Red Mountain Church
Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Mark 10:13-16
And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Red Mountain Church (RMC) takes seriously our responsibility to love and protect our Children. We believe that abuse can prevent Children from experiencing the joy and love of Christ. We acknowledge the tragic prevalence of child abuse, including in Christian environments, and desire to foster an environment that is both protective and responsive. The following guidelines are set forth to help provide a safe and nurturing environment at RMC. In addition, the guidelines are designed to make it difficult for abusers to target children and to minimize the opportunity for abusers to “groom” their targets.

Everyone who teaches, helps or cares for our Children must adhere to the following procedures and policies. They are intended to protect both Children and Employees/Volunteers and to be a helpful resource in addressing the issues of Child safety. Adults who violate the policy will not be allowed to work with Children.

Objective

The Child Protection Committee will support and advise the Session in matters concerning child safety, including sexual abuse awareness and education. The Committee will review the Policy yearly, recommend changes as needed, and oversee implementation of and adherence to the Policy.

The Committee may recommend needed exceptions to this Policy; any and all exceptions must be approved by the Session.

Composition

The Red Mountain Church Child Protection Committee is composed of the Children’s Ministry Director, the Youth Director, and 3-5 members of the congregation.

Definitions

Adult: a person eighteen (18) years of age or older.

Child or Children: a person under the age of eighteen (18).

Child Abuse: an injury of a Child by an Adult or other Child that is not accidental. It may include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

Child Emotional Abuse: any language or negative acts directed toward a Child by an Adult that is intended or likely to cause emotional anxiety, pain, or other severe emotional disturbance.

Examples of Child Emotional Abuse include, but are not limited to: repeated negative acts or statements spoken to the Child; exposure to repeated violent, brutal, or intimidating acts or statements among members of the facility; cruel or unusual actions that may be used in an attempt to gain submission, enforce maximum control, or to modify the Child's behavior; and any other act or omission that demonstrates a refusal to respond to the Child's needs.

Child Neglect: the failure, whether intentional or not, of the person responsible for the Child's care to provide for the Child's basic needs such as adequate food, clothing, medical care, supervision, and/or the failure to protect a Child from harm.

Examples of neglect include, but are not limited to: refusal or failure on the part of the person responsible for the Child's care to seek, obtain, and/or maintain the services necessary for proper medical, dental, or psychiatric care; recognizing the Child's need but failing to provide the Child with emotional nurturance; having inappropriate expectations of the Child; leaving a small Child unattended in water; and failing to provide adequate supervision to a young or developmentally delayed Child.

Child Physical Abuse: At a minimum*, the non-accidental bodily injury of a Child through physical contact or mistreatment.

Examples of injuries which may result from physical abuse include, but are not limited to: head injuries, bruises, cuts, or lacerations, internal injuries, burns, scalds, reddening or blistering of the tissue through application of heat by fire, chemical substances, cigarettes, matches, electricity, boiling hot water, friction, etc.; injuries to bone, muscle, cartilage, ligaments, fractures, dislocations, sprains, strains, displacements, hematomas, etc.; and death.

**Even if injuries do not result, harsh physical discipline such as shoving child to the ground or slapping a child's face increases the risk for long term medical and mental health conditions. Although the law permits parents to use corporal punishment, the law requires the discipline to be reasonable. The striking of infants is strictly prohibited. Harsh discipline done out of anger also warrants intervention.*

Child Sexual Abuse: sexual abuse includes any form of sexual contact with a minor, non-touching offenses, or sexual exploitation of a minor. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves Children in sexual behaviors for which they cannot be personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Sexual abuse perpetrated by an Adult is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a Child and an Adult. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the Adult or Child.

Sexual behavior between a Child and an Adult is always considered to be forced, whether or not the Child consents to it.

Sexual abuse perpetrated by a Child is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between Children, with or without the consent of either Child, when one Child has power or perceived authority over the other Child. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the Children.

Touching sexual offenses include, but are not limited to: touching a Child's genitals, breasts, or buttocks; forcing or telling a Child to touch an Adult's sexual organs; and penetrating a Child's vagina, mouth, or anus no matter how slightly with a penis or any object that doesn't have a valid medical purpose.

Non-touching sexual offenses include, but are not limited to: engaging in indecent exposure of showing Children your genitals; showing Children pornographic material; deliberately allowing Children to observe you or someone else having sexual intercourse; and masturbating in front of a Child.

Sexual exploitation includes, but is not limited to: forcing a Child or soliciting a Child for the purposes of prostitution; and using a Child to videotape or photograph pornography.

