

Abuse Prevention Policy

Hope Church
Little Rock, Arkansas
June 2026

Purpose:

To demonstrate Hope Church's commitment to the physical and emotional safety of all children, helpers, certified workers, and staff at Hope Church.

Definitions:

1. **Child or children-** person(s) under the age of eighteen (18) years.
2. **Child abuse-** includes *physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, sexual contact, grooming, or ritual abuse* inflicted by those legally responsible for the care and maintenance of the *child*, or an injury, which is at variance with the history given. This term encompasses both acts and omissions.
3. **Physical abuse-** occurs when a person deliberately and intentionally causes physical harm to a *child*.
4. **Emotional abuse-** occurs when a person exposes a *child* to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty, unfitting to the Gospel.
5. **Mental abuse-** occurs when a person deliberately and intentionally causes mental harm to a *child*.
6. **Neglect-** occurs when a person endangers a *child's* health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Examples include:
 - a. Failure or refusal to prevent *child abuse* when the person knows or should know that a child is being abused;
 - b. Failure to take reasonable action to protect a child from *child abuse*.
7. **Sexual abuse-** occurs when there is *sexual contact* between a *child* and an adult (or other more powerful *child*) occurs. *Sexual abuse* can also include non-contact acts toward a *child*, such as sexual verbal comments; exposure to pornographic material; obscene telephone calls, emails, text messages, or social media messages; exhibitionism; or allowing *children* to witness sexual activity.
8. **Sexual contact-** occurs when any act of sexual gratification involves:
 - a. Touching, directly or through clothing, of the sex organs, buttocks, or anus of a *child* or the breast of a female *child* (regardless of whether the breast have developed);
 - b. Encouraging a *child* to touch someone in a sexual manner; or
 - c. Requesting someone to touch the *child* in a sexual manner.
9. **Grooming-** occurs when an adult (or other more powerful *child*) knowingly disseminates to a *child* visual or print medium depicting sexually explicit content with the purpose to entice, induce, or groom the *child* to engage in *sexual contact*. Grooming also occurs when

an adult (or other more powerful *child*) knowingly targets any *child* to create opportunities for *sexual abuse*.

10. **Ritual abuse**- actions, not based in Biblical truth, in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a *child* are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the *child's* welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority to justify the *abuse*.
11. **Staff**- any employee of Hope Church, whether full-time, part-time, or interim.
12. **Participant**- a *child* who is registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise involved in an *event*.
13. **Certified Worker**- an adult charged with the care or supervision of *children* who have completed all requirements for certification.
14. **Helper**- a volunteer who are charged with the care or supervision of *children* at an event who have not completed the requirements for certification.
15. **Roamer**- a *certified worker* specifically designated to walk preschool/children's department halls during *events* to assist other *certified workers* when the two (2) *certified worker* rule cannot be met.
16. **Event**- any activity which is planned for *children* and intended to involve *children* and which is funded, in whole or in part, by Hope Church and which is planned and implemented by persons representing Hope Church, whether the activities take place on or off the campus of Hope Church.

Abuse Prevention Team

The Hope Church Abuse Prevention Team ("the Team") will be comprised of no less than three (3) Hope Church members and no less than one (1) *staff*, who shall serve as an ex officio team member. The Team shall be approved by the Hope Church congregation on an annual basis. The Team will be responsible for evaluation and/or improvement of the quality of care rendered by Hope Church *staff*, *certified workers*, and *helpers* to *participants*. To qualify for a nomination on the Team, a Hope Church member must be a *certified worker* as defined herein. The Team will determine whether Hope Church *staff*, *certified workers*, and *helpers* provided care to *participants* in compliance with the Hope Church Abuse Prevention Policy. The Team will be responsible for updating the Abuse Prevention Policy annually, or as otherwise needed. The Team shall also be responsible for consulting on *certified worker* applications, as necessary. Meeting minutes, documents, incident reports, or other records created by or at the direction/request of the Team, if any, shall be confidential unless law enforcement or subpoena compels the disclosure of these documents.

