



Big Woods Bible Church Children and Youth Protection Policy

Principles of Child Protection

- It is the policy of Big Woods Bible Church to protect the children and youth who are placed in our care, attend our services, and participate in our programs. It applies to all church programs and activities involving minors, from birth through age eighteen (18) years.
- We adopt this policy to honor the trust that parents place in us.
- We adopt this policy because it reflects the Lord Jesus' love for children and youth.
- We adopt this policy to protect the name of Jesus Christ and the witness of His church.
- It is understood and expected that every activity and/or event involving minors will be randomly monitored by leadership to ensure the Children and Youth Protection Policy is followed. Elders and pastors may attend any and all programs at any time.

Screening and Training for Children and Youth Workers¹

- Before serving as an employee or volunteer in children and youth ministry programs and events, including the pastor, any elder or deacon, who is to have any responsibility or supervisory role, an individual must provide a Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance (CY113), a Pennsylvania State Police Background Check (SP4-164 for employees or SP4-164A for volunteers), and a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal History Clearance if the employee or volunteer has not resided within the state of Pennsylvania continuously over the previous ten (10) years. If the employee or volunteer has resided within Pennsylvania continuously over the previous ten (10) years, a signed affidavit may be done in lieu of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal History Clearance.
 - The BWBC Office Manager will collect any necessary volunteer/employee clearances, verify that forms have been completed correctly, and screen each applicant.
 - No one will work with children until the background check is completed, which could take several weeks.
 - Individuals with a history of abuse may not work with children and youth.
 - Big Woods Bible Church reserves the right to determine who will volunteer with children and youth for any reason, as well as request additional clearances.
- In addition to providing the necessary volunteer/employee clearances, every applicant will complete an interview with an Elder or Ministry Coordinator.
- An Elder or Ministry Coordinator will conduct trainings for childcare workers. Each worker shall be required to attend a mandated reporter training. Additional training will consist of periodic meetings to review procedures for safe childcare.
- A childcare worker must be fingerprinted before commencing his or her duties or, if under eighteen (18) years of age, within 90 days after turning 18.

¹ Designated as "childcare workers" throughout the rest of this document

- Every childcare worker will attend an annual Children and Youth Policy and Protection training session and document that they attended the training.
- No member/regular attender will serve in any ministry associated with minors unless they have been faithful in regular attendance for a minimum of six months.
- Childcare workers (including youth helpers) should be at least 13 years old and at least five years older than the children or youth with which they are working. Exceptions will be made only by permission of the Ministry Coordinator or an elder. Youth volunteers under the age of 13 years old must serve alongside a parent or guardian.

Supervision of Children and Youth

The childcare workers are responsible for the supervision of minors during ministry activities, including observing the environment and equipment for unsafe situations, removing children from potentially dangerous conditions, reporting problems immediately to the Ministry Coordinator or elder, and also reporting any abuse or suspected abuse, regardless of whether it occurred within or outside the scope of the ministry, immediately to the Pennsylvania Childline by calling 1-800-932-0313 and following the directions given by state officials.

- It is the responsibility of the Ministry Coordinators or supervising Elder to ensure that anyone who has not been successfully screened and approved does not have unsupervised access to children and youth.
- Supervision of children will be guided by the two-childcare worker rule described in the next section.
- Respect and safety are the guiding principles for physical contact between childcare workers and children. It is the responsibility of the childcare worker to ensure this. Inappropriate or unwanted affection, and any type of grooming behaviors will not be tolerated.
- Any childcare worker who suspects an incident of inappropriate behavior or abuse toward a minor has occurred is required to report their concern immediately to the program leader, to the Ministry Coordinator, or to an elder. A confidential written record of the report and investigation will be initiated. Elders will respond promptly as necessary for the protection of the child. Elders will comply with state law in regarding reporting of abuse.
- Any childcare worker who observes, hears about, or suspects that abuse of a child has occurred or may be occurring, must also immediately report what they know, believe, or suspect, regardless of whether it occurred within or outside the scope of the ministry, immediately to the Pennsylvania Childline by calling 1-800-932-0313 and follow the directions given by state officials. It is not the responsibility of the worker to investigate or corroborate the alleged abuse, but only to report the concerns. In the event of an allegation of an incident or abuse, the worker is to make no statements to the press, friends, church members, or others except as identified above.

