

CHILDREN and YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY: SAFE SANCTUARY

1. PURPOSE:

It is the policy of Beacon Falls Congregational Church (BFCC) to provide a safe and secure environment for all children and youth participating in church programs and activities. A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse.

The Beacon Falls Congregational Church Christian Education Committee shall establish and maintain guidelines and procedures to protect children, youth and workers involved in church sanctioned and sponsored programs and activities. These guidelines and procedures govern the conduct of workers involved in church programs and activities, including, but not limited to procedures for the care and supervision of children and youth, that ensure physical safety, staffing requirements, screening and training of workers, transportation guidelines, and release and consent processes.

The implementation of the processes outlined in this policy establishes proper prevention measures to protect children and youth from incidents of misconduct, inappropriate behavior or abuse, while also protecting our staff and volunteers/workers from false accusations.

2. SCOPE:

This policy applies to all current and future staff and workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who have the responsibility of supervising and/or working with children and youth participating in church programs and activities. All staff, workers, and volunteers of Beacon Falls Congregational Church are expected to comply with the established Children and Youth Protection Policy: Safe Sanctuary.

3. DEFINITIONS:

- a. **Child, children, youth or minors:** All persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.
- b. **Adult:** Any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
- c. **Worker:** Any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid staff who is given the responsibility of working with, supervising, an/or caring for individuals under the age of eighteen (18) years.
- d. **Teenage Worker:** Any worker at least fourteen (14) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18), enlisted to assist in working with minors. The teenage worker is under the direct supervision of an adult worker.
- e. **Child Abuse:** Any physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, and/or ritual abuse of a child, children, youth, or minor.
- f. **Child Physical Abuse:** Any violent non-accidental contact which could result in serious physical injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, beating, harmful restraint, biting, shaking, or use of a weapon or instrument. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

- g. **Child Emotional Abuse:** Any pattern of spoken and/or unspoken intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's/minor's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolation, shaming, or belittling.
- h. **Child Neglect:** Any intentional behavior or conduct by a church worker that seriously disregards supervision and/or care for children entrusted to him/her. This negligent behavior endangers a child's/youth's/minor's health, safety, or welfare.
- i. **Child Sexual Abuse:** Any inappropriate behavior or activity of a sexual nature with a child, minor. It is violent and/or non-violent criminal behavior or activity that exploits a child's vulnerability and powerlessness by involving children, minors, in sexual behaviors and/or activities for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. The abuser may be an adult, adolescent, or other child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.
- j. **Child Ritual Abuse:** Abuse of any of the types listed here that occurs on a regular, intentional and stylized way to a child/youth/minor by a person or persons entrusted with their care.
- k. **National Background Check:** The procedure used by a qualified accredited agency to search in databases including, but not limited to, a person's Social Security number, alias', and appearance in National registries, for criminal activity. This search will be conducted for all church staff, workers, and/or volunteers, who supervise and/or work with children, youth and minors.
- l. **Protect My Ministry:** Protect My Ministry is a qualified, accredited Christian background screening provider, contracted by BFCC to conduct national criminal background checks, and provide administrative and training resources to protect minors and prevent false accusations.
- m. **Lines of Sight/Sound:** Being able to see what is happening in a given room by looking around through window or doorway within a reasonable distance. Being able to hear what is being said to children, youth, and minors within a reasonable distance.

4. PROCEDURES:

a. **Screening and Selection of Workers:**

All Church paid staff and adult volunteers who want to work with the Church's children/youth/minors must be screened. The screening process involves: completion of a written application form (See Appendix I); authorization to conduct a criminal background check (See Appendix II); contacting references (See Appendix III); reviewing results of the background checks; conducting interview and asking relevant questions (See Appendix IV); applicant signing covenant to abide by this policy (See Appendix V); and decision on application.

1). **Six Month Rule:**

All Church paid staff and adult volunteers who want to work with the Church's children/youth/minors must have regularly attended BFCC for a minimum of six (6) months prior to applying to work with minors. This time of interaction between BFCC leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation of applicant's suitability for working with children.

2). Written Application and Authorization for Criminal Background Check:

All paid church staff and adult volunteers, who want to work with the Church's children/youth/minors must complete and sign: a written application form (Appendix I) and an authorization to conduct a criminal background check form (Appendix II), provided by BFCC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, references and employment information, and disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be secured and maintained in strict confidence on file at BFCC.

3). Reference Checks:

The BFCC Minister, or a designated church staff member, contacts at least two of the references on the applicant's written application and records information obtained on Reference Check form (Appendix III). These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be secured and maintained in strict confidence on file at BFCC.

