(POL-PROTECTION) Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

General Board Approved: May 31, 2026

1. Purpose

1st Free Will Baptist Church desires to provide a safe and faithful ministry environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The purpose of this policy is to establish clear expectations for supervision, conduct, safety, and accountability in all ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

This policy is adopted because the church takes seriously its responsibility before God, families, the congregation, and the law to care for those entrusted to its ministry.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all ministries, programs, activities, classes, events, and trips involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, whether on church property or off church property.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Nursery;
- Children's ministry;
- Youth ministry;
- Sunday School;
- Vacation Bible School;
- Small groups;
- Church camps, retreats, and trips;
- Transportation connected to church ministry;
- Counseling, mentoring, or discipleship involving minors or vulnerable adults;
- Any church-sponsored activity involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

This policy applies to pastors, employees, officers, ministry leaders, volunteers, teachers, helpers, drivers, chaperones, and all others serving under the approval or authority of the church.

3. Definitions

For purposes of this policy:

- **Child / Minor** means any person under 18 years of age.
- **Youth** means a minor participating in middle school or high school ministry.
- **Vulnerable Adult** means an adult who, because of age, disability, illness, cognitive condition, dependency, or other limitation, may be unable to fully protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- **Ministry Worker** means any pastor, employee, officer, ministry leader, volunteer, teacher, helper, driver, chaperone, counselor, mentor, or other person serving in a ministry role.
- **Abuse** includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation, grooming behavior, or any conduct that places a child, youth, or vulnerable adult at risk of harm.

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4. General Protection Standard

All ministry involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be conducted with appropriate supervision, visibility, accountability, and care.

Ministry workers shall avoid situations that place a child, youth, vulnerable adult, or ministry worker in an isolated, unobservable, or unnecessarily private setting.

5. Two-Adult Rule / Rule of Three

Whenever reasonably possible, at least two approved adult ministry workers should be present during ministry activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

When two approved adults are not available, the ministry activity should follow the Rule of Three, meaning that one approved adult should not be alone with one child, youth, or vulnerable adult in an isolated or unobservable setting.

Acceptable alternatives may include:

- Two approved adults with one or more minors;
- One approved adult with two or more minors in an observable setting;
- One approved adult meeting in a visible area where another approved adult is nearby and aware of the meeting;
- A parent or guardian present or immediately nearby.

Private, isolated, one-on-one situations are not permitted except in genuine emergency situations.

6. Visibility

Rooms used for children, youth, or vulnerable adult ministry should remain observable when reasonably possible. Doors should remain open, have windows, or be located where other adults are nearby and able to observe activity.

Window coverings, locked doors, or other barriers that prevent reasonable observation should not be used during ministry activities unless necessary for safety, security, or emergency response.

7. Restroom and Diapering Procedures

Restroom and diapering procedures shall be handled with care, modesty, visibility, and accountability.

For young children who need restroom assistance, ministry workers should avoid being alone behind a closed door with a child. When assistance is needed, another approved adult should be nearby or aware.

Diapering should take place in an appropriate area that provides privacy for the child while maintaining accountability for the worker. Diapering should not occur in hidden or isolated areas.

Parents or guardians should be contacted when a child has a need that requires assistance beyond ordinary ministry care.

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8. Physical Contact and Appropriate Affection

Appropriate affection may be part of caring ministry, especially with young children. However, all physical contact must be wholesome, observable, age-appropriate, and never secretive, coercive, sexual, harsh, or confusing.

Appropriate contact may include:

- Brief side hugs;
- High-fives or fist bumps;
- Holding a young child's hand for safety;
- Comforting a distressed child in an appropriate and observable way.

Inappropriate contact includes, but is not limited to:

- Sexual contact or suggestive touching;
- Forced affection;
- Lap-sitting with older children or youth;
- Wrestling or roughhousing that could be misunderstood or become unsafe;

Any touch that a child, youth, vulnerable adult, parent, or ministry leader reasonably finds uncomfortable or inappropriate.

9. Discipline and Correction

Ministry workers shall use calm, respectful, and appropriate correction. Physical punishment is not permitted.

Ministry workers shall not shame, threaten, ridicule, scream at, or intimidate children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

When behavior becomes disruptive, unsafe, or beyond the ability of ministry workers to handle appropriately, parents or guardians should be contacted.

10. Check-In and Check-Out

Children should be released only to a parent, guardian, or approved adult designated by the parent or guardian.

For nursery and children's ministry, the church may use sign-in/sign-out sheets, tags, verbal confirmation, or other procedures appropriate to the size and structure of the ministry.

Youth may be dismissed according to the normal expectations communicated to parents and guardians, unless special circumstances require direct release to a parent or guardian.

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11. Overnight Events

Overnight events require prior approval from the General Board.

For overnight events:

- Parents or guardians must be informed of the nature, location, and supervision plan for the event;
- Written permission should be obtained;
- Sleeping arrangements must be modest and appropriate;
- Adults should not sleep alone in the same room, tent, cabin, or enclosed space with one unrelated minor;
- Male and female sleeping areas shall be separate;
- Adequate approved adult supervision must be provided.

12. Transportation of Children and Youth

Transportation involving children and youth shall follow the Church Driver Approval Policy and the Church Transportation and Vehicle Use Policy.

Ministry workers should avoid transporting one unrelated minor alone except in emergencies or when specifically approved by a parent or guardian and appropriate church leadership.

13. Digital Communication

Digital communication involving children and youth shall follow the Electronic Communication and Social Media Policy.

Private, secretive, or inappropriate communication between adult ministry workers and minors is not permitted.

14. Reporting Concerns

Any concern involving abuse, suspected abuse, misconduct, unsafe conduct, boundary violations, or policy violations shall be reported according to the Abuse, Misconduct, and Incident Reporting Policy.

Ministry workers should not ignore concerns, attempt to handle serious matters privately, or promise secrecy to a child, youth, vulnerable adult, parent, or accused person.

15. Removal from Ministry

The church may immediately remove or suspend any person from ministry service when safety concerns, misconduct, allegations, policy violations, or other circumstances make continued service unwise.

Removal from ministry service does not necessarily imply guilt. It may be done for the protection of all involved while concerns are reviewed.

16. Review

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

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