

Heritage Bible Church Child Protection Plan

February 25th, 2023

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1. General

Child abuse is a threat Heritage Bible Church (HBC) takes seriously. The primary goal of this Child Protection Plan (hereafter, “*Plan*”) is to minimize the likelihood of HBC bringing dishonor to God’s name. The *Plan* seeks to achieve this goal by minimizing the risk of child abuse. HBC is committed to preventing abuse to children or youth while they are involved in the ministries of HBC. If child abuse is reported, a secondary goal of the *Plan* is to provide all persons concerned with knowledge of how to respond.

2. Definitions

2.1. *Child abuse.*

2.1.1. *Physical abuse.* Includes violent assault or other actions leading to possible injury to the child. Includes close confinement such as tying or locking in a closet.

2.1.2. *Sexual abuse.* Includes sexual molestation, incest, and exploitation for prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.

2.2. *Child.* For the purposes of this *Plan*, a child is considered to be any person under the age of eighteen, regardless of physical or mental condition.

2.3. *Approved Children’s Workers* (hereafter, “*Workers*”). Those individuals who have met the requirements of this *Plan* and thus minister to children participating in ministries of HBC. *Workers* are responsible, during the noted activities, for the care of children who attend.

2.4. *Children’s ministries.* All children’s and youth activities sponsored by HBC. These include, but are not limited to: Summer Camps, Children’s Church, Nursery, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Youth Group, missions trips, and other special activities.

2.5. *Coordinator.* Any *Workers* (paid or volunteer) responsible for a given ministry (e.g. Summer Camp, Nursery, Children’s Church, etc.).

2.6. *Deacon of Children’s Ministries* (hereafter “the *Deacon*”). Individual appointed by the *Elders* of HBC as described in Article IV.C. of HBC’s Constitution. In the event no *Deacon* is currently serving, the *Elders* shall appoint a person to have oversight of the *Plan*.

2.7. *Elders.* The spiritual and functional leaders of HBC who are appointed as described in Article IV.B. of the HBC Constitution. As described in the noted article of the constitution, under certain circumstances, a Steering Committee may be the local leadership of the church rather than *Elders*. In such cases, all references to the *Elders* refer to the steering committee and all references to an *Elder* refer to a member of the steering committee.

3. Policies

- 3.1. Child abuse, in any of the forms listed in 2.1, will not be tolerated.
- 3.2. All children's and youth workers shall be alert to the potential for child abuse and shall report incidents of and/or allegations of child abuse to an *Elder* in accordance with the procedures listed in section 4.8.1.
- 3.3. Upon report of allegations of child abuse, children's and youth workers shall do their utmost to ensure the well-being of all involved and the honor of God's name.
- 3.4. All persons desiring to serve as children's or youth workers (volunteer or paid) must qualify as a *Worker* per the requirements of section 4.1.
- 3.5. The policies of this *Plan* apply to announced ministry activities that occur both inside and outside the walls of HBC's facilities. For example, if a *Worker* invites students to his/her home for a special ministry activity, the *Worker* shall make every reasonable attempt to have another *Worker* present.
- 3.6. Though it is impossible for this *Plan* to cover unannounced interaction between *Workers* and students, *Workers* are urged to obtain parental approval before such interaction and to assure that such interaction occurs in a public place so that it is above reproach.
- 3.7. The policies of this *Plan* do not apply to child care provided in the context of HBC related activities where parents are directly responsible for arranging for such care (e.g. a gathering of several families where an individual is hired or volunteers to watch the children).
- 3.8. For the purposes of special events (e.g. the congregational business meeting), children's workers may be hired from those who have been cleared as *Workers* by another approved church (see section 5.1.3). A record of approved churches shall be kept on file with this *Plan*.
 - 3.8.1. Individuals who have proven trustworthy in caring for the children of a *Worker* (i.e. have been recommended by a *Worker*), who authorize a background check, who take part in *Plan* training, and who are approved by the *Deacon* may be hired as *Workers*.
- 3.9. For special events where an outside group comes to the church to minister for a limited period of time, the *Deacon* may, with counsel from the *Elder(s)*, approve the group's workers to minister with HBC's children for a specified limited time. This approval will be based on the following considerations:
 - 3.9.1. The *Deacon* shall review the group's policy for screening its members.
 - 3.9.2. The *Deacon* shall discern from communication with the organization that it is trustworthy.
- 3.10. *Workers* shall not use corporeal punishment (any punishment that causes physical discomfort for the child) under any circumstances. When children are in need of discipline, it shall be administered per the "Heritage Bible Church Child Discipline Policy"
- 3.11. If a *Worker* observes that a child has been abused (e.g. bruises, injuries, or verbal testimony), regardless of where the abuse occurred, this, by Missouri law, must be reported as noted in Section 4.8.4.

