

Shades Valley Community Church Child Protection Policy

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I. Introduction: God's Heart for the Vulnerable

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores the cry of one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Shades Valley Community Church (**SVCC**) 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 (Ecclesiastes 4:1).

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) 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). 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)

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. 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) Abuse of adults is also common, and includes intimate partner violence, clergy abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse. Jesus condemned those who used their spiritual position to exploit others (e.g. Mark 12:38-40). Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to any form of abuse by becoming a community that is educated on abuse, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. While this policy is specific to protecting children and youth at SVCC, we are passionate about protecting all people in our community.

II. Definitions and Policy Foundations

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: For the purposes of this policy, SVCC defines a child as anyone in either of the following categories:

- any person age 18-years-old and under, or
- anyone in our student ministry

Child Sexual Abuse: Any sexual contact between an adult and a child, or a child with another child where there is a difference in power or development. Child sexual abuse can involve physical contact with a sexual or intimate part of the body, or other forms of sexual behavior engaged in for the purpose of sexual gratification or to degrade or abuse. Non-contact forms of sexual abuse include, but are not limited to: Photographing, videotaping, or displaying sexual behavior or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body.

In a situation involving two children and the conduct outlined above, SVCC will err on the side of protection by starting with the assumption that there is a “difference in power or development.” This assumption can then be overturned if an examination of the facts of the situation indicates otherwise. Whether there is a “difference in power or development” is determined on a case-by-case basis and can be guided by the following non-exhaustive factors: the relative ages of the children, differences in the relative social and physical development of the children, and whether one of the children held a position of leadership or influence.

Physical Abuse: Non-accidental injury that results from physical harm to a child and is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for or power over the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Emotional Abuse: Acts toward a child that cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to the child’s physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development. Often emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering.

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

Spiritual Abuse: Abuse administered in the name 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 or by a religious leader
- 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.

Indicators of Abuse: Because “the majority of children who are sexually abused will be moderately to severely symptomatic at some point in their life,”* SVCC 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 Child 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.

III. SVCC's Child Protection Policies

1. Church-Wide Policies: Appropriate Boundaries with Children

Protecting children is a collective responsibility of the body of SVCC.

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 Policy Team as soon as possible.

No adult should be alone with a child who is not their own without parental permission or the accountability of other adults.

No adult at SVCC should be alone with a child who is not their own without specific parental permission or the accountability of other adults as witnesses. No adult at SVCC should have a private meeting with a child. This includes structured and unstructured SVCC events, whether on or off church property (such as giving rides).

During times of corporate gatherings on church property, such as Sunday mornings, the accountability of other adults is presumed in the public areas of the church (which are defined as the foyer, the children's hall, and the sanctuary) when those public areas are in use. Parents and caregivers should not permit their children to be unaccompanied in private areas of the church. Be aware of situations where children may be especially vulnerable.

No adult may give a child who is not their own a ride without both specific parental permission and the accountability of another unrelated adult in the car. However, an exception is made if a parent who is driving his or her own child(ren) to and from an SVCC event gives a ride to another child attending the same event, though specific parental permission is still required. This exception does not apply to staff members or youth ministry volunteers.

For on-campus events where childcare is provided by SVCC, SVCC requires two babysitters. Community groups and other ministry groups providing their own babysitters at meetings on or off campus are not required to have two babysitters, but SVCC recommends that two babysitters be used whenever possible.

SVCC's goal with this policy is to normalize adults not being alone with other people's children outside of the accountability of other observing adults. Studies show that perpetrators often are trusted members of the community with whom parents knowingly entrust their children. The goal of this policy is to build a culture where adults are intentional about not putting themselves and their children into situations that could be easily exploited by a perpetrator. Requiring the accountability of other adults may not always be convenient, but it is an important safeguard for our children.

Restrooms are a place where children are especially vulnerable and require specific protective policies.

Restrooms are one example of a place where children are especially vulnerable, and as such require some specific protective policies.

