



Child Protection Policy

1. Introduction- Hope's commitment to Child Protection

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores the cry of one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12)¹. Hope Presbyterian Church is committed to being a refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. Abuse is not a sin like any other sin. Abuse is a crime and a particularly grievous sin when someone in a position of power and trust violates or harms someone who is powerless to stop it (see Ecclesiastes 4:1)².

As Christians, we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents.” (Matthew 10:16)³ We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and uphold our policy. Jesus spoke often about abuse using the metaphor of wolves, shepherds, and sheep. Jesus warned about “wolves in sheep’s clothing” who would prey upon the vulnerable (Matthew 7:15)⁴. The Bible affirms the value and dignity of children and all who are made in God’s image. God condemns abuse in all forms. Jesus calls every Christian and every church to walk in the light with him and “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (Ephesians 5:11)⁵

¹ 9- The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

12- For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

² Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

³ Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

⁴ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

⁵ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Sadly, child abuse is a common reality in our world and even in churches with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men being sexually abused in the U.S. before they turn 18. Other forms of child abuse are also common.⁶ Jesus condemned anyone who would abuse a child in the strongest possible terms: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)⁷ Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on abuse, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable.

2. Defining Abuse

We are committed to promoting a safe environment for all children at Hope Presbyterian Church. We believe in promoting healthy relationships between adults and children. We will not tolerate any form of abusive behavior—verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual. As adults, it is our task to work together to ensure that children are safe by abiding by the following Code of Conduct. All adults and youth, whether employees, volunteers, and student volunteers are subject to this Code of Conduct.

- **Mandated Reporter**—Any person who is required by law to report when the person knows or reasonably suspects that a child has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of a child. *Additionally, for the sake of vulnerable children who cannot protect themselves, all adults, attendees and members of Hope Church who know of abuse or who have a reasonable suspicion to believe there has been abuse are morally obligated to report abuse.*
- **Abuse-** Abuse: In general, abuse occurs when a person in a place of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, mentor, supervisor, teacher, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.
- **Child Abuse**—Any willful act, omission, or threatened act that results in any physical, mental or sexual injury or harm of a child.

⁶ According to the ACE Study 28% of children are physically abused, 11% of children are emotionally abused, 10% are physically neglected, and 15% are emotionally neglected in the US. See www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/

⁷ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

- **Child Physical Abuse**— non-accidental physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting, burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child.
- **Child Sexual Abuse**— Any sexual act between an adult and a child, or between two children, when one exerts power over the other; forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act; sexual abuse also includes non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner in person, by phone or internet.
- **Child Emotional Abuse**— When a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, but instead endures an environment of constant criticism, belittling, threatening, or bullying and or consistent neglect of basic and emotional needs.
- **Spiritual Abuse**— Abuse administered under the guise of religion. Including but not limited to:
 - Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child.
 - Compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his or her will.
 - Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church).
 - Abuse perpetuated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor).
 - Invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser
 - Using spirituality or spiritual authority to dismiss a child's perspective, agency, or value.
 - Any attempts to use God, the Bible, or theology to put their leadership or decisions beyond questioning or accountability.
 - Any attempts to spiritualize or justify harm or concerning interaction using God, the Bible, theology, or spirituality.
- **Neglect**— can take different forms:
 - Physical: failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision
 - Medical: failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment
 - Educational: failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
 - Emotional: inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs
- **Adult Volunteer**— Any person, over the age of 18, who supervises children during any church sponsored activity, including Sunday morning worship, youth group, an/or any event put on by Hope.

- **Youth Volunteer**—Any person, under the age of 18, who supervises children at a church sponsored activity or program. Youth aged 16 and over may serve as a leader for Sunday morning children’s church provided another adult is present. Youth age 15 and under may serve as a youth leader for Sunday morning Children’s church with their parent or close adult who has agreed to be responsible for them while working together. All youth volunteers will be required to read and sign an amended copy of the Volunteer Child Protection Commitment.