Application Process and Confidentiality of Records

Program *staff* and volunteers will be responsible for assisting *helpers* with the application process and the completion of the Certified Worker Packet. The packet shall include:

1. Certified Worker Application;
2. MinistrySafe training and testing; and
3. The following background checks through MinistrySafe:
 - a. National Sex Offender Registry;
 - b. State Sex Offender Registry;

- c. County Court Records;
- d. Criminal Background Check; and
- e. Motor Vehicle Check (only if driving for Hope Church *event(s)*)

After Certified Work Packets are processed, all records will be stored by our third-party vendor, MinistrySafe. Access to these records will be limited to the members of the Team and *staff* necessary to determine certification of a volunteer after initial processing. Under special circumstances, access to the records may be granted by the Team to law enforcement, mental health professionals, and/or legal advisors. All files may be retained indefinitely from the date of their origination.

Approval of Certification

After submission, review, and approval of the Certified Worker Packet, the applicant will interview with a program *staff* member or Team member. Upon completion acceptable background checks, and MinistrySafe certification, a volunteer will be classified as a *certified worker* to serve at Hope Church *events*.

Background checks shall be performed monthly, unless there are no checks to be run. Certification shall be for a period of three (3) years, at which time it may be renewed based on new background checks and the requirements established by the Team. Hope Church reserves the right to re-run the background checks any time during the three-year certification time frame.

Working with children is a privilege, not a right. Therefore, Hope Church reserves the right to revoke *Certified Worker* status at any time.

Disapproval of Certification

Under no circumstance will an individual who is reported to be on the Child Maltreatment Registry (whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful abuse) be approved as a *certified worker* or *helper*. Under no circumstance will an individual who is reported to have a criminal history of violence or abuse of any kind be approved as a *certified worker* or *helper*. Under no circumstance will an individual who is reported to have a criminal history of drug related conviction (misdemeanor or felony) within the five (5) years immediately prior to application be approved as a *certified worker* or *helper*. Under no circumstance will an individual who is reported to have a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application be allowed to act as a driver for a Hope Church *event*. An individual who is reported to have any criminal history may not be approved as a *certified worker* or *helper*, unless the *staff* and/or Team determines that a rare non-violent/non-abusive exception should be made. This determination will be documented in the file of this potential certified worker or helper.

In the event it is determined that an individual may be a registered sex offender under the Sex and Child Offender Registration Act, the Pastor, or his designee, and Team shall be immediately notified to ensure compliance with Hope Church's Policies Regarding Community Notifications Pursuant to the Sex and Child Offender Registration Act.

Certified Worker Requirements

To be approved as a *certified worker*, an applicant must complete each of the following:

1. Be eighteen (18) years of age or older;
2. Receive a recommendation from the *staff* or a Team member based on an interview or prior personal knowledge;
3. Complete MinistrySafe training/testing and forward the MinistrySafe Certificate of Completion to designated *staff*;
4. Complete a Certified Worker Packet. By completing these forms, the applicant grants Hope Church permission to undertake the inquiries necessary to complete the review of the application. The applicant grants Hope Church permission to perform various background checks (listed above) in perpetuity unless and until the applicant revokes such permission, in writing, to Hope Church. Hope Church will forward the applicant a link to a MinistrySafe website with instructions on completing the background check. Criminal background checks shall be completed for applicants who are to be considered as *certified workers*. The background check includes criminal history involving offenses classified as felonies or Class A misdemeanors under Arkansas law and federal law. Hope Church reserves the right to conduct a more comprehensive background check, at the discretion of the Team.
5. Complete Certified Worker Training. Hope Church will be responsible for providing all acceptable training, as designated by the Team. The mandatory training must be completed, including testing, prior to certification as a *certified worker*. See, Appendix B for the Training Guidelines.

Operating Procedures for Events

All *events* will be governed by the following guidelines:

1. Abuse Expressly Prohibited-
Any and all *child abuse* is strictly prohibited, including but not limited to: *physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, grooming, and/or ritual abuse*.
2. Two Certified Workers Rule-
At least two (2), unrelated *certified workers* must be present per room and/or within line of sight at any *event*. If a *certified worker* needs to leave a classroom, leaving the other *certified worker* alone with *children*, the classroom door should be left open until a *roamer* can step in, or until the other *certified worker* returns.
3. Four Year Rule-
A *certified worker* must be at least four (4) years older than the *participants* with whom he/she works.
4. Check-In and Check-Out Procedure
Please refer to the Hope Church Check-In, Check-Out Policy for this procedure.