- No one is permitted to assist a child in the restroom who is not their own child.
- During children’s programming, children will use single “Kids Only” restroom adjoining the Kids’ Worship and Kids’ Activity Room. Only one child may be in the restroom at a time.
- If a child needs assistance fastening pants, a volunteer will help outside of the restroom in the presence of another volunteer.
- Volunteers are not permitted to assist children in wiping. If a child needs help cleaning up, one volunteer will go and get the child’s parent.
- All babies/toddlers should have a diaper change at least once during the worship hour.
- Only approved female volunteers may change diapers.
- Volunteers will never leave a child unattended on the changing table or turn away from a child while they are on the table.
- An additional volunteer must be present in the room at the time of diaper change. One adult will never be alone with a child.
- If a child has a bowel movement, the diaper should be changed within 5 minutes.
- Volunteers will disinfect the changing table after each diaper change.
- Volunteers will not administer any creams or ointments. If a child needs cream or ointment, parents can be paged to administer it if necessary.
- All diapering and assistance shall be conducted with disposable gloves to prevent any skin to skin contact and to promote good hygiene.

Physical touch between an adult and child should be transparent, observable, and accountable to other adults.

Touch should always be welcomed by the child. 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. Although most sexual offenses against children are committed in more isolated settings, some child sex offenders will even offend in the presence of other adults. SVCC requires that all touch between an adult and child be transparent, observable, and accountable to other adults.

Any sexual touch or physically abusive touch is prohibited. SVCC also prohibits the following types of touch between an adult and unrelated child:

- 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, caressing, or any touch under clothing
- Tickling, Piggy Back Rides, etc.. (Perpetrators can use these kinds of games to lower a child’s inhibitions and make inappropriate touch from that adult seem more normal)
- Lap sitting (except for holding children in preschool or below)
- Adult-initiated full-frontal hugs
- Corporal punishment
- SVCC reserves the right to address any other behaviors deemed inappropriate.

Bonds between children and adults are necessary for the flourishing of the body at SVCC. SVCC desires to show healthy affection to its children through displays of affection when they are welcome by the child and accountable to other adults, such as:

- High-fives and fist bumps
- Pats on the head, shoulder, or upper back
- Side-hugs
- Holding hands of younger children, especially in escorting situations
- Appropriate physical affection initiated by the child

Sexual language in the presence of children is prohibited at SVCC.

SVCC acknowledges that sexual language is a common grooming tactic by offenders. As such, our community prohibits any of the following activities in the presence of children:

- Sexually suggestive language or slang, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits
- Uploading, downloading, sharing, or viewing of pornography
- Uploading, downloading, sharing, or viewing of any sexualized media (such as images, video games, music, movies, etc.)

Private communication between an adult and an unrelated child, or between a child and an older child in a different stage of development, is prohibited.

Any private communication between an adult and an unrelated child, or between a child and an older child in a different stage of development, is prohibited. This includes interaction via text, social media, or other forms of electronic communication that are private. Instead, group communications where the group includes at least two unrelated adults should be used (for example, group text chains or apps such as GroupMe where the conversations are posted to a larger group).

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 Policy Team and gently remind the student of the policy and direct them to an appropriate way to connect. The Policy Team will follow up with any appropriate actions such as informing parents.

Any discussion about sexuality in children's or youth ministry will occur with prior approval and notice through the Safety Team and church leadership.

Any discussion about sexuality will occur with prior approval and notice through the Safety Team and church leadership. Parents will be notified ahead of time. Our Policy Team and/or leadership will strive to conduct occasional safety talks on various aspects of prevention, including appropriate boundaries.

When the correction of children is necessary, adults should avoid any form of harsh language including shaming or yelling.

When the correction of children is necessary, adults should avoid any form of harsh language including shaming or yelling. Any serious issues of misconduct by kids should be brought to the attention of parents and church leadership. SVCC encourages positive verbal interactions, including:

- Encouragement
- Kind words
- Positive reinforcement
- Appropriate jokes

2. Children's and Youth Ministry Policies

All children who attend children's ministry activities and programs must be registered.

SVCC will register any child who attends children's ministry (birth – fifth grade) activities and programs. The registration will record who may safely pick up a child from an event, any allergies the child has, and medical concerns the church needs to know about. This initial registration will take place one time and can be updated later if needed.

Once children's attendance is recorded for an event, it is the church's responsibility to supervise those children from the time they are dropped off until the time they are picked up by an authorized caregiver.

SVCC requires a minimum of two adults to supervise all ministry involving children and youth.

Because a large percentage of child abuse occurs in isolation from others, SVCC requires a minimum of two adults to supervise all ministry involving children and youth including, but not limited to, Sunday morning and Wednesday night classes, and off-site official church events. When possible, there should be a minimum of two unrelated adults. For youth events, there should always be at least one male approved adult and one female approved adult present. (One exception is that events limited to a single sex may have two approved adults of that sex present, such as a girls-only Bible study with two female approved adults present.) 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. SVCC prohibits its youth 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 private setting. Any one-on-one meeting between a volunteer or staff member and a child must occur in a public setting and with the parent's prior consent and specific knowledge.