3. Safe Practices & Code of Conduct: The standards, expectations, and proper practices for employees & volunteers at Hope Church

Indicators of Abuse: Because “the majority of children who are sexually abused will be moderately to severely symptomatic at some point in their life,” Hope is familiar with and attentive to potential indicators of child sexual abuse. This will be a key aspect of training for our church. For a list of common indicators of abuse in children see Appendix I.

Impact of Abuse: Though a child’s injuries may be hidden from the untrained eye, child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment can result in immediate and/or lasting impact in all realms of the person’s well-being. Understanding how child abuse can traumatize the child and have lasting impact in the life of a surviving adult is a critical first step in preventing abuse and responding compassionately. Not every child will display the impact of their maltreatment and not every adult will experience the long-term consequences of their traumatic childhood experiences, but all are at increased risk.

Perpetrators of child maltreatment: People who sexually abuse children utilize deception, authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. The vast majority of those who perpetrate abuse in any form are known by their victims. In a Christian community, offenders typically groom not only victims, but caregivers and all in the community to establish a perception of themselves as someone who would never abuse a child.

Appropriate boundaries with Children

Our entire community must take collective responsibility to promote healthy interaction and boundaries with children. Abuse prevention takes place not only during structured times of ministry, but in our hallways, restrooms, parking lot, and homes. The following boundaries apply to all within our church and all of us are responsible for holding each other accountable. Any

violation of the following boundaries or any other concern related to safety should be relayed to the Children's Ministry Director as soon as possible.

No one at Hope should be alone with a child who is not their own. This includes times of structured ministry as well as unstructured times, whether on or off church property (including giving rides, unless specifically given parental permission to/from an event). If you enter a restroom and a child is present alone, please wait outside the restroom until they come out.

Adult-Child Interaction Standards:

Accountability: We honor the Lord when we hold each other accountable for the purpose of protecting all children made in His image. Adults, volunteers, and youth volunteers, shall hold each other and older children accountable in the area of physical contact, helping each other follow these guidelines, pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted, and reporting any observed violations of these boundaries. Every ministry activity ought to be open and interruptible.

Visibility: Ministry with children and students shall occur only in highly visible areas. Observability is a key factor in minimizing the risk of abuse. This means utilizing open and highly visible spaces as well as avoiding isolated areas. Doors to enclosed classrooms shall remain open when possible, and easily observable when closed.

One Adult — One Child situations: Because a large percentage of child abuse occurs in isolation from others, Hope Church requires a minimum of two, unrelated adults to supervise all ministry involving children and youth including, but not limited to, Sunday morning children's church, and off-site official church events. Our ratios for the supervision of young children will follow the recommended guidelines of our state. All adults serving in our ministry with children and youth should set an example to bring transparency and accountability to any close interactions with children. Hope Church prohibits its volunteers and staff from spending time with children alone, even with a caregiver's consent or a supervisor's knowledge, including in a private home or any other setting. Most abuse happens in one adult-one child situations, therefore we aim to avoid these situations whenever possible. At times, a one on one interaction is required, in which case this needs to be in an open, observable area. One adult — one child interactions should never take place in an enclosed area.

- Private meetings and/or counseling sessions may be scheduled only with the child's parents' permission, and in a public place. Such meetings may include private discussions that are out of the hearing of others, but under no circumstances may a private conference occur where no others are able to view the meeting from a nearby position.
- No child may be transported alone in a vehicle by an adult leader, student volunteer, or staff member without first having received permission from the child's parent or

caregiver. The driver must maintain clear communication with the parent/caregiver with regards to arrival, departure, and time spent away.

Touch: Appropriate touch is an important way for us to understand that we are loved, especially between adults and children. Appropriate touch is always observable and interruptible by other adults. Any touch should be welcomed by the child, and any resistance by the child should be immediately respected. Adults should always understand and respect that children do not always welcome touch and pay attention to the child's body language. If you are unsure if the child is consenting, just ask. Touch should immediately cease if the child is in any way uncomfortable. Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children, but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply to all children:

- Touch should be observable and interruptible rather than secretive.
- Touch should show care for the child rather than meet a need in the adult.
- Touch should be age and developmentally appropriate.
- Touch should always communicate respect for the child by honoring appropriate boundaries.
- Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children.

