



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

First Baptist Church of Rockport

*4 High Street
Rockport, MA 01966*

Policy Revised November 2024



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I. Introduction

- 1.1. **Policy Purpose:** All children have the right to be safe and protected from harm in any and all environments: home, school, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and communities. The First Baptist Church of Rockport, Massachusetts (“Rockport Baptist Church”) embraces this right to safety and is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of all children attending church related activities. It is in this spirit that the Child Protection Policy was created. It is the expectation of the First Baptist Church that all persons and entity under its auspices comply with the provisions stated in this policy. The policies and procedures included in this document apply to all activities which take place within the building and properties of Rockport Baptist Church as well as programs, activities, or events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church which take place elsewhere. The policies and procedures apply to all members, friends, volunteers, and employees of the church.
- 1.2. **Policy Review:** The Child Protection Policy of the Rockport Baptist Church will be reviewed and updated by the Church Personnel on an annual basis. If there are any questions regarding the contents of this booklet, please call the church office at (978) 546-6121. This Policy has been reviewed by Dinamary Horvath, Esq. Attorney at Law of Maxe Law, LLC. Rockport Massachusetts 01966.

II. Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions used for the purpose of this policy.

- 2.1 **Child:** Any person under the age of eighteen (18).
- 2.2 **Adult:** A person who is at least eighteen (18) years old.
- 2.3 **Parents:** Biological parents or legal guardian, whichever is appropriate to a child.
- 2.4 **Staff Members/Employees/Volunteers:** Any person who works for salary or wages at Rockport Baptist Church.
- 2.5 **Significant Access to Child:** Individuals who are scheduled to spend time with a child.
- 2.6 **Church Sponsored Activity:** Includes any and all gatherings that arise from any worship, educational, childcare, fellowship, administrative, pastoral, mission or recreational event generated or organized by Rockport Baptist Church whether on-campus or off-campus.
- 2.7 **Off-Site Activity:** Any trip or activity that is not held on church-owned property.
- 2.8 **Accidents:** Any incident that results in outside medical attention being required or involves a safety issue that needs to be reported to the church office.
- 2.9 **Child Abuse:** For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:
 - a. **Physical abuse** - any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
 - b. **Emotional abuse** - emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling or persistent teasing.
 - c. **Sexual abuse** - any sexual activity between a child and an adult including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
 - d. **Neglect** - depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

III. General Guidelines and Procedure

- 3.1 **Supervision:** *Two-Person Rule and Open-Door Policy*

- a. **Two-Person Rule:** Whenever possible, any adult who is present in a church sponsored activity for children should be accompanied by another adult. Employees and volunteers should not, during a church sponsored program, be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others.
- i. Whenever possible, these adults should be unrelated. The presence of two adults is to protect children against situations in which abuse might occur, and to protect adults against false allegations of abuse or neglect.
 - ii. In the event that two adults cannot be present in the room, such that one adult is alone in a room with one or more children, a door must be left open. The leader should not position himself or herself in the room such that other adults passing in the hallway cannot see him or her.
 - iii. Any informal counseling session with children, the door of the room used must remain open for the entire session. The session should be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.
 - iv. This two-person rule should be adhered to when supervising visits to the bathroom, showers, changing areas, or other circumstances in which the young person may be dressing or undressing. Additional guidance to be considered during restroom supervision is as follows:
 - Whenever possible, the staff member/adult will make sure any restroom used is not occupied by any suspicious or unknown individual before allowing children to use the facilities.
 - Always send children in pairs with an adult.
 - The staff member, will stand in the doorway while children are using the restroom. This policy allows privacy for the children and protection for the staff or volunteer (not being alone with a child).
 - The staff member shall strongly encourage parents to take children to the restroom whenever possible.
- b. **Open Door Policy:** Classrooms, childcare rooms, and any area in which programs for children are taking place may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. No windows may ever be totally blocked so as to prevent visual observation into the classroom.

3.2 **Respect the privacy of the individuals and protect one's own privacy:** In some instances of camp group trips, supervisors will be rooming with groups of young people. Caution

must be taken when discussing sensitive subjects with the boys or girls and sharing intimate details of one's personal life. Some areas of private life should remain private.

