

Child Protection Policy for Briarwood Baptist Church Watkinsville, Georgia

Revised 03-28-10

Purpose and Goal

The purpose and intent of this policy statement is to provide a safe and caring environment for the ministries of Briarwood Baptist Church ("Briarwood") involving preschool, children and youth under eighteen (18) years of age (each a "child" and, collectively, "children"), free from sexual or other abuse.

The goal of this policy statement is to establish guidelines and procedures for (i) the prevention of child abuse by church staff and volunteers working in those ministries, (ii) the protection of church staff and volunteers working in those ministries against false accusations of child abuse, and (iii) the manner in which alleged or suspected instances of child abuse are reported.

It is the desire of Briarwood that this policy statement strengthen the Christian educational ministries of our church by establishing appropriate ways of responding to alleged, suspected, or reported incidents of child abuse and by ensuring that all such incidents are dealt with in a fair and compassionate manner for all persons involved.

The success of achieving the goals and fulfilling the purposes for which this policy statement is adopted will depend upon screening, supervising and training church staff and volunteers. As information concerning the individuals may be considered confidential and sensitive, Briarwood strives to maintain the confidentiality of all information obtained pursuant to this policy statement. However, the need to protect children will be paramount, and any information obtained will be used as needed to accomplish such purpose.

Scope

This policy statement applies to all church staff and volunteers who work with ministries of Briarwood involving children, whether in a supervisory role or otherwise. This policy statement is not intended to apply to claims of harassment or sexual abuse of church staff in the context of their employment by Briarwood.

Definition of Child Abuse

1. Neglect or exploitation of a child, whether in the home by a caretaker, in a daycare situation, in a foster/residential setting, or in any other

setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent or another child.

2. The exploitation of a child's vulnerability or powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action. Child abuse can be violent or non-violent.

3. Criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially or developmentally ready.

4. Behavior that involves touching and non-touching aspects.

Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, "child abuse" shall also include the meaning assigned to such term in O.C.G.A. § 19-15-1, as same may be amended from time to time.

Screening Process

1. Church Staff. Each person who is employed by Briarwood on a part-time or full time basis is required to complete, in addition to employment applications and related forms, such other forms as may be necessary to facilitate a criminal records background check, regardless of whether such person will be working directly with ministries of the church involving children.

2. Volunteers. Each person who is not a staff member of Briarwood, but who, nevertheless, desires to serve in one or more ministries involving children (such as Sunday School, Children's Worship, Mission Friends, AWANA, R.A.'s, G.A.'s, Vacation Bible School, choirs, camps, retreats, youth revivals, and the like) must,

(a) have been a member of Briarwood, or regularly attended Briarwood (as determined in the discretion of the Child Protection Coordinators in consultation with the applicable church ministry leader), for at least six (6) months prior to applying for service. *In exercising such discretion, the Child Protection Coordinator may rely upon the documented recommendation of a church ministry leader or church staff member;*

(b) complete a volunteer worker application/screening form providing certain personal information, as well as the areas of ministry in which such person wishes to serve;

(c) complete a criminal records background release form and such other forms as may be necessary to facilitate a criminal records background check of such person and, if requested, to obtain a motor vehicle driving record of such person;

(d) complete a character reference form providing names of at least three (3) unrelated references on behalf of such person; and

(e) subject to receipt of a satisfactory criminal records background check and favorable character references, undergo a personal interview, if requested, by a designated church ministry leader.

All volunteer workers must satisfy or complete the foregoing requirements prior to beginning service with any ministry of Briarwood involving children (each such volunteer satisfying the foregoing requirements being referred to herein as a "Screened Volunteer").

3. Special Guests. A Guest leader may assist in Briarwood events after the said worker has obtained clearance described and undergone our background screening process and meets the following criteria:

- (a) Been a volunteer working with children of a church of like faith for at least one year
- (b) Letter of recommendation from a minister of that church is obtained

4. Child Protection Coordinator. Briarwood's Business Administrator shall serve as the so-called "Child Protection Coordinator" having responsibility for (i) coordinating the submittal of all information required to obtain a criminal records background check on each person subject to this policy statement, (ii) maintaining information and documentation, as same may be updated at intervals recommended from time to time by the Child Protection Committee, on each person who works with the ministries involving children, and (iii) working with church leadership, as necessary, to maintain compliance with this policy statement.

