

# Shallowford Presbyterian Church Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth<sup>1</sup>

Adopted July 16, 2014

rev 02/08/2024

## Introduction

The mission of Shallowford Presbyterian Church is to invite all people to a faithful way of life in Christ and in community. We want that community to be a sanctuary—a place that, especially for our children, is safe and secure. As we nurture, support, educate, and guide our children and youth, we are dedicated to protecting them from physical, emotional and sexual abuse at all times.

We believe that we are doing God’s work, creating a nurturing community of faith that will support all people. We believe in looking for and bringing out the best in all children and adults. While we can never guarantee our children’s safety nor anticipate all risks, we believe that we must take all reasonable measures to minimize risks that we can foresee and establish guidelines that will help us establish the safest and most loving community possible. This document is written to accomplish that aim.

In short, we must do what we can to ensure that our children are protected from physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse. One way to accomplish this goal is by holding periodic training sessions. These training sessions will focus on creating a safe environment for our children, avoiding risky situations, explaining how sexual predators typically operate, and reviewing the requirements of this policy.

This Child/Youth Protection Policy applies to all ministries of Shallowford Presbyterian Church (sometimes referred to as “Shallowford”), except Shallowford Presbyterian School (the “School”). It replaces the policy that was approved by the Shallowford Session on April 20, 2005. This policy will be shared with our affiliate ministries, which may have additional policies that can add to, but not detract from, the requirements of this policy. The School has its own policy, that is in some respects more restrictive than this one, and the School will be treated as an affiliate ministry for purposes of this policy.

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<sup>1</sup> In an emergency situation where health or safety is at risk, call 911 immediately.

Initial here:

## **A. Appropriate Behaviors**

We believe that children are best taught through positive, consistent, and loving guidance. The following behaviors are considered appropriate for adults to use in relating to children and youth<sup>2</sup> when working or volunteering for Shallowford:

1. Welcome each child personally.
2. Listen carefully to children and show interest in what they say
3. Be fair and consistent
4. Have a sense of humor and smile often
5. Focus on positive behaviors and offer praise for that behavior
6. Set clear limits that can be managed by adults and understood by children
7. Provide appropriate, positive discipline when needed, focusing on the behavior, not the child
8. Be mindful of the child's safety at all times, in all circumstances
9. Be a good role model by demonstrating appropriate emotional behavior
10. Focus attention on the well-being of each child as well as on the group as a whole

## **B. Inappropriate, Prohibited Behaviors that can Constitute Physical or Emotional Abuse**

1. No corporal punishment of any child associated with any Shallowford program is allowed. "Corporal punishment" means any conduct which would cause any degree of physical pain or discomfort to a child.
2. No conduct is permitted which would knowingly expose a child to physical pain or endangerment. We also expect our staff and volunteers to strive to avoid causing emotional pain to children other than, of course, pain or embarrassment caused by reasonable discipline, such as "time out."
3. If a child is behaving in such a way as to present a threat to his/her own physical safety or the safety of others, the child should be safely restrained. The adult(s) responsible for the child is to be notified as soon as practicable and the child removed from the program as soon as practicable until such time as the child no longer poses a threat to safety. Any costs, such as transportation or special custodial costs, incurred as a result of removing a child from a program are the responsibility of the child's parent(s) or responsible adult(s).

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this document, the term "children" or "children and youth" refers to all minors under the age of 18.

### **C. Child Abuse and Neglect**

1. "Child sexual abuse" is any act which involves any kind of physical contact with or visible exposure of the genitals, genital area, or breasts of a child or an adult interacting with a child, or any depiction of same. This provision does not apply to reasonable and necessary changing of diapers or toilet training of a young child. "Child sexual abuse" also includes any conduct intended to cause sexual arousal in or in the presence of a child.
2. Child physical abuse is physical injury inflicted or permitted to be inflicted upon a child by a parent or caretaker by other than accidental means.
3. Neglect is the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision or emotional care to a child for whom they are responsible.
4. Child physical and sexual abuse and neglect also include any definitions of such misconduct contained in current state statutes and regulations.
5. Child abuse and neglect will not be permitted or tolerated.

### **D. Reporting Procedures Regarding Actual or Suspected Child Physical or Sexual Abuse**

1. In an emergency situation where health or safety is at risk, call 911 immediately.
2. If you observe or suspect that child physical or sexual abuse or neglect has occurred, immediately notify Shallowford's Senior Pastor (Anna Traynham, cell number 864.982.2453) and one additional Shallowford program staff member of your choice. Program staff members are those holding the following positions: Associate Pastor, Director of Music Ministries, Parish Associate for Congregational Care, and Director of the School. If the Senior Pastor is unavailable, immediately notify the Chair of Shallowford's Personnel Committee or the Clerk of the Session (depending on availability and which of them you can reach first) in place of the Senior Pastor. The names and cell numbers of the current incumbents in these positions are listed at the end of this policy and will be updated annually. In no event are you required to make your report to a Report Recipient you suspect of engaging in abuse. In all cases, your report shall be made to two of the individuals listed above, who will be called the "Report Recipients."
3. If for some reason you cannot reach any of the Report Recipients described immediately above and imminent danger of the child is suspected, then the state Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) should be notified as soon as practicable and not later than within 24 hours through their statewide toll-free hotline then in effect. The State of Georgia child protection reporting number in effect at the time of adoption of this policy is 1.855.422.4453.