Hope Church prohibits the following:

- Sexually or physically abusive touch
- Any touch that is unwanted by a child or not observable by others
- Touching a child's thighs, stomach, or lower back
- Any intimate touch such as massage, playing with hair, or any touch under clothing
- Tickling, Piggy Back Rides, or other games involving lots of touch with children
- Lap sitting (except for holding children in the nursery)
- Full frontal hugs
- Corporal Punishment

Speech: Words are a powerful way to build one another up or tear one another down. There shall be no verbal interaction involving shaming, belittling, name calling, cursing, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate a child, or making inappropriate or derogatory remarks about a child, their physique, body development, or dress. Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling sexual or other inappropriate jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or discussing sexual encounters or desires with children. Adults shall refrain from showing preferential treatment to a particular child or student, especially in the form of promises or gifts.

When children or teens raise questions about their body or sexuality, volunteers and staff will answer the question at hand in an age-appropriate way and inform the teen's parent as well as a supervisor. Any education about sexuality will occur with prior approval and notice through the Safety Team and church leadership. Parents will be notified ahead of time. Our Safety Team will conduct regular safety talks on various aspects of prevention, including appropriate boundaries and consent.

Technology: Any employee or volunteer working with children or students is responsible to ensure that any technology is used appropriately. Use of phones, the internet, TV, and movies when children are in our care must be monitored. Technology can quickly be turned from a proper use into something that is used for exploitation. All pornography and any other sexually explicit or suggestive content is strictly prohibited. Adults should refrain from developing a relationship with a child or student primarily over electronic media (text, IM, etc.), since this is not open and observable. All aspects of this Code of Conduct are equally applicable to all interactions, communications, and descriptions over electronic media, and will be held accountable as such. Any sexual documentation of or interaction with a child by means of electronic media is abusive and strictly forbidden. Explicitly prohibited are photos of children who are unclothed, toileting, changing clothes, or (outside the context of a water oriented event) are in swimwear or are wet.

Youth Groups: The boundaries of our policy apply to any and all interactions with youth from staff or volunteers in the youth ministry including any online interaction, texting or messaging, giving rides, or any informal in person time. This means that all interaction must be observable or transparent with others and the policy boundaries apply at all times. There is to be no interaction online through social media, texting/messaging, or otherwise that is private. Any private communication initiated by an adult toward a youth is a serious boundary violation. If a youth messages you privately, document it with a member of the child safeguarding team and gently remind the student of the policy and direct them to an appropriate way to connect soon. The child safeguarding team will follow up with any appropriate actions such as informing parents.

Building Security and Supervision: With safety in mind, Hope Church has carefully considered the physical spaces in which children are permitted. All children and youth areas have proper lighting, and high visibility, such as large windows/ doors with windows. Classrooms and spaces used as class space are regularly reviewed for safety standards. Every activity involving children is observable and interruptible and we are all accountable to one another. Program supervisors shall frequently and randomly stop in to observe the nursery and other areas where children and adults are together. Regular supervision helps reduce risk. A Visual Supervision Team will be present on Sunday mornings to further provide observation and protection during worship, before and after services.

Parent Involvement: In order to maintain proper standards of safety and care, we encourage parents to drop by, even unannounced, to observe any activity or meeting in the area in which their child is participating (while respecting the flow and goals of the activity). Parents are also encouraged to view the kid's area, nursery, and student ministry rooms

through the doors/windows in the hallway. Along with other adults, parents have a key role to play in keeping their children safe. The involvement of watchful parents, who make unannounced visits, leads to a safer environment for all children. Parents are encouraged to be educated in our Procedures and Code of Conduct and help with their enforcement. That said, Parents are also responsible for knowing where their children are at all times, and a child may not be dropped off or left anywhere unattended before a program has officially begun or before the appropriate number of leaders are in place as detailed in this Child Protection Policy.