4). National Criminal Background Checks:

The BFCC Minister, or a designated church staff member, will enter the information from each written application form (Appendix I) into the secure website for "Protect My Ministry", our contracted accredited Christian background screening provider. The BFCC Minister, or the designated church staff member will review the results of the background checks from "Protect My Ministry". A disqualifying offense that would keep an individual from working with children would be: convictions for an offense involving children and/or offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, and indecency. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form is also be a disqualifying event. Documentation of the national criminal background checks will be secured and maintained in strict confidence on file at BFCC.

5). Personal Interview:

The BFCC Minister, or the designated church staff member, who contacted applicant references, entered information into the "Protect My Ministry" secured website and received and reviewed the results of the background checks, will conduct an applicant interview. A personal face-to-face interview is conducted with the applicant to review: the application form, reference checks, background checks, interview questions (Appendix V) and discuss his/her suitability for the position.

6). Participation Covenant:

Before beginning work with BFCC's children/youth/minors, each paid staff member and volunteer/worker will sign a participation covenant statement (Appendix V) that they have read, understood, and agree to follow this Child and Youth Protection Policy: Safe Sanctuary.

b. Supervision of Children/Youth/Minors:

1). Two Person Rule:

The “Two Person Rule” is defined as having at least two people in any classroom or setting, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person. 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 unless there is a window in the door and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher.

2). Open Door Policy:

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit/observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

3). Restroom Guidelines:

When taking children to the rest room, the worker(s) should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children to enter alone. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door, unless assistance is needed. In any instance requiring supervision in the rest room (multiple children, toilet training, etc.), the door of the rest room should remain open. For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child.

4). Discipline Policy:

It is the policy of BFCC 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 Church School Superintendent if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

5). Teenage Workers and Five-Years-Older Rule:

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for individuals who are 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 at least five years older than the oldest child participant, are screened as specified above and must be under the supervision of an adult and never be left alone with children.

6). Sick Child Policy:

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all children at BFCC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. 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; and/or other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease. Children who are observed by our workers 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 for the day.

7). Medication Policy:

It is the policy of BFCC 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).

8). Accidental Injuries to Children/Youth/Minors:

When a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps will be followed:

For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as picked up from our care.

For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the Church Council. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

Once the child receives appropriate medical attention, an incident report (Appendix VI) is completed.

9). Transportation of Children/Youth/Minors:

BFCC Christian Education Committee requires the following transportation standards for all BFCC youth events: all drivers must be at least twenty-one years of age; all drivers must have a valid driver's license; every passenger must be in a seat; children under 12 years of age cannot ride in the front seat; the driver and all passengers must always wear a seatbelt; each driver has clear directions to the event; and each vehicle has a cell phone in case of emergencies.

The screened adults organizing the event must ensure the following: they know the drivers for the event; the drivers have been approved through BFCC screening process, including a driving record search and are properly insured; and the vehicles for the trip are in good working order including tires.

c. Reporting Allegations of: Child Abuse/Inappropriate Behavior or Policy Violations:

1). Reporting Procedures for Allegations of Children/Youth/Minor Abuse:

- (a). All allegations of abuse must be taken seriously.
- (b). All allegations should be reported to the BFCC Minister, or the designated church staff member, immediately.
- (c). The BFCC Minister, or the designated church staff member, will notify the parents or legal guardian.
- (d). All situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- (e). No accused will be addressed by anyone other than the BFCC Minister, or designated church staff member, until the safety of the child or victim is secured.

- (f). All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and BFCC will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists.

2). Reporting Procedures for Allegations of Inappropriate Behavior or Policy Violations:

Any behavior that might be deemed inappropriate or a violation of the BFCC Child and Youth Protection Policy: Safe Sanctuary procedures should be reported even if it does not rise to the level of "abuse". Reports such as these should be made to the BFCC Minister and/or to Church Council. Once the BFCC Minister and/or Church Council is alerted to a potential problem it will be their responsibility to investigate the situation and determine what additional actions should be taken. All members of the congregation should feel empowered to talk with the BFCC Minister and/or Church Council about any behaviors they observe and have questions about. All communication about these types of reports will be held in strict confidence.

3). Required Documentation for All Child Injuries and Alleged Child Abuse:

- (a). Person witnessing the child injury completes an incident report (Appendix VI).
- (b). Complete two incident reports (Appendix VI) for all allegations of child abuse.
 - (1). One incident report is completed by the reporter of the alleged child abuse.
 - (2). A separate incident report is completed by the alleged abuser.
- (c). Additional documentation by BFCC Minister, or designated church staff member:
 - (1). Any action taken regarding the child injury and/or alleged child abuse.
 - (2). Date and time and content of telephone conversation with parent(s)/guardian(s) of victim of alleged child abuse.
 - (3). Date and time of call to local law enforcement, name of person spoken to, content of conversation, and any case number assigned.
 - (4). Date, time and contents of any other contacts made regarding the incident.

d. Responding to and Investigating Allegations of Child Abuse:

- 1). Steps will be taken to immediately ensure the safety of the victim of the suspected abuse.
- 2). Steps will be taken to ensure the victim has no contact with the person suspected of the abuse during the investigation.
- 3). Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children/youth/minors. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child/youth/minor is secured, the BFCC Minister, or designated church staff member will inform the accused that abuse has been reported.

