

Kids First Child Protection Policy

Introduction

At LifeSpring Church we place a high value on people. The individuals that God has brought through our doors or planted in our mission field comprise a sacred trust, a tremendous responsibility of love and care. A very special segment of our ministry is specifically targeted to preschoolers, children, and youth. Our ministry to these youngsters is designed specifically to meet their age-specific spiritual, learning, and emotional needs. The growing incidence of abuse crimes perpetrated against children has prompted our need to implement a program of prevention that we've termed *Kids First*.

LifeSpring Church desires to be a safe place for all children and youth who attend. We believe that preventive steps can be taken to:

1. promote the safety of children
2. insulate volunteers from false accusations
3. safeguard the congregation from the trauma and consequences of the victimization of a minor

LifeSpring Church has adopted *Kids First*, a needed prevention program, to reduce the possibility of child sexual abuse occurring in our congregation. The program consists of education about the problem of child sexual abuse and new policies and procedures to safeguard our children, youth, and volunteers.

“Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual activity with a child... The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided that the child is four years older than the victim” (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992). All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent and includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

The *Kids First* policies and procedures cover four broad areas:

- I. Worker Selection and Screening
- II. Worker Supervision
- III. Reporting Requirements
- IV. Response Plan

Administration

The administration of this policy will be under the supervision of the pastoral staff. In the absence of a pastoral staff member, the chairman of the deacons will assume responsibility. The pastoral staff and chairman of deacons are required to make themselves familiar with the contents of *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church* by Hammar, Klipowicz, and Cobble (Christian Ministry Resources, 1993). A copy is available in the church office.

The administrator(s) must also be aware that they are dealing with sensitive and personal information. Strict confidentiality must be observed. All documents pertaining to worker screening and supervision are to be labeled “confidential” and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Associate Pastor’s office.

A copy of the *Kids First* policy will be provided to all workers, paid and volunteer, who work with preschoolers, children, or youth at LifeSpring Church.

I. Worker Selection and Screening

A. Childcare Provided By, And Located At, LSC For Age-Graded Learning

(Example: Sunday morning Bible Study)

1. All workers responsible for preschoolers, children, or youth must be at least eighteen (18) years old. An exception to this is the mentoring of a seventeen year old, second semester Senior High student intent on fulfilling a future teaching position. Also, youth age fourteen (14) or older may assist in the children's area for purposes of their personal leadership development provided that there is an adult supervising the department. Such youth must complete the *Kids First* screening process.
2. All workers, volunteer and paid, must complete all the components of the *Kids First* screening process before they begin work at the church. Persons serving at the time this policy becomes effective are required to complete the process retroactively.
3. Leader: Learner ratios are as follows:

Babies	1:2
One-Twos	1:3
Threes-Pre-K	1:4
Kindergarten	1:5
Grades 1-6	1:6

B. Childcare Provided By, And Located At, LSC

(Example: Sunday Evening Childcare)

1. All workers responsible for preschoolers, children, or youth must be at least eighteen (18) years old. An exception to this is the mentoring of a seventeen year old, second semester Senior High student intent on fulfilling a future teaching position. Also, youth age fourteen (14) or older may assist in the children's area for purposes of their personal leadership development provided that there is an adult supervising the department. Such youth must complete the *Kids First* screening process
2. All workers, volunteer and paid, must complete all the components of the *Kids First* screening process before they begin work at the church. Persons serving at the time this policy becomes effective are required to complete the process retroactively.
3. Worker: Child ratios are as follows:

Babies	1:3
One-Twos	1:4
Threes-Pre-K	1:6
Kindergarten	1:7
Grades 1-6	1:9

C. Childcare Not Provided By, But Located At LSC For A Sponsored Ministry

(Example: Parent's Night Out)

1. All workers responsible for preschoolers, children, or youth must be at least eighteen (18) years old. An exception to this is the mentoring of a seventeen year old, second semester Senior High student intent on fulfilling a future teaching position. Also, youth age fourteen (14) or older may assist in the children's area for purposes of their personal leadership development provided that there is an adult supervising the department. Such youth must complete the *Kids First* screening process
2. All workers, volunteer and paid, must complete all the components of the *Kids First* screening process before they begin work at the church. Persons serving at the time this policy becomes effective are required to complete the process retroactively.

3. Worker: Child ratios are as follows:

Babies	1:4
One-Twos	1:6
Threes-Pre-K	1:8
Kindergarten	1:10
Grades 1-6	1:12

D. Childcare Not Provided By, Nor Located At LSC For A Sponsored Ministry

(Example: LifeGroups)

1. All workers responsible for preschoolers or children must be at least fifteen (15) years old. In situations where childcare is provided at a location separate from the parent's location, at least one worker must be eighteen (18) years old and capable of transporting a child, if necessary.
2. All workers, volunteer and paid, must complete all the components of the *Kids First* screening process before they begin providing care for children. Persons serving at the time this policy becomes effective are required to complete the process retroactively.
3. Worker: Child ratios are as follows:

Babies	1:4
One-Twos	1:6
Threes-Pre-K	1:8
Kindergarten	1:10
Grades 1-6	1:12

E. Screening Components

1. Employment Application: Paid workers, part-time and full-time including pastoral staff, must complete an Employment Application.
2. Leader Screening Form: All potential workers, paid and volunteer, must complete a *Kids First* Leader Screening Form.
3. Personal Interview: All potential paid workers will be interviewed by a member of the pastoral staff and/or the applicable division or program director (e.g. Bible study division director, VBS director, Children's Church director). This interview will serve to:
 - a. discover the applicant's giftedness and areas of interest
 - b. explore the applicant's background in working with minors
 - c. introduce the *Kids First* policy and requirements to the potential worker
4. Reference Checks: A contact will be made with each of the applicant's personal, church, and organizational references. Results of those contacts will be considered in determining the fitness of the applicant to serve. A record of each contact will be maintained in the worker's file.
5. Criminal Records Check Authorization Form: The potential worker will submit a signed authorization at the time of application. The records check will be conducted for all paid staff members. Volunteer workers will have their background checked only as deemed appropriate by the pastoral staff. The applicant will be notified, in writing, when a check is to be conducted.

