not qualify for adult protective services under Chapter 9 of Title 38.

(4) DULY CONSTITUTED AUTHORITY. The chief of police of a municipality or municipality and county; or the sheriff, if the observation of child abuse or neglect is made in an unincorporated territory; or the Department of Human Resources; or any person, organization, corporation, group, or agency authorized and designated by the Department of Human Resources to receive reports of child abuse and neglect; provided, that a duly constituted authority shall not include an agency involved in the acts or omissions of the reported child abuse or neglect.

(Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1; Acts 1981, No. 81-615, p. 1031; Acts 1981, No. 81-789, p. 1387; Acts 1993, 1st Ex. Sess., No. 93-890, p. 162, §2; Act 2019-447, §1.)

Code of Alabama – Section 26-14-3 – Mandatory

(a) All hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, doctors, physicians, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, physical therapists, nurses, public and private K-12 employees, school teachers and officials, peace officers, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professionals, employees of public and private institutions of postsecondary and higher education, members of the clergy as defined in Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence, or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, when the child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect, shall be required to report orally, either by telephone or direct communication immediately, and shall be followed by a written report, to a duly constituted authority.

(b)(1) When an initial report is made to a law enforcement official, the official subsequently shall inform the Department of Human Resources of the report so that the department can carry out its responsibility to provide protective services when deemed appropriate to the respective child or children.

(2) As soon as is practicable after a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect is made, the Department of Human Resources shall make efforts to determine the military status of the parent or guardian of the child who is the subject of the child abuse or neglect allegation.

(3) If the Department of Human Resources determines that a parent or guardian under subdivision (2) is in the military, the department shall notify a United States Department of Defense family advocacy program at the military installation of the parent or guardian that there is an allegation of child abuse or neglect that is being investigated that involves a child of the military parent or guardian.

(c) When the Department of Human Resources receives initial reports of suspected abuse or neglect, as defined in Section 26-14-1, including suspected abuse or neglect involving discipline or corporal punishment committed in a public or private school or suspected abuse or neglect in a state-operated child residential facility, the Department of Human Resources shall transmit a copy of school reports to the law enforcement agency and residential facility reports to the law enforcement agency and the operating state agency which shall conduct the investigation. When the investigation is completed, a written report of the completed investigation shall contain the information required by the state Department of Human Resources which shall be submitted by the law enforcement agency

or the state agency to the county department of human resources for entry into the state's central registry.

(d) Nothing in this chapter shall preclude interagency agreements between departments of human resources, law enforcement, and any other state agencies on procedures for investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect to provide for departments of human resources to assist law enforcement and other state agencies in these investigations.

(e) Any provision of this section to the contrary notwithstanding, if any agency or authority investigates any report pursuant to this section and the report does not result in a conviction, the agency or authority shall expunge any record of the information or report any data developed from the record.

(f) Subsection (a) to the contrary notwithstanding, a member of the clergy shall not be required to report information gained solely in a confidential communication privileged pursuant to Rule 505 of the Alabama Rules of Evidence which communication shall continue to be privileged as provided by law.

(g) Commencing on August 1, 2013, a public or private employer who discharges, suspends, disciplines, or penalizes an employee solely for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect pursuant to this section shall be guilty of a Class C misdemeanor.

(Acts 1965, No. 563, p. 1049, §1; Acts 1967, No. 725, p. 1560; Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1; Acts 1993, 1st Ex. Sess., No. 93-890, p. 162, §3; Act 2003-272, p. 645, §1; Act 2013-201, p. 416, §1; Act 2016-354, §2; Act 2017-257, §1.)

Code of Alabama - Section 26-14-5 - Contents of reports.

The reports provided for in this chapter shall state, if known, the name of the child, his or her whereabouts, the names and addresses of the parents, guardian, or caretaker, and the character and extent of his or her injuries. The written report shall also contain, if known, any evidence of previous injuries to the child and any other pertinent information which might establish the cause of such injury or injuries, and the identity of the person or persons responsible for the same. (Acts 1965, No. 563, p. 1049, §2; Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1.)

Code of Alabama - Section 26-14-13 - Penalty for failure to make required report.

Any person who shall knowingly fail to make the report required by this chapter shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be punished by a sentence of not more than six months' imprisonment or a fine of not more than \$500.00. (Acts 1965, No. 563, p. 1049, §5; Acts 1975, No. 1124, p. 2213, §1.)