5. Open Door Procedure-
The parents/guardians of the *children* served, Team members, and/or *staff* members have the right to visit and observe *events* or classrooms at any time, unannounced. However, parents/guardians who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at Hope Church will be required to complete the Certified Worker Packet.
6. Windows in All Classrooms-
It is recommended that all rooms used for *children* have a window in or near the door or be a Dutch door. Otherwise, doors should remain open. All windows viewing into rooms used for *children's events* should remain unobstructed at all times. No decorations or signs are permitted to cover door windows.
7. Being Alone with a Child-
If in the course of his/her duties on behalf of Hope Church a *certified worker* knows of a legitimate reason for being alone with a *child*, the *certified worker* shall notify program *staff* in advance of being alone with the *child*. If an emergency situation arises and the *certified worker* cannot notify program *staff* in advance of being alone with a *child*, the *certified worker* should quickly conduct necessary business with the *child* in a public space, in a room with a window in the door, or in a room with the door open. The *certified worker* must then notify program *staff* as soon as possible following the emergency situation. *Helpers* are not permitted to be alone with *children*.
8. Individual Counseling-
One-to-one interactions are generally discouraged, but are sometimes necessary and appropriate. However, care must be taken so that one-to-one activities are conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Before one-to-one counseling, the *certified worker* must notify program *staff*. During counseling of *children*, doors may be closed if there is an unobstructed window viewing into the room. If there is no window, the door must remain open for the entire counseling session. *Helpers* are not permitted to provide one-to-one counseling to *children*.
9. Verbal Interactions with Children-
Verbal interactions between *staff/certified workers/helpers* and *children* should be positive and uplifting. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* should not talk to *children* in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of *children*.
10. Classroom Discipline-
All *certified workers* and *helpers* will work to protect the dignity of a *child*. If a *child* becomes disruptive, begin with the following steps to correct the *child*:
 - a. Restate the rules to the entire class;

- b. Gain eye contact with him/her;
- c. Walk in the *child's* direction, standing near him/her;
- d. Redirect the *child's* actions; and
- e. Move the *child* to a different seat or location in the classroom.

When it is evident that you have an extreme case, which cannot be handled in the classroom, contact *staff* for assistance.

No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, grabbing, hitting, restraining, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Similarly, *certified workers/helpers* may not: yell at a child; threaten a child; openly humiliate a child in front of the class; seclude a child; or confront a parent in front of others.

11. Physical Contact with Children-

Certified workers/helpers should be mindful of the ways in which they physically interact with *children* at Hope Church. Examples of appropriate displays of affection include, but are not limited to:

- a. Hugs, but only when initiated by the *child*. Avoid full-contact hugs when possible;
- b. Pats on the shoulder or back;
- c. "High-fives" or "fist-bumps";
- d. Verbal praise;
- e. Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms;
- f. Arms around shoulders; and
- g. Holding hands.

Examples of inappropriate displays of affection include, but are not limited to:

- a. Kisses on mouth;
- b. *Children* sitting in laps of *staff/certified workers/helpers*;
- c. Tickling;
- d. Touching of bottoms, chests, or genital areas, except when necessary in toileting, or bathing;
- e. Any prolonged physical contact;
- f. Showing any physical affection in isolated areas of the building, such as closets, bathrooms, empty rooms, empty hallways, or vehicles;
- g. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* sleeping in bed with a child;
- h. *Child* riding on *staff's/certified workers'/helpers'* back or shoulders;
- i. Any type of massage given by a *child* to adults/*staff/certified workers/helpers*;
- j. Allowing a child to touch you in an inappropriate physical way (such as the examples listed in this section); and
- k. Any form of affection that is unwanted by the *child*. A *child's* preference not to be touched must be respected.

Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.

Certified workers/helpers/staff are responsible for protecting *children* under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse must be reported immediately to TWO (2) different individuals: *staff* **AND** a Team member.

12. Leaving a Classroom with Children-

Anytime *certified workers/helpers* leave a classroom with *children*, they should conduct a headcount before leaving and after arriving at the second location. Continue conducting periodic headcounts until back in the classroom.

13. Missing Child-

In the event a child is missing, *staff* should be notified immediately. *Staff* will notify security team members and the missing *child's* parent(s). The *staff* will determine when to notify other parents to increase church awareness. Everyone involved is reminded to remain calm and rational while moving in a timely manner.

14. Gifts-

No *staff/certified worker/helper* should give gifts to an individual *child* without the prior knowledge of the parent(s)/guardian(s) and applicable *staff*. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate, but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

15. Bathroom Procedures-

No adults, including *certified workers* and *helpers*, should enter restrooms, toilets, shower rooms, locker rooms, or changing rooms occupied by *children* when hands-on supervision is not required or appropriate (this does not apply to the parent/*child* relationship).