4. Procedures

- 4.1. Selection. To qualify as a *Worker*, an individual must:
 - 4.1.1. Have attended HBC regularly for at least 6 months and given reasonable testimony of Christ like character.
 - 4.1.2. Take part in *Plan* training.

- 4.1.3. Initially, and once every five years thereafter, sign HBC *Plan* "Children's Worker Agreement & Background Check Authorization" form (Section 7, hereafter "*Worker Form*") noting agreement to abide by it and authorizing HBC to obtain a criminal background check on them (as described in 5.3.1). To avoid incurring the expense of a large number of background checks in the same year, the group of *Workers* who had background checks done during the 1st year of the *Plan* should have their second background check advance by one or two years so that the number of total background checks per year is spread more evenly across the five year cycle of the plan.
- 4.1.4. Must be at least 15 years of age
- 4.2. Windows in Doors. To provide accountability, HBC shall make every reasonable effort to have windows in the doors of classrooms used for any children's ministry.
- 4.3. Unlocked Doors. Doors to rooms in which children's ministry is taking place shall remain unlocked during said ministry.
- 4.4. Two-Person Rule. For ministries involving children 6th grade age or younger, every reasonable attempt will be made to have two *Workers* present. One of these two *Workers* will be at least 18 years of age. The second person can be a roving individual who drops into various classes unannounced. An example of this is the Sunday School superintendent checking in on the classes at various times throughout the Sunday School hour. Ministry plans shall not include a teacher and a student alone such that no one else can see or hear their interaction. When one-on-one time is needed, it shall take place where it can be seen (4.2 facilitates this) or where it can be heard by others.
- 4.5. Bathroom Usage. When children, 6th grade or younger, need to use the bathroom, every reasonable attempt shall be made to have a *Worker* go with them. For children over age 5, the assisting *Worker* shall be of the same sex and, unless extenuating circumstances arise, will not enter the bathroom stall with the child. If no *Worker* of the same sex is available, a *Worker* will wait outside the bathroom assuring the child does not remain in the bathroom for an unreasonable period of time. When students under age 5 need help in using the bathroom, the *Worker* will assist, making every reasonable effort not to have contact with the child's private parts. Children needing diaper changes will be cared for with sanitary wipes and every reasonable effort shall be made to avoid direct contact with the child's private parts. *Workers* shall not remain in a closed bathroom with a child for more than a minute or two. Children older than 6th grade will be encouraged to go in groups of two or three.
- 4.6. Training. Once every five years, the *Deacon* shall provide *Workers* with training regarding the various aspects of the *Plan*.
- 4.7. Age Difference. *Workers*, under the age of 18, shall be at least 5 years older than the children with whom they are working. A young person with less age difference can be present (e.g. as a helper), but shall not be left alone with children.
- 4.8. Actions upon allegation of child abuse.
 - 4.8.1. Immediate reporting. Anyone aware of allegations of child abuse, either by direct observation or otherwise, is responsible for reporting these allegations immediately to an *Elder* of HBC. No such allegation should go for more than 1 hour without being reported to an *Elder*.
 - 4.8.2. Investigating. *Elders* with knowledge of an allegation shall share that knowledge with the *Elder* board. The *Elders* are responsible for quickly investigating the situation to determine the facts and whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to the actions of Section 4.8.3 and following.
 - 4.8.3. *Elder Voice* of the Church. Should there be evidence of child abuse by someone in the church, the *Elders* shall designate one of their number as the *Elder Voice* (point man) of the church in handling media inquiries and contacting authorities. All inquiries shall be

referred to the *Elder Voice* and other church representatives shall refuse to speak to the issue publicly.

