

# HOUSTON'S FIRSTBAPTIST CHURCH

— EFFECTIVE —

AUG 1, 2023



## *Safeguarding*

Cultivating a Culture that Cares

# PROTECTION POLICY

— CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND SPECIAL NEEDS ADULTS —



HOUSTON'S FIRST  
BAPTIST CHURCH

[HoustonsFirst.org](http://HoustonsFirst.org)



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# INTRODUCTION – THE WHY!

“Every child has the right to be safe from harm. Nevertheless, every year the lives and physical, mental, (spiritual) and emotional wellbeing of millions of children around the world are threatened by maltreatment such as abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.”

–Family Health International 360

At Houston’s First Baptist Church we take seriously the responsibility to create environments of safety and security, protecting the wellbeing of children, youth and special needs adults (CYSNA). These policies and procedures have been developed to prevent intentional and unintentional harm happening to children, youth and special needs adults as they participate in programs, services and activities across all campuses and auxiliary ministries. These policies are also intended to assist our staff and unpaid volunteers as they serve the church.

As a Relevant Biblical Community, it is imperative that we understand relevant issues with commitment and resolve to confront them in the context of a safe community empowered by Biblical Principles. Our desire is to place Appropriate Adults in the environments of children, youth, and adults with special needs by increasing both knowledge and awareness of the facts associated with child sexual abuse.

- An estimated ONE in 10 children will be a victim of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.
- There are an estimated 42 million adult survivors of sexual abuse living in the US today.
- Of the estimated 36% of children who disclose abuse, many are disclosed to a friend or family member who does NOT choose to report the abuse.
- 60% of child sexual abuse victims will NEVER tell anyone!

Research has shown that a remarkable difference is made when adults take responsibility with action and resolve, making proactive choices regardless of risk and supporting one another in the context of community.

God’s heart for the vulnerable is on display throughout the pages of scripture with over 2,000 references to children, justice, injustice, the poor, the fatherless, and the widow including protective themes for all vulnerable peoples. The vulnerable are those who find themselves in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or the risk of abuse or neglect. Their very survival hinges on their connection to someone bigger, stronger and wiser for protection, comfort, and delight as well as help regulating their feelings. These needs invite both the potential for help and the potential for harm.

\*\*Disclaimer: As the statistics above indicate, we recognize there are possibly staff and certainly many among the vast number of volunteers who may find themselves right in the middle of these numbers. Discussing childhood sexual abuse and the means by which we must prevent it may be triggering and difficult. If that is you, please know that it is our deepest desire to cultivate a Culture that Cares by both caring and grieving this space with you. We model what we share here by becoming a safe place for you, too! At the end of this packet you will find a wealth of resources and ways to start or continue your healing journey.\*\*

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It is essential to understand that as image bearers we cannot separate the body from the spirit. Abuse of any kind, especially sexual abuse, is a violation of personhood and deeply alters the capacity to give and receive love. It is therefore imperative as disciple makers and reconcilers that the pursuit of a healthy theology of protection (or safeguarding) be a foundation in both the motivation and the execution of every activity, program and initiative created within all areas and levels of ministry at Houston's First Baptist Church.

“If theology is to the church as a compass is to sailors in a storm, then safeguarding [Protection] is the true north of all the helpful service the church has to offer. Together they must set the direction of all Christian ministry.”

—Dr. Krish Kandiah

The following document was created to provide knowledge of child protective issues facing our society today and to clearly communicate strategies for protection and reporting guidelines. The goal is to strengthen both capacity and resolve to protect children. As both citizens and Christians, Houston's First Baptist Church's expectation is that all staff and volunteers demonstrate resolve, integrity and courage to actively participate as God's agents of protection for the most vulnerable.

Our desire is that a culture of care be created that adheres to the standards, principles, and guidelines presented in this document and which all staff, deacons, volunteers, interns, members of Houston's First Baptist Church, official guests, partner organizations and anyone who might come in contact with children, youth, and special needs adults would seek to follow both in the church and in their personal lives.