Parents are responsible for signing in and signing out their children for Nursery, Children’s Church or Sunday School. **A parent or legal guardian is the only adult who may sign out their child from Childcare unless a specific arrangement is made in advance with written documentation. High school aged siblings may pick up their younger siblings after Children’s Church or Sunday School if they have the corresponding sticker for their sibling.**

The Children's Wing

Only children and necessary childcare workers are permitted in the children's wing. The following are exceptions to the children's wing rule:

- If the child is unsure and the parent wants to walk them back, the parent/guardian and child will be escorted by a childcare worker to the classroom, then the parent/guardian will be escorted out. If the child does not want to stay on their own, they may leave with their parent/guardian.
- If a new family to Big Woods wants to know where their child is going in the Children's Wing, the Children's Ministry Monitor may escort them back to drop off the child and give them a brief tour of the Children's Wing.
- Parents/guardians of nursery age children are able to enter the Children's Wing to drop off and pick up their child at the entrance to the Nursery. Non-nursery age children are not permitted in the nursery.
- Elders and deacons (who have passed background checks) are to be given full access due to the nature of their responsibilities.

The Two-Adult Rule

The two-childcare worker rule states that there must always be two adult childcare workers present when supervising one or more children during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children. This rule is designed for the safety of minors as well as adults and is required across all ministry areas.

- The childcare workers should be in sight of each other at all times. At no time should one worker be with a single child or youth in a secluded area.
 - If it is ever necessary for one of the adult childcare workers to leave the room, the door is to remain open to the childcare room until the childcare worker returns or another (typically the Children's Ministry Monitor) adult takes his/her place.
- The purpose of the two-childcare worker rule is to make sure the actions of any one childcare worker are known to at least one other childcare worker and to encourage childcare workers to support each other in ministry.

Unplanned Situations with Only One Childcare Worker

On the rare occasion, childcare workers may find themselves without another worker due to unforeseen circumstances. The following procedures should be followed:

- **Immediately inform the Ministry Coordinator or Elder**
- **Visible location**--For the entire time when there is only one childcare worker present, the worker and children/youth must be in a location that is visible to others with an unobstructed window, open door, etc.
- In the event an unplanned one-on-one event occurs without prior written permission being obtained, the worker must report in writing to church leadership (Ministry Coordinator or an Elder) who was involved, at what time, and the activity and circumstances.

Restrooms/Diapering

Children in grades K-5 may use the restrooms on their own. Children younger than 5 may be assisted, if necessary. In this case, the restroom door must remain open. An adult childcare worker should be called to stand outside the door, if a child needs assistance in the restroom from another childcare worker.

- Parents/guardians of nursery and preschool children may choose to give permission for the adult childcare worker to accompany their child to the restroom or change diapers. If permission is not given, parents/guardians must be paged and directed towards the family restrooms.

- Youth helpers are not permitted to change diapers or accompany children to the restroom. If diapering facilities exist in the room, these are to be used. Otherwise, diapering facilities in the restroom may be used if the door remains open.

Youth Serving as Childcare Workers

We encourage older students to serve in the Children's Ministry; however, youth helpers are not considered an adult childcare worker and cannot be included to meet the Two-Adult Rule.

Youth Ministry Policies

If an adult leader and youth seek one-on-one time (for the purpose of discipleship, counseling, etc), written permission must be received from the parents/guardian. Such permission must cover a defined period, such as one day or a calendar year.

- In the event an unplanned one-on-one event occurs without prior written permission being obtained, the worker must report in writing to church leadership (an Elder) who was involved, at what time and the activity and circumstances. The incident will be reviewed for appropriateness and further action taken, if warranted.

Special care shall be given to assure sufficient staffing for overnight functions. These events will include written parental permission and parent/guardian and youth understanding of acceptable behavior, rules and expectations. If adults will be bunking in the same room or area as youth, two adults are required.

Transportation

Any time children or youth will be transported in a church vehicle or the vehicle of a worker, the parent/guardian must have signed a permission slip agreeing to the transportation.

