



Child Abuse Prevention Policy

The Cross Church of Pensacola, Florida
2022

Child abuse is an immoral act of violence, and it is an abuse of power because someone who is stronger takes advantage of someone who is weaker. It is not only a sin, but it is also a crime, which calls for immediate reporting to the civil authorities. The Bible gives civil government the power of the sword to judge criminals (Rom 13:1-7) but denies it to the church (Matt 26:51-53; Jn 18:36). Therefore, child abuse, as defined by the state, may never be handled within the church alone but must always and immediately involve the appropriate civil authorities.¹

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse can take many forms, and like all abuse, it is based on the abuser's false sense of his or her rights and entitlements. Abuse is a pattern of coercive sinful control that intimidates and manipulates others to obtain what is desired. Child abuse may be verbal (Prov 12:18; 18:21), emotional (Ps 41:9; Prov 27:6), neglectful (Gen 37:24-25), physical (Matt 26:67), and/or sexual (2 Sam 13:1-18) in nature. It occurs far more often than many might expect. When child abuse occurs, the consequences are devastating to the child, to the child's family, and to the church. We, therefore, understand that we must take steps to educate our congregation about abuse and prevent it wherever possible. Though there is no way to make a place perfectly secure in this fallen world, this Child Abuse Prevention Policy is part of our effort to make our church a more secure place for children. This policy is part of The Cross Church of Pensacola, Florida's (hereinafter "The Cross Church") operational procedures.

THE THREEFOLD PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

First, we hope that any would-be predators will read this policy and choose not to victimize children in our church. Predators should know that the people in our congregation have been educated and are aware of abusive dynamics. If they attempt to abuse our children, we will notice, and we will take action.

Second, we desire to provide a caring and secure environment for children. One of the most important ways to provide security is to shine the light of truth on the issue. Evil hides in the darkness. Secrecy and ignorance are covers for sin. Christians are not to take part in unfruitful works of darkness, but to

¹ See Chapter 827, "Abuse of Children" in the 2022 Florida Statutes:
http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0800-0899/0827/0827.html

“expose them” (Eph 5:11-13). Therefore, this policy is an important first step in protecting children.

Third, we want everyone in the church to learn how to respond to child abuse biblically and in accordance with the law (1 Pet 2:13-15).

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Cross Church seeks to express God’s love for all who bear His image and provide for their wellbeing as far as it depends upon us. The Lord Jesus Christ loves children and calls them to Himself. He said, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (Mk 10:14). Those who abuse children are hindering them from the gospel and tempting them to disbelieve the goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark 10:16 speaks of how Christ treated children: “He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.” This church seeks to love and protect children, to prevent child abuse of every form, and to minister to families where abuse may occur. The Bible is the foundation upon which all our policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

Many people are unfamiliar with the statistical information about child abuse. The information about the prevalence and threat of child abuse shows that we need to take steps to protect children as much as possible:

- Child sexual abuse is seventy-five times more common than pediatric cancer.
- One out of four girls, and one out of six boys, will be sexually abused by their eighteenth birthday.
- According to the Department of Justice, there is one child molester per square mile in the United States.
- One in seven children between ages ten and seventeen have been sexually solicited online.

LEGAL DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

Florida state law defines abuse as “any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual abuse, injury, or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.” Florida Statutes Title V. Judicial Branch § 39.01(2)

Florida state law defines abandoned or abandonment as “a situation in which the parent or legal custodian of a child or, in the absence of a parent or legal custodian, the caregiver, while being able, has made no significant contribution to the child's care and maintenance or has failed to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with the child, or both. For purposes of this subsection, ‘establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship’ includes, but is not limited to, frequent and regular contact with the child through frequent and regular visitation or frequent and regular communication to or with the child, and the exercise of parental rights and responsibilities. Marginal efforts and incidental or token visits or communications are not sufficient to establish or maintain a substantial and positive relationship with a child. A man's acknowledgement of paternity of the child

does not limit the period of time considered in determining whether the child was abandoned. The term does not include a surrendered newborn infant as described in [s. 383.50](#), a ‘child in need of services’ as defined in chapter 984, or a ‘family in need of services’ as defined in chapter 984. The incarceration, repeated incarceration, or extended incarceration of a parent, legal custodian, or caregiver responsible for a child’s welfare may support a finding of abandonment.” Florida Statutes Title V. Judicial Branch § 39.01(1)

Florida state law defines juvenile sexual abuse as “any sexual behavior by a child which occurs without consent, without equality, or as a result of coercion. For purposes of this subsection, the following definitions apply:

- (a) ‘Coercion’ means the exploitation of authority or the use of bribes, threats of force, or intimidation to gain cooperation or compliance.
- (b) ‘Equality’ means two participants operating with the same level of power in a relationship, neither being controlled nor coerced by the other.
- (c) ‘Consent’ means an agreement, including all of the following:
 1. Understanding what is proposed based on age, maturity, developmental level, functioning, and experience.
 2. Knowledge of societal standards for what is being proposed.
 3. Awareness of potential consequences and alternatives.
 4. Assumption that agreement or disagreement will be accepted equally.
 5. Voluntary decision.
 6. Mental competence.

