

# **POLICY GUIDELINES HANDBOOK UPDATE**

**(A comprehensive policy to  
reduce the risk of child abuse)**

*Revised March 2018*

**This policy is implemented to ensure a safe  
environment for the children who attend  
Cornerstone Church.**

**Please read and retain this handbook for your  
records.**

## **Procedures and Policies:**

1. To screen all paid employees (including clergy), who work with youth or children, a national background check.
2. To screen all non-paid workers for any position involving work with youth or children, a national background check.
3. To check references on all paid and non-paid individuals working with youth or children.
4. To train staff (both paid and non-paid) who work with youth or children, to understand the nature of sexual abuse.
5. To train staff (both paid and non-paid) who work with youth or children, how to carry out policies to prevent sexual abuse.
6. To take measures to ensure that all policies are taken seriously and are consistently enforced.
7. To inform our workers of the state law concerning child abuse reporting obligations.
8. To define a reporting procedure for suspected incidents of abuse.
9. To outline a specific response strategy to implement when an allegation of sexual abuse is made at our church.
10. To provide for adequate insurance coverage.

# **A FOUR-FOLD PROCEDURAL STRATEGY:**

The following is a brief synopsis of the information contained in this handbook.

Four critical areas will be addressed:

## **A. WORKER SELECTION**

1. Screening procedure
  - a. Initial application
  - b. Agreement to follow policies
    - (1) Membership orientation
    - (2) Criminal history
2. Reference checks
3. Criminal records check
4. 6-month rule

## **B. WORKER SUPERVISION**

1. Team approach
2. Parental permission

## **C. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

1. State compliance - legal obligation
2. Reporting procedure
3. Definition of abuse
4. Confidentiality

## **D. RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS**

1. Allegations to be taken seriously
2. Confidentiality
3. Notification of third parties
4. Care for the victim
5. Care for the accused
6. Prepared statement

## **A. WORKER SELECTION**

To ensure adequate safeguards for Cornerstone Church youth and children's ministries, the following procedures and policies for worker selection shall be implemented.

These procedures for worker selection are the same for paid and non-paid staff.

During this screening process, it is the church's intention to ask direct questions that will enable the church to identify applicants that should not work with youth or children.

### **1. SCREENING PROCEDURE**

#### **a. INITIAL APPLICATION**

##### ***Cornerstone Church Youth and Children's Workers Application***

The purpose of this application is to ensure that Cornerstone Church provides a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs. The completion of this application will reduce the risk of sexual abuse. All completed forms will be kept in a locked file.

Because of changes that may occur in recent court decisions, workers will be required to update their application once every two years. The form will be completed when first becoming a worker, and then subsequently every two years.

Identity will be confirmed with a photographic identification.

If the applicant will be driving vehicles on the church's behalf, his or her driver's license number will be given to the church's insurance company, which may research the applicant's driving record.

All churches the applicant has attended will be contacted. This is discussed further under **REFERENCE CHECKS** below.

Contact will also be made of all organizations outside the church, in order to determine the applicant's suitability for working with children.

**b. AGREEMENT TO FOLLOW POLICIES**

**EXPLANATION OF AGREEMENT POLICY:**

*Questions 1 and 2: As a church volunteer, do you agree to observe all church policies regarding working with youth or children? Have you attended a membership orientation?*

A membership orientation class is used to introduce the prevention plan. During the orientation, all church policies concerning child abuse prevention is explained. Before working with youth or children, each member should understand that they are required to follow the church's policies.

*Question 3: Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime?*

Adults who have been convicted of or plead guilty to either child sexual or physical abuse will not work with children or youth. Cornerstone Church fully understands its legal and moral obligation to provide a safe place for its youth and children. The amount of time that has elapsed since the offense occurred will not change the applicant's qualifications to work with youth or children.

## **2. REFERENCE CHECKS**

### **EXPLANATION OF REFERENCE CONTACT FORM:**

A minimum of 2 reference checks will be performed by a designated person. All reference forms will be kept with the corresponding Workers Application in a locked file. A reference form will be completed for each reference contacted.

The designated person will be responsible for all information listed on the form. He or she will:

- a. Specifically ask the contact whether or not the applicant is suitable for work with children or youth.
- b. Summarize the results of the contact.
- c. Note on the form if the contact refuses to comment.
- d. Determine whether or not the applicant is suitable for work with children or youth.

The person performing the reference checks will base his or her determination on facts received.

## **3. REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK AND AUTHORIZATION**

The church will perform a national background check on every children's worker volunteer applicant. All applicants will be required to fill out a national background check Request Form and present a **valid** government photo ID (driver's license, passport, military, etc.) for us to photo copy. Please note that a copy of your ID is required by the state and federal law, so even if you have been coming to Cornerstone for years, we still need you to bring your ID. Your information will be kept in your file in a locked cabinet and only authorized staff will have access to it.

