(POL-INCIDENT) Abuse, Misconduct, and Incident Reporting Policy

General Board Approved: May 31, 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear procedures for reporting and responding to abuse, suspected abuse, misconduct, unsafe conduct, injuries, accidents, and other serious incidents connected to the ministry of 1st Free Will Baptist Church.

The church desires to respond to concerns with truth, care, urgency, humility, and proper accountability.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all pastors, employees, officers, ministry leaders, volunteers, members, and others participating in church ministry.

This policy applies to incidents occurring:

- On church property;
- During church-sponsored activities;
- During transportation connected to church ministry;
- During pastoral care, counseling, mentoring, or discipleship connected to the church;
- In any setting where the concern affects the safety, ministry, or testimony of the church.

3. Definitions

- **Abuse** includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation, grooming behavior, or other conduct that harms or endangers a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- **Misconduct** includes behavior by a ministry worker, member, or participant that violates church policy, moral expectations, safety standards, or appropriate ministry boundaries.
- **Incident** includes injury, accident, threat, medical emergency, unsafe condition, property damage, inappropriate behavior, or other event requiring documentation or leadership attention.

4. Immediate Safety

When a serious concern arises, the first priority is the immediate safety of the person who may be harmed or at risk.

Ministry workers should:

- Remove the person from immediate danger if it is safe to do so;
- Call emergency services when needed;
- Notify a pastor, ministry leader, or designated church leader as soon as possible;
- Preserve information and avoid disturbing evidence when abuse or criminal conduct may be involved.

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5. Reporting Abuse or Suspected Abuse

Any person who knows of, observes, receives a disclosure of, or reasonably suspects abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult must report the concern promptly to the appropriate civil authorities as required by law.

The church shall not discourage, delay, or prevent a report to civil authorities.

A report to the General Board does not replace any legally required report to civil authorities.

6. Reporting to The General Board

In addition to any legally required report to civil authorities, concerns should be reported promptly to one of the following:

- Lead Pastor;
- Deacon Board member;
- General Board member;
- Another designated church officer if the above individuals are unavailable or implicated.

If the concern involves the Lead Pastor, the report should be made to the Deacon Board.

If the concern involves a Deacon, Trustee, officer, employee, or ministry leader, the concern should be reported to the Lead Pastor and/or appropriate board leadership, unless that person is implicated.

7. No Promise Of Secrecy

Ministry workers shall not promise secrecy to anyone reporting abuse, misconduct, or a serious concern.

The church will handle matters with appropriate care and confidentiality, but information may need to be shared with parents or guardians, civil authorities, the General Board, insurance representatives, legal counsel, or others with a legitimate need to know.

8. Documentation

An incident report should be completed as soon as possible after any serious incident, allegation, injury, accident, policy violation, or safety concern.

Documentation should include:

- Date, time, and location;
- Names of persons involved;
- Names of witnesses;
- Description of what happened;
- Actions taken;
- Persons notified;
- Whether civil authorities were contacted;
- Signature of the person completing the report.

Reports should be factual and should avoid speculation, blame, or unnecessary personal opinion.

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9. Suspension During Review

Any person accused of abuse, serious misconduct, or conduct that may endanger others may be immediately suspended from ministry service while the matter is reviewed.

Suspension during review is not a declaration of guilt. It is a protective measure for all involved.

10. Cooperation with Authorities

The church shall cooperate with law enforcement, child protection agencies, adult protection agencies, insurance representatives, and legal counsel as appropriate.

The church shall not attempt to investigate criminal matters in place of civil authorities.

11. Internal Review

After immediate safety and legal reporting responsibilities are addressed, the General Board may conduct an internal review to determine appropriate ministry, employment, membership, or disciplinary action.

Any action involving church membership discipline or dismissal shall be handled according to the Church Bylaws, including the role of the Deacon Board and the due process required therein.

12. Communication

Public or congregational communication about serious incidents shall be handled only by persons designated by the General Board.

Care should be taken to protect victims, avoid gossip, avoid defamation, preserve confidentiality, and speak truthfully.

13. Retaliation Prohibited

No person shall be punished, threatened, intimidated, or retaliated against for making a good-faith report of abuse, misconduct, unsafe conduct, or policy violation.

14. False Reports

Knowingly making a false report is serious misconduct and may result in disciplinary action. A report that cannot be proven is not necessarily a false report.

15. Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically by the General Board and may be revised as needed.

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