The unique challenges of special off-site events such as retreats, camp-outs, mission trips, etc. will be addressed in a later addition to this policy. If there are any questions or concerns about this topic in the meantime, please contact the Policy Team.

Gifts given by staff and volunteers to children should be given to groups of children rather than to individual children.

Some abusers will attempt to flatter and gain a child's trust by giving individual gifts. To avoid this tactic, 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

This Policy shall be disseminated widely to the church community to raise awareness and promote the mentality that all are responsible for creating a safe environment for children.

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 promote the mentality that all of us are responsible for creating a safe environment for children. Specifically, the most current version of our Policy shall be:

- Posted on the church's website
- Readily available in printed form upon request
- Distributed to new members
- Revisited often by our leaders as a key aspect of discipleship in sermons and other communications

The Policy Team will assess and update this policy annually in consultation with our GRACE Safeguarding Specialist.

SVCC requires all church staff and youth volunteers to sign an annual online affirmation that they have read and agree to abide by the terms of this Policy.

SVCC requires all church staff and youth volunteers to sign an annual online affirmation that they have read and agree to abide by the terms of this Policy including holding others accountable. Furthermore, all staff and volunteers will attend periodic trainings on child maltreatment and this policy.

3. Hiring and Screening Policies

SVCC screens all church staff and children and youth ministry volunteers.

In keeping with our values of protecting the children in our care, SVCC requires the following screening procedures for any person whom the church employs or any person who volunteers with the church's children's or youth ministries:

- The completion of a written informational form.
- A background check that includes the following information:
 - Confirmation of education and previous employment (for employees)
 - State criminal record check
 - State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check
 - State sex offender registry check
 - Motor vehicle record check (if responsibilities include driving)
 - Professional disciplinary board background check (for employees)
- An interview that explores a candidate's written application and introduces the child protection policy to the candidate.
- A general Google search
- For employees, at least three references to be contacted. These references should include:
 - Previous employers
 - At least one reference not supplied directly by the applicant
 - References for any position where the person worked with minors.
- SVCC reserves the right to ask for and contact references for volunteers when appropriate.

Volunteers and employees may be subject to random periodic background rechecks.

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. If any potentially concerning information comes to light OR if the screening process shows that a candidate has ever been accused or convicted of any type of crime, SVCC will consult with its GRACE Safeguarding Specialist or other experts to help assess the situation.

4. Reporting Child Abuse

All adults at SVCC are morally required to report witnessed abuse, any disclosure of child abuse (e.g. by a child or a perpetrator), consistent or egregious indicators of abuse, or any reports or rumors a child is being abused.

The abuse of a child is not only an egregious sin, but a serious crime. Reporting could save a child immeasurable suffering. Silence in the face of abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. SVCC encourages all adults to consider it their moral duty to report the abuse of children to the proper authorities.

All adults at SVCC are morally required to report witnessed abuse, any disclosure of child abuse (*e.g.* by a child or a perpetrator), consistent or egregious indicators of abuse, or any reports or rumors a child is being abused. (Mandated reporters such as social workers, teachers, medical professionals, etc., are also legally required to report child abuse.) When you report abuse you are not personally accusing someone of abuse. You are simply giving information that may prove vital to the protection of children to professions who are trained to respond in a variety of appropriate ways.

If you have any questions about the reporting process, please contact the Policy Team.

When and how should I report child abuse to the authorities?

Anyone with knowledge or reasonable suspicion of sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect should report it directly to the authorities.

Alabama law defines “abuse” as: “harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation.”¹

Alabama law defines “sexual abuse” as: “the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or having a child assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of the conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of the conduct; or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children as those acts are defined by Alabama law.”²

Alabama law defines “neglect” as: “negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, supervision, clothing, or shelter.”³

Reports should be made as soon as possible and certainly within 24 hours. Reports can be made to local law enforcement or the county Department of Human Resources. In Homewood, reports can be made to:

- Homewood Police Department - (205) 332-6200
- Jefferson County Department of Human Resources Child Abuse Hotline - (205) 423-4850

¹ Alabama Code § 26-14-1(1).