## **4. 6 MONTH RULE**

The church has adopted a 6 month rule whereby any person working with children must have been a regular attender at Cornerstone Church for a minimum of 6 months.

## **B. WORKER SUPERVISION**

Because we at Cornerstone Church want to provide a safe, secure environment for our children and youth, we will implement the policies set forth in this section. We intend to exercise every reasonable precaution in the supervision of our church workers.

### **1. TEAM APPROACH**

The church has implemented a "two-person" rule. This rule stipulates that two persons will always be present during any church activity involving children, whether on or off church property. One of the person's must be an adult member of Cornerstone Church. If it is a church-sanctioned activity, two persons must always be at the activity, both must be adults and one should be a member.

This rule is implemented to reduce the risk of sexual molestation and the risk of false accusations of molestation.

### **2. OVERNIGHT RULE**

The church will give special attention to overnight activities that involve children or youth. All adult chaperones and supervisors of these activities must have current forms on file allowing them to work with children or youth at Cornerstone. All overnight activities should be cleared with appropriate church leaders, and a list of workers involved in the activity should be provided to them.

## **C. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

According to Massachusetts General Laws, the staff of our church (including all teachers and workers who work with youth or children) are required to report any case of suspected abuse to a designated person. The designated person will consult with the Senior Pastor, and then make a report to the Department of Social Services.

Our policy requires all workers to immediately report any suspected abuse to the designated person.

According to Massachusetts Law and Department of Social Services

Regulations (110 CMR, section 400):

**ABUSE INCLUDES:**

- (1) The non-accidental commission of any act by a caretaker\* which causes or creates a substantial risk of harm or threat of harm to a child's well-being; and
- (2) The commission of a sex offense against a child as defined by the criminal laws of the Commonwealth.

*\* A caretaker can be a child's parent, stepparent, guardian, baby-sitter or any other person responsible for a child's health or welfare, whether at home, a relative's home, school, a day care center, a foster home, a group care facility, or any other residential setting.*

Confidentiality and the well-being of both the victim and the accused will always be a priority in evaluating and reporting a case of suspected abuse.

The church should conduct periodic training of workers and staff regarding the reporting procedures. The training sessions should present the church's policy on reporting, the nature of child abuse, signs of abuse and the major components of this "POLICY GUIDELINES HANDBOOK."

**D. RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS**

To further ensure that the church responds properly to allegations of child abuse, we will follow the following procedures.

**1. ALL ALLEGATIONS WILL BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

The church will not overlook any allegation. We will take all allegations seriously.

- a. Allegations are not to be denied.
- b. Allegations are not to be minimized.
- c. Allegations are not to cause the church to blame the victim or the victims of the family.

**2. ALL SITUATIONS ARE TO BE HANDLED WITH DUE RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL'S PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY.**

All attempts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is preserved. Only proper authorities, outlined in our *REPORTING PROCEDURES*, will be contacted about the allegation.

**3. IMMEDIATE CONTACT OF OUR INSURANCE CARRIER, LAWYER AND ASSEMBLY OF GOD DISTRICT OFFICIALS.**

Because of the various complications that may arise because of such allegations, the insurance company and lawyer will be contacted for further counsel on what steps should be taken with regard to the allegations of child abuse.

**4. ADEQUATE CARE MUST BE SHOWN FOR THE WELL-BEING OF VICTIMS OF CHILD ABUSE.**

Showing care and safety of the victim will help prevent further hurt. This will be our first priority. The church must not respond in a negative manner to the victim, which would only increase the pain and hurt.

**5. ADEQUATE CARE MUST BE EXTENDED TO THE ACCUSED.**

The church must be certain to treat the accused with dignity and support. Any accused church worker should be temporarily relieved of duties and responsibilities until an adequate investigation is completed.

**6. IN CASE OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF ALLEGATIONS**

The following prepared statement should be read or given to the media if allegations become public knowledge. The church must let the public know of its commitment to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

To avoid conflicting or contradictory statements the church will designate the Senior Pastor or a church board member as a spokesperson for the church. All correspondence with the media should be done by only this individual.

## **A PREPARED STATEMENT**

“The members of Cornerstone Church take very seriously the social problem of child abuse. We understand that the future hope of this nation rests upon our children's development and potential. Physical and sexual abuse always endanger that future and shatter the innocence and purity of childhood.

Cornerstone Church has within its governing policy clearly defined guidelines to be implemented with regard to child abuse. Every possible effort is made to ensure the safety of our children and youth. Included in that policy following: proper worker selection, screening procedures, personal interviews, records checks and worker supervision procedures.

Furthermore, all allegations are taken seriously, taking into consideration the well-being of any victim and the accused.

All necessary actions are currently being taken to investigate the current allegation and properly deal with the matter at hand.”