Church Leadership: any pastor, member of the Session, Shepherdess, member of the Diaconate, or Deaconess.

Children's Ministry Director: Employee of RMC for Nursery and Children's Ministry (through 5th grade) who oversees the administration of the Child Protection Policy.

Youth Director: Employee of RMC for Youth (Grades 6th-12th) who serves on the Child Protection Committee.

Employee: any person who is paid by RMC on a full or part time basis and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of Children.

Grooming: when someone builds an emotional connection with a child in order to gain their trust for the purposes of abuse, exploitation or trafficking.

Student Assistant: Any child in 4th grade through 17 years who volunteers with younger children along with their parent or adult member willing to be responsible for them.

Volunteer: any individual who is not paid by the church and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of Children.

Youth: A Child who is in the Youth Group (Grades 6-12)

Requirements

All Employees, Volunteers, and Church Leadership working with children are required to follow these guidelines.

Church Leadership, including Children's Ministry and Youth Directors

- Submit to a background check every three years
- Be trained in policy and child safety procedures
- Attend a yearly training meeting with volunteers
- Maintain a working knowledge of counseling and community referrals
- Review the church policy yearly
- Agree to code of conduct
- Agree to report any suspected or reported abuse
- Agree to inform other churches if an alleged perpetrator, abuser or person with allegations of behavioral misconduct are known to attend.
- For any discipline issues, follow the age-assigned guidelines
- Be in prayer through the year for the protection of vulnerable persons
- Complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training every 2 years (to be implemented Fall 2026)

Volunteers

- Submit to a background check every three years
- Be trained in policy and child safety procedures
- Be a member of RMC
- Agree to code of conduct
- Agree to report any suspected or reported abuse
- For any discipline issues, follow the age-assigned guidelines. Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- Complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training every 2 years (to be implemented Fall 2026)

Employees

- Submit to a background check every two years
- Clear a reference check upon hire
- Be trained in policy and child safety procedures
- Attendance at a yearly review that can be one-on-one with Children's Director or in a group setting

- Agree to Code of Conduct
- Agree to report any suspected or reported abuse
- For any discipline issues, follow the age-assigned guidelines. Corporal punishment is prohibited for all age groups.
- Complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training every 2 years (to be implemented Fall 2026)

Code of Conduct

The following policies will guide those working with children and youth in areas regarding child protection.

Two-Adult Rule
Rooms will be equipped with at least two unrelated Adults. Volunteers under 18 may serve with the two Adults, but never count as an Adult.

Youth Rooms
In certain cases, Youth may gather in multiple small groups with one adult, when in a highly visible area. In this scenario, one adult (unrelated to the other adults) will act as a monitor of all groups.

Adults must make every effort to refrain from being alone in a room with a Child. The presence of other Adults or Children creates a safer environment where behavior is observable and Adults are more accountable.

If an Adult needs to remove a Child from the group, the Child and Adult must always be within sight of at least one additional Adult. In the rare circumstance when there is not another available second adult, an Adult may be alone with a Child or Children as long as there is visual access to the room. All interactions between an Adult and Child should be readily observable and interruptible.

If a Volunteer needs additional support, he/she may call the Children's Director to assist as needed.

Nursery Drop-Off and Pick-up
We ask that Adults who are not serving with our children to please refrain from entering the room to drop off and pick up their Children. Volunteers and Employees will help collect the Child and his/her belongings and pass him/her over the door.

Check-In
All Children attending nursery through 5th grade must check in on Sunday mornings.

Communication
Adults shall communicate with Children and each other in an appropriate and edifying way. There will be no tolerance for denigrating, foul, or sexually suggestive language.

Technology

Phones and Other Screens

- Any use of screens must be a church sanctioned planned activity. Do not use cell phones, tablets, computers, or other technological devices when watching or supervising children. The ***only*** permitted use of cell phones while working/volunteering is for contacting a parent or Children's Ministry Director or for an emergency.
- Red Mountain Church maintains a strict "No Phones" policy for Children and Youth at all events. (Youth should put away their phones during the event.)

Messaging

- Any messaging, including texts and emails, between an Adult and Child must include the parent of the Child. There should be no private conversations. If a Child contacts an Adult through social media or texting, the Adult should respond by adding one of the Child's parents to the response. *If the Child is communicating about abuse from his/her parent, then the adult should respond by adding the Children's Director or Senior Pastor to the response.*
- Staff or Volunteers may send a group message to Youth. Texts should be informational, not conversational.
- All forms of communication are subject to observation by Staff Members and/or Church Leadership. All electronic communication must not be erased or deleted and made available upon request by the ministry leader or Pastor.