4. The Report Recipients will notify DFCS at 1.855.422.4453 within 24 hours after receiving a report of misconduct that, if true, would require reporting to DFCS. A written report of any internal inquiry will be prepared as soon as practicable. The form to be used in documenting such a report can be accessed via this link: <https://www.shallowford.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AllegedAbuseReport.pdf>
5. Any adult volunteer, church member, or Shallowford staff member who is aware of a situation in which a report of actual or suspected physical or sexual abuse of a child at Shallowford has been made is expected to maintain such information in the greatest degree of confidence, sharing it only with those on the church staff, volunteer leaders, and state or county agencies with a need to know.
6. All incidents and suspected abuse will be documented and confidentially kept on file in a secured location in the church office. All incidents and suspected abuse will be reported by the Report Recipients to the church's insurance provider if the incident or suspected abuse involves a church staff member or volunteer or occurs on SPC's property. The accident, incident, and suspected abuse forms will be readily accessible on the Shallowford website and in the church office.

#### **E. Prevention Guidelines**

All programs involving children or youth shall be governed by these guidelines:

1. Two adults or more shall be present at all times for any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth. If two adults cannot attend, the event must be canceled. For example, this includes informal use of the playground during events such as Wednesday Night Supper. The requirement of a second adult can be satisfied by the presence of a supervising minister, staff member, or lay volunteer who has overall responsibility for a program and is available to circulate, checking in frequently with each classroom or setting where another adult is present. However, with written parental permission and the approval of the appropriate program staff member, confirmands can attend outings and events in public locations with only their elder sponsors.
2. Confidential counseling between a staff person or adult volunteer and a child or youth will not occur behind a closed door unless the door has a window that can be seen through. During such counseling sessions, another adult will be present, in the room or in an adjacent room, who is aware that a counseling session is in progress and who could hear and respond in the event of an outcry. If another adult is not continuously present as described above, the counseling session must occur in a room with an open door or in a public place, such as a table at a local coffee shop or restaurant, where sufficient confidentiality can be maintained while keeping the session in constant public view.

3. Confidential counseling will not occur in private settings where the two-person rule above cannot be maintained. In the event that a child or youth approaches a staff person or volunteer under circumstances contrary to those outlined above, the adult will be responsible for immediately moving the counseling session to a setting where the two-person rule can be observed, for example, by suggesting a walk down the sidewalk of a well-traveled street or moving the conversation to a public establishment such as a local coffee shop or restaurant.
4. Counseling between a professionally certified pastoral counselor (or licensed clinician) and a child or youth shall not be bound by the above restrictions. Rather, licensed counselors or therapists shall adhere to the accepted standards of professional conduct as established by their licensing organization, which govern such counseling situations.
5. When transporting children or youth, staff and volunteers will make reasonable efforts to maintain the two-person rule, as described above, or to have more than one child or youth in the vehicle. When it is impracticable to have two adults present, the adult should seek parental permission to transport the child or youth. Such permission may be given in advance and may be ongoing, such as permission to transport youth to school after the Friday morning youth breakfast each week.
6. Classroom doors will have uncovered windows or doors will be left ajar when children and/or youth are present in the room.
7. Written parental permission shall be obtained when groups of children or youth leave church property accompanied by an adult. Such permission shall be given in advance for a full school year. Such permission shall include space for the parent(s) or other responsible adult(s) to furnish information concerning allergies or other special needs. If, in the judgment of the adult supervisor of an event, a special need cannot be accommodated, the child may be obligated to participate in an alternate activity or program. It is the obligation of the parent(s) or child's other responsible adult(s) to furnish Shallowford with complete and accurate information concerning the child's allergies, medical conditions, or special needs, so as to afford the church a full opportunity to determine in advance of an event whether it would be appropriate for the child to participate in the event. It is imperative also that the parent(s) or other responsible adult(s) furnish the church with accurate, up-to-date emergency contact information.
8. Unauthorized persons will not be allowed to remain with a children's or youth group. Unauthorized persons include, but are not limited to: persons with no affiliation with the program, event, or ministry in progress; and children and youth attending an activity for which parental permission is required who do not have consent to attend.

