

# Preamble

Matthew 18:1-10 Jesus is very clear that no one should harm the children and woe to anyone who does.

We at Sawyer Highlands Church realize that children are a precious gift from God and we take the responsibility of their safety seriously. Sadly, many children have been abused and sometimes this abuse has been at the hands of church employees and volunteers in connection with church activities. This abuse can cause great and longstanding pain and injury to the individual victims and their families and can have a terrible negative impact on the church.

Although we cannot absolutely prevent child abuse, we as a church can use reasonable care when selecting those who will work with our children and then providing adequate supervision in church sponsored activities.

The goal of this policy is to protect our children from abuse, to protect our church staff and volunteers from false accusations and to protect the ministry of Sawyer Highlands Church.

By having a policy our workers will have a clear understanding of the church's expectations when serving.

Anyone with a conviction of child abuse will be denied a position of working with the youth. An accusation of child abuse may or may not disqualify one from working with our youth.

All accusations of abuse will be taken seriously and we will take the appropriate steps and measures set forth in this policy. Where allegations of misconduct have been made, we have established procedures which afford a full and fair hearing to persons making a complaint, alleged victims (if not the person making the complaint) and alleged offenders. A person accused of misconduct shall be presumed innocent until the occurrence of misconduct has been substantiated.

These policies were developed by a committee commissioned by the Board of Elders. This policy has been reviewed and approved by the Elders and counsel.

## Definitions of Child Abuse

As an example of how child abuse is defined in a law, excerpts from Michigan's Child Protection Law, P.A. 1975, No. 238, are as follows:

"Child abuse" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a teacher or teacher's aide which occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation; or maltreatment.

"Child neglect" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare, which occurs through either of the following:

Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.

Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

"Sexual abuse" means engaging in sexual contact or sexual penetration as defined in section 520a of the Michigan penal code.

"Sexual exploitation" includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution, or allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the photographing, filming, or depicting of a child engaged in a listed sexual act as defined in section 145c of Act No. 328 of the public Acts of 1931.

To broaden the church's understanding of child abuse, this policy manual includes the following definitions of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse

1. **Physical abuse.** Any nonaccidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a child- whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.
2. **Physical neglect.** Not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of a child in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a child's normal development.
3. **Sexual abuse.** The exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not

involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic material, obscene telephone calls, “peeping Toms,” and request to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact includes fondling of body parts such as breast, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.

4. **Emotional abuse.** Attempting to control a child’s life through words, threats, and fear; destroying a child’s self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child’s mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

### Other Definitions useful for this policy

1. **Volunteer.** Persons giving leadership in any children’s ministries including but not limited to: nursery attendant/helpers, Sunday School teachers and helpers, Youth Group leaders/sponsors.
2. **Staff.** An individual serving in an official paid capacity which include but not limited to pastors, secretary, custodian, young adult leader.
3. **Adult.** An individual who is age 18 and over.
4. **Children, youth, minors, infants, toddlers.** Are individuals age 17 and under.

## Screening Requirements for Volunteers & Paid Staff

1. Must be a member of Sawyer Highlands Church or active participant with a faithful attendance of at least 6 months, exceptions would be paid staff and summer interns.
2. Completion of written application.
3. Personal interview.
4. Three (3) references must be provided.
5. Criminal Records check may be performed on any volunteer in a supervisory position and /or having frequent and/or unsupervised contact with youth. Criminal Records check will be performed on all paid staff. Anyone with a conviction of child abuse will be denied a position of working with children. Accusation of child abuse may or may not disqualify one from working with children.
6. Signed participation agreement.
7. Will participate in Child Protection training offered by SHC.
8. Church leadership reserves the right to exclude anyone from a volunteer or paid position.

Application, references and personal interviews will be processed by and conducted by either a deacon or program supervisor. Child Protection Director will conduct Criminal Records check, process part 2 of the application and renewal application. The Elder Board and Child Protection Director will have access to all information.

## Nursery Policy

1. Whenever nursery is in session, two (2) attendants, including at least one adult, should be present.
2. Minors over the age of 14 may volunteer for service, provided an adult is present. Minors may not care for child(ren) without adult supervision.
3. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in case of illness.
4. An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for that particular time should not spend time in the nursery. There are exceptions, such as, nursing mothers and family members needing to assist their child.
5. Diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery. Minors are not to have the responsibility of changing diapers.
6. Infants and Toddlers should be signed-in and released to only those authorized to pick up child.
7. The Discipline Policy applies.
8. The Bathroom Policy applies.
9. Children under the age of 14 may accompany scheduled parents.