For those who work and serve at Houston's First Baptist Church, either paid or volunteer, these standards are non-negotiable while working, ministering and/or traveling on behalf of Houston's First Baptist Church. Because of our commitment to this culture of care, any paid staff or unpaid volunteers who violate the standards in this policy will be subject to any of the following, depending on the situation:

- Restriction/limitation of duties
- Required retraining
- Request to stop serving as volunteer
- Dismissal/termination
- Prosecution

Preventing child sexual abuse happens by Cultivating a Culture that Cares. It is important that we be aligned in purpose and values as we engage this important work.

# THE CODE OF CONDUCT

## FOR APPROPRIATE INTERACTION WITH KIDS

- 1 We will SAY SOMETHING if we SEE SOMETHING. If you observe any behavior (child, parent, volunteer, or staff) that seems “off” or suspicious, report this to your supervisor or a staff member right away.
- 2 We will watch for and report “grooming” behavior. Anything that creates secrecy, privacy, or isolates a child from the group by an adult should be reported.
- 3 We will maintain the Two-Adult Rule. Two adults must be present in the room or area of ministry and one-on-one interactions should be interruptible and visible.
- 4 We will ensure private activities are only performed by approved persons and do not violate the Two-Adult Rule. This includes activities such as diapering, toileting, dressing, and bathing.
- 5 We will teach and model healthy touch. We will not engage in spanking, hitting, or threatening any child, nor any behavior or touching which is inappropriate with a child including sexualized behavior such as kissing and fondling. We will respect a child’s ability to say NO.
- 6 We will exercise due diligence in avoiding risky behavior in “hotspots.” Hotspots include transportation, bathrooms, closets, camp lodging, or secluded areas.
- 7 We will communicate with everyone in a safe, respectful, and encouraging manner. We will not bully, give false promises, engage in sexualized talk, “pet names,” shouting, shaming, or silencing of any child, volunteer, staff member, or parent. This also includes the addition of a second adult in all electronic communication with students.
- 8 We will affirm each person’s inherent dignity as someone made in the image of God.
- 9 We will report any behavior by children that is not age-appropriate in an effort to provide restoration and healing.
- 10 We will provide professional communication with parents/guardians and not insult or criticize parenting techniques. Any practices deemed dangerous to a child will be reported to a supervisor.
- 11 We will be aware of the potential for peer abuse in any form and seek to provide supervision and intercession that will minimize this risk.
- 12 Every approved Safeguarding volunteer will be clearly identified as a Houston’s First volunteer.

# 3. SCREENING PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEERS

## 3.1 ROLE OF CERTIFIED SCREENERS

### 1. Definition

A designated individual assigned by a Ministry Leader to screen and approve prospective volunteers according to the Safeguarding Protection Policy (SPP)

### 2. Job Description

The role of a screener includes the following responsibilities:

- Follow the SPP screening process as outlined in this document
- Diligently follow up on all missing information, red flags, or concerns regarding prospective or active volunteers
- Maintain, verify and store accurate records of all prospective and current volunteers serving within their ministry
- Ensure that all current volunteers are up to date on annual review requirements
  - Email upcoming review process to current volunteers a minimum of one month in advance
  - Email both volunteers and ministry leaders when a volunteer is no longer eligible to serve if they have not completed the process
- Share responsibility with the Ministry Leader to ensure that all volunteers have been appropriately screened per the process below and found to be appropriate to serve with children
- Attend all designated SPP training and meetings
- Effectively communicate to prospective volunteers and other ministry staff the SPP requirements for those approved to serve with minors and adults with special needs

### 3. Selection of Screeners

Screeners are selected by the ministry leader in which they work (i.e. Preschool selects for Preschool). They must be a full-time staff member of Houston's First and approved by the Associate Director of Operations. At that point, they are considered Certified Screeners for Houston's First.

## 3.2 SAFEGUARDING TEN STEP SCREENING PROCESS

1. Initial Interest — A prospective volunteer communicates an interest in serving with children or adults with special needs. This starts the screening process.