9. No child or youth shall leave a designated meeting area without permission or supervision. For overnight events and events occurring away from the church site, children or youth must have written parental permission to leave an event early except in emergency situations. In instances where a third party is to pick up a child or youth from an event, the parent or custodial adult must give prior written authorization or telephone permission to a staff member and/or Shallowford volunteer in charge.
10. Children from infants through grade 3 must be signed in and out of Sunday School. The sign in/out sheet will include the name and telephone number(s) of the adult responsible for the child, as well as notification of any allergies or special conditions. Sign in/sign out procedures particular to the ministry programs such as our children's choirs, Kids on a Mission, Vacation Bible School, Kids' Night Out, and other programs for children will be coordinated with the input and guidance of Shallowford's Director of Children's Ministries and the Christian Education Committee. Youth in grades 6 through 12 will be required to sign out if they leave an event early in addition to having parental permission.
11. The School as well as independent programs for which Shallowford is a sponsoring institution (such as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and other organizations that use Shallowford's premises) are responsible for developing and implementing their own child and youth protection policies, so long as they are at least as rigorous as the standards set forth in this policy. Copies of such policies must be provided to Shallowford's Personnel Committee. These programs are free to adopt this policy as their own if they so choose.
12. In an instance in which a child or youth is not picked up in a timely manner at the conclusion of an event, the event leaders will attempt to contact the parent or custodial adult, followed by the emergency contacts on file. If no authorized person still comes forward to pick up the child or youth three hours following the close of the event, the event leader is authorized to report the child or youth as abandoned to public safety authorities, in consultation with the Senior Pastor or pastor-on-call.
13. Shallowford staff members and volunteers may use social media and texting to communicate with youth in grades 6 through 12. It is a best practice for any adult to copy another adult on any text message sent to a child or youth in connection with SPC programs and events. Shallowford's staff will follow this practice, and other adult volunteers are encouraged to do so.
14. Any volunteer or staff member who believes that a child or youth is experiencing emotional issues or exhibiting signs of emotional abuse is encouraged to contact the Interim Pastor or other appropriate program staff member so that counseling and pastoral care can be provided.

## **F. Education**

Sexual predators typically use socially desirable behaviors to establish the trust of adults and children. As a result, prevention of child sexual abuse, both within and outside of the church, suffers from the dual limitations of (1) the inability to identify abusers before the abuse occurs, and (2) the curtailment of socially desirable behaviors caused by preventive efforts. As a response, Shallowford will provide periodically a class for parents to help them understand the dangers of abuse facing children (both within and outside the church) and to give them concrete steps to teach their children, in an age-appropriate manner, to recognize inappropriate conduct by adults and to know that parents and other adults will listen to and believe them. Shallowford volunteers are encouraged, but not required, to attend such training in addition to training they are required to attend. Such class will include, at a minimum, the following elements:

- Explanation of the problem of child sexual abuse, especially as it relates to churches.
- Explanation of common “grooming” behaviors of sexual predators.
- Explanation that sexual predators have no physical profile and may be very charismatic, and that pre-abusive grooming behaviors are largely indistinguishable from socially-desirable behaviors that the church wants to encourage.
- Description of specific, concrete and age-appropriate steps that parents can take to talk to their children and prepare them.
- Description of this policy.

## **G. Selection and Screening of Staff**

### **1. Employed Staff**

#### **a. Clergy Staff**

Clergy staff will be required to give consent for a criminal background check upon being called to ministry at Shallowford. The Personnel Committee is responsible for ensuring that a criminal background check is conducted on all clergy staff. Any questions raised by the criminal background check will be discussed and resolved by the Chair of the Pastor Nominating Committee and the Chair of the Personnel Committee.

#### **b. Other Staff**

All persons employed by Shallowford Presbyterian Church or the School shall:

- i. Be at least 14 years of age and be at least four years older than the children or youth with whom they are working and, if under 21, be supervised by an adult over the age of 21;

- ii. Complete an employment application or employee information form;
- iii. Provide one or more character references. These references may be oral or in writing;
- iv. Within the first week of their employment and thereafter at least every 3 years, complete a mandatory online training session on the prevention, procedures, and reporting of suspected abuse that includes training on this policy; and
- v. Complete a consent form for a criminal record check. Shallowford will obtain a criminal background check on every staff member at least once every 3 years, and applicants must pass this criminal record check to the satisfaction of supervisory church staff. No applicant with known prior incidents of physical or sexual abuse, child neglect, child exploitation, or other forms of sexual misconduct will be hired by Shallowford. Other information revealed by the background check will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Personal information provided by staff and applicants in connection with the consent for criminal record check and the results of criminal record checks shall be maintained in confidence.
- vi. First Aid and CPR training is offered annually by the School. Program staff and paid nursery workers are required to take this course and keep their certification up to date.