Photos and Social Media

- Written permission from Children and parents must be obtained by Red Mountain Church before taking and posting photographs or videos online. No pictures of Children in a state of undress may be posted.
- No information about a Child's name, age, school or location may be identified.
- Volunteers should not post pictures of youth or children from church events to their personal social media.
- Adults may not engage with youth or children on social media. Students may follow adults, but Adults should not follow, like, comment on, or otherwise interact with any form of a youth's social media.
- *Social media* includes Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and other websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Adult and Youth Relationship

Any romantic relationship between an Adult and Youth is prohibited.

Transportation

- Parents are responsible for providing or arranging for transportation to and from events. Parents are discouraged from asking leaders to transport children. However if a leader does transport a child at the parent's request, this is not part of the church event.
- The church may from time to time provide transportation as an official part of church events. For example, the church may provide transportation to out-of-town events. When

Children and Youth are transported as a part of church events, all guidelines of this policy will apply:

- Two or more cars with one Adult driver per car travelling as a caravan to an event meets the two-adult requirement.
- From time to time one Adult driver may transport a group of Children or Youth in a single vehicle. This Driver must have parental permission for each child before transporting.
- Drivers should refrain from being alone in a vehicle with a Child.
- Staff members and Volunteers should avoid distractions while driving and are expected to abide by all traffic laws.
- Drivers for church events must complete an RMC Volunteer Driver Authorization form.

Intoxication

- Staff and volunteers are prohibited from using or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, medications that impair judgment, THC products, other intoxicating substances, or any illegal drugs while working with, supervising, or traveling with Children or Youth.
- Transmission of such substances to any child or student is also prohibited. (Sacramental use of wine for the Lord's Supper is not prohibited.)

Appropriate Touching Guidelines

Adults shall behave and interact with Children in an appropriate way at all times. Interacting with Children in a way that is intended to or appears to be sexually stimulating or suggestive is strictly prohibited. If an individual violates guidelines on touching Children, the situation will be brought to the Session and the response will be handled on a case-by-case basis (this may include termination of employment or no longer being allowed to work with Children).

- **Appropriate Touch** is positive physical contact that nurtures Children and develops a sense of emotional security and maturity in their interactions with Adults. Appropriate touch is applied to meet the needs of the Children and not the Adults. ***Some*** examples of appropriate touch are as follows:
  - High Fives, fist bumps, handshakes
  - Side hugs
  - Pat on the upper back
  - Picking up a child in distress
  - Sitting side by side

- **Inappropriate Touch** involves, but is not limited to, coercion or other forms of physical contact which exploits the Child's lack of knowledge, satisfies Adult physical needs at the expense of the Child, violates laws against sexual or other physical contact between Adult and Child, and any attempt to modify Child behavior with physical force. Any observed inappropriate touches should be reported to the Children's Director. Inappropriate touching

will be reported to Child Protection Services. ***Some*** examples of inappropriate touch are as follows:

- Shoving, squeezing, pulling, hair pulling, shaking, slapping, pinching, biting, kicking, or hitting a Child for any reason
- Tickling Children – it is over stimulating and is considered by some professionals to be a deceptive device that could lead to inappropriate touching
- No kissing whatsoever between a Child and Adult OR between Children
- Slapping or tapping a Child on the behind, even when playing
- Caressing or fondling Children, even in non-private areas
- Any touch unwanted by a child
- Any touch that is secret

Remember, a nurturing touch is very important in developing a positive relationship with children. Children should be touched appropriately on faces, hands, shoulders, heads and backs. Other than as outlined in this Policy, never touch a Child in areas that would be covered by a full swimming suit to include, the genital areas, buttocks and the chest/breasts. Appropriate and nurturing touch should be in a public setting, never in a private setting.

Accountability

Church Leadership, Employees, and Volunteers should intervene if he or she sees anyone crossing a child safe boundary or violating the Code of Conduct. Such intervention may include: ● Remaining present with the child in order to provide him or her a sense of security ● Redirecting the child to join other children in a different area.

Church Leadership, Employees, and Volunteers give permission to other Adults to take these intervening actions.

Bathroom Policy

Sex offenders often look for an excuse to see Children undressing or to comment on their private parts. Therefore, every opportunity to keep Children safe when their private parts are exposed are expected to be taken. ***Parents should take their Child to the restroom prior to dropping them off in the nursery or taking them to church as a first precaution.***

- **Use of the bathroom, for parents**
  - For children 4 and under, parents can take children into the restroom that the adult would normally use.
  - For children 5 and older, if a parent needs to attend to the child, the parent can use the family restroom.