2. Safeguarding Volunteer Application — Any prospective volunteer must complete the required application fully. The application is used to gain information as to the appropriateness of the prospective volunteer.

3. Staff Approval Email — The Safeguarding Office will send out Staff Approval emails FOR all campuses TO all campuses to gather any additional information or concerns known by staff. Screeners will be notified if any issues are raised.

4. Background Check — All prospective volunteers (18 years and older) must complete and pass a criminal background check. Any background check found to have issues of concern will need to be approved by the Associate Director of Operations before proceeding.

- Background Checks must be completed every two years. For any current volunteer that began serving before age 18, a background check must be completed and passed by their 18th birthday.

5. Membership Requirements — Prospective volunteers must be a confirmed Houston's First church member as indicated on their Rock profile.
6. Six Month Church Involvement — Prospective volunteers must have a minimum of six months between the creation of their ERA (Estimated Regular Attender) tag in Rock and the begin date of their service. Examples of activities which would cause the creation of an ERA tag are tithing, registering for an event through Rock, or attending an LBS class.
7. Three References:
  - Houston's First Leadership — Examples include LBS Director or Teacher, Staff Member, Deacon, Ministry Leader, or Serving Group Leader.
  - Professional Reference — Former employer or ministry supervisor
  - Personal Reference — Non-family member
8. Interview — Each prospective volunteer must be interviewed by a Certified Screener either In-Person or by Zoom.
9. Approval/Rejection — Once these steps have been completed, a Certified Screener will determine, based on this information, if the prospective volunteer is appropriate for the ministry in which they are applying to serve.
10. Volunteer Onboarding by Ministry — Ministry Leaders will appropriately onboard each new volunteer. This onboarding will include training in the CODE OF CONDUCT and any other appropriate procedures.

### 3.3 MINORS SERVING WITH KIDS

Houston's First students, age 11–17, who seek to work with Children's, Preschool or Special Needs ministries

1. Minors are required to fill out a Minor Application which is reviewed by a screener.
2. Minors must have email approval from the Ministry Director of the ministry they are currently in (First Kids or HUB).

### 3.4 NON-HOUSTON'S FIRST VOLUNTEERS

Adults who do NOT attend Houston's First, but do attend a like-minded (New Testament) church and seek to be involved in either a one-time event or an ongoing ministry.

#### A. One-time event Approval (Non-Houston's First Volunteer –temp)

1. Required to fill out a SPP Volunteer Application which is reviewed by a screener
2. Required to pass a background check
3. Must have a Non-Houston's First form completed and signed by their attending church regarding their involvement and appropriateness to serve with kids
  - The Associate Director of Operations will approve/deny based on this information
  - The Approved to Serve tag will expire at the end of the event

#### B. On-going Ministry Approval (Non-Houston's First Volunteer)

1. Required to fill out a SPP Volunteer Application which is reviewed by a screener
2. Required to pass a background check
3. Must have a Non-Houston's First form completed and signed by their attending church regarding their involvement and appropriateness to serve with kids
4. Must provide two references:
  - Professional Reference — former employer or ministry supervisor
  - Personal Reference — non-family member

5. Must be interviewed by a Certified Screener either in-person or by zoom

- The Associate Director of Operations will approve/deny based on this information.

### 3.5 NON-SAFEGUARDING HOUSTON'S FIRST STAFF

Houston's Firststaff members who serve in an area besides Safeguarding seeking to work in a ministry or event with kids.

A. Treated as a prospective volunteer and subject to the screening process above

## 4. TRAINING AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

**NOTE:** Failure to complete the requirements below will result in being moved to "unable to serve" status in ROCK for volunteers and non-compliance issues for staff members.