## 2. Volunteers

- a. All volunteers working with children or youth shall be at least four years older than the children or youth with whom they are volunteering to work and, if under 21, be supervised by an adult over the age of 21.
- b. All volunteers working with children or youth on a continuing basis<sup>3</sup> shall:
  - i. If age 18 or older, complete consent for criminal record check. Shallowford will screen each volunteer at least once every 3 years for offenses that pose a risk to the health and safety of others. No volunteer with known prior incidents of physical or sexual abuse, child neglect, child exploitation, or other forms of sexual misconduct will be permitted to interact with minors at Shallowford. Other information revealed by the background check will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Personal information provided by volunteer applicants in connection with the consent for criminal record check and the results of criminal record checks shall be maintained in confidence. The Director of Operations will receive and monitor background check reports on all staff members and all volunteers, and will share concerns with the Senior Pastor, who will determine whether the information needs to be shared with other program staff on a “need to know” basis.
  - ii. Within the first month after becoming a volunteer and thereafter at least once every 3 years, volunteers 18 and older shall complete a training session that includes information on the prevention, procedures, and reporting of suspected abuse and that includes training on this policy. Volunteers who provide documentation that they have participated in substantially similar training elsewhere within the previous three years and volunteers under the age of 18 will be required to undergo training only on this policy.
  - iii. Be active in the Shallowford Presbyterian Church community for at least six months or work exclusively partnered with a longer-term member of the community and supply one or more references if they have been at Shallowford less than six months. The references may be oral or in writing.

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<sup>3</sup> Volunteers who are not generally expected to volunteer more than 8-10 hours per year on an irregular, occasional basis (e.g., a parent who shows up to read an occasional story or to help with a party) are not required to comply with the training and background check requirements of this policy. However, the two-person rule must be followed with respect to such volunteers.

- iv. We seek to be a welcoming and inviting redemptive community of believers. However, redemptive action and efforts to ensure the safety of our children and youth may sometimes be in tension, as in the case of known sex offenders who participate in the life of our church. Known sex offenders are encouraged to make their status and any terms of probation known to the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor will ask a task force of the Session to establish appropriate boundaries, in writing, governing the life of the offender within the church, including areas on our campus where he/she may go unaccompanied. No decisions made by the task force will conflict with any of the provisions of this Child/Youth Protection Policy. The known offender will acknowledge in writing his receipt and acceptance of this policy and of the boundaries imposed. At no time shall a known offender (1) be assigned to volunteer in ministries with children or youth; (2) congregate with children and youth; or (3) be allowed in areas of the church or grounds dedicated to children and youth or in use primarily by children and youth. As circumstances warrant, the Senior Pastor may identify a known offender to church staff members and leaders whose ministries should be informed. Known offenders will receive the normal pastoral care afforded any member. Should a known offender violate any of the terms in this policy or disregard any boundaries set by SPC, the violation will be addressed by the Senior Pastor following consultation with the task force.

## **H. Implementation**

This policy shall replace the existing Shallowford Presbyterian Church Policy on Supervision of Children, effective August 17, 2014. All Shallowford volunteers and staff, including those who commenced service under the previous policy, shall be required to be re-screened under these new procedures.

Upon adoption, these policies will be accessible on Shallowford's web site. Additionally, printed copies of the policy will be maintained and posted in the church office and the School office and will be furnished upon request.

Affiliated programs using Shallowford's facility who want to maintain their own policies on the prevention of child abuse will provide a copy of such policies to the Chair of the Shallowford Personnel Committee for review and approval. All such policies shall be approved as long as they provide at least as much protection as this policy.

The Associate Pastor for Mission and Discipleship shall report to the Session six months following the implementation of this policy and at 12-month intervals thereafter regarding the implementation of the policy, including positive and negative effects of the policy, any obstacles that have been encountered, etc. The goal of such an assessment and report shall be to ensure that this policy is being enforced in a manner consistent with Shallowford's mission and culture.

## 2024 Alleged Abuse Report Recipients

Title	Name	Cell Number	Additional Number
Senior Pastor	Anna Traynham	864.982.2453	404.321.1844 (Church) Ext 222
Associate Pastor	Bradley Kibler	404.839.0589	404.321.1844 (Church) Ext 225
Associate Pastor	Landon Dillard	704.502.6382	404.321.1844 (Church) Ext 230
Director of Music Ministries			404.321.1844 (Church) Ext 224
Church Administrator	Sandra Ward	512.571.8284	404.321.1844 (Church) Ext 234
Head of Shallowford School	Meredith Moseley	770.363.4024	404.321.3061 (School)
Chair, Personnel Committee	Sara Simonds	404.434.7959	
Clerk of Session	Bruce Morris	404.895.6069	

I have read and understand Shallowford Presbyterian's Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth.

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Name Printed

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Signature

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Date

***Please tear off and save this page for your reference.***

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