- 4). All allegations will be investigated expeditiously by established authorities.
- 5). Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities and any investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or Connecticut State Department of Children and Families (DCF) for Child Protective Services.
- 6). Any accused worker will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed.
- 7). All details, interviews, and information will remain strictly confidential to those legitimately involved in the investigation. Any individual or group responsible for a breach in this confidentiality is subject to disciplinary action.
- 8). Supportive care will be given to all persons involved to include the victim of the suspected abuse (and his/her family) and the person suspected of the abuse (and his/her family), to restore all persons to wholeness.
- 9). No victim involved in an allegation or anyone responsible for reporting an allegation will be retaliated against.
- 10). Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

e. Training:

BFCC Christian Education Committee will provide training on this Child and Youth Protection Policy: Safe Sanctuary to all children/youth/minors workers and will regularly schedule additional training classes and/or events that focus on current issues of child protection. Attendance and completion of classroom and/or online training on child and youth protection is required of all BFCC children/youth/minors workers. Each worker will be given the legal definition of child abuse in writing, as well as the policy of the church on reporting of child abuse. Workers will also be required to view child abuse prevention video(s) and read the written materials available on this subject to help them gain an appreciation for the reality of the concern. This will help workers identify child abuse in the future if they see signs of it.

In addition, BFCC Christian Education Committee will offer opportunities for training in: CPR; Antichoking procedures; First Aid; and use of AED to all children/youth/minors workers and to other interested members of BFCC congregation.

5. REFERENCES:

- a. Child and Youth Protection Policy United Methodist Church
- b. GuideOne Insurance Safe Church Child/Youth Worker Application Form
- c. Child Abuse Policy Davidson Street Baptist Church Clinton South Carolina
- d. Safe Sanctuary Policy Ashland United Methodist Church
- e. Safe Sanctuaries by Joy Thornburg Metton

6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY:

Christian Education Committee reviews and updates this policy annually.
Follow-up date May 2019.

7. RESCISSIONS:

None

APPENDICES: I-VII

- I. Application to Work with Children/Youth/Minors
- II. Criminal Background Check Authorization
- III. Reference Check Documentation
- IV. Interview Questions
- V. Participation Covenant Statement
- VI. Incident Report Form

Application to Work with Children/Youth/Minors

It is the goal of Beacon Falls Congregational Church (BFCC) to create a safe and secure environment for all BFCC’s children/youth/minors and the paid staff and/or workers/volunteers who work with church minors. To facilitate this emphasis, it is necessary to gather pertinent information from those who want to work with BFCC’s children/youth/minors. This information will be used for the sole purpose of helping the church provide a safe and secure environment for children and workers.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Have you ever used name(s) other than the one above? If yes, please list:

Current street address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Years at address: _____

Previous address: _____

Current phone number (Home): _____ (Work): _____

Social Security No.: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Please respond to all questions below that apply to the position for which you are applying/volunteering.

Position applying/volunteering for: _____

When are you available to work? _____

Do you have a valid driver’s license? _____ Commercial license? _____

License number: _____ State issued: _____

Application to Work with Children/Youth/Minors

Employment History

(Please begin with most recent)

Employment Date (s)	Employer & Supervisor's Name	Address & Telephone Number	Job Title & Primary Responsibilities	Reason for Leaving

Is there any reason you should NOT work with or around children or youth? _____

Have you ever been the subject of a child abuse investigation? _____

If yes, please provide details: _____

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a criminal offense? _____

If yes, please provide details: _____

Application to Work with Children/Youth/Minors

Educational Background

	Name/Location of School	Year Graduated	Degree	Areas of Concentration
High School				
College				
Other				

Please provide the following church information:

What, if any, church affiliation do you have? _____

How long have you attended that church? _____ Are you a member? _____

List other churches with which you have been affiliated: _____

Have you ever worked with youth or children? _____ List where: _____

Please list two references (preferably of a business or organizational nature):

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Years known each other: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Years known each other: _____

Application to Work with Children/Youth/Minors

I hereby give permission to make a thorough investigation of my past employment, education, and background, and release from liability all persons, companies, or corporations supplying such information. I also release the Beacon Falls Congregational Church from any liability that might result from making such an investigation. I understand that any false statements or implications made by me on this application or other required documentation shall be considered sufficient cause to deny me from working with BFCC's children/youth/minors.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Criminal Background Check Authorization

I, _____, HEREBY AUTHORIZE the Beacon Falls Congregational Church to request any local, state or federal law enforcement department or agency to release information regarding any record of any investigations, charges or convictions contained in its files, or in any criminal file maintained on me, whether said file is a local, state, or national file, and including but not limited to accusations and convictions for crimes committed, against minors, to the fullest extent permitted by local, state and federal law. I release any and all law enforcement departments, agencies, and their employees from all liability that may result from any such disclosure made in response to this request. I also give my permission for this information to be shared with those persons who will participate in making decisions with respect to my application.