- During youth ministry activities and in light of unplanned circumstances, permission may be obtained over the phone or via text provided that the church worker/volunteer has sufficient indicia of reliability to reasonably believe that he/she is actually communicating with the parent or guardian.

Communication Outside of Usual Ministry Functions

Any communication with childcare age (5th grade and under) children should be through the parents or guardians. Communication with youth (6th through 12th grade) should be done with permission (verbal or written) and knowledge of the parents or guardians.

Discipline

Clear rules and expectations and consistent messages about behavior are the key to effective discipline procedures. Childcare workers will be loving, firm and consistent with instructions. Childcare workers are to teach, encourage, and monitor the children but not to take active steps of discipline. Verbal correction will be used in a loving manner when necessary. If at any time, the child becomes physically aggressive towards an adult, other children, or themselves; these procedures will be followed.

- The monitor on duty or deacon will be called and instructed to page or locate the parents or guardians.
- If needed, the other children will be removed from the situation.
- Following the incident, the parents will be informed in detail.

Anti-Bullying Statement

Bullying is a range of unacceptable behaviors that hurt, intimidate, frighten, harm, humiliate, undermine or exclude an individual or group. Bullying is deliberate and repeated over time, and is difficult for the sufferer to defend themselves against.

- We take bullying very seriously at Big Woods Bible Church and will not tolerate bullying in any form. Any concerns expressed by children, staff or parents will be investigated and the results of that investigation will be communicated to the alleged perpetrator and parents/guardians as well as the alleged victim and parents/guardians.
 - If we suspect bullying, leaders will inform parents or guardians. It is not the leader's role to discipline children. If a child who is bullying others and does not respond to a teacher's direction to cease that behavior, parents or guardians will be immediately paged or a deacon will locate them.
 - A child who continually acts out in a bullying manner may be asked not to return until he/she can behave appropriately and follow the direction of the adult leadership.
 - In cases where it is determined that the incident(s) were not bullying but behavior was unacceptable, it will still be addressed. Children/youth/parents/staff are encouraged to share their concerns so that actions can be taken.

Medical Supplies

Childcare workers should be prepared to protect and care for children in the case of minor injuries or emergencies. Childcare workers should understand that they have a duty of care to ensure that the children within their charge are not placed at a higher-than-normal risk of injury, and, if injured, are promptly cared for. The training mentioned above will include instruction on how to address these situations. For medical problems that require more serious attention call 911 or local emergency phone number.

- For minor injuries, childcare workers can follow basic first aid. An adult with first aid training should be summoned when available.
- For emergencies, the deacon on call should contact an appropriate member of our response team members to handle an emergency.
 - If an emergency were to occur during service which requires immediate parent/guardian notification, the Children's Ministry Monitor will page the parent with the corresponding pager number on the child's sticker. If there is no pager number, a deacon will be notified to locate the parents.
- All injuries, including minor injuries, must be documented on our accident form if they required medical attention, and the accident form should be submitted immediately after the incident to the Ministry Coordinator or Elder.
- Parents/guardians must always be notified about their child's injury, even if minor.

Photography & Social Media

Media images and recordings bring life to and help tell the story of Big Woods Bible Church, enhance the quality of the information we provide to our members and give visitors an idea of what to expect when they attend our church. The church often photographs or records our various ministry activities, events and programs, creating media to use in church-produced materials, including, but not limited to, bulletins, posters, brochures, flyers, newsletters and other printed materials, social media sites and on the church website. Sharing photos and videos of our members is a privilege for us, and we intend to respect and honor it.

While we reserve the right to photograph and record church events, in an effort to respect your privacy, we will strive to adhere to the following guidelines:

- We will not knowingly post anything that would be embarrassing, objectionable or hurtful to anyone in a photo or video.
- We do not identify children or youth by name or any other identifying information in the photos and videos we use in our online and printed publications. If a nametag is visible in a photo, it will be removed with photo editing software.
- Images of individual minors will not be used to advertise future events without explicit parental consent (a photo release form). (Large-group photos in which individual children cannot be identified are permissible.)
- We will gladly remove any photo or video upon request from our online sites. If you see a photo that includes you or your child and would like it removed from the site, please call 570-893-8274 or notify the church office via email at info@bigwoods.org.

Policy approved: January 19th, 2022