² Alabama Code § 26-14-1(1).

³ Alabama Code § 26-14-1(2).

After being made aware of a child abuse report, SVCC will work with leaders and consult experts as needed to take any necessary steps for the safety of the vulnerable in the community.

After a church member has reported abuse to the authorities, SVCC asks that they notify a member of the Policy Team as soon as possible. Do not inform anyone who is suspected of abuse (or anyone else within the household, if the suspected abuser is within the household) that a report has been made.

The Policy Team will work with leaders and consult experts as needed to take any necessary steps for the safety of the vulnerable in the community. Steps may include barring a person from church property, suspension, or termination pending the results of an investigation.

Under the following circumstances, SVCC will consult with GRACE to determine if an independent investigation, review, or consultation 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 Policy Team believes the individual's behavior might still violate the church policy, be immoral, be inappropriate, or be unsafe.
3. The suspected abuser is a pastor.

If an independent investigation is deemed necessary, SVCC will retain an organization that meets the following criteria:

1. Completely independent of SVCC
2. A multi-disciplinary team experienced in proper investigation techniques
3. Up-to-date on child maltreatment research

5. Notification of Policy Violations and Concerns

Any person who witnesses a violation is expected to intervene and notify the Policy Team.

Some policy violations do not rise to the level of being offenses that are reportable to the authorities as described in the previous section. SVCC takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to child safety. Any person - staff, volunteer, parent, or church attendee - who witnesses a violation is expected to intervene (if possible or at least get help) and then speak to the Policy Team as soon as possible. Any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of the Policy Team as soon as possible. The Policy Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability.

SVCC understands and expects that some policy violations may be inadvertent or accidental. The Policy

Team should still be notified of those policy violations. The Policy Team will assess all violations and determine the appropriate response. In the case of an inadvertent or accidental policy violation, that response may simply be to remind the involved parties of the applicable policy. Documenting policy violations—even ones that appear minor or inadvertent—is important because it allows the Policy Team to identify areas where additional education on the policy may be needed, to identify where a policy may need to be modified, to notify parents of potential issues, and, most importantly, to identify concerning patterns of behavior that otherwise might not be apparent.

When and how should I notify the Policy Team about a policy violation or concern?

Policy violations or concerns should be sent to the official Policy Team email box: policyteam@shadesvalley.org. Additionally, Policy Team members may be contacted directly. The members of the Policy Team are listed on the church website: www.shadesvalley.org/policyteam. Any concerns or violations regarding a member of the Policy Team should be taken directly to pastoral staff.

The Policy Team will document any notifications of violations and work with leadership and/or GRACE as needed to address any needs for action or follow-up.

Some emergencies may require a one-time exception to the policy in order to protect a child. (One example might be if a child has a medical emergency during a ministry event, and it would be faster for an adult at the event to drive the child to the hospital rather than wait for an ambulance.) In such an emergency, the adult(s) involved should do what is necessary to protect and care for the child, then proactively inform the Policy Team of the details as soon as possible so that it can be documented.

If staff or volunteers believe that a certain ministry event should be excepted from any part of this policy, they should notify the Policy Team well in advance of the event so that the request may be discussed, any needed mitigations can be put into place, and it can be sent for leadership approval. If such a preapproved exception is granted, the Policy Team will document both the exception and the justification, and all parents of affected children should be notified.

IV. Supporting Survivors

When survivors choose to disclose abuse, they need our community's utmost support.

Because children and adult survivors are often legitimately reluctant to disclose abuse, SVCC acknowledges that when survivors choose to do so, they need our community's utmost support. See Appendix II for guidance on personally supporting survivors.

SVCC will designate a "Support Person" to the child and the child's family within 24 hours of learning of abuse.

Support Person(s). A Support member or members of the Policy Team and/or church leadership will be designated as a "Support Person(s)" and will reach out to the child and the child's family⁴ within 24 hours of learning of the abuse to express the church's unequivocal support. Understanding that abuse can have ongoing impact on a child and a child's family, the Support Person(s) will seek permission from the child and the child's family to continue offering support on an ongoing basis. This support will include:

- Showing up
- Listening
- Validating strong (even negative) emotions
- Asking the child and the child's family how else the church can offer support
- Respecting the privacy and agency of the victim

Support Person(s) will understand the limitations of their role and will not offer therapeutic, legal or other advice, but will instead complement the efforts of involved professionals to support the child and family.