II. Worker Supervision

- A. The Two Worker Rule: Two properly screened workers must be present during any church activity, on campus or off. When a worker has a legitimate need to be alone with a

minor or the situation makes the presence of a third party impractical, parental permission must be obtained from the child's parent or guardian. Workers should notify the appropriate church leader (e.g. pastor or program director) in advance of such situations.

- B. Suspicious Behavior: Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult worker and a minor must be reported immediately to the pastoral staff or program director. Such instances will be confronted immediately and investigated. When appropriate, warnings will be issued in writing and the situation monitored very closely. The adult worker's services will be terminated immediately for continued violation of such warnings, or for a single violation of sufficient gravity.
- C. Criminal Sanctions: Adults who work with minors must understand that sexual relationships with minors can lead to a felony conviction and imprisonment in a state penitentiary. Workers must also understand that the church insurance policy may not provide them with a legal defense of a sexual misconduct charge, or pay any portion of a jury verdict assessed against them on account of such conduct.
- D. Windows on Classroom Doors: All classrooms will have windows on the doors to insure non-obstructed observation at all times.
- E. Adequate Personnel: Programs that involve preschoolers, children, or youth must always include adequate supervisory personnel. Supervision should also be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.
- F. Overnight Rule: Overnight activities involving children or youth must be given special attention. All adult chaperones and supervisors must be screened according to the *Kids First* policy and cleared in advance with the program director and/or pastoral staff.
- G. Preschool Identification Procedure: Parents of preschoolers will sign their children in with the classroom teacher and receive a randomly assigned, numbered identification card. The identification card must be presented to pick up the child at the end of the session.

III. Reporting Requirements

- A. Rationale: The aim of *Kids First* is to reduce the likelihood that a minor would be left vulnerable to a potentially abusive situation. If, despite our best efforts, there is reason to suspect abuse, this section of the policy outlines the specific steps to be taken. Workers need to recognize their responsibility to report questionable or inappropriate behavior. That responsibility includes both a moral obligation as to the protection of minors and a church obligation as to the safeguarding of the ministry of LifeSpring Church.
- B. Policy Violations: A worker who becomes aware that the safeguards detailed in the *Kids First* protection policy are being ignored should immediately report such violations to their program director and/or a pastoral staff member.
- C. Indicators and Symptoms of Child Sexual Abuse: Workers and staff members should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized in Exhibit 1. None of the symptoms listed prove abuse; they merely serve as warning signs of possible problems. Workers should report to their supervisor when a child displays these indicators.
- D. Reporting Procedure: Potentially abusive or unhealthy activities must be immediately reported. Workers must immediately bring such activities to the attention of the church leadership (program director and/or pastoral staff). Documentation of all questionable activities will be made in writing. The timeliness of reporting cannot be overemphasized.

If in doubt, report. Reporting reflects a serious obligation at all levels of church leadership.

- E. Reporting to the State: When abuse is suspected or alleged, it must be reported to the proper authorities. Reporting suspected abuse is an act of caring and concern. Furthermore, failure to report suspected abuse may lead to criminal charges. **ALL CASES OF SUSPECTED ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN WILL BE REPORTED.** Such reporting shall include all instances of suspected abuse, regardless of whether it is suspected to have taken place on church grounds or by a church worker. Suspected cases of abuse must be reported to the authorities within 24 hours.
 - 1. For suspected maltreatment of a minor, notify the Intake Office of the Douglas-Sarpy County Child Protective Services at 595-3331.
 - 2. If the victim is in immediate danger, notify local law enforcement by dialing 9-1-1.

IV. Response Plan

As the foregoing makes clear, prevention of abuse is the intention of *Kids First*. Realistically, however, no practical prevention strategy is 100 percent effective. Further, the most thorough prevention plan cannot completely insulate the church from an allegation of abuse. As a result, the following response plan will be followed in the event that an allegation of abuse on church grounds or by a church worker is made. The pastoral staff will guide the church's response.

- A. Documentation: All efforts directed toward the investigation of an allegation must be thoroughly documented. Workers' files must be complete and up-to-date.
- B. Reporting: Report the incident immediately to:
 - 1. the church insurance carrier
 - 2. the church attorney
 - 3. the Eastern Nebraska Baptist Association
- C. Civil Authorities: Under the guidance of the insurance carrier and attorney, contact civil authorities.
- D. Notify the parents.
- E. Care for the Involved Parties:
 - 1. Of first priority, insure the safety of the preschooler, child, or youth.
 - 2. Take the allegation seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family.
 - 3. Treat the accused with dignity and support. Temporarily relieve the accused of his or her duties until the investigation is completed.
- F. Spokesperson: The Senior Pastor shall serve as the church's sole spokesperson to the congregation and media. No other church leader or worker should take on this task. The Senior Pastor will speak in a discrete, informed, and diplomatic manner to the congregation and the media.

Exhibit 1

Symptoms of Molestation

Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

Behavioral signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” of sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- “I don’t like [a particular church worker].”
- “[A church worker] does things to me when we’re alone.”
- “I don’t like to be alone with [a church worker].”