Bathroom Use: No adult or student volunteer should take or send a child to the bathroom alone. Any small child needing to use the bathroom, should be accompanied by their parent/caregiver. Elementary age children can be sent to the bathroom in with a same gendered sibling. During a longer period of activity, classes may go to the bathroom as a group. The class will line up in the hallway and children will be sent in after the teachers have made sure the bathrooms are clear of other adults or youth. Teachers will hold the door open and send in children two or three at a time. Line-of-sound instead of line-of-sight supervision will be maintained while children are using the facilities.

Diapering: Children in diapers are already vulnerable, and when a diaper needs changing a child is especially vulnerable. Nursery volunteers will not change diapers, unless under a specific exception from the parent/caregiver. Parents will be notified by text, or in person that their child is in need of a diaper change. A changing table with supplies is provided in the nursery for the use of parents. If, by special exception a diaper is being changed by nursery staff, the worker will notify the other workers present, and then change the diaper quickly, with a door open, and with respect for the child.

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from displaying favoritism towards a child or group of children. Staff may not give gifts to individual children, unless the gifts are:

- Able to be given to other children at other times for similar reasons (e.g., gifts to graduating seniors; a new Bible for students entering middle school; end of the year thank you gifts to older children who volunteered in the nursery)
- Signed from the church rather than the individual staff member
- Given together with another staff member

These standards will not be compromised. If an event is lacking sufficient supervision (i.e. only one adult is available in a Sunday school class room that exceeds adult/child ratios, youth group event, then the event shall be either delayed until the appropriate number of leaders are present to safely receive children, or the event will be canceled altogether.

4. Volunteer handbook and safety commitment

All volunteers with Hope Kids must read and sign the:

1. Hope Presbyterian Church Volunteer Handbook

2. Hope Presbyterian Church Child Protection Policy

Volunteers will be subject to an annual background check performed by Checkr. In submitting to these requirements, volunteers are committing to the safety and security of all Hope Kids, both within and outside of church sponsored events and gatherings.

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child in any way, or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may not work with children in any capacity, and Hope Church will contact its GRACE Certification Specialist about how to proceed. If the screening process shows that a candidate has ever been accused of a violent and/or sexual crime OR convicted of any other type of crime, Hope Church will consult with its GRACE Certification Specialist to assess the situation.

5. Violations

For the safety of every child in our care, we are all responsible to help ensure the boundaries set forth in this Child Protection Policy are followed. Hope Church takes any violations of our Child Protection Policy very seriously. Abusers are rarely caught in the act of abusing a child, but are more often seen breaking the rules and crossing boundaries. We must all be prepared to both give and to receive correction if a boundary is being crossed for whatever reason.

While every incident of boundary and rule violation does not necessarily signal that child abuse has occurred, every incidence of a boundary violation requires responsible action to safeguard children. Our expectation is that you will intervene when a boundary is crossed. Those who are unwilling to guard proper boundaries cannot work with our children. When a boundary is crossed, kindly but firmly remind the person of the boundary, make sure the situation is safe, and if deemed necessary, fill out an Child Safety Incident Report form and submit it to a member of the church staff. All reports will be kept confidential. Cases where it would be appropriate to fill out a Child Safety Incident Report would include but not be limited to:

- If there is any boundary violation, or repeat violations.
- If an adult or student volunteer raises their voice at a child.
- If an adult or student volunteer wants to give a child a hug and the child seems uncomfortable (even in a visible area).
- If an adult or student volunteer makes a remark or tells a joke with sexual content.
- If there is an attitude of resistance to boundaries (by adult or student volunteer).
- If an adult or student volunteer is all alone with a child in an isolated area (an especially dangerous boundary violation).
- Please note that any abuse should be immediately stopped and then reported to the authorities. The above only apply to Code of Conduct violations.