### 4.1 SCREENERS

- A. Required to attend specific training for screeners four times a year
- B. Must complete Skillful Screening Process Training by Ministry Safe every three years
- C. Required to attend "check-in" meetings four times a year
- D. Missed training/check-in meetings may result in loss of certification

### 4.2 MINISTRY LEADERS

Division heads or anyone else who designates screeners

- A. Required to attend specific training two times a year – one of these will be alongside screeners from their ministry
- B. Must complete Skillful Screening Process Training by Ministry Safe every 3 years

### 4.3 ALL SAFEGUARDING STAFF

Those working with CYSNA on a regular basis

- A. Must complete the Sexual Abuse Awareness Training from Ministry Safe within six months of employment and subsequently every three years.
- B. Must attend specific Safeguarding Protection training (in addition to requirement for all staff)
- C. Must be very familiar with the CODE OF CONDUCT

### 4.4 ALL VOLUNTEERS

- A. Required to complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training by Ministry Safe within six months of beginning to serve and subsequently every five years.
- B. Required each year to complete the Annual Review
- C. Must be very familiar with the CODE OF CONDUCT

### 4.5 ALL HOUSTON'S FIRST STAFF

- A. Must attend/watch Safeguarding Protection training (one time per year)
- B. Must be familiar with principles in the CODE OF CONDUCT
- C. Must complete Ministry Safe Training (Sexual Abuse Awareness) every five years

# 5. RESPONSE TO INDICATORS OF ABUSE

## 5.1 PROCESS FOR REPORTING POTENTIAL ABUSE

### A. When to report

It is important to remember that unless you see the abuse happening you are dealing with potential abuse. It is not your responsibility to decide if abuse has occurred, but to report and allow the authorities to make that decision. Report potential abuse if:

- You have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect
- You witness any abuse to a child at Houston's First by any person

### B. Steps to take

- Report any potential abuse to your ministry leader
- Complete a Disclosure/Incident Report
- Report potential abuse to authorities
- Send report to SPPO office

## 5.2 CONFIDENTIALITY IN REPORTING

Do not disclose the names of any abuse victims or potential perpetrators to anyone except your ministry leader, authorities or to others when requested to do so by church leadership.

## 5.3 CARE FOR THE CHILD

- The parents of the child must be contacted, except in situations where the parents are suspected to be the perpetrator.
- Do not leave the child alone.
- Do not question the child.

## 5.4 INTERVENTION WITH THE ALLEGED PERPETUATOR

- Have membership services remove their Approved to Serve Tag and put a block on their Rock Profile.
- Inform Associate Director of Operations of the allegation.
- Inform the individual in person (phone is acceptable) and in writing that while the review process is ongoing they may not
  - Serve in any area with children present
  - Serve in any leadership capacity with Houston's First or our ministries
  - Enter the preschool or children's area, even to drop off/pick up their own children

## 5.5 ASSISTANCE FROM JPMCC

The Counseling Center is available and should be included in any situations of potential abuse. They can assist in ongoing care for the child and family as well as help in communicating with parents and others in authority. It is not necessary to call the Counseling Center for reporting abuse to the Hotline.

# 6. SAFEGUARDING PROTECTION POLICY OFFICE

## 6.1 ROLE OF SAFEGUARDING OFFICE

The Safeguarding Protection Policy Office is comprised of Central Support personnel assigned by the Director of Operations to oversee, audit, and train Houston's First Staff and volunteers in SPP. It is NOT the responsibility of the Safeguarding Office to recruit or approve volunteers but to oversee and assist in the process. The responsibility of recruiting and screening appropriate adults (or minors in some instances) to serve as volunteers remains with Ministry Leaders.

## 6.2 AUTHORITY/AUDITS

- The Safeguarding Office has the authority to conduct random audits of events, ministries and volunteers throughout the year. The Safeguarding Office has zero-tolerance for non-compliance of the Safeguarding Protection Policy and has the authority to refer non-compliance issues to HR. Any issues of non-compliance will result in verbal and written warnings and if necessary, termination of employment.
- The Safeguarding Office is also the final say regarding questions of interpretation of SPP.

