

**CHILD AND YOUTH  
ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY  
FOR HOPE POINT CHURCH  
Adopted September 1, 2013**

# CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY FOR HOPE POINT CHURCH

## Introduction

**HOPE POINT CHURCH** believes that children should be safe from harm, abuse, and neglect. We also desire to protect and support those who work with our children on a paid and volunteer basis. We acknowledge that child abuse is not just a tragedy for the abused and the abuser; the repercussions of abuse reach their families and our wider community as well.

To help protect minors, **HOPE POINT CHURCH** has adopted the following Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy. It is important that all **HOPE POINT CHURCH** paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent sexual, emotional, and physical abuse against children. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of Protection and Prevention, and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children.

## Purpose

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of abuse of a minor in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist **HOPE POINT CHURCH** in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

## Definitions

The following terms used herein and are defined as follows:

1. *Paid Staff*: Any pastor, minister, or employee who is paid by Hope Point.
2. *Children/Youth/Minor*: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
3. *Adult*: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or as defined by state law.

4. *Volunteer*: Means any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors.
5. *Teenage Volunteer*: Means any volunteer (as defined in #4 above) who is less than 18 years of age.
6. *Contracted childcare worker*: Means anyone who is contracted (hired) by Hope Point for temporary childcare responsibilities in support of Hope Point events or meetings.
7. *Sexual Abuse*: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor or adult to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of minor or adult, or incest with a minor or adult, or as defined by federal and state law. This includes and is not limited to unwelcome sexual remarks, jokes, advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures; sexual touching, fondling, molestation, assault, or other intimate physical contact; compelling another person to engage in a sexual act by threats or fear or undue influence; and providing or displaying pornographic materials to another person.
8. *Emotional Abuse*: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may include bullying.
9. *Physical Abuse*: Defined as non-accidental trauma or physical injury to a minor caused by punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child.
10. *Supervision*: reasonable exercise of thoughtful action and care by responsible persons towards others, realizing that what constitutes appropriate supervision will vary with the ages of those involved and the context of the activity.

## **Protection and Prevention**

### **Volunteer Screening Procedures**

The following screening procedures are to be used with contracted workers and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All information collected should be maintained in confidence.

1. *Volunteer Application*: Any volunteer who will work with a minor must complete HP Form1 (Workers with Minors Application). This form will be completed and submitted online.

Our Applications include questions regarding:

- Current address.
- Volunteer experience.

- Criminal history information. (Except for Teen Volunteers and contracted workers under the age of 18)- accomplished through a criminal background check.
  - Personal references.
2. Conduct interviews with qualified applicants. It is understood that formal interviews may not be utilized for volunteers and contracted workers since better information is available through observation and interaction over time. (see 6-month Rule in #5 below)

If detrimental information is uncovered during the interview but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is ultimately hired or accepted as a volunteer, document the reasons for overriding the prior information.

3. Contact all listed references. Contact each of the volunteer applicant's references and ask for any information that might help determine the applicant's suitability for the position. If a response is not received within a reasonable period of time, follow up and keep notes if possible. Use Form # HP 3- Reference Check Questions. This form will be completed and submitted online.
4. *Criminal Background Check:* **HOPE POINT CHURCH** will conduct a criminal background check on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All criminal background checks will be updated every 2 years, or as deemed appropriate by Hope Point staff.

*Any prospective volunteer that has a previous conviction of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they might have contact with minors.*

*Any prospective volunteer may also be disqualified from service to minors due to previous felony charges revealed during the background check. The Elder board will review and provide resolution in such instances on a case-by-case basis and will document this decision.*

5. *Six-Month Preference:* It is recommended that all volunteers working with children be a regular attender of **HOPE POINT CHURCH** for six months. Exceptions to this time preference is weighed on an individual basis and discussed as a staff unit.
6. *Conduct annual training and review Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy.* Training will include signs and indicators of sexual abuse, screening procedures, supervision procedures, behavioral guidelines, restroom policy, and emergency procedures.

### **Confidentiality**

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All information discovered or obtained through a criminal background check will be stored in a secure online database. Access to this information will be restricted to Hope Point staff.

## Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating situation exists, **HOPE POINT CHURCH**:

1. Will have adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity.
2. Will monitor facilities during activities involving minors.
3. Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom. The paid staff or volunteer will wait to escort the child back to the activity. The volunteer should be visible at all times by another worker.
4. Will release minors only to a parent or guardian and utilize the check in security system during regular, Sunday morning worship services for minors under the age of 12. This system includes identification labels for children and parents which ensure the proper release of children to the correct adults.
5. Will recognize that instances of counseling minors where circumstances dictate that counseling is most effective on a one-on-one basis, a paid staff or volunteer may meet individually with a minor in a public place with the awareness and previous consent of that individual's parent or legal guardian. Exceptions to consent may be made for emergencies.
6. Will obtain parental permission, including emergency contacts before taking minors on trips and should provide information regarding the trip.
7. Will use two paid staff or volunteers when transporting minors in vehicles, whenever possible.
  - Driver should be at least 21 years old and no older than 65 years of age.
  - Driver should be accompanied by at least two minors except for when the driver is transporting his or her own children.
  - In rare circumstances when this is unavoidable, the parent should be notified.
8. Will encourage minors to use a "buddy system" whenever minors go on trips off of **HOPE POINT CHURCH** property.
9. Reasonable effort will be made to monitor peer to peer interaction during unstructured time.
10. To the extent possible, HOPE POINT CHURCH events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.
11. Will screen all paid staff and volunteers and approve those individuals in advance for any overnight activities.

## Behavioral Guidelines

All volunteers and paid staff will observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. Whenever possible, at least two preferably unrelated paid staff or volunteers will be in the room when minors are present. Doors will be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present.
3. When escorting a child to the restroom, volunteers
  - are never allowed in a restroom alone with a child
  - should assist children with their clothing in the doorway before they go into the restroom.
  - should always remain visible by another volunteer.
  - should stand in the doorway to monitor children when needed.
  - should prop the door open and ask another volunteer to assist you, if the child needs further help.
4. Avoid all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
5. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
6. If you recognize an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and adult, maintain clear professional boundaries speak to another individual with supervisory authority.
7. If one-on-one pastoral care is necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments. Speaking to a minor one-on-one should be done in public settings where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other people.
8. Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the appropriate staff member of **HOPE POINT CHURCH**.

## **Disqualification**

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

The Elder board may qualify a volunteer for service who has committed a past offense (non-sexual) and will document such decisions on a case-by-case basis.

## **Response to Sexual Abuse**

**HOPE POINT CHURCH** will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. All accusations of abuse will be taken seriously. Under South Carolina law, clergy and paid staff are under legal mandate to report cases of abuse against minors. Accordingly, allegations of abuse are a serious matter and should not be made flippantly or lightly, but with thoughtfulness and reasonability. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse.

When an allegation is made involving abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The Hope Point staff member overseeing the area where an allegation is made will begin investigating the allegations and may use the assistance of the Administrative Pastor. In cases where a paid staff member is accused of misconduct, the Administrative Pastor will conduct the investigation. In cases where the Administrative Pastor is accused of misconduct, an Elder will conduct the investigation. The investigation will be conducted as follows:

1. The Hope Point Staff member will investigate and confirm the facts reported and the condition of the minor offended on the day that the incident is reported using HP Form 5, Incident Report. This report is to be completed in its entirety within 24 hours of any formal allegation of physical, emotional, or sexual misconduct to a minor. This investigation and report shall consist of basic who, what, and where questions only, as DSS or the local law

enforcement agency will conduct a detailed investigation. This report is to be submitted to the Administrative Pastor within the same timeframe.

2. When an allegation is brought forward, the Hope Point staff member shall report the incident or allegation to appropriate authorities, which includes the Department of Social Services and/or the Spartanburg County Law Enforcement.
3. The Administrative Pastor shall report the matter to **HOPE POINT CHURCH's** insurance carrier- Church Mutual.
4. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
5. **HOPE POINT CHURCH** may suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
6. At the conclusion of this investigation, the Administrative Pastor (and legal counsel if necessary) will meet with the Elder body of **HOPE POINT CHURCH** and present the results of this investigation, which will include findings and recommendations of actions.
7. As deemed necessary by the Elders, the Administrative Pastor or an Elder will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
8. The Administrative Pastor or an Elder will meet with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
9. During the investigation, the Administrative Pastor or an Elder may maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, and inform them of the actions taken and assist them in their process of healing.
10. The Administrative Pastor and/or Elders (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts.
11. The Administrative Pastor will communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel of **HOPE POINT CHURCH**.
12. The Elders will determine the appropriate communication from Hope Point Church with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
13. The Administrative Pastor, in conjunction with the Elder body and legal counsel, will respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise.

## **Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy Acknowledgment**

These guidelines have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. **HOPE POINT CHURCH** reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this policy and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the policy and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with the **HOPE POINT CHURCH** or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have reviewed a copy of the **HOPE POINT CHURCH's** Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained herein. I understand that these policies are the property of the **HOPE POINT CHURCH**.

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Print Name

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Signature

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Date