

# CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

## Preamble

The Pastors, staff, and volunteers of Broadneck Evangelical Presbyterian Church (BEP) are called to be of Christ, like Christ, and with Christ, being a reflection of His love in all they do in service to others. It is important that all of us endeavor to serve others with love and compassion, ministering to the needs of all. We must always be conscious of the needs of those who may be broken and vulnerable. It is essential that nothing that is done within BEP would ever create brokenness.

This policy document is devoted to the prevention of child abuse. Jesus said in Matthew 18:5-6 (NIV), *“<sup>5</sup>And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. <sup>6</sup>But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”* In all our programs for children, we attempt to welcome children in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our emphasis is on teaching the gospel to children-teaching them of God’s mercy and love; that they don’t have to be enslaved to the evil in the world. Therefore, we need also to prevent evil from happening to them.

We have a special obligation to provide Christian care and nurture to the children that the Lord places in our care for various church ministries. This policy is intended to make clear that BEP commits itself, within the framework of all that is reasonable, to responsible selection, training, and supervisory practices over our ministries in order to protect those it serves from abuse of any type. *(Adopted by permission of Glen Burnie Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 7/04)*

## Section 1 Statement of Policy

Child abuse including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse is contrary to Biblical principles and is prohibited!

Any accusation or evidence of child abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported to the appropriate authorities for investigation in accordance with this policy and state law! This includes any accusation involving BEP Elders, Deacons, employees, ministry leaders, volunteers, members, or BEP visitors whether occurring on BEP property, at BEP events, or evidence of abuse is discovered while a child is in the care of BEP.

The Church, through the teaching and ruling elders, will provide spiritual guidance as necessary to restore to Christian fellowship those who have been harmed by abuse, as well as those who have committed abuse, *or those wrongfully and publicly accused of abuse.*

## Section 2 Statement of Core Values

**Core Value 1: Life as God Intended,** We believe that the life for which every human heart yearns is found in a relationship with Christ that forever connects you with God.

**Core Value 2: Becoming a Community,** We believe that this new life in Christ connects you with God’s family in supportive, authentic relationships where we share life and grow together in our relationship with God.

**Core Value 3: Becoming an Investing Community,** We believe that this new life in Christ gives you a new purpose to intentionally serve God together with others, using your gifts, talents and time for God’s best in your church family, community and world.

**Core Value 4: Reaching a Community,** We believe that this new life in Christ opens your heart to a hurting and needy world, equipping you to contagiously relate Christ's mercy, love and truth in your realm of relationships and beyond.

**Core Value 5: Praying Community,** We believe that this new life in Christ engages a vision for a God-sized work of irresistible influence in our community and around the world, energized by a life of prayerful reliance and expectancy.

### **Section 3 Definitions**

- a. The terms **"child or youth abuse or neglect"** for this Policy, have the definition which is the same definition that the Maryland Code, including the Code of Maryland Regulations in effect at the time that the abuse or neglect is reported or has occurred, uses for the terms "child abuse" or "child neglect."
- b. The terms **"child"** and **"youth"** include all persons younger than 18 years old. For the purpose of BEP programs, "child" means an individual younger than Middle School age, and "youth" refers to an individual of Middle School age but younger than 18 years old.
- c. **BEP Community** means any BEP employee, member or child or child under the care of a BEP member, user of any BEP facility, attender or participant in any BEP ministry, or visitor of BEP facilities.
- d. **BEP Children and Youth Activity** includes any activity related to BEP which involves close contact with any child or youth by a person other than the parents of that child or youth.
- e. **"Reason to Believe"** means that term as used in the Maryland Code, including the Code of Maryland Regulations in effect at the time that the abuse or neglect is reported or has occurred, to define the occasion on which a person must report suspected or actual child abuse or child neglect.
- f. **"Reporter"** means a person who knows, learns of, or hears of an allegation of child abuse or neglect occurring or that has occurred (a) in connection with any BEP Activity; or (b) in connection with anyone within the BEP Community.