## **Jr. Church Policy**

1. Whenever Jr. Church is in session, two (2) attendants, including at least one adult, should be present.
2. Minors over the age of 14 may volunteer for service, provided an adult is present. Minors may not care for children without adult supervision.
3. Bathroom Policy applies.
4. Children should not leave Jr. Church except for illness, to use the bathroom or other compelling reasons.
5. A drop off and pick up procedure should be used to insure proper release of children.
6. Discipline Policy applies.
7. Children under the age of 14 may accompany scheduled parents.

## **Sunday School Program Policy**

1. Whenever Sunday School is in session, at least one adult attendant should be present. A Hall Monitor will conduct random and frequent checks of classroom through classroom windows.
2. Children should not leave the classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reasons.
3. Children are to be released to appropriate parent, guardian, and designated or authorized person.
4. Discipline Policy applies.
5. Bathroom Policy applies.

## **Jr. & Sr. High Youth Policy**

1. Should provide adequate supervision. Each function should have at least two (2) adults.
2. Counseling/Mentoring should take place in a public place and with permission of parent or guardian.
3. Husband & wife may serve together as leaders provided another adult is present.
4. If a child needs significant medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.
5. While the appropriate display of affection between staff and their students is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. For that reason, displays of affection should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. A staff or students/attendee right to refuse any of these will be respected.
6. Discipline Policy applies.
7. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other. A youth group leader should direct no gifts, phone calls or letters of a personal nature to a youth group member.
8. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders should provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders should not hold a youth group function without appropriate or sufficient supervision.

## **Bathroom Policy**

1. An adult attendant should accompany children age 5 and under.
2. It is strongly encouraged that teachers either take the whole class at a designated time, have child go with another child of the same age and gender or wait for parent.
3. When assisting children to the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the door. If child requests assistance, the bathroom door must be left ajar.

## **Record Keeping Policy**

1. Only authorized people will view applications.
2. Applications and materials pertaining to the screening process will be kept in a locked file and accessible to authorized personnel only.
3. All documents pertaining to volunteers and paid staff will be retained permanently in a confidential locked file. Once a person is no longer employed or attending SHC the documents will be placed in a sealed envelope in a locked file.
4. Unauthorized access to or disclosure of confidential information, including volunteers and employment documents may be grounds for dismissal.

## **Building Policy**

1. All classroom, nursery and office doors should be fitted with a glass insert so that activity can be monitored without disruption. Glass insert should not be covered or fitted with a curtain.
2. If the entire room is not visible through the glass in the door a convex mirror should be placed in the room to allow for complete viewing of the room.
3. Classrooms should be locked when not in use.
4. Storage closets and maintenance rooms. One or more of the following should be implemented:
  - a. Closet doors and doors to maintenance rooms remain locked when church programs are in session.
  - b. Doors should be fitted with a lockset that allows young children to manipulate the lock and the doorknob from the inside.
  - c. Limit the number of individuals with keys to these rooms and keep a list of those individuals. Individuals need prior approval to have a key. (Church secretary should keep record of keys)
5. All Church workers, paid or volunteer will notify and obtain approval in advance for the sponsorship of any activity in the name of the church or on church property. Scheduling should be done through the church office.

## Discipline Policy

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
2. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted.
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior continues.
4. Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children's/youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
8. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church sponsored activities begin a new season. The periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
9. Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:
  - a. Distract the child/youth with another activity.
  - b. Help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behavior.
  - c. Separate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist.
10. For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
11. When nothing seems to be working, leaders should get help before "losing their cool."