- 3.3 Invitations:** Adults shall not invite a child to their home alone. Invitation should be extended to a group and ensure that there is at least one other responsible adult present and that parents are aware of the invitation and where they will be.
- 3.4 Alcohol, illegal drugs, vaping, and smoking:** Consuming, using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while working or volunteering with children is prohibited.
- a. Being impaired by legally prescribed drugs while working or volunteering with children is prohibited.
 - b. Smoking or use of tobacco or marijuana in the presence of children, or parents while working or volunteering is prohibited.
- 3.5 Weapons and Firearms:** Possessing or using concealed weapons or firearms while working or volunteering with children is prohibited, unless approved by written consent from Pastor and Board of Deacons.
- 3.6 Confidentiality:** The highest level of confidentiality should be maintained at all times in relationships with adults and children. However, it should be made clear that there are certain circumstances, for instance if a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm, that other people will need to be told so that the child can be protected.
- 3.7 Discipline Policy:** Staff and volunteers may not discipline children by use of physical punishment, verbal abuse (such as ridicule), or by failing to provide the necessities of care. The purpose of discipline is restoration and correction.
- a. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation must be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.
 - b. Physical restraint is used only in situations necessary to protect the child, other children, or staff from harm.
- 3.8 Internet Safety and Social Media:** The internet and social media are evolving tools for developing and deepening ministries but also pose significant safety challenges. The best practice for minor to adult relationship on social media is as follows:
- a. Adults should refrain from initiating video chats, snap chat, or Instagram with children.
 - b. Adults should not submit “friend” requests to children. Children may request friendships with adults, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with children prior to responding to these requests.

- c. Adults who choose to accept friend requests from children should use all privacy settings applicable to shield children from any inappropriate content that may exist within the adult's profile.
- d. All children and adults should be informed that any communication that is sent via digital means (email, social networking site notes or posts, texts, etc.) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others.
- e. Adults should archive or save all email correspondence with children.
- f. Profanity, inappropriate jokes and media, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment in the presence of children, or parents are prohibited.
- g. Adults shall be mindful of the content on any portable electronic device, social networking pages, or other electronic media that might be accessible to any children.

IV. Criminal Background Verification Policy and Procedure

- 4.1 **Policy:** Rockport Baptist Church uses the Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information ("CORI") verification process and may also use a national criminal background verification service selected by the Church.
- a. Rockport Baptist Church requires a CORI report on:
 - i. All prospective employees;
 - ii. Adult and Other leaders; and
 - iii. All volunteers who supervise children overnight.
 - b. Anyone convicted of any felony or a felony default by the court, with child or elder abuse, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, will not be considered, under any circumstances, for a position at Rockport Baptist Church.
- 4.2 **Procedure:** Ministerial staff will provide CORI applications to all prospective employees, adult and other leaders, and volunteers and turn them into the CORI processor.
- a. The CORI processor will submit CORI applications and receive CORI reports.
 - b. The CORI processor will consult the Pastoral staff when there are concerns. All attempts will be made to maintain confidentiality.
 - c. The Pastoral staff may consult with the church's staff and an attorney retained by the Church regarding background check findings and reports.
 - d. All reports are maintained in a secure/locked location in the Rockport Baptist Church office.
 - e. CORI reports are repeated every three years.

V. Health and Safety

- 5.1 If there is a medical emergency, the parents and the Pastor should be contacted and 911 called as warranted.
- 5.2 Telephones in case of a medical emergency are available in the Church Offices. A cell phone will be available on trips.
- 5.3 First Aid supplies will be available on the event site.
 - a. All workers will be informed of the location of First Aid supplies/equipment.
 - b. Whenever possible, all activities with children shall have a staff or volunteer adult leader with current-certification first aid/CPR training.
- 5.4 All adults should be aware of fire safety.¹ Fire extinguishers will be available and regularly checked. Smoke detectors will be installed and batteries regularly checked.
- 5.5 Smoking is not permitted on church premises.
- 5.6 Adults should be aware of any special limitations a child may have or any allergies especially to foods such as peanuts.
- 5.7 Each child, adult, and staff must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Each minor's forms must have a parent or guardian's signature.
 - a. Group leaders should have a copy of all medical forms for overnight or off-site events. These forms will be kept on the event site for the duration of the event. They shall also have access to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.
- 5.8 A written report will be completed in the case of any accident, medical emergency or injury.

