



# Living Hope Bible Church Child Protection Policy

## INTRODUCTION

At Living Hope Bible Church we are passionate about the glory of God. Having experienced the transforming power of the gospel in our own lives, we naturally want to share this good news with others, especially our children. What a wonderful privilege we have to proclaim the greatness of God to the next generation. We earnestly desire that they, too, will know of God's love and place their trust in his son, Jesus.

Although we at Living Hope believe in the transforming power of God's Living Hope in the lives of all persons including those persons who suffer from sexual sins and other sins which cause them to be a danger to children ordinary prudence and the need to protect the church from legal liabilities, dictate that we impose some formal structure and organizational protections on all our ministries involving children. These guidelines are set forth in the hope and expectation that we can provide a safe environment to minister the gospel to our children.

Our Children's and Youth Ministries are partners with parents in providing quality instruction for our children. All these guidelines are meant to protect and promote growth both for the children and adults involved. They are meant to allow Living Hope access to more background information about our workers and to encourage and to facilitate prompt and appropriate responses to reports of abuse, as well as to foster an attitude and a routine practice of personal respect and confidentiality in the handling of these types of incidents.

In taking some simple preventative steps, we can reduce the risk to our children and our ministry programs.

### **I. SCOPE OF POLICY**

Anyone who teaches, supervises, assists or otherwise works with our children in any capacity will be required to follow these policies. Some programs may have additional requirements specifically designed for the individual needs of children in that program or age group.

Parents who participate in Youth Ministry activities with their child/children are not considered Youth "workers" for purposes of this policy. All other adults working in Youth Ministry will comply with the requirements of this policy.

### **II. DEFINITIONS**

**2.0 "Child Abuse" defined.** In general, child abuse includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation, as well as any form of physical or emotional abuse of children. Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, any conduct prohibited by Illinois State law.

**2.1 "Child" or "Children" defined.** "Child" or "Children" means any person under the age of eighteen (18) who is under the care, control and supervision of Living Hope Pastors, staff or laypersons who are acting in any capacity on behalf of the church.

**2.2 "Classroom Visitors" defined.** A classroom visitor is defined as any adult who is not a teacher, worker or parent of a child in that classroom.

**2.3. "Off-Site Activities" and "Church Property" defined.** "Off-site activities" are those activities that take place away from the Living Hope church offices, or the location of our regular Sunday services. "Church property" is any facility, whether rented or owned, that is regularly used for the purpose of conducting church activities.

### **III. WORKER SELECTION AND SCREENING**

The first step in reducing risk to our children and ministry programs is in making the best efforts to select appropriate workers.

**3.0 Pre-Qualifications for Ministry with Children.** Living Hope requires that all workers involved in any aspect of ministry involving children, be members in good standing at Living Hope Bible Church.

All workers in any Children's or Youth Ministries will be screened. A screening form must be completed and signed by all workers (See Appendix A - "Application for Worker in Children's and Youth Ministry").

Minors who help in children's ministry (age 12 and above) must undergo the same application process as adults wishing to work in children's ministry. Minors who work in the nursery with infants will be screened and accepted on a case by case basis. Minors who help in classes will undergo the same training as adults with certain restrictions (such as not taking children to the bathroom) imposed.

Minors under 17 years of age are exempt from the criminal check process. In Illinois, anyone arrested who is 17 or older is considered an adult. Anyone 17 years or older will be subject to a criminal background check as well as a search of the State and Federal Sex Offender Registration Databases.

As a part of the screening process and as an additional condition of working in any aspect of Living Hope ministry involving direct contact with children, all workers must agree in writing to follow all the policies and procedures as outlined in the Living Hope Bible Church Child Protection Policy. In addition, all workers must consent to a criminal background check.

**3.1 Persons Excluded from Serving.** Anyone with a history, pattern or conviction of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of children or adults, will be excluded from working in Children's Ministries, Youth ministry, or any other ministry area within Living Hope, which involves direct, unsupervised contact with children, regardless of their conversion.