- **Children Who are in Diapers**
    - The changing of diapers should be done by Employees hired specifically for childcare duties, and done within unobstructed sight, and with the knowledge of other Adults. They should inform the other adult with a statement such as, “I am changing this child’s diaper”.
    - Any special instructions given by parents leaving Children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards (“Seth Adams has medicine in the bag for rash.”) for Employees to reference.
    - Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
    - Children should be changed on changing stations only and according to diaper changing procedures only.

- **Children Who are Toilet Training**
    - Only Employees hired specifically for childcare duties and those Volunteers who have met all expectations of this policy will assist young Children in the restroom and will inform another adult that they are assisting a Child in the restroom.
    - When Children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open.
    - Young Children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
    - “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the Child that accidents happen and by completing the changing of diapers or underwear /extra clothing.
    - Any special instructions given by parents leaving Children in the nursery will be recorded during check-in (“Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.”).

- **Children who are fully toilet trained**
    - Children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed.
    - An Adult should stand outside of the restroom while the Child goes inside. The Adult should be able to hear the Child, but not see them.
    - Children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.
    - If a Child needs assistance with something such as buttoning/ snapping pants, an Adult may help them in the hallway in plain sight of other adults.
    - If an Adult must go into the restroom to check on an individual Child, he or she will seek out another Adult to accompany him/ her. If another Adult is unavailable, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the Adult should leave the exterior door open when entering the bathroom and attempt to verbally assist the Child in completing their activities while the Child remains behind the bathroom stall. Adults are to instruct, but not touch.

- **Children With Special Needs**
    - Parents will offer instruction to Employees and Volunteers regarding how to change diapers or assist a Child with special needs. This information may be stored on registration cards.
    - The same guidelines mentioned above apply to Children with special needs.
    - The Children's Director will work with parents and caregivers to establish the best way to provide caring, observable, and interruptible interactions with people who have differences.

- **Youth**
    - Youth do not need assistance in the restroom.
    - Male and female students are prohibited from being in the same restroom at the same time.

Meeting with Youth/ Mentoring Youth

- One-on-One meetings with a Youth must be in a public, observable, interruptible location.
- All meetings should be recorded on a calendar accessible by Staff and Church Leadership.
- Another unrelated Adult should always know when there is a meeting between a Youth and an Adult

Gift Giving and Special Attention

- If a child needs extra attention due to something like a loss or illness, the attention must not come from one Adult. It must be coordinated in a rotation whereby Staff and Volunteers take turns providing the extra attention.
- If any Adult plans to give a special gift to a child, at least two other Adults must be informed beforehand, including the Child's parent.
- All gifts must meet the Child's need, not the Adult's.

Community Group Settings

Parents are responsible for watching their children at Community Group Meetings. A list of background-checked childcare workers is available to parents who want to hire childcare, however, please note that a cleared background check does not prevent child abuse.

Employees' Children

All Children of Employees must be with Children who are their age. Children never count as Adults when providing childcare.

Student Assistants

RMC welcomes opportunities for children of adult members to serve alongside a parent or adult who agrees to be responsible for them. Student assistants are expected to treat others with kindness, respect and safety. They are never considered an Adult when assisting. They also must agree to the code of conduct.

Off-site Events

This policy applies to all church events, whether on the RMC campus or at another location. Adults who are volunteering with children and/or youth at a church event in an off-site location shall agree to abide by this policy's Code of Conduct.

Process of Response

Reporting

Statement of Belief about Reporting Abuse

While state laws mandate only certain individuals to report abuse, RMC believes there is both a spiritual and legal duty for Adults to report any disclosed or suspected Child Abuse to the appropriate authorities. We believe that just because a state does not require all adults to report does not mean they are prohibited from reporting. Churches can and should go above and beyond to protect vulnerable people. Any time a disclosure of abuse or suspected abuse is made, there must be a response of belief, protection and reporting. We therefore encourage any and all Adults to report.

We **require** that all Volunteers, Church Leadership and Employees file a report. This does not mean that Volunteers, Church Leadership or Employees perform any 'preliminary assessments' or 'preliminary investigations' to determine the plausibility of any allegations before reporting to the authorities. The Church must fully cooperate with the authorities in any criminal abuse investigation.