VI. Driving Policy/Off-site Trips and Events

- 6.1 **Driving Policy:** Travel arrangements for off-site trips and events will be coordinated through the Church.
 - a. Persons designated to provide transportation to or from the church or an off-site activity must be known to the designated leader of the event.
 - b. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-person rule still applies. Therefore, a driver must avoid giving rides to individual children.
 - c. Seat belts will be provided for all passengers.
 - d. All adult drivers of children will be screened through a driving history search. The driver must:
 - i. Be at least 21 years old;
 - ii. Have a valid state driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated;

¹ Emergency procedures, including evacuation plans, will be reviewed at each teacher orientation.

- iii. Have no known record of convictions for driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license or reckless endangerment; and
- iv. Have proof of insurance.

6.2 Permission Forms: Parent/Guardian Permission Forms and Medical Consent Forms must be completed prior to all trips. The two-adult rule must be followed throughout the trip with any foreseeable exceptions clearly stated and approved in advance by the parent or guardian. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. Under no circumstances may one adult alone take or accompany minors on an overnight outing.

- a. Travel arrangements for off-site events will be coordinated through the Church.
- b. Persons designated to provide transportation to or from church or an off-site activity must be known to the designated leader of the event.
- c. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-person rule still applies. Therefore, a driver must avoid giving rides to individual children.

VII. Reporting Incidents

7.1 Reporting Incidents: Any individual who observes or becomes aware of any alleged or potential incident must, as soon as possible, report the matter to the staff member in charge of the program or the Pastor.

7.2 Investigation: Upon receipt of a report, incident, or allegation at Rockport Baptist Church, either the Pastor, the Chair of the Board of Deacons, the Chair of Christian Education or Chair of the Nominating Personnel and Safety Committee shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and appropriate procedures are followed as required by Massachusetts law. The Church's investigatory process will include documenting all steps undertaken in handling the investigation as follows:

- a. The Pastor/Deacon will take prompt steps to investigate the allegations and interview the Complainant first and then notify the accused of the complaint. Investigations usually include separate personal interviews by the Pastor/ Deacon with the person bringing the complaint and with anyone else deemed necessary to obtain needed information. In meeting with the Complainant, the Pastor/ Deacon will seek to:
 - i. Hear his/her allegations directly and discreetly.
 - ii. Request that a written complaint be prepared.
 - iii. Request permission from complainant(s) to use the written complaint and his/her name in discussion with the accused.
 - iv. Secure the complainant(s) willingness to continue the investigation.
 - v. Outline the process that will be followed in response to the complaint.
- b. If the Pastor/Deacon believe that there is sufficient cause for concern that there may have been an intentional violation of this policy, they shall meet with the accused in order to:

- i. Present him/her with the formal, written complaint.
 - ii. Outline the process that will be followed in response to the complaint, emphasizing the presumption of innocence.
 - iii. Receive his/her response to the complaint directly (may be verbal and/or written).
 - iv. Make it possible to present to the complainant a summary of the accused's response for comment.
- c. If there is sufficient cause for concern that there may have been an intentional violation of this policy, the Pastor/Deacon shall proceed to investigate fully the allegations contained in the written complaint. Any additional allegations must also be placed in writing and a copy provided to the accused. The Pastor/Deacon shall fully investigate the allegations through information and documentation from the complainant(s), the accused, and any other sources that are deemed credible, relevant or appropriate.

7.3 Confidentiality: All investigations shall be conducted in a confidential manner, compatible with a thorough investigation of the report or allegation.

7.4 Parental Notification: If an incident has occurred on church property or during a church-sponsored event, the parents of any child involved in any allegation of abuse shall be immediately notified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

I, the undersigned, have read, understand and will comply with the Child Protection Policy of the First Baptist Church, Rockport, Massachusetts.

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____