

# **Child Protection Policy for Briarwood Baptist Church Watkinsville, Georgia**

*Effective Date: March, 17, 2013*

## **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 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. §19-7-5(b)(4), 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 any required employment applications and related forms, such other forms as may be necessary to facilitate a criminal records background check and to obtain a motor vehicle driving record, 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) (i) be a member of Briarwood, (ii) have regularly attended Briarwood for at least six (6) months prior to applying for service (as determined in the discretion of the Child Protection Coordinator in consultation with the applicable church ministry leader or church staff member, and in exercising such discretion, the Child Protection Coordinator may rely upon the documented recommendation of such church ministry leader or church staff member), (iii) be a member, or a part-time or full-time staff member of, another church of Christian faith, or (iv) (A) be a member of a Christian organization or ministry for at least six (6) months prior to applying for service and (B) furnish a favorable letter of recommendation from a minister (or leader of comparable standing) of such organization or ministry;

(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. 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.

4. 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. 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.

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.

(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.

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 Volunteers 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.

## **Notification and Reporting of Child Abuse**

Any allegation or instance of child abuse will be handled forthrightly in accordance with this policy statement and, to the extent possible, 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. Notification of Child Abuse.

**All members of the church staff and volunteer workers having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused shall report or cause reports of that abuse to be made to the pastor or other ministerial staff member of Briarwood (or other designated delegate thereof) as the person in charge of the church facility.**

### 2. Reporting Alleged Child Abuse to Outside Agencies.

(a) Georgia law requires that Briarwood report incidences of suspected child abuse in accordance with O.C.G.A. §19-7-5, as same may be amended.

(b) Under no circumstances shall the pastor or other ministerial staff member of Briarwood (or any designated delegate thereof) to whom notification has been made exercise any control, restraint, modification, or make any other change to the information provided by the person reporting child abuse; provided, however, the pastor or other ministerial staff member of Briarwood (or the designated delegate thereof) may be consulted prior to the making of a report and may provide any additional, relevant and necessary information when making the report.

(c) Anything in this policy statement to the contrary notwithstanding, any other person, other than a member of the Church staff or a volunteer workers, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is abused may report such abuse, or cause reports to be made, as provided in this policy statement.

(d) An oral report shall be made immediately, but in no case later than twenty-four (24) hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, by telephone or otherwise and followed by a report in writing, if requested, to a child welfare agency providing protective services, as designated by the Department of Human Services, which is presently the Oconee County Child Abuse and Neglect Reports of the Department of Family and Children Services (telephone number 706-310-2260). In the absence of such child welfare agency, such report shall be made the Oconee County Sheriff's Department (telephone number 706-769-3945) or other

appropriate police authority or to the District Attorney for the Western Judicial Circuit.

Any report filed or made pursuant to this policy statement shall contain such information as required by law, including the names and addresses of the child and the child's parents or caretakers, if known, the child's age, the nature and extent of the child's injuries, including any evidence of previous injuries, and any other information that the reporting person believes might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries and the identity of the perpetrator.

(e) Any person or entity participating in the making of a report or causing a report to be made to a child welfare agency providing protective services or to an appropriate police authority pursuant to Georgia law or participating in any judicial proceeding or any other proceeding resulting therefrom shall, in so doing, be immune from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed, provided such participation pursuant to applicable law is made in good faith. Any person making a report, whether or not required by applicable law, shall be immune from liability under O.C.G.A. §19-7-5.

(f) Suspected child abuse which is required to be reported by any person pursuant to this policy statement shall be reported even though the reasonable cause to believe that such abuse has occurred or is occurring is based, in whole or in part, upon any communication to that person which is otherwise made privileged or confidential by law; provided, however, that the pastor or other ministerial staff member shall not be required to report child abuse reported solely within the context of confession or other similar communication required to be kept confidential under church doctrine or practice. When the pastor or other ministerial staff member receives information about child abuse from any other source, the pastor or other ministerial staff member shall comply with the reporting requirements of this policy statement, even though the pastor or other ministerial staff member may have also received a report of child abuse from the confession of the perpetrator.

(g) Any person required by this policy statement to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a misdemeanor under Georgia law.

### 3. Notification to Insurance Carrier.

Briarwood shall promptly notify its insurance carrier of each reported case of alleged or suspected child abuse.

## **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.



**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