### **Section 4 Screening**

**Overview** The Volunteer Screening Process will provide an appropriate level of background screening and training for all volunteers or employees that will have contact with children and youth.

**Applicability** All volunteers in contact with children and youth will be required to complete a Child and Youth Volunteer Service Application. If an individual refuses to complete a Child and Youth Volunteer Service Application, then he (he refers hereafter to he or she) may not serve as a volunteer.

#### **A. All Volunteers with Contact with Children and Youth**

1. The Ministry Leaders for the various ministries will submit to the Session a list of volunteer positions within their ministry areas with a recommendation whether it has positions with contact with children and/or youth. Volunteer applicants who will have contact with children and/or youth may include but are not limited to those who: have substantial time as the supervisor of children or youth activities, small group discipleship time with child or youth, limited one-on-one discipleship time with a child or youth (this will be of limited duration

and conducted only with the knowledge and consent of the parents), overnight supervision even with other supervisors present, Sunday School teacher, or youth interns.

2. Complete the Applicant Information of the Child and Youth Volunteer Service Application, which includes:
  - a. Answer all questions and provide all necessary information to complete a background check by the session approved agency – ProtectMyMinistry.
  - b. The volunteer applicant will satisfactorily complete the on line training sessions by ProtectMyMinistry.
  - c. The volunteer applicant electronic signature authorizes the background check(s), releases BEP from liability associated with the background check(s), and indicates that the applicant has read, understood, and agrees to comply with the application and release, the Church’s Core Values and the Child and Youth Protection Policy.
3. A Session member will review the results of the Child and Youth Volunteer Service Application background check and on-line training session.

#### **B. Elders, Deacons, BEP Employees, and Ministry Leaders of Child and Youth Programs**

In addition to pre-employment screening, all Elders, Deacons, BEP Employees, and Ministry Leaders of Child and Youth Programs will be fully screened under above paragraph A and will include a MD Department of Social Services-Child Protective Services “Consent For Release of Information/Background Clearance Request” screening.

#### **C. Parental Oversight**

Parental involvement in children’s activities at BEP is highly encouraged because it provides an important element of parental oversight and supervision to children’s ministries. Parents are encouraged to attend and monitor children and youth events and will not be considered a volunteer under this policy unless they chose to volunteer to help with a child or youth ministry

#### **D. Commencement of Service**

A volunteer shall be a member in good standing of BEP. Non-members may apply to become volunteers, but they must specifically be approved by the Session prior to screening and service. A volunteer may start serving after completing the process in paragraph A with satisfactory results. *If an individual refuses to allow a Background Check, then he may not serve as a volunteer with children or youth ministries.* If any reference or the Background check provides negative information, BEP at its discretion may refuse to allow the applicant to serve as a Volunteer. The Church Administrator will provide updated lists of approved volunteers for ministry leaders’ use.

#### **E. Special Event Volunteers**

At the recommendation of a ministry leader, the Session may authorize Special Event Volunteers for large public events. These Special Event Volunteers may serve provided that they are adequately supervised and are never alone (one-on-one) with children or youth. The Special Event Volunteers will sign the Special Event Volunteer form which will include a copy of the Statement of Policy and BEP’s Core Values.

#### **F. Training**

## 1. Congregational Awareness

Occasionally, the congregation will be provided with a general overview of BEP Child Protection Policy. This overview will emphasize:

- that protecting children from any form of abuse is a BEP core value priority
- that BEP takes any report or accusation of abuse seriously
- how to report suspected abuse
- that BEP will refer any accusation of abuse to appropriate authorities for investigation
- avoiding one-on-one situations or perception of impropriety

A copy of the BEP Child and Youth Protection Policy will be made available.

## 2. Volunteers

Concurrent with the commencement of volunteer service and every 3 years thereafter, each volunteer will be required to complete the process in paragraph A.