Support Person(s) will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances, even when the abuse is alleged and there is no legal resolution, will a Support Person(s):

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the child or the child's family
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief of the child
- Attempt to silence the child or the child's family in any way or for any reason
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the perpetrator
- Urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator

⁴ In most cases the Support Person will reach out to the child and the child's family. However, in some instances it may be appropriate to reach out and offer support only to the child (e.g., a teenager who has been abused by both parents or a child who has been abused by a parent and gone unsupported by the other parent), while abiding by the boundaries outlined in this Policy.

SVCC will offer to help the family find a qualified mental health practitioner with expertise treating victims of abuse and their family members and will offer to subsidize such treatment or connect the family to resources that may be able to assist in this regard.

Mental Health Care. The church will offer to help the family find a qualified mental health practitioner with expertise treating victims of abuse and their family members. If the family requires assistance paying for mental health treatment, the church will offer to subsidize such treatment, or connect the family to resources that may be able to assist in this regard. In the event that the child is found to have been abused by a church employee, volunteer, or other individual serving in an official capacity, or that the church was negligent or otherwise complicit in allowing the abuse to happen, the church will reimburse the entire cost of treatment for the child and the child's family members.

SVCC is committed to protecting the privacy of all victims of child abuse.

Public Support. The church commits to protecting the privacy of all victims of child abuse. We also understand that all too often child victims of abuse are publicly marginalized while communities rally to protect abusers. In the event that a victim of abuse is publicly attacked or disparaged for the abuse or their response to the abuse, the church leadership will – with the victim's permission – make a public statement denouncing and prohibiting such treatment of the victim, and urge the community to offer support instead. If the disparagement occurs privately, the church leadership will communicate the same message privately to the relevant individuals.

V. Policy on Known Child Sex Offenders

Repentant child sex offenders who attend SVCC will be held to a high standard of accountability with appropriate safeguards in place.

SVCC is committed to holding admitted or convicted offenders we believe are repentant to a high standard of accountability. Known offenders who demonstrate evidence that they are not repentant are extremely dangerous and are not welcome in our church. Jesus welcomed sinners, but he did not command us to welcome wolves among the sheep. Known offenders who wish to have any connection to our church must be willing to undergo a process designed to assess their individual situation, ongoing repentance, and what safeguards are appropriate. Offenders must agree to accept whatever accountability and safeguards our leadership, in consultation with child protection experts, deem appropriate. Offenders must be willing to agree to this before the process of assessment begins. No assessment will begin if the victim(s) of the perpetrator are still in our church as any victim should be free to worship without their perpetrator present.

If a convicted offender asks to join our community, we will contact our GRACE Safeguarding Specialist to assist with the assessment of the situation. Similarly, if an individual was in the past credibly accused of child sexual abuse or any form of child maltreatment, but was not or has not yet been convicted, we will contact our GRACE Safeguarding Specialist on how to best proceed.

Leaders will use the following process:

1. Interview with the Known Offender
2. Interview with other Relevant Parties (e.g. family, treatment provider, counselor, parole officer, etc.)
3. Acquire Records relating to the Offender
4. Assess Repentance in Consultation with Experts
5. [If applicable]: Setting Level of Participation, Accountability, and Safeguarding Requirements (Including listening to any known survivors about the impact in their life, and accountability on and off church property).

Leaders will consult with experts as needed throughout this process to ask appropriate questions and assess them.

No one who is convicted of or who has admitted to abusing a child may work with children or vulnerable persons in the ministry of our church, have any access to children in our church (on or off church property), or hold any position of power or trust, even if it is not directly connected to ministry to children. Any offender who evidences deception, minimization, excuses, victim blaming, or other indicators they are not repentant shall not be allowed any connection to our church. Unrepentant offenders are not welcome.

Any adult who is a convicted or admitted child sex offender who attends group activities shall agree to have their name known to the congregation and shall abide by all accountability and safeguards. Any adult

offender who is known or believed to be attracted to children or fantasizes about children will not attend in any settings with children.

The safeguards shall address accountability on and off church property and will involve communication with appropriate persons such as family, friends, employers, counselors, and parole/probation officers. The safeguards shall be reviewed as needed, and at a minimum every year by leadership and the Policy Team, and in consultation with child protection experts.

When a known offender is judged to be repentant and has some connection to the church, those who have responsibility to minister to him or her will have specific training.