## Hall Monitor Policy

1. Hall Monitors will be identified with a badge that indicates they are Hall Monitors.
2. At least one Hall Monitor will conduct checks whenever Church and Sunday School are in session.
3. Duties of the Hall Monitors:
  - a. Frequent and random checks of all classrooms in session until the program ends. A check is defined as looking through the classroom window.
  - b. Frequent and random checks of bathrooms until the program ends. A check is defined as opening the bathroom door and/or listening.
  - c. Frequent and random checks of unoccupied classrooms until the program ends. A check is defined as opening the classroom door and turning on the lights.
  - d. Hall Monitors will direct youth found in the hallways to their classroom or to parents.
  - e. Hall Monitors should immediately report urgent concerns or suspicions to the appropriate ministry leader. Hall Monitors must fill out an Incident Report Form within four hours of the concern or suspicion.
4. Only adults may be Hall Monitors.

## **Transportation Policy**

This policy applies to adults while serving in ministry to youth who may transport non-related youth in church sponsored programs.

1. It is strongly encouraged that at least two (2) of the following procedures should be in place:
  - A. Two adults are present and seated in the front seat of the vehicle when transporting youth.
  - B. At least two youth are present in the vehicle
  - C. Youth are seated in the back seats of the vehicle
  - D. A reasonable attempt will be made to contact the parent or legal guardian before transporting a solitary youth.
2. Adults must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance before transporting youth. Drivers who routinely transport youth will have their driving record reviewed prior to the beginning of each church year.
3. Drivers need to abide by state requirements for car seat use, seatbelt use and air bag safety.
  - A. Youth are to wear seatbelts whenever the vehicle is in service. Drivers may not transport more youths than there are available seatbelts.
  - B. Where required by law, car seats must be available for younger children.
  - C. For safety, youth under the age of 10 may not sit in the front seat if there is a passenger-side airbag.

Adults or minors who transport related youth to church-sponsored events are not subject to this policy.

The transportation policy does not extend to parents or guardians who request or give permission for a minor with a valid driver's license to transport non-related youth.

## **Off-Site Policy**

APPLIES TO ALL YOUTH PROGRAMS SPONSORED OFF-SITE

1. At least 2 adults present. If a husband and wife team are serving together then a third adult is required.
2. All church workers, paid or volunteer will notify and obtain approval in advance for the sponsorship of any off-site activity in the name of the church.
3. Signed permission/medical form prior to event.

## **Overnight Policy**

1. At least 2 adults represented for both male and female youth
2. Adequate supervision should be provided. Functions should not occur without appropriate or sufficient supervision.



3. Signed permission/medical form prior to the event.
4. An adult who is not the parent or legal guardian should not sleep alone in a room with a youth.

## **Policy For Reporting Suspected or Alleged Abuse**

IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO COMPLY WITH THE MICHIGAN CHILD PROTECTION LAW AND TO COOPERATE FULLY WITH THE PROPER AUTHORITIES. APPROPRIATE RESPONSE WILL HELP ENSURE THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF OUR CHILDREN.

IN THE CASE OF SUBSTANTIATED ABUSE, WE AS A CHURCH WILL PROVIDE APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY ASSISTANCE TO THE VICTIM, THE OFFENDER, AND TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES.

1. Anyone in a volunteer or paid position representing Sawyer Highlands Church who has received first hand information leading to a reasonable suspicion of child abuse is responsible to report to the Abuse Response Team and then to the proper authorities within 24 hours. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged or suspected abuse, but only to report it to the proper authorities.
2. In the event a volunteer or staff is uncertain as to whether a reasonable suspicion of child abuse has occurred, the volunteer/staff is encouraged to contact their program supervisor for a meeting with members of the Abuse Response Team. This meeting should take place as soon as possible after the volunteer/staff hears information or witnesses behavior causing them to consider whether or not a reasonable suspicion of child abuse has occurred.
3. The volunteer/staff cannot be prohibited from reporting what they may believe is reasonable suspicion of child abuse even if the Abuse Response Team does not concur. However, if the volunteer/staff person with first-hand information refuses to file a report and the Abuse Response Team members believe a reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists; a committee member should file a report of suspected child abuse.
4. In most circumstances the identity of the person making a report will not be revealed without consent unless required for the purposes of a court hearing. Therefore, the volunteer/staff with first-hand information must fill out the appropriate church incident report and report to the proper authorities.
5. State of Michigan law requires the Pastor to report all alleged abuse cases involving children to FIA and/or Local law enforcement department.
6. Duties of the Abuse Response Team (ART):
  - a. Meet with any volunteer or staff who has questions about a possible report of child abuse.
  - b. Notify pastoral staff and Elder board of any reports received.
  - c. Notify the church's insurance agent and legal counsel whenever a reasonable suspicion of child abuse is reported to police officials.
  - d. Assign a member of the ART to engage the media in any discussion that may arise from the reporting of child abuse to police officials.
  - e. Insure that a pastoral care team for the individuals and families who are party to the allegations has been assigned.
  - f. If deemed necessary, assign members to conduct an independent investigation of charges of child abuse against a volunteer or staff only. Allegations outside of the church programs and facilities are not the domain of the ART.