### **IV. WORKER SUPERVISION**

Worker supervision is the next step in risk reduction.

**4.0 Discipline.** Discipline will be carried out through instruction, training and correction. A child's dignity must be regarded at all times. Gentleness, respect and understanding must guide all actions and words. At no time will physical punishment be used.

**4.1 Inappropriate Touching.** Touching a child's private areas or the clothing covering those areas and all other forms of Child Sexual Abuse as defined in Section 2.0 are strictly prohibited. The only exception is the necessary hygienic care for infants or toddlers. When a worker is caring for a child in the process of toilet training, the worker may accompany the child to the restroom to assist him or her, provided the door to the restroom is left open.

**4.2 Supervision Policy.** To the extent reasonably practicable, two (2) adult workers should be present during any church activity in a group setting (Such as special classes, business meetings, outreach events, etc.) in which child care or Children's Ministry program or Youth Ministry program is being conducted. Adult supervision must be maintained before and after ministry programs until all children are safely in the custody of their parents or guardians.

**4.3 Adult Admission to Classrooms or Nursery.** Only scheduled workers or parents caring for their own children in a nursery or classroom should be in children's areas. If someone other than these people come to a nursery or classroom they should be asked to return to the auditorium or a director, elder, or deacon should be notified immediately to help with the situation.

**4.4 Workers Alone With Children.** To the extent reasonably practicable in any group ministry activities, no individual worker should ever be left alone in a closed room with one individual child.

**4.5 Overnight and Off-Site Activities.** All overnight and of site activities, involving Children's or Youth Ministries, must be approved in advance by the Elders or other member of the pastoral staff (if given that responsibility by the Elders). A permission slip must be completed and signed by the child's parent or guardian.

When transporting children or youth is necessary, all drivers must be at least 21 years of age, have a valid drivers license (with the proper classification) and current automobile insurance. If the vehicle is equipped with seatbelts, the number of persons in the vehicle must not exceed the number of seat belts. To the extent reasonably practicable, no individual driver should be left alone in a vehicle with one individual child.

**4.6 Transportation Safety Policy.** If a vehicle is used in transportation for the church all passengers should wear seat belts and all children are to be secured in an age appropriate child safety seats.

**4.7 Identification Procedure for the Nursery.** Each family participating in the Sunday nursery program will be required to sign in their child to the Nursery and assigned a Nursery Beeper with a number. The child will not be released to the custody of any person who does not match with the name and Beeper number given at sign in. Exceptions may be granted 1.) In situations where the person picking up the child is known by the nursery worker to be the child's parent/guardian, or 2.) At the discretion of a Director-level person or higher.

**4.8 Infant and Toddler Diaper Changing.** Unless otherwise directed by the parents, the children in the infant nursery will be changed by adult female screened workers. The children in the toddler nursery will be checked and changed by adult female, screened workers if needed.

**4.9 Minors serving in Nursery.** The Director of the Nursery will consider each case separately as to determine suitability for serving in the infant or toddler nursery.

**4.10 Additional Nursery guidelines.** Procedures and specific details concerning additional nursery procedures can be found in Nursery Policies and Procedures Manual as prepared by the Nursery committee.

## **V. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

Effective Reporting Procedures enhance the effort to reduce risk to our children. In general regarding any report of abuse, workers must strive to respond immediately to: i.) Remove the child from the scene (if the abuse took place on site) and the perpetrator and put the child in a safe place; and ii.) Report the incident to an elder or member of the Pastoral Staff.

**5.0 Immediate Response to Incidents/Reports of Abuse.** If a child recounts an incident of abuse that took place either at church or home, his/her word must be taken seriously. He or she must be treated with dignity and respect.