Juvenile sexual behavior ranges from noncontact sexual behavior such as making obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and the showing or taking of lewd photographs to varying degrees of direct sexual contact, such as frottage, fondling, digital penetration, rape, fellatio, sodomy, and various other sexually aggressive acts.” Florida Statutes Title V. Judicial Branch § 39.01(7)

Florida state law defines neglect as “when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child’s physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired. The foregoing circumstances shall not be considered neglect if caused primarily by financial inability unless actual services for relief have been offered to and rejected by such person. A parent or legal custodian legitimately practicing religious beliefs in accordance with a recognized church or religious organization who thereby does not provide specific medical treatment for a child may not, for that reason alone, be considered a negligent parent or legal custodian; however, such an exception does not preclude a court from ordering the following services to be provided, when the health of the child so requires:

- (a) Medical services from a licensed physician, dentist, optometrist, podiatric physician, or other qualified health care provider; or
- (b) Treatment by a duly accredited practitioner who relies solely on spiritual means for healing in accordance with the tenets and practices of a well-recognized church or religious organization.

Neglect of a child includes acts or omissions.” Florida Statutes Title V. Judicial Branch § 39.01(44)

ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

The above definitions of child abuse are codified in Florida state law. The Cross Church further defines child abuse as follows:

Contact Sexual Abuse: “Touching with any part of one’s body another’s genitalia, buttocks, breasts or surrounding areas (e.g., thighs, stomach, lower back), except as necessary for caregiving (such as changing an infant’s diaper) or medical purposes (such as administering an EpiPen to a child’s buttocks), using one’s own genitalia, buttocks, breasts, or surrounding areas to touch another’s body (e.g., rubbing one’s penis against a child’s back), kissing, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal, anal, or other orifice penetration by a penis, finger or other object, exploiting a child by engaging the child in prostitution or the production of pornography.”

Non-contact Sexual Abuse: “Sexual communication (whether verbal or written, including by telephone, text message, email, or social media), voyeurism (spying on private or intimate behaviors, such as those involving undressing, nudity, or sexual activity), exposure to pornography or other sexually explicit material, exhibitionism (exposure of part or all of an adult’s naked body), exposure of part or all of a child’s naked body (except as necessary for caregiving or medical purposes), any activity intended to abuse, degrade, arouse, or gratify sexual desires, instruction from an adult for a child to engage in sexual activity alone or with a third party.”

Physical Abuse: “Kicking, punching, slapping, choking, throwing objects, or otherwise inflicting pain or fear of immediate injury.” Appropriate parental spanking, the loving use of the rod and reproof, is not abuse (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). On the property of The Cross Church, and on all church activities, no one but a child’s own parents may spank any child.

Neglect: May be “physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision), medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment), educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs), emotional (e.g., inattention to a child’s emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs).”

All of these abusive behaviors are strictly prohibited at The Cross Church.

DEFINITION OF A MINOR

For reporting purposes, a minor is anyone 17 years old and under. Child abuse occurs when someone 17 years and under is abused.

PROTECTION POLICY

Screening and Procedures: All officers, employees, and volunteers involved in any Nursery or Children’s Ministries will read and agree to both The Church Child Abuse Prevention Policy and The Cross Church Child Care Policies and Procedures, complete a criminal background check, be a member of the Cross Church or be pursuing membership, be in good standing with the Cross Church, and be approved by the elders of the Cross Church. Nursery Workers must also be approved by the Nursery Ministry Director.

Child Body Safety: The Cross Church will make a book, *God Made All of Me* by Justin Holcomb and Lindsey Holcomb, available to parents, which explains how to teach their children about their bodies, their right to refuse unwanted touches, and how to identify the parts of their bodies that are off-limits to

others. If you would like a copy of this book, please ask one of the elders and they will be happy to provide it to you if finances are an issue.