You are authorized to rely upon a photocopy or fax copy of this document.

Signature of Applicant: _____ Date: _____

Reference Check Documentation

Applicant Name: _____

Reference Name: _____

Date of Contact: _____

Method of Contact and Contact Information:

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Other: _____

Reference Check Type (check one):

Former Employer

Personal

Former Volunteer

Other Organization (please specify): _____

How long have you know the applicant? Under which circumstances?

What is your knowledge of this person's work with children/youth?

How would you describe this person's manner of interacting with children/youth?

Based on your observation, is this person reliable and dependable?

Would you feel comfortable with this person being alone with a small group of children/youth for a period of time? Why or why not?

Reference Check Documentation

Do you have any concerns we should know about regarding this person’s ability to work with children/youth?

Were you ever made aware of circumstances in which this person’s care of children/youth was called into question or criticized? If yes, please describe the circumstances.

Were you ever made aware of any criminal or civil investigations or actions taken against this person? If yes, please describe the circumstances.

Do you recommend this person to work with children/youth? Why or why not?

Is this person eligible to work with your organization’s children again in the future? If no, why not?

Additional notes or comments:

Signed (person checking reference): _____

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Summarize your employment history.
- Tell me about your experiences with children. Have you worked or volunteered for other youth serving organizations? Watch for adults whose lives seem to revolve around spending time with children.
- What strengths can you bring to this job?
- Why do you want to work with children? Once again, watch the candidate who is too child focused or those who want to work with children because they are "pure", "innocent", "trusting", "non-judgmental", "clean", etc. Adults should want to work with children because they have something to offer children. Beware of the adult who wants to work with children because children meet their adult needs for control, love, or affection.
- What ages of children do you prefer to work with? Child sexual abusers generally have a specific age they prefer. Does the candidate indicate a preference for sex, age, certain traits?
- Do you have any reservations about working with children of different ages? Same as above.
- Do you think there are any reasons to treat boys and girls differently? Listen closely to their reasons or rationale. Does it feel right?
- If you saw another teacher/staff/volunteer, one you liked and respected, strike a child, what would you do? Make sure at some point the candidate plans to tell the BFCC Minister, or designee.

Interview Questions

- How were you disciplined as a child? How did you feel about this way? Watch for families that used physical punishment as a method to resolve problems. Does the candidate have unresolved issues related to their upbringing or do they condone this type of discipline?
- Have you ever been reprimanded at work? For what? Was the reprimand related to their ability to deal with children?
- Who are your best friends? Adult's best friends should be other adults.
- Do you relate better with adults or with children? Why? Be cautious of anyone who relates better to children than adults.
- How would you react to any accusation of child abuse? Watch for a comfort level, a reasonable response, a panic look, a carefully thought out manipulative response.
- What would you do if a child told you a secret? Make sure the candidate does not make a promise not to tell.
- What would you do if a child asked you a question about sex? Is the candidate comfortable with the topic? Do they share only what the child is asking?
- Ask other "what if questions. Watch for a candidate whose responses are consistent with you philosophy, who asks other staff for help and support; one who is a team player. Note how quickly they resort to punitive punishment and how realistic or honest the responses are.

Be cautious of candidates who seem overly anxious to be hired, those who seem "too smooth" and those who try to take over the interview.

Participation Covenant Statement

The congregation of Beacon Falls Congregational Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and staff/volunteers who participate in child/youth/minor programs and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a place of safety and protection.

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.

All adults involved with children or youth of our church must have been active participants of the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall observe the Children and Youth Protection Policy: Safe Sanctuary at all times.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding child abuse.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall immediately report to the BFCC Minister or designee, any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in programs for children youth, and minors? ___ Yes No ___

I have read this Participation Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

BFCC Child and Youth Protection Policy Incident Report Form

Reason for report: _____

Date-of-incident: _____ Time: _____

Place of incident: _____

Name of reporter: _____ Title: _____

Name(s) of Child(ren)/Youth: _____ Age(s): _____

Describe in detail exactly what happened:

Were there any witnesses? ___ Yes No ___ If Yes, list.

What action did you take?

Has the incident been resolved? : ___ Yes ___ No Explain:

Have the following people and/or services been notified? Yes or No

Please note date and time of notification

Please note name of person(s) you contacted

Parent _____

Pastor _____

Church Council _____

Police _____

Other Person(s) _____

Ambulance _____

Other Services _____

Signature of reporter: _____ Date: _____