If the abuse is observed or alleged to have taken place on church property, the first response must be to make sure that he or she is in a safe place removed from the perpetrator and the location in which the abuse took place. Immediate emotional support must be given as appropriate and the child should be reminded that telling someone is the correct thing to do. The person to whom the incident is reported should under no circumstances promise not to tell anyone.

All workers and ministry leaders at all levels of the church who have direct contact with children shall be trained to immediately bring such report to the attention of one of the elders or Pastoral Staff. After obtaining a report of abuse and taking such steps as are necessary and appropriate to verify the complaint on at least a preliminary basis, the Pastor / elder who received such complaint shall immediately notify the child's parent or guardian - as well as the proper law enforcement authorities. The remainder of the pastoral staff and the board of elders shall also be immediately notified.

The pastor shall disclose to the parent or guardian the facts which are known at the time, specifically including the fact that an incident has been witnessed or reported, the time and place and nature of the incident and the steps which have been taken by Living Hope to verify the complaint on a preliminary basis. In the event that the parent or guardian has been accused of abuse, the pastor may wait until after an initial investigation by law enforcement authorities is completed before giving such information.

**5.1 Treatment of the Accused.** Under no circumstances shall any Living Hope representative make promises to the accused about the handling of the complaint. A member of the Pastoral staff or elders shall be responsible to obtain the appropriate information and make the decisions required in responding to any complaint, so that the complaint may be acted upon and resolved in a timely way.

Anyone accused of child abuse, as defined in section 2.0, shall be relieved of his or her duties as a children's or youth worker at Living Hope pending resolution of the complaint. The Board of Elders will have sole discretion to determine whether to reinstate the worker, as well as the timing and conditions of reinstatement. Pastoral counseling will be offered when appropriate under the circumstances.

**5.2 Cooperation with Law Enforcement Authorities.** Living Hope will cooperate fully with all law enforcement authorities and administrative agencies with jurisdiction in the investigation of the complaint and the criminal prosecution of the offender.

**5.3 Record of Resolution of the Complaint.** In all cases involving an incident of abuse or an allegation of abuse, a member of the Pastoral Staff or one of the elders shall complete at the appropriate time a report to the file which summarizes all pertinent facts concerning the complaint, which states the specific resolution of the complaint and the reasons therefore, and the need for follow-up action, if any. Such a report shall be maintained at all times in a secure file by a member of the Pastoral Staff or one of the elders. A copy of this report shall be given to the Secretary of the Board of Elders and maintained as part of the official church records.

## **VI. CONFIDENTIALITY OF APPLICATIONS, RECORDS AND REPORTS**

**6.0 Access to Records.** Records of workers' applications, references and screening forms are maintained in the church office in a secured file cabinet by the secretary of the Council of Elders. The Directors of Children's Ministries and the Board of Elders shall have access to completed application forms. Only the Board of Elders shall have access to background check information. An individual file is maintained for each worker, and all information shall be maintained in locked files on a strictly confidential, need-to-know basis.

**6.1 Statements to the Congregation and/or Media.** In the event an allegation of abuse becomes common knowledge within the Living Hope congregation, it is discretionary with the Board of Elders and Senior Pastor as to whether and in what manner a public statement to the congregation about the incident is appropriate. If the allegation becomes public knowledge, only the Senior Pastor or a member of the Pastoral Staff are authorized to release any information to the media so that incomplete, incorrect or conflicting public statements will not be issued by Living Hope. At all points in the decision making process regarding public statements, the Elder Board shall be informed and consulted to the extent reasonably practicable.

## **VII. MISCELLANEOUS**

**7.1 Exceptions to Policy.** Any exceptions to this policy must be approved by the Board of Elders. Such exceptions shall only be granted for good cause shown and a written statement justifying the reasons for the exception shall be prepared by a pastoral staff member with copies distributed to the Board of Elders for their approval or disapproval.





*May the Lord bless you as you live for Christ and  
are conformed to His glorious image!*

Adopted August 21, 2014