## 3. Employees

Concurrent with the employment and every 3 years thereafter, each employee will be required to complete the process in paragraph A.

## G. Privacy Issues

While the Session recognizes the sensitive nature of allegations of child and youth abuse and neglect, it also recognizes a presumption of openness and transparency deters that abuse and neglect. The BEP Community therefore should be aware that while confidentiality is an expectation in connection with the Application, and process in this policy of receiving and acting on reports of abuse and neglect, BEP does not and cannot guarantee privacy or confidentiality in connections with any aspect of the Policy or its implementation.

## H. Retention and Handling of Application Files

All volunteer applications and accompanying documentation will be retained in a permanent, locked file and/or by ProtectMyMinistry. Access to these records will be limited to Session designated personnel only. All material collected by BEP in pursuit of this policy will be afforded reasonable protection. However, privacy cannot be guaranteed in all cases. This especially applies to a reporter or to an accused during any initial verification of a report of abuse or neglect.

## Section 3 Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations

**Application of Policy** – This Policy shall apply in all situations that any person within the BEP Community has Reason to Believe that child or youth abuse or neglect has occurred (a) in connection with any BEP Activity; or (b) in connection with anyone within the BEP Community. The Session recognizes, however, that situations or allegations of child or youth abuse or neglect, will differ. Some may be reported by first-hand witnesses or the abused, or abuser, themselves. Others may be reported as the result of third or more hand information. Some may involve long-time members of BEP; others may involve persons who have had only the briefest contact with BEP. In all of the situations, however, great harm to the Body of Christ that is BEP and the larger church, as well as to all involved, can occur where there are founded, or unfounded, reports. Response to a

report of child or youth abuse or neglect therefore must be conducted with great wisdom and strong reliance on prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**A. All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously.**

Principles to guide the Process:

- Action Steps in Section 3, will be followed
- Pray immediately and throughout the process
- Discretion should be balanced with immediate action
- Strict confidentiality will be the expectation of all throughout this process
- Allegations are just that; do not assume anything
- Document all actions taken throughout the process
- With the approval of the participants, all meetings should be recorded
- The number of individuals handling sensitive information will be limited to the lowest number to accomplish this process.
- The intent of this policy is to pass details of any reporter's allegations of abuse or neglect to state or local authorities for investigation rather than to conduct a detailed investigation

**B. All allegations should normally follow these Action Steps:**

1. Report the allegation to a BEP Elder and/or Pastor

a. Information should include:

- Nature of allegation; What, when, and where?
- Child's name and age
- Reporter's Name
- Accused's Name

b. The information should be written down by an Elder and dated.

c. A team of current Elders designated by the Session should move to the next step in the process.

2. Notification Steps (Note, these steps may be conducted concurrently, as required)

a. Notify Parents

b. Notify BEP Legal Counsel of an allegation of abuse

c. Notify Insurance Carrier

d. Notify State and/ or Local Authorities of an allegation of abuse:

*Code of Maryland Regulations, 07.02.07, Protective Services for Neglected and Abused Children*

- BEP Employees, Volunteers, Members, and Attendees comply with these reporting requirements by reporting the allegation to a BEP Elder and/or Pastor.
- BEP Elders and/or Pastors comply with these reporting requirements by calling Anne Arundel County Child Protective Services (CPS) at (410) 421-8400 (Within 24 hours for this Policy only)

3. Guidelines for meeting with the Accuser

a. Notification of the parents of the child involved should take place as soon as possible; within 24 hours of receiving a report of abuse is a good guideline.

b. Parents of the child at this contact should be assured that:

- BEP takes all allegations of this nature seriously
- BEP will treat all information regarding this incident with the strictest of confidence allowed within the bounds of the State of Maryland

- BEP requests a meeting with the parents and child within 24 hours to learn of the events concerning the allegation of abuse.