Keeping our children safe is the responsibility of the entire community. Anyone who has knowledge of a known offender who is attending or is planning to attend an event associated with SVCC should notify the Policy Team. The Policy Team will work with leadership (and, when appropriate, outside experts) to determine the best protection plan.

VI. Facility Rental Policy

On occasion, SVCC may allow the rental and/or use of its facilities for non-SVCC events. While this policy is generally intended to apply only to SVCC activities, SVCC leadership will evaluate any other events and uses of its facilities on a case-by-case basis and may impose certain child safety requirements on those holding such events.

VII. Appendices

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

Polyvictimization: SVCC takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We are aware of the research on polyvictimization, which tells us that children who are maltreated in one way are at significantly increased risk of being maltreated in multiple ways. Therefore, as our church becomes aware

of an indicator or report of a child being maltreated in one way, we will be alert to the possibility that this child might also be maltreated in another way, and will take steps to protect the child from known risks and be extra attentive to and supportive of the child.

Appendix II - Personally Supporting Survivors

When children disclose, they almost always do so reluctantly, or in ways that are unconvincing or , and may later recant even when there is proof that the abuse occurred. If questioned directly, many child victims may deny the abuse. When children disclose intentionally, children may first test the adult's reaction by pretending that the abuse happened to a friend or by supplying only a small bit of information. If a child discloses abuse to you, following are helpful tips on how to respond in the moment:

- Stay calm.
- Show love and respect for the child.
- Thank the child for telling you and praise the child's courage.
- If the child expresses guilt or concerns about getting in trouble, reassure the child that no matter what happened he or she is not to blame.
- If the child expresses concerns about not being believed, reassure the child that you believe him/her.
- Allow the child to talk freely; do not interrupt, ask the child to repeat words, or probe for details. Use open-ended questions such as "What happened next?" or "Tell me more."
- Do not offer false assurances, such as promising to keep the child's disclosure a secret.
- Let the child know what to expect next, and incorporate their input where possible.
- Protect the child immediately from the suspected offender.
- Report the abuse to authorities and notify your supervisors/church leaders.
- Document the disclosure and your report.
- Protect the child's right to privacy and avoid the urge to turn indiscriminately to colleagues, friends, or family for advice. Instead turn to professionals experienced in handling cases of child sexual abuse and to carefully selected individuals who can provide assistance and support to the child and you.

Receiving an adult's abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Victims often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. SVCC encourages anyone receiving an adult's abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

DO Say

Thank you for telling me.

I believe you.

You did the right thing _____ (asking for help/telling me/reporting the abuse etc.).

I'm glad you're talking with me.

I'm sorry this happened to you.
How can I help?

Take as much time as you need.

Things may never be the same, but they can get better.

I am here.

The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.

It is okay to be angry.

It's understandable you're feeling that way.

Your reaction is not an uncommon response.

You're not going crazy. These are normal reactions following an assault.

It wasn't your fault.

DON'T Say

Why are you telling me this?

Why didn't you _____ (scream/stop him etc.)

What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?

Tell me more details about what happened.

Why did he do that to you? Had you done something to make him think that was okay?

You need to forgive and move on.

Don't worry, it's going to be all right.

It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.

It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.

Try to be strong.

Out of tragedies good things happen.

You're lucky that _____ didn't happen.

It was God's will.
I know how you feel.

Perhaps you misunderstood...

VIII. References

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/cestudy/

* S. R. Dube, R. F. Anda, C. L. Whitfield, D. W. Brown, V. J. Felitti, M. Dong, and W. H. Giles, "Child Sexual Abuse: Consequences and Implications," *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 24 (2005): 358-364. Retrieved from: www.medscape.com/viewarticle/731970_1; See also, S. R. Dube, et. al., "Long-Term Consequences of Childhood Sexual Abuse by Gender of Victim," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28 (2005): 430–438. Retrieved from [www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(05\)00078-4/fulltext](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(05)00078-4/fulltext).

On the particular vulnerabilities of rides: Jules Woodson, who is a fairly prominent advocate against sexual abuse in Southern Baptist churches, was abused by her youth pastor when giving her a ride home from a church event. <https://www.fathommag.com/stories/prophetic-survivors-jules-woodson>

On perpetrators using physical touch games to to lower a child's inhibitions and make inappropriate touch from that adult seem more normal:

<https://www.d2l.org/trustyourgut/>

<https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/signs-sexual-predator>