

FBC Cabot Policy on Interaction with Minors

First Baptist Church Cabot (FBC) is committed to providing a church environment that is a safe place for children and youth (minors) and that will protect them from any maltreatment when they are involved in church-related activities. We adopt these policies and procedures not only to maximize safety and prevent child maltreatment from occurring within our church community, but also to guide and protect employees and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of child maltreatment. For Clarity, students 18 years or older, participating as students, are still considered minors. Any reference to volunteers in the policy refers to anyone 18 years of age and over who is serving without pay in the children or youth ministry.

- I. **Mandatory reporting** – All FBC staff and volunteers working with minors are mandatory reporters. Any allegation or suspicion of maltreatment of a minor, including but not limited to abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, or abandonment, should be treated as sincere and legitimate and must be referred to the quickest available Pastoral Staff member and the Child Abuse Hotline, a unit established by the Department of Human Services and the Division of Arkansas State Police. All allegations must be reported to the Child Abuse Hotline. It is the job of the Child Abuse Hotline to decide if there is any substance to the allegation. The Child Abuse Hotline number is 1-800-482-5964.

- II. **Boundaries** – All staff members and volunteers will maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries with minors.
 - a. Examples of permissible physical contact may include:
 - i. Brief side hugs or an arm around the shoulder.
 - ii. Brief pat on the shoulder/upper back.
 - iii. Hand-shakes or “high fives.”
 - iv. Holding hands during prayer.
 - v. Holding hands while walking with young children or those unsteady.
 - vi. Brief touching of hand, head, shoulder, or arm.
 - b. Driving alone with a minor is forbidden. The two-adult rule applies to driving. Exception: Volunteers driving to/from church with minors that are not their children need specific written permission from the minor’s parents. Text, email or written note are all acceptable forms of permission.

- III. **Two-Adult rule** – The two-adult rule states that there must always be two non-related adults present when supervising one or more minors. This rule is designed for the safety of volunteers and staff members as well as minors, and is required across all ministry areas. When not reasonably feasible to staff with two non-related adults, there must be an additional adult serving as a “floater” with visual and physical access to all areas. A floater could be any staff member or volunteer who can move in and out of classrooms, recreation areas, and meeting rooms functioning as an additional set of eyes and hands.

- IV. **Guidance and Discipleship** – All guidance and discipleship with minors will be accomplished while following the Two-Adult rule. Exception: Pastoral staff guidance and discipleship may be accomplished by one pastor in offices with either the door open or with unobstructed windows (no closed blinds or curtains) and another adult in view, or in a public space in view of others.

V. **Electronic Communication with Minors** – Protect the privacy and identity of all minors in online writings, postings and discussions.

a. Social media Connections

- i. No volunteer or staff member may initiate connection with a minor on social media (adding a friend/following/messaging).
- ii. If a minor initiates a social media connection, a volunteer or staff member may respond by adding the minor, as long as the minor is over 13 years of age.
- iii. All social media groups and pages associated with Preschools, Children’s or Youth Ministry areas will be designated as “closed” groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the page administrators.
- iv. All church-related social media groups and pages must have at least two administrators. One of the administrators must be a staff member. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
- v. Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for guidance and discipleship - especially with minors.
 1. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation that is compliant with this Policy (e.g., office with unobstructed windows, two-adult rule, etc.).
- vi. Social media is a great tool for communication with a student ministry as a whole – getting information out to the group, not one on one.
- vii. It is not necessary, nor productive, to reach out to minors that have never connected with the church or ministry
 1. Minors spend a great deal of time online; however, it is not the means by which they form connections with churches
- viii. When checking in on any location-tagging social media, only “check in” yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants’ location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.

b. Texting and Social Media Communication

- i. All communication with minors must be in a public or group forum. Just as one should never be alone with a minor in person, no volunteer or staff member should have a private electronic conversation with a minor.
- ii. If a minor text messages or private messages a volunteer or staff member, the volunteer or staff member should screen shot the initial message, create a new message to the minor, and include a second adult, with the response below:
 1. This new message should begin with: “Hey (second adult), (minor) just messaged me asking about (this topic). Let’s all talk about this.”
 2. The communications policy should be communicated somewhat regularly with both minors and their parents and volunteers and staff members. As a result, this response should not be a surprise to the minor.

c. Snapchat and other similar applications

- i. Due to the design of this type of social media, any communication or other interaction between a volunteers or staff member and a minor via Snapchat, or any other similar application, is prohibited.

d. Photos

- i. Volunteers and staff members must not post photos or video that identify minors or vulnerable adults on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
- ii. Photos may only be posted to social media pages by page administrators. Adults (staff members, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. “tag”) themselves.
- iii. Photos of minors may only be published or posted after a photo release has been signed by their parent or guardian. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors.
- iv. When posting photos, allow others to identify themselves.

