



Children's Ministry

Child Protection Policy

Austin Bluffs Evangelical Free Church

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General Purpose Statement

Austin Bluff Evangelical Free Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of ABEFC from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child”, “children”, or “student” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes paid persons who work with children. The term “volunteer” means anyone unpaid serving at any capacity in Children’s Ministry.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

- **Church Attendance**

A person being considered for any volunteer or paid position involving contact with minors must be part of one or more of the following classifications/groups:

A. If not a member, he/she has been involved with and in good standing at ABEFC for a minimum of six (6) months.

B. He/she becomes or is a member of ABEFC – pending leadership approval.

C. If he/she is not an attender of ABEFC, person being considered will be required to provide a reference/recommendation from home church and must be in good standing with church community. Non-attender prospective volunteers and/or workers will be required to sign an authorization form allowing ABEFC to run a background check.

- **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete the online application and read and agree to the Child Protection Policy. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the ABEFC

- **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

- **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant of a paid position is permitted to work with children, she/he may be asked to provide at least two work references. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references (unless the applicant is 14-17 years of age without prior institutional reference or experience. In such case,

personal references are allowed. (*See Teenage Workers section below.)
Documentation of the reference checks will be filed in confidence on file at ABEFC.

Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all volunteers and workers (regardless of position). Before a background check is run, prospective workers/volunteers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, she/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Children's Ministry Director and/or Pastoral Staff on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at ABEFC.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable to hire and approve volunteers and/or paid staff who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14
- Must be screened as specified above
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless:

- In a counseling situation approved by parents.
- 3rd-6th grade students may have a parental permission slip allowing the student to use the restroom alone.
- 3rd-6th grade students may have a parental permission slip allowing for student to be dismissed at the end of the class/activity/program without parent/guardian "claim ticket".

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.

- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at ABEFC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Children's Ministry Director for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Allegations of Abuse on Church Premises

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at ABEFC or during our onsite sponsored programs/activities, the parent or guardian of the child will be notified. With the discretion of the parent or guardian & under the guidance of the leadership team, each alleged incident will be reviewed. Upon review the following shall occur:

- a. The worker, volunteer, or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
- b. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and ABEFC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
- c. The insurance company will be notified, and ABEFC will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
- d. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of ABEFC should refrain from speaking to the media.
- e. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
- f. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

All children ages 0-6th grade must wear a security label name tag to attend any ABEFC activities and programs. The automated check-in system should be used by parents and guardians only. Siblings are not permitted to check children in/out of class.

The security check-in/check-out procedure:

1. Children should be signed in by a parent or guardian using the automated check-in system. The parent will receive two labels for the child 1) self-adhesive label goes on the child's shirt and 2) "claim ticket" with matching code.
2. The parent or guardian must present the "claim ticket" in order to sign-out the child from our care. With the "claim ticket" along with facial recognition, the adult worker/volunteer may release child.
3. In the event that a parent/guardian is unable to present the "claim ticket," the Children's Ministry Director will be contacted and will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian after discussing the surrounding circumstances with the parent or guardian.
4. Grades 3rd-6th students may have a parental permission slip allowing the student to be dismissed at the end of the class/activity/program without parent/guardian "claim ticket".

Infant Nursery (ages 0-1): along with the automated label, the infant nursery workers will assign each parent a numbered pager as a form of communication. The child will also be checked-in on a roster that allows parents to add any special needs and care instruction. At check-out, along with the printed "claim ticket", parents need to return the pager.

Toddler Nursery (ages 1-2): along with the automated label, the toddler nursery workers will assign each parent a pager as a form of communication. The child will also check-in on a roster that allows parents to add any special needs and care instructions. If a parent has a child in more than one class room, the worker will assign each sibling/child the same pager number.

3 and 4 year olds: along with the automated label, the preschool workers will assign each parent a pager as a form of communication. The child will also check-in on a roster that allows parents to add any special needs and care instructions. If a parent has a child in more than one class room, the worker will assign each sibling/child the same pager number.

5 years – 2nd Grade: workers/volunteers will greet each child at the classroom door, check the automated label, and exchange an additional information with parents. Once class begins, rollcall will be taken as part of the Evacuation Procedure Policy. Workers/volunteers must cross reference the automated label with the parent's "claim tickets". Code/number must match.

3rd – 6th grade: workers/volunteers shall greet each child at the classroom door, check the automated label, and exchange any additional information with parents. Once class begins, roll

call will be taken as part of the Evacuation Procedure Policy. Workers/volunteers must cross reference the automated label with the parent's "claim tickets", unless the parent/guardian has agreed to and signed the permission slip. The permission slip allows children to be dismissed by the teacher without a "claim ticket". Once the child is released from class, the parent/guardian is liable. If a visitor attends class, teacher is to ask parent to fill out permission slip and/or is to remind the parent/guardian to fill out the VISITOR label which becomes the "claim ticket".