In the event of the failure or inability of the Business Administrator, at any time, to act or in the event of any vacancy in the position of Business Administrator, the Child Protection Coordinator shall be such person as the Pastor may designate, subject to approval by the Board of Deacons.

The church staff and volunteer worker applications and screening forms, background checks and reference checks on each person subject to this policy statement intrudes into the privacy of the lives of those persons involved in the ministries of Briarwood involving children. Nevertheless, Briarwood values the security of its children and has determined that such security outweighs the personal invasion inherent with any investigation and disclosure of such personal information. Subject to the foregoing, all personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of criminal background and reference checks and the prohibition of any person to participate or serve in a ministry, program or activity on the basis of the requirements set forth herein will be maintained in confidence to the greatest extent practicable. All records will be kept in a secure area accessible only by the Child Protection Coordinator.

5. Ongoing Review and Training.

a) All church staff and volunteer workers in children's ministries must complete such additional criminal records background release and related forms, and provide such updated information, as required, from time to time, by the Child Protection Committee of Briarwood; provided, however, criminal records background checks of all persons subject to this policy statement shall be conducted not less frequently than once every five (5) years.

(b) All church staff and volunteer workers must attend such group training sessions as and when same are recommended or offered by or on behalf of Briarwood and, further, maintain a record of such attendance with the Child Protection Coordinator. Any such training may include, among other things, the following areas:

- (i) Sexual and physical abuse symptoms.
- (ii) Action that constitutes inappropriate conduct.
- (iii) Church policies that govern working with children.
- (iv) Work with handicapped children.
- (v) Civil and criminal consequences of inappropriate conduct.
- (vi) Practical and legal considerations for the screening process.

Training will be offered on a timely basis by the appropriate church ministry leader or church staff member.

Supervision of Children

1. (a) At all times there shall be a minimum of two (2) adults working together with children or two (2) adults within "line of sight"; provided, however, in a Sunday school class or similar teaching environment for children, it is acceptable to have individual classes/groups with one adult teacher/leader, so long as the department group leaders are present in the general area and more than one child is present. For purposes of the foregoing "two adult" rule, a husband and wife team is considered one adult. Only persons over eighteen (18) years of age qualify as adults for purposes of the "two adult" rule.

(b) When guest leaders are participating in Briarwood sponsored events, such leaders must be screened and approved by the applicable church ministry leaders, in coordination with the Child Protection Coordinator and may work with children only when accompanied by a church staff member or Screened Volunteer worker. After six months of service a guest leader may be considered a screened volunteer. (They count as an adult, but work under the supervision of another cleared leader.)

2. (a) For overnight activities away from the church premises which are sponsored by Briarwood, such as retreats, trips or camps, church staff members or Screened Volunteers must be used as chaperones. There should always be at least two (2) adults accompanying each event and two (2) adults per activity. When "guest" leaders are participating in overnight activities away from the church premises as described above, such leaders must be screened and approved by the applicable church ministry leader, in coordination with the Child Protection Coordinator and may work with the children only when accompanied by a church staff member or Screened Volunteer worker.

(b) At events which require overnight accommodations, it is strongly recommended that at least two (2) adults be present in every room. When staying in a hotel, if there is only one (1) adult for a room, that adult should sleep in a separate room from the children; however, if circumstances require that children share a room with the adult, the adult must sleep in a separate bed from the children and there must be more than one (1) child in the room. Recognizing that accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one adult is adequate so long as any one adult shall not be alone with a child.

3. An activity "sponsored" by Briarwood shall be defined as any activity, on or off church premises, planned or approved by the appropriate church ministry leader and with respect to which Briarwood supervises the activity.
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4. If an adult finds himself or herself alone with a child, that adult must be certain that the counseling or teaching of such child is done in an open area so that the child and adult will be visible (that is, within line of sight) to other adults in the area.

5. With respect to use of restrooms by children,
(a) when children use restrooms, doors must remain open at all times when a worker is assisting a child inside the restroom;

(b) in all situations other than as described in clause (a) above, a child and one (1) adult are not permitted to enter the restroom alone, whether on or off church premises; and

(c) diaper changing areas for infants must be in open areas visible from a doorway.