How to make a report

In any case where a Volunteer, Church Leadership or Employee witnesses or suspects child abuse of any kind in any context, they are required to follow these guidelines:

1. Within 24 hours, report the incident to the appropriate Ministry Director (Children's Ministry, Youth, etc.). If the appropriate Ministry Director is unavailable, they may report the abuse to any Pastor or Session member. *
2. Within 24 hours, in coordination with the Ministry Director, provide a written incident report (See Appendix for form). This report shall detail all relevant facts with respect to the incident. Do not interview the child at the time of reporting; that is the responsibility of the proper authorities. It is necessary only to record the facts available at that time.
3. Within 24 hours, the Ministry Director and/ or Senior Pastor will file the report with the appropriate authorities.
4. All reports are confidential and shared on a "need-to-know" basis so that any alleged perpetrator is not forewarned. Remember that the Child has a right for their privacy to be respected to the fullest possible extent. The written report itself should be kept in a secure, confidential location.

** In any case where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom a report should be made, the report should be submitted to the highest ranking appropriate RMC representative.*

The contact number for Jefferson County's Child Abuse Hotline is:

Child Abuse Hotline (205) 423-4850

What information should I include in my report?

Below is some information that is helpful in any report of suspected abuse:

- The name of the Child
- Current location of the Child
- If alleged perpetrator has access to Child (or other Children)
- County of residence
- Extent of injuries or information that led to knowledge of or suspicious event that led to report
- Age of child
- Address of child and parents or guardian if known.
- Other Children in the home

Response to Report

When a Ministry Director receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately contact the Senior Pastor and appropriately document the incident.

The Senior Pastor shall be charged with:

1. Ensuring the appropriate law enforcement authorities have been contacted.
2. Contacting the Session to inform them of the incident.
3. Contacting the RMC legal counsel and insurance provider.
4. Contacting the parents or guardian of the alleged victim to inform them of the incident, unless the alleged perpetrator is the parent.
5. Taking all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged perpetrator has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
6. Taking all necessary steps to ensure that the alleged perpetrator is barred from further work with children or youth pending investigation.
7. ***If needed***, ensuring that the alleged perpetrator is informed that a report has been filed that specifically names them.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In order to protect the child, their family, the reporter, and the alleged perpetrator, under no circumstances shall the person making a report discuss the report with anyone other than the person to whom they have reported the abuse and other authorities outlined above. Every reasonable effort will be made by RMC to maintain the confidentiality of the child, their parents, the reporter, and the alleged perpetrator.

Public Communication
The Senior Pastor of RMC is normally the designated person to make any and all public statements on behalf of the church. The Session and the Senior Pastor have the right to designate any other person to speak on behalf of the church. Under no circumstances shall an employee or volunteer speak to the media or other outside parties about any abuse incident. This principle does not apply to speaking with appropriate law enforcement. RMC is committed to submitting to its legal obligations.

Follow Up with Pending Cases
The Church must fully cooperate with the authorities in any criminal abuse investigation. Church Staff and Leadership will make a case-by-case decision of how to protect the victim, Children and other vulnerable persons.
If abuse is confirmed, the information must be distributed to take steps to keep children safe.

An abuse that is not confirmed may still require the Church to address issues exposed during the process in accordance with the Policy. A third party such as GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments) may help navigate decisions to keep Children safe.

All reports and response steps will be reviewed to identify ways to improve the response process.

Communication with Other Churches
If Church leadership has actual knowledge of an alleged perpetrator or abuser who begins attending a church other than RMC, Church leadership has a duty to inform the other church.

Supporting
Child abuse inflicts spiritual injury. The Church's compassionate, authentic response is therefore crucial to demonstrate Christ's love to victims and address trauma that is used by spiritual forces to undermine faith and isolate victims. Therefore, RMC commits to helping support victims. See attached Form entitled *Suggested Ways to Support Victims of Child Abuse*.

Training and Increasing Awareness

The principles found in RMC's training policies reflect God's instruction to protect His little ones (Matthew 8:16) and to be "equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). Therefore, ongoing training will be ***required*** for all Church Leadership, Employees, and Volunteers who engage Children.

All Church Leadership, Employees and Volunteers will receive training every two years in prevention of and response to abuse, including training in reporting procedure. This will entail a yearly review of the church's policy as well as ongoing training topics selected by the Director of Children's Ministry with input from the Session and Volunteers. Ongoing topics can come from a variety of materials including books, speakers or workshops.

Care teams will be made available for victims of abuse as needed. A healthcare provider such as a social worker or counselor will provide training for the care teams on interacting with people who have suffered the trauma of abuse.

Opportunities for continued training and awareness will be provided for other Adults, Children and families. See Form Child Protection Training Opportunity Suggestions.

Appendix

- Abuse Report Form for Alabama DHR
- Resource List
- Suggested Ways to Support Victims of Child Abuse