All *children* 5th grade and under must be escorted to the restroom by a *certified worker*. If the *child* does not require assistance in the restroom, the *certified worker* should check the restroom before the *child* enters to ensure the restroom is clear of any adults. Once cleared, the *child* should enter the restroom while the *certified worker* waits in the hallway.

If the *child* requires assistance in the restroom, assistance must be rendered by a *certified worker*, not a *helper*. The *certified worker* must leave the restroom door ajar and should alert the other *certified worker* that he/she is providing restroom assistance.

16. Diapering-

The following procedures shall apply to any *child* who requires diaper changes:

- a. Only female *certified workers* or the child's parent/guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex. *Helpers* will not change diapers.
- b. Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other *certified workers/helpers*.
- c. *Children* will never be left unattended on changing tables.
- d. Any special instructions given by parents/guardians will be followed;
- e. *Children* should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diapers;
- f. *Children* should be changed on changing stations only; and
- g. *Certified workers* shall wash hands and sanitize changing station immediately following each diaper change.

17. Events Away from Hope Church-

All *children* participating in off-campus, out-of-town, or overnight *events* must have written consent and a medical release form.

There must be access to a telephone when *children* are at an *event* away from Hope Church property.

There must be two (2) *certified workers* on any *event*, whether overnight or not. In no circumstance is one adult to supervise a *child* or *children* on an overnight *event*.

Female *certified workers* shall supervise female *children* in their sleeping quarters and male *certified workers* shall supervise male *children* in their sleeping quarters. Married couples shall not sleep in the same quarters if *children* are present, but shall observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements.

With the exception of a parent/*child* combination, an adult and a *child* are not to occupy the same bed or sleeping bag. One *certified worker/helper* may not share a room with only one *child*, with the exception of the parent/*child* combination.

18. Transportation/Vehicles-

It is best to avoid the circumstance in which adults drive children (who are not their own) in a personal vehicle for a Hope Church *event*. If transportation is necessary, however, the following guidelines should be strictly observed when *certified workers* are involved in the transportation of *children*:

- a. **No adult subject to this policy will be alone in a vehicle with any *child* in connection with Hope Church event**, excepting the parent/*child* relationship;
- b. Any driver transporting children for a Hope Church event must observe the "Two Certified Workers Rule" while in the vehicle (just as it would be observed in a classroom);

- c. The *certified worker*/driver shall notify program *staff* in advance of transporting *children*. If an emergency situation arises and the *certified worker*/driver cannot notify program *staff* in advance of transporting children, the *certified worker*/driver must notify program *staff* as soon as possible following the emergency situation;
- d. *Children* should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place are prohibited;
- e. Adults should avoid physical contact with *children* while in vehicles; and
- f. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver that would violate Arkansas law.

19. Digital Safety-

Online Gatherings- Digital (or online) gatherings of *children* shall follow the same guidelines and procedures as in-person gatherings. Just as we ask no *staff/certified worker/helper* to be alone with a *child* in-person, we ask that no *staff/certified worker/helper* contacts a *child* directly and privately. All digital communication with a *child* should be done in a public forum or with another *certified worker* or parent/guardian involved.

Staff/certified workers/helpers should be dressed appropriately and set expectations for *children* to also dress appropriately while attending virtual meetings. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* should be cognizant of their surroundings when conducting online meetings to make sure there are no inappropriate backgrounds or items in the room from which they are streaming. Some examples of inappropriate items might be alcohol, smoking materials, or adult-themed materials.

Parents/Guardians will be notified of any inappropriate activity reasonably suspected to have occurred or if there are other concerns about online interactions.

Online Posting- Written consent from a parent or legal guardian must be given prior to posting any *child's* picture on any of Hope Church's social media or digital platforms. Similarly, *staff/certified workers/helpers* may not post photos of children (excepting their own) on their personal social media without written parental consent. Written consent can be submitted via email, text, or may be included in a Photo/Video Release form. When obtained, written parental consent should be saved and shared with *staff*. It should be noted that a Photo Release for Hope Church does not grant *staff/certified workers/helpers* permission to post on their personal social media. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* are permitted to share social media posts that have previously been posted by a parent/guardian or institution, so long as the post does not violate any other Hope Church policy.

Internet postings should never disclose sensitive or confidential information, unless written consent to share said information is obtained from the individual it concerns. This includes but is not limited to personal and/or medical information. Examples of information that should not be shared or engaged online include:

- a. A *child* or volunteer's last name, regardless of Photo Release; and
- b. Posts or interactions that violate Hope Church's values, including harassment and confidentiality issues.