## 6.3 ROLE OF HR IN THE SPP

The HR Department will intervene when it is understood that the SPP has not been followed by employees and steps to correct those errors by the Safeguarding Office have been unsuccessful. This intervention may include retraining, transfer and/or termination of employment. HR will also ensure that the SPP CODE OF CONDUCT is included during the onboarding process and Ministry Safe training is completed for all staff, regardless of the employee's role.

# 7. RESOURCES

## A. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Appropriate Adult** — A person deemed safe to interact with kids through the screening of their experience, reputation, involvement, background and previous actions

**CYSNA**— Children, Youth and Special Needs Adults

**Failure to protect** — To fail to provide safety in a reasonable way to a child or vulnerable person.

**Grooming** — Establishing an emotional connection with a child, and the adults around the child, to gain access to and time alone with the child with the intention of lowering the child's inhibitions for child sexual abuse

**Hotspots** — Areas and environments with a higher risk for abuse to occur due to isolation, inability to monitor, or other risk factors. They include transportation, bathrooms, closets, camp lodging or secluded areas.

**Ministry Leader** — A Minister or Director over an area of ministry that works with kids or interacts with kids in a significant way. Examples are: Children's Minister, Go Houston Coordinator, Ministry Coordinator for after-school programs at Faith Center, etc.

**Minor** — Any person under the age of 18. May also be referred to as "child."

**Peer-to-Peer Abuse** — Any of the types of abuse listed below where the abuser is also a child, youth or special needs adult

**Red Flag** — An issue or incident that raises alarm as to someone's "appropriateness" for serving with kids

**Screener** — A person selected by a Ministry Leader who completes the training necessary to be considered "certified"

**Types of Abuse:**

- **Emotional** — A pattern of behavior that causes adverse effects on a child's emotional development including shaming, humiliating, rejecting, or name calling
- **Neglect** — Ongoing failure to provide for a child's physical, educational, emotional, social, or safety needs
- **Physical** — Any act that results in a non-accidental physical injury. This may include but is not limited to hitting, punching, pinching, kicking, etc.
- **Sexual** — Includes direct or indirect sexual exploitation of a child by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in sexual activities (physical, verbal, visual, or psychological)
- **Spiritual** — Occurs when someone in a position of spiritual power or authority in a faith-based environment misuses their power and the trust placed in them, with the intention of controlling, coercing, or dominating a child

**Volunteer** — Any person not employed by Houston's First participating in ministry activities without compensation

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## B. TEXAS CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES INFO

Hotline — 1-800.252.5400

## C. JULIANNA POOR MEMORIAL COUNSELING CENTER

- Schedule an appointment — 713.335.6462
- Fees—\$100/session for non-Houston's First members, \$50/session for Houston's First members
- Scholarships available
- Sessions last for 45 minutes
- Services offered:
  - Individual and Couple Counseling
  - Family Counseling
  - Adolescent Counseling – Anxiety, depression, same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria
  - Preparation for Marriage
  - Life Transitions
  - Group Counseling
  - Support Group

## D. SAFEGUARDING PROTECTION POLICY OFFICE

Houston's First Baptist Church — The Loop Campus

- Safeguarding Director – Jenny Sheets
  - Email: [Safeguarding@HoustonsFirst.org](mailto:Safeguarding@HoustonsFirst.org)
  - Phone: 713.335.6453
  - Office: Rm267

## E. DISCLOSURE/INCIDENT FORM

### Houston's First's Safeguarding Protection Disclosure/Incident Form

This form is to be used when a child, youth or special needs adult discloses potential abuse to a Houston's First staff member or volunteer, or a potential Safeguarding protection incident occurs during a Houston's First sponsored event. Please provide as much information as possible.

Reporter's Name:

Child's Name:

Date of incident:

Time of incident:

Location of incident:

List all people who were present when the incident occurred (adults and children):

Provide a detailed description of the incident:

Provide a description of any action taken after the incident:

Was a report made to DFPS? If yes:

Date of report:

Case #

Name of reporter:

Hotline or webform?