

Policy for Protecting Children

Revision 1 August 2022



This policy is based on the basic tenant that as followers of Christ we have a duty to take reasonable measures to protect children entrusted to our care. This policy covers situations where an activity is taking place where adults are supervising children on church or school property or in an activity off property with adults who attend, volunteer, or are employed by the Lewis Avenue Baptist Church. The title Lewis Avenue Baptist Church (LABC) is intended to encompass all ministries implemented under LABC. Stateline Christian School and Early Learning Center Daycare ministries for example.

INTRODUCTION

To help protect children Lewis Avenue Baptist Church (LABC) has adopted the following Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program. It is important that all LABC's paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent sexual, physical, or emotional abuse against children. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of Protection and Prevention, and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children.

PURPOSE

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist LABC in screening a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used herein and are defined as follows:

1. *Paid Staff*: Any pastor, minister, preacher, teacher, aid, or employee who is paid by LABC.
2. *Child/Youth/Minor*: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
3. *Adult*: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or as defined by state law.
4. *Volunteer*: Any unpaid person engaged or involved in ministry activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. *Sexual Abuse*: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor or adult to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familiar relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of minor or adult, or incest with a minor or adult, or as defined by federal and state law. This includes and is not limited to unwelcome sexual remarks, jokes, advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures; sexual touching, fondling, molestation, assault, or other intimate physical contact; compelling another person to engage in a sexual act by threats or fear or undue influence; and providing or displaying pornographic materials to another person.
6. *Child Emotional Abuse*: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying or as defined by state law.

SCREENING

Employers, including churches that use volunteers in ministry, have a duty to make a reasonable investigation of an applicant's fitness for the position before he is hired. This responsibility is intensified when the position is one involving the supervision of children. Therefore, all employees of the church or school and all volunteers who will be granted direct access to children will be required to complete an application for employment or volunteer status. Information collected is maintained confidential. If an applicant is NOT approved after screening materials are reviewed, this decision is communicated to the applicant, pastor, deacon board and security team.

The screening and approval process is outlined as follows:

1. Staff and Volunteers assigned to work or supervise those who work with children will be required to have been a regular attending member of LABC for a period of a least six months or having been recommended by the Pastor, a deacon or staff member if attending for less than 6 months.
2. The applicant affirms the review and understanding of the LABC child protection policies.
3. The applicant completes a screening form (either online or paper copy) indicating required personal information.
4. The applicant annotates that the information provided is true and gives permission for Lewis Avenue Baptist church to complete some or all of the following:
 - a. Credit checks (if seeking employment)
 - b. Criminal and civil background checks
 - c. Sex offender database checks
 - d. Contacting previous employers or references
5. The applicant completes training and an exam as required.
6. A screening committee selected from one or more senior leaders from the church staff or deacon board will conduct a review of the screening information to conclude a decision of Approved or NOT Approved for the applicant.
 - a. If a decision of Approved is made with extenuating circumstances this information shall be documented final approval made by the pastor and board of deacons (at least 2/3 present) through a unanimous vote.
 - b. Decisions of NOT Approved are documented and communicated to the Pastor, deacon board, and security team, as well as the applicant.
7. A list of the approved personnel shall be maintained for reference and periodic review.
8. Screening for adults attending offsite school activities but not directly supervising children, such as field trips, will require a Michigan ICHAT (Internet Criminal History Access Tool) check as a minimum.

Note: Currently the church uses the company Protect My Ministry to conduct screening checks and maintain data related to the screening process in an online database. Access to the database should be limited to those required to make qualitative decisions on applicant approval and those persons should be cognizant of the confidentiality required when handling personal information.

DISQUALIFICATION

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deterred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult; assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor, or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

Sexual Offender at LABC

LABC may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation, but they must adhere to these specific guidelines.

1. The offender will provide LABC (Pastor or deacon) with an official written notice or document from the court/probation/parole officer which describes any restrictions or provisions regarding attending services or other functions where children are present.
2. If restrictions do not prohibit attendance at church or other functions, LABC will implement the following guidelines.
 - a. A known sexual offender may not participate in any of the child or youth programs in any way;
 - b. A known sexual offender may only participate in services each week as determined by LABC (Pastor or deacon);
 - c. A known sexual offender must check in to the security team prior to each service attended and check out when leaving.
 - d. A known sexual offender can attend other activities as determined by LABC (Pastor or deacon) where minors are present such as sporting events or school programs if in full compliance with court/probation/parole officer restrictions.
 - e. The identity of the sexual offender will be maintained in a notebook at the security desk or school principals office so that staff and security may provide oversight while they are present on the property.

OVERSIGHT

A child abuse prevention policy is important in several ways. Initial drafting of the policy will encourage leaders to focus on the ministry's duty to protect children and on ways to carry out that responsibility. Once adopted, it informs workers and volunteers in children's ministries that church leaders consider the prevention of child abuse a critically important spiritual matter that they should take very seriously.

The policy will also warn potential abusers that the church will not tolerate their sinful behavior, even if they are long-time members or beloved leaders. Knowing that they will not be able to hide behind the church if they are caught abusing children may prevent someone from making any attempt of abuse.

After its adoption, a policy must be consistently enforced. Even the strictest policy is worthless if not enforced. Oversight of activities will ensure policies are followed.