- g. Determine whether the ART or the first-hand reporter maintains a liaison with police officials.
- h. Shall maintain records of reported incidents and will keep such records confidential, accurately and completely documenting all efforts at handling an incident.

## **Responding To Alleged Offenders Who Are Volunteers or Paid Church Leaders.**

1. If at any time, regardless of whether an allegation is made, a volunteer or paid church leader admits to sexual misconduct or physical assault against a minor, the admissions of guilt should be brought to the attention of the governing body, which deliberates and adjudicates the matter.
2. If a volunteer or paid church leader confesses or is found guilty of sexual misconduct or physical assault against a minor, he/she must be removed from office/position and should be barred from further service in that or a similar capacity.
3. If the governing body learns from police officials that allegations of abuse merit serious investigation or there is the possibility of formal charges:
  - a. The governing body should be presented with written documentation specifying the nature of the allegation and the information known at this point.
  - b. The governing body shall give the accused an opportunity to confront the allegations.
  - c. In light of the information presented, the governing body should enact at least one of the following steps:
    - i. Limit the contact between the accused and accuser or any minor in the congregation.
    - ii. Remove/suspend the accused from office/position (with pay when applicable) and without prejudice pending the outcome of the investigation.
4. If the governing body learns from police officials that criminal charges have been filed against the accused, follow steps A, B, and C above, and at step C, enact both limited contact and suspension/removal.
5. If the governing body learns from police officials that criminal proceedings have concluded, the matter should be revisited.
  - a. If criminal charges are dropped, or the result of a criminal proceeding is an acquittal, the council should decide whether to rescind its earlier action and /or take additional action.

## Media Response Policy

When and if media becomes involved and the incident becomes a public matter, such as at the time of disclosure or if an arrest is made and judicial hearings scheduled, the media has the right to report such incidents to inform the general public. It is important, however, that the media not become an opportunity to “Try the case” in the public eye and subvert the legal process. A media policy can assist church leaders and the congregation to thoughtfully prepare for and respond to the media’s awareness of an abusive event, while protecting the victims of such attacks and preserving the natural process of the legal system.

1. The identity of the (alleged) victims of such attacks ought to be held confidential, especially children and minors up to age 18. Minors need parental consent to disclose his/her name. Only adult victims or adult survivors can give consent to release their name for publication.
2. The facts ought to be presented, only if they are known, and all speculation and conjecture removed. (What allegedly happened, where it happened, when it happened and who allegedly perpetrated the incident.)
3. A prepared statement will assist the person reporting the events on behalf of the congregation to the media. The prepared statement ought to be reviewed by the appropriate church leaders in consultation with legal advisors and experts in the area of addressing abuse issues.
4. The lawyer and a designated person will share such events with the media when it is deemed necessary. The designated person ought to be knowledgeable about abuse issues, not related to either victim or perpetrator, but someone who is actively involved in congregational care or the life of the church.
5. The media ought to be informed that the congregation is being informed of the events, that steps are underway to educate the congregation about abuse and that preventative measures are being sought if not already in place.
6. The designated person will remind the media that such matters are seriously held and reviewed by the church leaders who will not dismiss or diminish the allegations that come to their attention.
7. The designated person will request the prayers of the community for healing in the lives of the people involved, and for the congregation which suffers with the awareness that the sin of abuse has occurred within their fold.

This document contains information from:

Swagman, Beth. *Preventing Child Abuse: a guide for churches*. Grand Rapids Michigan. Faith Alive Christian Resources published by CRC Publications. 2003

# Participation Agreement

**Sawyer Highlands Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, volunteers and staff who participate in ministries. I have received and reviewed the church policy on Child Abuse Prevention. I agree to observe and abide by all church policies, Bylaws and the church's Constitution regarding working in ministries with children and youth.**

**Printed name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicants**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_