- 4.8.4. *Reporting to authorities.* Should there be evidence of child abuse, the *Elder Voice* shall contact the church's attorney within 6 hours for counsel on how to proceed. Should there be evidence of child abuse, the *Elder Voice* shall contact the authorities within 9 hours. The State of Missouri Child Abuse or Neglect phone number is 1-800-392-3738. Should there be evidence of child abuse by someone in the church, the *Elder Voice* shall notify the church's insurance agent within 12 hours. Should there be evidence of child abuse by someone in the church, the *Elders* should discern as much as they can while fully cooperating with those assigned by the state to complete the official investigation.
- 4.8.5. *Suspension of Workers.* The *Elders* are responsible for suspending *Workers* from service upon receipt of an allegation of child abuse until such allegation has been satisfactorily investigated and the individual is exonerated. The *Elders* shall communicate such actions to the *Worker's* Coordinator.
- 4.8.6. *Termination of Workers.* The *Elders* shall terminate *Workers* from service for repeated willful violation of any requirement of the *Plan* or for an actual instance of abuse. The *Elders* shall also communicate such actions to the *Worker's* Coordinator. An example of a willful violation of a requirement of the *Plan* would be: to choose to spend unsupervised time alone with a child with no form of accountability and no evidence of extenuating circumstances requiring such.
- 4.8.7. *Records.* Records of any alleged incidents shall be kept by the *Elders* for at least 7 years to document all efforts of handling them. This shall include date and time of the accusation, those involved, dates and times of any calls to state authorities, dates of interviews, facts uncovered, and a summary of the matter's resolution.
- 4.8.8. *Elder Follow-up.* If, after an investigation, the allegation of abuse is found to be unsubstantiated, the *Elders* shall follow up with the individual who reported the alleged abuse, the accused, and the *Worker's* Coordinator. The *Elders* shall make every reasonable effort to assure all those aware of the matter are informed of the accused's innocence.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. Deacon of Children's Ministries

- 5.1.1. Once every two years, review the *Plan* for any needed updates. If updates appear to be necessary, the *Deacon* shall obtain the *Elders* approval before modifying the *Plan*. If changes are made, the *Deacon* shall update the *Plan* training.
- 5.1.2. Provide training opportunities for prospective new *Workers* and for *Workers* who received training five years ago.
- 5.1.3. With counsel from representative *Elder(s)*, find and approve, nearby, like-minded churches whose child protection plan is satisfactory such that their *Workers* can be hired to work with HBC children during special events. The *Deacon* shall maintain a list of approved churches and shall provide this list to children's ministry Coordinators and, upon request, to the *Elders*.
- 5.1.4. When HBC chooses an outside group to minister, the *Deacon* may, with counsel from representative *Elder(s)*, determine whether the group's members should be approved to work with HBC's children as described in section 3.9.
- 5.1.5. Maintain a list of each *Worker's* name, last training date, and last criminal background check date based on results provided by the *Elder* (5.3.1).

5.1.6. Every six months, review noted list for *Workers* whose last background check date is within six months of five years old.

5.1.7. For prospective new *Workers* and *Workers* meeting criteria of 5.1.6, ask *Worker* to submit, to the *Elder* (5.3.1), a signed *Worker Form* and participate in *Plan* training.

5.2. Coordinators

5.2.1. When an individual indicates willingness to serve in a children's ministry:

1. Assure they meet requirements in sections 4.1.
2. Explain and provide them with a copy of the *Plan*.
3. Arrange for them to receive *Plan* training.
4. Provide a blank copy of the *Worker Form* to the applicant, ask them to fill it out, sign it, and provide it to the *Elder* (5.3.1)
5. Wait for response from the *Elder* regarding the applicant's approval.

5.3. Elders

5.3.1. Select one of their number to:

1. Based on signed *Worker Form*, request criminal background check for applicants.
2. Inform the *Deacon* and Coordinator of applicant's approval status.
3. Retain criminal background check results in a way that keeps them confidential to the *Elder* board.

5.3.2. Be prepared to quickly investigate any child abuse allegations as described in section 4.8.

6. Conclusion

HBC wishes to reduce the risk of child abuse and provide a safe environment for children and youth and will continue to strive toward this end to protect our children.

7. Children's Worker Agreement & Background Check Authorization

The following is an excerpt of the "Children's Worker Agreement, Background Check Authorization & Teacher's Agreement"
("HeritageChildrensWorkerContractBackgroundCheckAuthorizationYyyyMnDd.doc").

[start of file excerpt]

_____ Name (Last, First, Middle)

Children's Worker Agreement & Background Check Authorization

In accepting the responsibility to work with children at Heritage Bible Church, I agree to the following:

- I will abide by the guidelines of Heritage's Child Protection Plan and I authorize Heritage Bible Church to obtain a national criminal & sexual offender background check on me. I understand my personal information, provided below, will NOT be used for any purpose other than obtaining the noted check. I understand the results of my check will only be accessible to the leaders of Heritage Bible Church.

Date of birth: _____

Email Address _____

(you will receive an email requesting that you enter your information to authorize your background check)

Signature _____ Date _____

Date of Child Protection Plan Training _____

Certification of background check

Leader Signature _____ Date _____

[end of file excerpt]

8. Change History

8.1. February 25th, 2023 Changes

8.1.1. Removed Social Security number, date of birth, and street address from the application form as it is now entered by the applicant on the background check website and need not be known nor handled by Deacon of Children's Ministries. Added email address as this is where applicant will receive email requesting entry of information to authorize the background check.

8.1.2. Replaced "Heritage Bible Church" in page header with HBC logo.