First time Sunday visitors: if a family is visiting for the first time, they are to follow the instruction posted at the automated check-in area. They will fill out the red VISITOR adhesive name tag with the child's name and place it on their child's shirt. They will be asked to fill out the visitor label that will be handed to the classroom worker/volunteer with a matching code for check-out.

Awana: the Awana participants/workers/volunteers adheres to a program specific check-in and check-out system monitored and administered by the Awana Commanders.

Evacuation Procedure Policy

In the event of an emergency evacuation, the workers will follow the below procedure:

1. Listen to instruction from the Security Team via the radio.
2. Gather students in a single file line (nursery and toddler classes use the walking rope).
3. Lead worker/volunteer take a head count.
4. Lead worker/volunteers gather rollcall roster, the whistle, & security radio.
5. Assistant worker/volunteer escort the student line out the door following the evacuation exit maps posted in the classroom.
6. Lead worker/volunteer guides the student line from the rear.
7. All classes to gather on the north lawn at Maizeland Rd.
8. Do not allow parents to check-out children during the evacuation.
9. Parents must check-out children after classes have gathered on the lawn.
10. In the case of a missing parent or child, immediately notify Children's Ministry Director and Security Team.
11. The class may be escorted to the ministry house by the Security Team.

Sick Child Policy

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Eye or skin infections;
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious diseases.

Children who are observed by our workers/volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up.

Physical Contact with Children

Physical contact with children should be minimal and should be reserved to patting on the top of the head, patting of the shoulders, patting on the upper back, shaking hands, high fives, and an occasional side hug.

Avoid allowing children to sit on your lap. Preschoolers (3-4 years of age) should not be carried or held unless they need to be comforted. In this case, only adult female worker/volunteer holding the child in need. If a child has been crying for 10 minutes and is inconsolable, the parents should be called.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of ABEFC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with Children's Ministry Director to develop a plan of action.

Worker/volunteers are to be trained in the use of an EPI-PEN.

Child Discipline Policy

It is the policy of ABEFC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with Children's Ministry Director if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues. Workers/volunteers are encouraged to keep the lines of communication open with parents regarding behavioral issues they observe in the classroom. ABEFC follows the "three strikes" policy regarding the violation of the discipline policy.

Children who are creating a distraction in the classroom:

- **Strike one:** will be asked to alter their disruptive behavior
- **Strike two:** will be warned the next strike will be removal from class & placed on time-out away from the other children.
- **Strike three:** Children's Ministry Director will be called and child will be escorted out of the class room and parent will be notified.

There are three expectation that guide the behavior policy for children at ABEFC: Respect, Responsibility, and Active participation.

Respect:

- Be respectful in attitude and behavior.
- Keep your hands to yourself.
- Listen and follow directions.
- Raise your hand and wait to be call on in class.
- Bow your head and close your eyes during prayer.

Responsibility:

- Bring your Bible to class.
- Listen quietly.
- Be helpful.
- Model godly behavior

Active Participation:

- Enthusiastically participate in discussion.
- Be encouraging to others.
- Lend a helping hand.

Restroom Guidelines

Children 3 years of age through 2nd grade should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, two workers/volunteers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

- **Infants:** it is recommended that a paid nursery staff change diapers. Gloves are required for diaper changing. Men are not to change diapers.
- **Nursery:** Nursery children should use the classroom bathroom with the upper door/window open. One adult should supervise in the bathroom and a second adult should be the acknowledged back-up in the classroom. Only children who are 3 years of age and toilet trained are permitted to “graduate” out of the Nursery classroom into the 3's and 4's preschool class. It is not the responsibility of the nursery workers/volunteers to toilet train, only assist if the child in training ask to use there bathroom.
- **3's and 4's class:** Due to the toilet-training age of this group, it is recommended all the adult workers/volunteers should escort the whole class to the foyer bathrooms or the gym bathrooms. If a group of children need to use the restroom, one adult can escort them to the gym restroom. Once at the restroom, adult should then open the infant or nursery door/window and ask the adult worker/volunteer in that classroom to be their back-up.
- **5's-2nd grade:** In the case of only two workers/volunteers running the class, the two adults should escort the whole class to the foyer bathrooms or the gym bathrooms. In the case of three workers/volunteers running the class, one adult can take the group to the gym bathroom. Once at the restroom, adult should then open the infant or nursery door/window and ask the adult worker/volunteer in that classroom to be their back-up.

- **3rd & 4th grades:** Children may use the foyer restroom on their own (one at a time) unless parent has requested otherwise. Permission slip required.
- **5th & 6th grades:** Children may use the foyer restroom on their own (one at a time) unless parent has requested otherwise. Permission slip required.

Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Training

ABEFC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.