6. Making a report

The abuse of children is not only a sin, but it is a serious crime. When adults report suspected child abuse to the legal authorities, their report could save a child's life. In contrast, silence about suspected abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. Hope Presbyterian Church encourages its members, both mandated reporters and not, to contact the authorities immediately when a child discloses abuse, when they witness child abuse, or when they observe signs of abuse.

Not all adults in Ohio are mandated reporters of child abuse, but all adults at Hope are expected to report because as Christians we have a moral obligation to speak up for the vulnerable. Therefore, all adults at Hope Church are required to report witnessed abuse, children's abuse disclosures, consistent and egregious indicators of abuse, a perpetrator's disclosure, or rumors a child is being abused.

Making a Report:

1. Within 24 hours, a report must be made to Franklin County Children's Services, or local police.
2. Contact a pastor or Elder who is uninvolved.
3. Fill out a Child Safety Incident Report Form and submit it to the pastor.
4. The pastor will inform church leadership, legal representation, and insurance.

Reports should be made within 24 hours.

Reports can be made by phone **1-855-OH-CHILD (1-855-642-4453)**. More information on reporting in Ohio can be found here: <https://jfs.ohio.gov/ocf/reportchildabuseandneglect.stm>

The closest child advocacy center to Hope Church is Franklin County Children's Services (FCCS) Main Office: 855 West Mound Street, Columbus, Ohio 43223. If anyone has questions concerning a child's safety, Hope Church encourages that person to reach out to the child advocacy center.

24-hour Child Abuse Hotline: (614) 229-7000

General Questions: (614) 229-7100

childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov

After a church member has reported abuse, Hope Church asks that they notify the Children's Church Director, Head Pastor, member of Session (or all of the above).

Under the following circumstances, Hope Church will consult with GRACE to determine if an independent review should be pursued:

1. When a suspicion of child maltreatment is reported to the civil authorities and they decline to investigate or prosecute the alleged abuses.
2. A district attorney has not pursued legal prosecution because no suspected criminal behavior is reported; however, the Child Safeguarding Committee believes the individual's behavior might still violate the church policy, be immoral, be inappropriate, or be unsafe.

If an investigation is deemed necessary, Hope Presbyterian Church will retain an organization that meets the following criteria:

1. Completely independent of Hope Church
2. Experienced in proper investigation techniques

3. Up-to-date on child maltreatment research

7. Appendix

Appendix I - Potential Indicators of Child Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse if a child has:

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty, pain or blood in the genital area when walking, sitting, or using the bathroom
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Injuries (e.g., bruises, tearing, bleeding), itching, or swelling in the genital, vaginal, or anal area
- Urinary tract infections, yeast infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy

It is atypical for children to engage in the following sexual behaviors:

- Placing mouth on sex part
- Asking others to engage in sexual acts
- Trying to have intercourse or imitating intercourse
- Undressing others, especially if done forcefully
- Imitating sexual positions with dolls
- Inserting an object into vagina or anus, especially if child continues to do so despite pain
- Manually stimulating or having oral or genital contact with pets
- Making sexual sounds
- Inserting tongue in mouth when kissing

Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, burns)
- Especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of injury
- These injuries may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments

- Pay particular attention to injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body

Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- Is obviously malnourished, listless, or fatigued
- Begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger
- Is consistently dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Untreated illness, injuries, health (e.g., unfilled cavities) or serious educational needs
- Broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aid, or other necessary aids or equipment
- Has an untreated need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Stays at school outside of school hours
- Frequently absent or significant academic struggles
- Is inappropriately left unsupervised
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

This Policy shall be disseminated widely to the church community through publications, public discussion, educational opportunities, sermons, training programs and other appropriate means of communication that will raise awareness and create a safe environment for our children.

Hope Presbyterian Church requires all staff and volunteers working with children, parents, and church leaders to sign an annual affirmation indicating that they have read and agree to abide by the terms of this Policy, as a precondition to engagement with the church or receiving access to children. Affirmations will be stored in the church's office files.