Parental Permission

1. Church staff and Screened Volunteer workers must obtain the prior written consent of the child's parent or guardian before going off church premises or spending time alone on or off church premises with a child in an unsupervised situation. One-on-one situations shall be limited to exceptional circumstances.

2. The driver of an automobile for any activity sponsored by Briarwood which is to be held off church premises must provide evidence of a valid driver license and insurance coverage to the designated church ministry leader coordinating such activity. All such drivers are subject to the provisions of this policy statement.

Reporting and Response

Any allegation of child abuse will be handled forthrightly with due respect to the privacy and confidentiality of each person involved. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities and insurance company investigators under the guidance of the attorney retained by Briarwood.

1. Internal Reporting of Suspicious Behavior on the Part of Church Staff or Volunteer Workers.

(a) It is incumbent on all church staff and volunteer workers to be aware of the potential of child abuse that can arise from various situations and activities involving children. Volunteers and church staff must provide prompt and direct corrective comments to any individual when any suspicious behavior is observed.

(b) Any violation of the policies set forth in this statement shall be reported promptly to the adult in charge of the group, as well as the church ministry leader in charge of the age group involved or the Child Protection Coordinator.

2. Reaction of Children and Youth to Inappropriate Behavior on the Part of Church Staff or Volunteer Workers.

(a) Church staff and volunteer workers aware of a concern by a child alleging misbehavior from a church staff or volunteer worker should encourage the child to report their concerns to parents, a teacher or trusted staff member or volunteer of the church. Church staff and volunteer workers must also promptly report the concern to the adult in charge of the group, as well as the church ministry leader in charge of the age group or the Child Protection Coordinator.

(b) Briarwood will provide information and materials regarding this issue and reporting channels to parents of all children involved in its programs as such information and materials become available.

3. Reporting Alleged Child Abuse to Outside Agencies.

(a) Georgia statutes do not require that Briarwood report incidences of suspected child abuse as a "mandatory reporter" at this time. However, Briarwood has elected to provide reports of suspected or alleged child abuse to the appropriate authorities, including the applicable child welfare agency providing protective services (as designated by the Georgia Department of Human Resources) or, in the absence of such agency to an appropriate police authority or district attorney, and Briarwood's insurance carrier. Such reporting, in good faith, is permitted by a provision of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated which states any other person (other than a "mandatory reporter") may report suspected or alleged instances of child abuse.

(b) The Child Protection Coordinator will serve as the reporting authority for Briarwood. A report may be made by telephone and if requested, followed by a written report.

4. State law indicates any person who, in good faith, makes a report to the proper authority shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability. Any "mandatory reporter" who knowingly and willingly fails to report a suspected case of child abuse may be guilty of a misdemeanor. This does not apply to any failure on the part of Briarwood to report, but such failure may result in additional risks in the event of litigation should Briarwood fail to report an alleged incident.

(a) Briarwood has elected to notify Briarwood's insurance carrier of each reported case of alleged or suspected child abuse, as well as to the proper authorities having jurisdiction. Our contact at Church Mutual Insurance Company is Dana K. Doster (agent) at 800-554-2642. The report to Georgia state authorities should be directed to the Oconee County Child Abuse and Neglect Reports (Department of Family and Children Services) at telephone (706) 310-2260. The report to any local law enforcement authority should be directed to the Oconee County Sheriff's Department at telephone 706-769-3945.

(b) Any report filed pursuant to this policy statement should be made in the presence of the attorney retained by Briarwood or another church staff member who can attest to the report and its contents.

(c) The report should contain the following information: names and addresses of the child and the child's parents or caretaker, the child's age and the nature and extent of the child's injuries, including any evidence of previous injuries, such as identifying information of the accused (to the extent possible) and any other information that the reporting person believes may be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries.

Amendment of Policy

The Child Protection Committee shall have the responsibility of regularly reviewing the policies of Briarwood and laws concerning child abuse prevention and reduction and make appropriate recommendations of any changes in policies to the church staff and to the congregation.

This policy statement adopted on _____ and shall become effective on that date which is 120 days after the date of adoption.

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Agreement

I, _____ (print name) acknowledge receipt of the Child Protection Policy for Briarwood Baptist Church and agree to abide by the terms of the policy statement and to refrain from engaging in any unscriptural conduct in the performance of any service or activities on behalf of Briarwood Baptist Church.

Date

Signature

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