Private Messaging- whether it is via text, social media, or an online meeting, inappropriate statements or any attempt to initiate inappropriate conduct of any sort will not be tolerated. When messaging, *staff/certified workers/helpers* should adhere to the following:

- a. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* working with *children* shall not have one-on-one interaction with any *child*, including text messages, online chats, social media, or via other technology means. Parents/guardians shall be included in online correspondence and invitations to remote activities for *children*;
- b. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* shall not use electronic communication to post or discuss sensitive topics, including those of a violent or sexual nature;
- c. If an adult subject to this policy receives inappropriate communication from a *child*, he/she shall tell *staff* and a Team member immediately and save the correspondence. Depending on the nature of the communication, if maltreatment or an attempt to solicit is reasonably suspected, the *Staff/certified worker/helper* shall report the incident to the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline;
- d. In mentoring situations, where the conversations are appropriately one-on-one, this should be done in an open area or where there is a way to encourage transparency in the virtual environment, such as including another adult in the mentoring – even in digital communication – as one possible solution; and
- e. *Staff/Team members/parents/guardians* should be encouraged to attend and drop in on in-person and virtual sessions taking place with *children*.

In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how *staff/certified workers/helpers* should behave with regard to digital safety and/or social media, please check with Hope Church *staff* or the Leadership Team before posting, messaging, or speaking as a representative of Hope Church.

20. Other Inappropriate Behavior-

- a. Intoxicants- *staff/certified workers/helpers* are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any Hope Church facility, at a Hope Church *event*, while traveling with *children*, or while working with or supervising *children*.
- b. Tobacco- *staff/certified workers/helpers* should abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products (including vape pens and e-cigarettes) in church facilities, while in the presence of *children* or their parents/guardians, or during Hope Church *events*. Hope Church is a tobacco-free facility.
- c. Sexually oriented conversations- *staff/certified workers/helpers* are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with *children*, and they are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about

their own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities with any *child* at Hope Church or at a Hope Church *event*.

- d. Sexually oriented materials- *staff/certified workers/helpers* are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of *children*. *Staff/certified workers/helpers* are prohibited from showing any sexually oriented materials to *children*, whether on purpose or by negligence.
- e. Nudity- *staff/certified workers/helpers* should never be nude in the presence of *children* in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party or overnight retreat, etc.), *staff/certified workers/helpers* take extra care to ensure that he/she is not observed nude by *children*.

Responses by Staff, Certified Workers, and Helpers to Allegations of Abuse

If *abuse* occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance, and intervention. If *abuse* is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a *certified worker, helper, or staff*, that person shall immediately notify **TWO (2)** different individuals- a *staff* member and a Team member. When in doubt, report! The Team shall direct the following course of action:

1. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the *child*, as the situation requires, and
2. **IMMEDIATELY** (do not wait until the next day) contact the Pastor and a member of the Leadership Team, who will work with the Abuse Prevention Team and the reporting person to facilitate notification to:
 - a. the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-482-5964). This is a requirement of the law and must be done within 24 hours. (Note: *Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases*);
 - b. the appropriate *staff*. If a *staff* member is the accused party, the Leadership Team should also be immediately contacted;
 - c. the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the alleged victim. When talking with the parent(s), it is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified, even if the parent does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: *if one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents*); and
 - d. Hope Church's insurance company, if the alleged abuse occurred during a Hope Church event.

Other Important Information Regarding Allegations of Abuse

1. If the accused abuser is working in a volunteer position with *children* at Hope Church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect, remove the accused from further involvement with *children*. The accused abuser shall not return to working with children unless and

until law enforcement's investigation is complete and the accused abuser is found to be innocent.

2. Any contact with the media will be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson determined by the Team. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson will generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comment made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.

Registered Sex Offenders

All persons who are required by applicable law to register as a sex offender attending or visiting Hope Church shall disclose their status in writing to the pastor and to the Abuse Prevention Team. No such person shall be permitted to work with or be around anyone under the age of 18 and may be required or requested not to attend services or activities where *children* may be present. Nothing in this section is intended to change or increase the standard of care for Hope Church. Hope Church will comply with applicable law with regard to registered sex offenders.

Appendixes

- A. Certified Volunteer Application
- B. Abuse Prevention Training Guidelines
- C. Outside Group Waiver