Policies when planning or conducting activities involving children or teens:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. Have an adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the size and complexity of the activity.
 - a. Note that if parents of children are attending an activity and that parent is not on the ministry approved list then they should not supervise children who are not their own alone. It is not time consuming to get approved so plan ahead and get additional adults screened if needed.
3. To the extent possible, LABC events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.
4. Monitor facilities during activities involving children, during church service and events. The security team is assigned to conduct video surveillance of the property when manned. During other times adults responsible for the activity will monitor for unusual situations or unexpected personnel at the activity.
5. Use two paid staff or volunteers when transporting minors in vehicles. If necessary to transport minors alone or when dropping off the last person use these guidelines:
 - a. The riders are age 16 or above.
 - b. The gender of the single rider and the driver are the same.
 - c. Parental permission has been obtained using text messaging or in writing.
6. Release minors only to a parent, guardian, or an adult directly approved by the parent or guardian.
7. Obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment forms if needed and emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips and provide information regarding the trip to the parents or guardians.
 - a. Information provided should include, location of the activity, who to contact in an emergency, and which other approved adults are attending the activity.
 - b. Pastor, Assistant Pastor, or School Principal approve ALL adults in advance for any overnight activities.
 - c. Brief minors to use a "buddy system" when on trips off LABC's property.

8. Require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same gender as the minor. In an emergency, if a minor child requires assistance, have a parent sibling assist if possible. Only approved female workers will assist minor children if needed and should do so in pairs.
9. Whenever possible, at least two paid staff or volunteers will be in the room when minors are present. If only one adult is present, stay within view of video surveillance cameras, leave doors open, or move to a public area. Speaking to a minor one-on-one should be done in public area.
10. AVOID all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
11. Conversations using text or phone should be informational only with minors. NEVER engage in lengthy personal text or phone conversations with minors. NEVER use suggestive language or any sexually related communication. NEVER text personal photos or video with minors.
12. If you recognize an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and adult, maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the minor to another individual with supervisory authority. Notify the parents or guardian and the Pastor.
13. NEVER engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including, but not limited to, physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
14. Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the proper authorities and leaders at LABC.
15. Violations or infractions of the policies of this procedure should be reported to the Pastor for disposition.

Note: *Willful violation, repeated neglect, or an indifferent attitude toward these policies, could lead to dismissal of a paid staff member or removal of a volunteer from ministry duties.*

RESPONSE TO ABUSE

The following are MANDATED reporters in the State of Michigan.

1. Members of the clergy
2. School Administrator
3. School counselor or teacher
4. Regulated child care provider

If a child is in immediate danger call 911.

The mandatory reporter who has contact with the minor is responsible for making the report.

The Child Protection Law requires mandated reporters who have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect to make an **immediate report** to MDHHS – Centralized Intake (855-444-3911) or online @ MDHHS online, followed by a **written report within 72 hours**. The reporter is not expected to investigate the matter, know the legal definitions of child abuse and neglect, or even know the name of the perpetrator. The Child Protection Law is intended to make reporting simple and places responsibility for determining appropriate action with the Children’s Protective Services (CPS) division of MDHHS. Within 72 hours of making the verbal report, mandated reporters must file a written report as required in the Child Protection Law. MDHHS encourages the use of the DHS-3200, Report of Suspected or Actual Child Abuse or Neglect form, which includes all the information required under the law. Mandated reporters must also provide a copy of the written report to the head of their organization. One report from an organization will be considered adequate to meet the law’s reporting requirement.

Forward reports to Department of Health & Human Services Centralized Intake for Abuse and Neglect
5321 28th Street Court S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49546

or email to: MDHHS-CPS-CIGroup@michigan.gov Fax: 616-977-1154 | 616-977-1158 | 616-977-8050 | 616-977-8900

Monroe County Sheriff – Bedford – 734-847-6146

Michigan State Police – 734-242-3500

LABC will promptly respond to, research, and document any accusation of sexual abuse or intentional violation of this policy. All accusations of sexual abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse. Persons made known of allegations should reports matters immediately to the appropriate authorities.

***Note:** The person(s) entrusted to respond to allegations will be a trusted leader at LABC and not related in any way to the accuser or accused. (Pastor, Assistant Pastor, School Principal, Deacon, Security Team member)*

When an allegation is made involving abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The appointed person will inquire further about the allegations, if necessary, and may use the assistance of legal counsel or other consultants. The inquiry and subsequent communications will be conducted as follows:

NOTE: LABC will immediately report allegations that indicate abuse has or could have occurred. Further inquiry may be necessary if allegations do not plainly describe the abuse.

1. Report the incident to appropriate authorities in accordance with the federal and state mandatory reporting laws.
2. Report the matter to LABC insurance carrier.
3. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
4. An official of LABC (and legal counsel or other consultants) will then meet with the Pastor and Board of Deacons of LABC and present a report on their inquiry, which will include findings and recommendations for actions.
5. If determined necessary by the Pastor and Board of Deacons, suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
6. An official of LABC communicates with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
7. An official of LABC communicates with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
8. During the investigation, an official of LABC maintains communication with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, inform them of the actions taken, and assist them in their process of healing.
9. An official of LABC (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts.
10. Communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel of LABC.
11. Communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
12. Hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson if necessary to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of LABC's attorney.