

North Oak Christian Church
Abuse Prevention or Child Protection Policy
September 2019

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Statement of Policy

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, clergy, employees, elected and appointed leaders, and members & friends of the congregation are “ministers*”. The success and strength of this policy is not created by its words, but by the actions of our Ministers* who must carry it out. It is especially important that every minister* to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. Each minister* is obligated to demonstrate and encourage self-care, continuing education, maintenance of personal boundaries, and support of those who are vulnerable, or in need of support or refuge. Every minister* should seek to protect vulnerable individuals of every kind and to comply with State laws as may be their statutory obligation.

Each minister* shall acquire knowledge of the details of this policy and related procedures in order to:

1. Prevent “sexual exploitation” or “sexual harassment”.
2. Prevent abuse or exploitation of “vulnerable adults”.
3. Prevent abuse or mistreatment of children.
4. Demonstrate appropriate physical contact or verbal interaction.
5. Enforce standards for contact between employees and children.
6. Communicate to others and practice guidelines regarding electronic communications and social media.
7. Manage risk of one-on-one contact between adults and children.
8. Recognize the importance, and act upon observations or allegations of behavior outside policy boundaries.
9. Understand and accept obligations and know how to report suspected abuse of children or “vulnerable adults”.
10. Recognize circumstances of “sexual harassment” and the obligation and means to report to church leadership.
11. Refrain from using a position of power or authority to exploit an advantage over any other person, adult or child.

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Screening & Selection

Application & Qualification --

All employment candidates shall

1. Complete an application reciting work history, education, years of residence history and disclosure of criminal convictions. An affirmative response is required to each and every question; no answers may be omitted. Falsification of any aspect of the application shall be grounds for immediate dismissal.
2. Provide a minimum of three references, which shall include both work-related and personal.
3. Grant written permission to conduct a background check.
4. Upon selection, sign an acknowledgement of these policies and procedures.

Volunteers shall be active members or friends of this church for no less than six months before being permitted to work in child oriented programs.

The Personnel Support Team and Board representative (Interviewing Team) shall interview every candidate for employment. The Interviewing team shall contact and interview at least three references for each employment candidate.

Background Checking --

The Interviewing team is responsible for conducting a criminal background check on every employment candidate and volunteer in keeping with current State of Missouri regulations for licensed childcare.

Criminal background checks may be repeated for employees and volunteers who perpetually work with children every three years.

Approval Procedure --

The Interviewing Team shall review each background check and agree that the applicant is eligible for employment.

Where a criminal record exists, consideration shall be given to:

1. Seriousness of the crime;
2. Statutes that may legally disqualify the person from working with minors;
3. Length of time since the last offense;
4. Pattern of criminal activity; and
5. Activities the applicant has been involved in since the offense(s) occurred.

Conviction for the following crimes shall be considered barriers to employment:

1. Violent crimes
2. Sexual assault
3. Sexual abuse or neglect of a child
4. Drug offenses or driving offenses (depending upon position requirements)
5. Convicted or Registered Sex Offenders

Record Retention –

The individual record shall include:

- Employee application
- Permission to perform a background check
- Results of the background check

Training

To fulfill our leadership obligation to our ministers*, each new employee shall review and agree to follow NOCC's Abuse Prevention – Child Protection Policy.

Internal Feedback Systems

In ordinary administrative matters we expect ministers* to address concerns with the Board. However, situations affecting the health and welfare of children and “vulnerable adults” require a direct and expedited means of communication, so if a minister* observes violations, s/he has a **right and duty to report** it directly to the Board Moderator.

Congregational Awareness

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the children, parents, “vulnerable adults” and guardians we serve. They are entitled to know what to expect of our ministries, the ministers* who serve them, and to know related policies. This entire policy shall be posted on the NOCC website, www.nocckc.org . The webmaster will keep it up to date at the direction of the Board.

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In Missouri, if you have “reasonable cause to believe” a child is being abused or neglected, you must report that suspicion to the state Department of Children’s Services or law enforcement – and you are required by law to do it immediately.

Responding

NOCC is committed to prompt, professional and measured response to all circumstances, which may range from violations of these policies and procedures to suspicion or allegations of abuse. We are committed to (1) seriously consider the concerns of victims; (2) undertake a fair investigation of policy violations; (3) protect the confidentiality of parties involved in investigation; (4) report to and cooperate fully with public authorities; and (5) communicate fully with the congregation within the bounds of individual rights to confidentiality. Fulfillment of this commitment requires every minister* to assume responsibility as part of their respective duties.

Responsibility of Ministers* –

Each employee or volunteer is obligated to live the standard and help others to do the same. NOCC expects that ministers* will relate to each other in a cordial and professional manner and will support, encourage and mentor each other. Each is obligated to guide and gently correct others as they would in a circumstance of high personal risk. When another person, regardless of status, rank or power, repeats a violation of our standards, the observer must report the violation to the Board or the Board Moderator.

Reporting responsibility includes incidents of child-on-child sexual activity, dangerous behaviors, employee-on-employee “sexual harassment”, bullying of any kind, and exploitation of a “vulnerable adult” or circumstances which rise to the level of abuse requiring action by a “mandatory reporter”.

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Monitoring Compliance with Standards —

Following the pattern of good employment practices, Ministers* shall follow a process of “progressive discipline” in supervisory relationships with both employees and constituents. This process recognizes that an isolated violation of the Code of Conduct or Ministry Standards may not be intended or malicious; the first transgression may simply indicate the failure to properly train. Nevertheless, repeated violations cannot be tolerated. Each Minister* shall employ “progressive discipline”, and maintain records of both monitoring and disciplinary activity.

APPENDIX A – Definitions

Minister* –

Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, clergy, employees, elected and appointed leaders, and members & friends of the congregation are “ministers”*.

APPENDIX B – Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct defines individual responsibilities as ministers* to meet the expectations of North Oak Christian Church with respect to behavior or conduct in the service of the ministries of the church, especially those which serve children and “vulnerable adults”.

General Requirements --

Each person subject to this Code shall

1. Act as a team member in fulfilling ministry objectives
2. Treat children and “vulnerable adults” with respect, and fairly without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion
3. Practice those behaviors we regard as necessary and positive as well as to refrain from those behaviors which have been defined as prohibited.

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General Prohibitions --

The following behaviors are prohibited at all times:

1. Display affection toward a child in privacy.
2. Use profanity or tell off-color jokes.
3. Discuss sexual encounters with or around children or in any way involve children in personal problems or issues.
4. Date or become romantically involved with children.
5. Use or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of children.
6. Possess sexually oriented materials, including printed or online pornography, on church property.
7. Stare at or comment on children's bodies.
8. Engage in inappropriate or unapproved electronic communication with children.
9. Work one-on-one with children in a private setting.
10. Abuse children in anyway including (but not limited to) the following:
 - Physical abuse: hit, spank, shake, slap, unnecessarily restrain
 - Verbal abuse: degrade, threaten, curse
 - Sexual abuse: inappropriately touch, expose oneself, or engage in sexually oriented conversations
 - Mental abuse: shame, humiliate, act cruelly
 - Neglect: withhold food, water, shelter
 - Permit children to engage in the following: hazing, bullying, derogatory name-calling, games of Truth or Dare, ridicule or humiliation or sexual activity
11. Manipulate or exploit a "vulnerable adult" in any way.