

Why do we have a Safe Sanctuaries Policy?

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults.

Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. We want to do all we can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of First Baptist Church of Knoxville, and therefore we believe that implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people is part of our Christian witness.

The policy recognizes that our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable people as we affirm the belief that all individuals are of sacred worth, created in the image of God.

Tragically, churches have all too often not been safe place for these groups of people as sexual abuse and exploitation have occurred frequently in churches, both large and small, urban and rural, and the problem runs across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines.

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

Jesus taught, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

Therefore, we should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;

- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives. (adapted from Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10).

Our Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfill this call for the congregation of First Baptist Church of Knoxville.

FBC Knoxville Youth Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines

All volunteers and staff who work with the youth ministries of FBC Knoxville must:

- be a member or regular attendee of FBC Knoxville for no shorter a time than 6 months.
- complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- provide the names and contact information of three personal references.
- undergo a criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for youth at FBC Knoxville.
- read and sign the complete Safe Sanctuaries policy of the youth program.

Any Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for the youth at FBC Knoxville

Volunteers agree to the possibility of being interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do at the discretion of the Youth Minister and/or other Church staff.

Policies and Procedures

Whenever supervising activities involving youth at FBC Knoxville:

- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable populations should publicly accessible. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/

youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.

- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied with youth
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer may regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.

Regarding electronic, digital and online communication with youth:

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries to youth. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be implemented:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the youths' parent or guardian as well as the pastor in charge should be made aware.
- If an adult leader receives a private text from youth that seems to be of questionable content, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident **immediately**.

Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.

- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.