VI. Classroom safety

- a. All classrooms from newborn through high school must follow the two-adult rule. Two adults are required to be with students at all times. If students arrive before two teachers are present, they should wait in the hallway or a common area until two teachers arrive. If a teacher calls in sick or a class ends up with only one teacher, that class will combine with another class until the two-adult rule can be followed.
- b. **Bathroom breaks** – If the students are old enough, they should go to the bathroom without teacher help. Teachers will ensure the bathroom is clear of any other adults. If the students need teacher help, the two-adult rule applies. If there is not a bathroom in the classroom, a bathroom break should be planned for all students at the same time. Only allow one child per stall or urinal in the bathroom at a time.
- c. **Sitting in laps** – Two- and three-year-olds may sit in a volunteer’s or staff member’s lap for one minute and then should be moved to a seat. These minors may sit next to a teacher or be held by a teacher while the teacher walks for a longer period of time.
 - i. No other minor (pre-k and older) may sit in a volunteer’s or staff member’s lap.
- d. **Diaper Changing and Nursery Care**
 - i. Only volunteers and staff members who are 18-years-old or older may change diapers.
 - ii. There will be a minimum of two staff members or volunteers present in the room when changing diapers.
- e. **Child Behavior and Conduct**
 - i. All behavior is a form of communication; therefore, it is important to listen to what a minor is saying through his or her actions.
 - ii. If a minor is disruptive, disrespectful, or dangerous, notify the staff as soon as possible.
 - iii. Never touch any minor in a disrespectful manner or make derogatory remarks.
 - iv. Never spank, yell at, or intimidate a minor in an angry or fearful manner.
- f. **Minors with Special Needs** – Physical touch required by any special needs minors that falls outside of previously stated boundaries, (see Section II. VI.) will be specifically documented and a waiver signed by the parents and teachers of said minors.

VII. Screening

- a. **Staff: Background Requirements**
 - i. Applicants for full-time or part-time paid employment at FBC will be required to provide, complete, or undergo the following:

1. An Employment and Volunteer Ministry Application that includes information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes;
 2. A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction of pending proceeding for child maltreatment, including but not limited to abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, or abandonment; and
 3. A reference check covering, where possible, the two immediate past employers, or personal references unrelated to the applicant if no information can be obtained from past employers.
- ii. Prior to hiring an applicant, FBC will obtain a criminal record report for that individual. Every year, FBC will perform national criminal database searches and national sex offender registry searches on existing employees, and each employee shall be required to execute any documents that FBC might request for such purpose. Any individual who has lived outside Arkansas in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court searches.
 - iii. Every new employee will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FBC Policy on Interaction with Minors, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
 - iv. All staff will complete "Ministry Safe Training" as designated by the Senior Pastor. Due to the rapidly changing environment, this training will be refreshed annually.
 - v. Any candidate for employment who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding addressing an allegation of child maltreatment cannot be employed by FBC. A conviction or pending proceeding for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from employment: drug-related activity, pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or maltreatment of a minor.

b. Volunteers: Background Requirements

- i. Any adult wishing to volunteer to work with minors of the church must be an FBC member or attend FBC regularly for at least six months.
- ii. Volunteers working with minors of the church in any volunteer ministry, will be required to provide, complete, or undergo the following:
 1. The Volunteer Ministry Application which will include information regarding past employment and prior convictions for crimes; and
 2. A specific statement that the individual has no prior conviction or pending proceeding for child maltreatment, including but not limited to abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, or abandonment.
- iii. Prior to becoming a volunteer, FBC will obtain a background check for that individual. Every year, FBC will perform national criminal database searches and national sex offender registry searches on existing volunteers and leaders in the church, and each volunteer or leader in the church shall be required to execute any documents that FBC might request for such purpose. Any individual who has lived outside Arkansas in the last five years may be subject to additional county or state court searches.
- iv. Every new volunteer, prior to beginning any volunteer role, will be required to sign an acknowledgement that he or she has received a copy of the FBC Policy on Interaction with Minors, understands it, and will comply with its terms.

- v. Every new volunteer will be provided general training on child maltreatment, including its recognition and prevention, as well as the terms and conditions of this Policy.
- vi. Any candidate for volunteer service who has a past conviction of or pending proceeding related to an allegation of child maltreatment cannot work with minors at FBC. Refusal to complete the Volunteer Ministry Application process or a conviction or pending proceeding for any of the following will automatically disqualify an individual from volunteer service with minors: drug-related activity, pedophilic behavior, incest, rape, assaults, indecent exposure, pornography, sodomy, or maltreatment of a minor.