



CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Augusta Worship Center (AWC) Child Abuse Prevention Policy is to assist us in providing a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of church life. AWC is a **safe zone** for all children and adults who attend our services, or any church related activity. AWC recognizes there are individuals in the world who do not conform to the values of our church or scripture, and they victimize children. Although no organization or individual can assure complete protection, the AWC Child Abuse Prevention Policy's aim is to prevent any occurrence of child abuse.

This policy applies to all members and participating visitors/guests of the Augusta Worship Center. AWC will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this commitment not only reflects your concern about our children's safety, but your concern to stop child abuse and its damaging effects. For the safety and protection of our children and members who participate in church-sponsored activities with children, the guidelines provided in this policy apply.

Guidelines For Reporting An Allegation

1. AWC will treat any person who makes a complaint under this policy with the utmost respect and will fully handle all complaints swiftly and confidentially and consider the need to take appropriate corrective action when necessary.
2. Filing a complaint will not be used against the complainant under any circumstance, alleged victims are strongly encouraged to use this protective procedure.
3. AWC will pray for the unity of the church and all persons affected by the allegation and will attempt to assure the safety and protection of persons who have been harmed.
4. If AWC receives an allegation of child abuse, we will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or anyone making such an allegation.
5. The alleged accused will be treated with dignity throughout the investigative process
6. AWC will assume that such complaints are made in good faith however, if any complaint is intended to be malicious, this will be considered an abuse of policy and will be handled accordingly.

When Child Abuse Is Suspected

1. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
2. Immediately notify the pastor who will initiate an internal investigation of the allegations within (a reasonable amount of time) of notice.
3. Immediately notify law enforcement of the allegation (when necessary).
4. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the allegations.
5. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his duties until the investigation is concluded.

Pastoral Responsibilities

1. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary in providing care to the alleged victim and the accused and their families and show care and comfort for the alleged victim.
 - a. The pastor should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an investigation.
 - b. The pastor should not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.
2. The pastor should maintain confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised otherwise.
3. The pastor should not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.
4. The pastor should not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the alleged victim and his or her family. Remembering that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority.

Definitions



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In this policy the following definitions apply: **Adult**—Any person aged 18 or older. - **Child or Youth**: Any person under the age of 18.

Child Abuse—Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The law typically uses the following definitions and explanations in determining whether abuse of a child has occurred.

Physical Abuse—A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, and stabbing wounds.

Physical Neglect: The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.

Sexual Abuse: Abuse that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, voyeurism).

Mental Abuse/Neglect: A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harms to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

Corporal Punishment: Any punishment applied to the body but not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching, pulling, or squeezing.

Church Worker: Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.

Mandated Reporter: Any persons with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. Mandated reporting is the **early recognition** of child maltreatment with the goal of preventing further abuse from occurring. Many mandated reporters have professional relationships with children that make it possible for children to disclose abuse or for the mandated reporter to identify maltreatment. If the pastor or church staff fail to act on the report, the designee Shall Make The Report To Law Enforcement.

Reasonable Suspicion: means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse, or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child

GEORGIA LAW O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5,

Georgia law, **O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5**, requires certain persons to report suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities. In addition to contacting the police department, Mandatory Reporters must also report suspected neglect or abuse to the Georgia Department of Human Services by calling 1-855-GACHILD (422-4453).

How to Report

- A report must be made **within 24 hours** by phone or electronically:
 - DFCS' centralized intake is available 24/7 by calling: **1-855-GACHILD (1-855-422-4453)** or reporting **online** (requires online training prior to report)
- If the child is in immediate danger, report to law enforcement (911).
- **What if a child or family just needs resources or support?**
 - Call 1-800-CHILDREN (**1-800-244-5373**) to speak with a resource navigator or search the online resource map.