c. The Meeting with parents and child should cover these areas:

- Open in prayer.
- Ask the accuser to repeat the allegation.
  - If the accuser's allegation remains unchanged:
    - i. Review this policy with the parents emphasizing steps already taken and reviewing the steps to follow.
    - ii. Assure both parents and child that BEP will continue to provide follow-up care, but State officials will handle any subsequent investigation.
    - iii. Explain the Process to the parents
      - a) How BEP intends to proceed
      - b) That BEP Elders will meet with the accused using strict confidentiality.
      - c) Pray with and for the parents, child, and the accused.
  - If the accuser recants:
    - i. Share this document with the parents emphasizing steps already taken and reviewing the steps to follow.
    - ii. Discuss with parents the concept of restitution for the severity of this false accusation.
    - iii. Explain the Process to the parents:
      - a) How BEP intends to proceed.
      - b) Explain that BEP Elders will meet with the Accused using strict confidentiality (no names will be provided, only an outline of situation events).
      - c) Pray with and for the parents, child, and the Accused.

4. Guidelines for meeting with the Accused.

a. Notification of the accused of the nature of the allegation should take place within 24 hours of receiving a report of abuse.

b. Accused should be assured that:

- BEP takes all allegations of this nature seriously
- BEP will treat all information regarding this incident with the strictest of confidence allowed within the bounds of the laws of the State of Maryland.
- BEP requests a meeting with the accused within 24 hours to discuss the events concerning the allegation of abuse.

c. The meeting with the accused should cover these areas:

- Open in prayer.
- 2. Make accused aware of the nature of the allegation (no names will be provided, only an outline of situation events).
- If recanted share this also.
- Ask accused to discuss the events concerning the allegation of abuse if they would like.
- Review this policy with the accused emphasizing the steps already taken and reviewing the steps to follow.
  - a) Ask if the Accused has any misgiving about:
    - i. How BEP has handled the process so far?
    - ii. How BEP intends to proceed?
  - b) Pray with and for the accused, the parents, and the accuser.

5. Session will review all documents and decide on the best course of action.

- a. Clarifications and/ or requests for more information
- b. Follow-up with all actively involved parties
- c. Reaching a resolution of such an allegation within our BEP family
- d. Notification of congregation if warranted
- e. Admonitions concerning gossip if warranted
- f. Plans for any media response if warranted.
- g. Legal and/ or insurance consultation if warranted.

### **C. Considerations if the Accused is a paid employee of BEP**

1. If the accused employee at any point admits, employment will be immediately terminated.
2. If the accused employee claims innocence in the face of an accusation, legal advice should be obtained by Session for available options.

I have reviewed a copy of, understand, and agree to observe the BEP Core Values and the BEP Child and Youth Policy.

I understand that false statements and/or omissions regarding past or present conduct or situations are cause for rejection of my application or dismissal as a BEP child and youth volunteer, as well as further application of appropriate church discipline and potential legal prosecution under applicable state and federal laws.

I hereby authorize BEP and Protect My Ministry to conduct a personal and professional background check for the purpose of this application. They may contact references, past and current employers, churches, youth organizations, or agencies where I have provided volunteer service and any other individual or organization that may have information relevant to my application.

I hereby release all of the above stated entities and their agents from any and all liability in connection with providing information, investigating or evaluating my application.

#### **I also confirm and agree with the following:**

- I have never been terminated from youth volunteer service or employment due to suspected child abuse.
- I have never been accused of physically, sexually, or emotionally abusing, or neglecting a child.
- I have never been the subject of, or involved in any way with, any investigation by any government, or church authority, of actual or suspected child abuse or neglect.
- I am not a user or viewer of pornographic material

I have read and understand the above stated information within this release and I agree of my own free will to submit to and follow the requirements of the BEP Child & Youth Policy.

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**STEP 2: Go to [Protect My Ministry](#) and complete application**