Acceptable Physical Contact: The Bible has many examples of appropriate physical touch. The Lord Jesus Himself, for example, took children “*in his arms* and blessed them, laying *his hands* on them” (Mk 10:16). Certainly, touches such as sitting side by side, side hugs, pats on the shoulder, high fives, fist bumps, and handshakes are acceptable. Care should be taken that physical expressions of affection toward a minor are not unwanted, secret, or in any way intended to be sexually stimulating. While on church property or participating in church activities, church officers, employees, volunteers, and members may not spank any children, except their own and any over whom they have legal custody. Spanking by parents or guardians, using the rod and reproof in love, is appropriate (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15).

Volunteer Rule: Volunteer applications for designated or occasional positions will be accepted only from persons who are actively pursuing membership at The Cross Church and have passed a criminal background check. Exceptions to the volunteer application policy may be made at the discretion of the pastors/elders. In these cases, the excepted volunteer will be paired with another trained church member or staff person.

Supervision: Reasonable effort will be made to ensure that teachers and/or directors are present, or nearby, and available during Sunday and mid-week activities. Reasonable effort will be made to ensure that more than one adult worker will be present, or nearby, with preschoolers, children and students during church activities. Reasonable effort will also be made to ensure that one adult is never left alone with one minor.

Appropriate Clothing: Adult workers and volunteers must wear appropriate clothing at all times. Activities such as skinny dipping are prohibited. All sexually suggestive or otherwise inappropriate clothing is prohibited.

View Windows/Open Doors: Reasonable effort will be made to place preschoolers, children and students in rooms with view windows or open doors for all teaching/learning activities.

Over-Night Activities: All church officers, employees, volunteers, and members of the church will be required to comply with the Child Abuse Prevention Policy during over-night activities sponsored by The Cross Church.

Within-Town Activities: All church officers, employees, volunteers, and members will be required to comply with all of the Child Abuse Prevention policies during The Cross Church sponsored within town activities.

Out-of-Town Activities: All minors should have written parental (or guardian) consent before going on an out-of-town church activity. All church officers, employees, volunteers, and members shall be required to comply with all of The Cross Church’s Child Abuse Prevention Policy during The Cross Church sponsored out-of-town activities.

Transportation: Minors should be transported in groups. An unaccompanied adult should not drive a single minor (other than his or her own child) in a church-sponsored activity. Minors will not drive

other minors without the express consent of both the driver's and rider(s)' parents.

WHEN AND HOW TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE

1. If you witness child abuse as defined by state law (cited above), you should seek to stop it immediately. Next, it must be reported to the Department of Children and Families (1-800-96-ABUSE, TTY 1-800-955-8771).
2. If anyone reports child abuse to you as defined by state law, you must report it to the Department of Children and Families. The requirement to report includes a child's own disclosure.
3. If you have reasonable suspicion of abuse as defined by state law, you must report it directly to the Department of Children and Families.
4. Reporting abuse should never be done casually or thoughtlessly and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, the law requires you to report reasonable suspicions of abuse. In most cases, you will have to report someone you know: a leader, a colleague, church member, friend or family member. This makes reporting difficult. However, failing to report suspected child abuse can have severe consequences to the child at risk. Failure to report also often emboldens abusers who ordinarily go on to abuse other children.
5. Only after the abuse is reported to the Department of Children and Families should it be reported to a pastor/elder for it to be handled properly within the church.
6. The Cross Church will keep a full record of all complaints, proceedings, and the resolutions of the allegations.

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously, and church leadership will act in accordance with the law of God (Acts 5:29) and the laws of the state of Florida (Rom 13:1) insofar as they never contradict the law of God.

The official spokesperson for The Cross Church in any of these matters will be one of the pastors/elders. No other church staff members or church members may speak to the media in an official capacity.

The Cross Church will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual who makes allegations of abuse. The church will seek to assist the complainant's family.

If anyone in church attendance (including members or leaders) is arrested for child abuse, the elders will make this known to the congregation so that parents can talk to their children about any contact they may have had with the alleged abuser. The pastors will seek to minister to all involved, including the alleged abuser.

The Cross Church has an obligation to maintain a pastoral relationship with all effected parties and not to "take sides" in matters that are unproven in a court of law. We believe that the accused should be

presumed innocent until proven guilty before a competent ecclesiastical or civil authority. We believe in the due process of law and the need for two or three credible witnesses, or lines of evidence, or other definitive proof, to establish guilt before a competent authority. See Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:9; Heb 10:28.

The Cross Church may not and will not ignore, dismiss, or cover-up any allegations of child abuse. Credible allegations of child abuse against church members must not only be reported to the appropriate civil authorities, but also investigated by the elders to determine whether or not church discipline is warranted. While the church is called to extend forgiveness to all, it is never permitted to overlook child abuse, but should confront abusers firmly in love with the Word of God for the sake of biblical justice, in order to protect children, and for the sake of their own souls.