

The Heights Church Denver

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Revised August 2022

GENERAL POLICY

The Heights Church Denver has a profound moral and legal obligation to reduce the possibility of child abuse from ever occurring at The Heights events or on The Heights properties. This policy has been formed with that obligation in mind. Incidents of child sexual, emotional, and physical abuse or neglect cut across all boundaries. Each year, over one million children are victims. Abuse causes deep and sometimes lifelong psychological damage to its victims and their families. Further, when abuse occurs, or allegation of abuse, in the context of a Christian organization, the reputations of the Lord and the Church are both made at risk.

Therefore, both in response to the provisions of the National Child Protection Act of 1993 and because The Heights Church desires that its facilities and activities be safe and secure for all children and youth who attend or participate in The Heights events, The Heights has adopted the following Child/Youth Protection Policy.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define child abuse
- Ensure that all volunteers and compensated child and youth workers understand The Heights Church's employment selection practices (as they relate to child abuse)
- Provide for the reporting of suspected abuse
- Ensure the appropriate supervision and conduct of workers
- Train workers regarding child abuse
- Set up a process to deal with workers who have been accused of child abuse
- Establish a staff and volunteer screening process
- Establish a policy for non-Organization groups who are using or renting The Heights Church facilities

PROCEDURE

A. Definition of Child Abuse

1. What is a Child?

Part of The Heights Church's mission is to minister to infants, toddlers, elementary school, middle school and high school students including those who just graduated from high school. Due to the unique nature of our Heights Kids and Heights Students programs, and the cultural phenomenon of more students graduating from high school at a later age, the following exception to this definition may be granted on a case-by-case basis, by the Program Director, or his/her designate, or the Child Protection Coordinator:

For purposes of this policy, a student or teen volunteer who is 18, may be treated as a minor if:

- They recently graduated from high school in the same calendar year. AND
- They turned 18 within the previous 9 months.]

If these two conditions are met, and an exemption to the policy is granted, a person may be treated as a minor up until August 31 of the current calendar year. **Both** of these conditions (above) must be met. Otherwise, The Heights Church will consider a minor as anyone under the age of 18, and an adult as anyone 18 and over.

2. What is considered child abuse?

Colorado Law defines *child abuse* as “[involving] injury or threat of injury to a child’s life or health. It can include physical, sexual, and sometimes emotional/mental abuse. Child abuse can also include neglect and can cause emotional or physical harm.”

Colorado Law defines *emotional abuse* as “when someone threatens, bullies, criticizes, or shames a child over and over again.”

Colorado Law defines *physical abuse* as “when someone touches a child in a way that causes injury or pain. For example, someone might punch, shove, slap, kick, or threaten a child.”

Colorado Law defines *neglect* as “when a parent or caregiver does not provide enough care to support a child’s [physical, emotional, educational, and/or medical] development.”

3. What is sexual child abuse?

Colorado Law defines *sexual child abuse* as “when an adult or an older child commits sexual acts on a child.” Sexual abuse almost always occurs by someone whom the child knows. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- Fondling of breast, buttocks or groin
- Oral, genital, and anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments
- Pornographic videos or pictures
- Obscene phone calls
- Obscene messages, Instant Messages, Posts and other digital/written communication
- Exhibitionism (also “*Indecent Exposure*”)
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

B. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

While not expressly mandated in Colorado's Child Protection Act as a mandatory reporting party of child abuse, the Heights Church considers itself essentially and ethically mandated to report suspected and observed child abuse or neglect to the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare division. The Heights Church staff and volunteers will report child abuse to 911 in case of immediate emergency, or to 1-844-CO-4-KIDS (**1-844-264-5437**) in suspected situations that require more information.

1. How to Report an Incident

Any Heights Church staff, employee, or volunteer **must** report any suspicions immediately to a supervisor (paid staff member). The Child Protection Coordinator and/or a paid member of The Heights Church staff will guide the reporter through the *Form for Reporting Abuse*. Any suspicions or allegations must also be reported to the Child Protection Coordinator. The Heights Church’s Child Protection Coordinator is currently the Director of Family Ministries, Heyden Peery.

Heyden Peery’s primary phone number is: (512) 653-1893. The Heights Church’s primary phone number is (720) 446-9145. It is the responsibility of every staff employee or volunteer to ensure that **at least two** paid staff members are aware of the verbal and/or written report.

2. After a Report is Made

The Child Protection Coordinator or his/her designate will see that an immediate investigation is conducted in conjunction with appropriate leadership. If it is determined that child abuse has occurred, the Child Protection Coordinator or his/her designate will place a “HOT LINE” phone call to the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare division.

- **The hot line phone number for the great Denver area is 1-844-264-5437.**

It is the right of any employee or volunteer to make their own call to the Child Welfare Division of Human Services if they are not satisfied leadership has completed a proper investigation and/or actions.

Once the governing state agency accepts the telephone report as legitimate (probable basis of truth), the agency will assign a caseworker to investigate.

C. Allegations Made Against Staff or Volunteers

1. Paid Staff

In the event an allegation is made against a paid staff person, that staff member will automatically be either relieved from any further activity or function whereby he/she has any contact with kids or students, or put on paid leave, until the allegation has been resolved. This means that the accused is not allowed to work in his/her previous role, but will continue to receive his/her usual pay until an investigation can be completed.

2. Volunteer

The Heights Church's policy is to immediately remove the volunteer from his or her role. The volunteer will then not be permitted to serve in a volunteer capacity until any allegations are fully and undeniably resolved.

3. The Heights Church's Internal Reporting Procedure

Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult volunteer team member and/or paid team member and a child should be immediately reported to the supervisor and the Child Protection Coordinator, Heyden Peery. The accused person will be confronted immediately and investigated. Prompt warnings (a written record must be kept) will be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored diligently. The adult team member's services will be terminated immediately for gross violation of Heights Family Ministries safety policy.

The Heights Church's elder team, insurance company, and attorney will be advised of an allegation of sufficient gravity. At the discretion of the elder team, an outside professional may be hired to monitor the investigation.

It is the responsibility of every staff employee or volunteer to ensure that at least two paid staff members are aware of the verbal and/or written report regarding a paid, or volunteer team member. If any employee or volunteer is not sure leadership has completed a proper investigation and/or actions, they have the right and responsibility to inform a third leadership staff member and/or board member. It is the right of any staff employee or volunteer to make their own call to the Child Welfare Division of Family Services (**1-844-264-5437**) if they are not satisfied leadership has completed a proper investigation and/or actions.

4. Rights of the Accused

If a staff member or volunteer is being investigated by a governmental agency because of a report of suspected child abuse, he/she has certain rights. These include:

- a) The right to be informed of the nature of the report (not including information about the person(s) who reported the alleged abuse or neglect).
- b) The right to provide full information regarding his/her knowledge of the alleged report and to identify witnesses who can support his/her explanation.
- c) The right to deny the social worker entrance to his/her home or to discuss the allegations. (If he/she chooses not to cooperate with the social worker conducting the investigation, the assistance of law enforcement may be obtained.)

5. Worker's Rights if a Report of Child Abuse is Confirmed

Should a report of abuse be confirmed following an investigation by the governmental agency, the worker will have certain rights. These include:

- a) The right to request and receive information about the finding (not including information about the person(s) who reported the alleged abuse or neglect).
- b) The right to disagree with the finding and to request a formal hearing by a State Department hearing office.
- c) The right to legal representation.

NOTE: Adults who work with children and youth should understand that sexual relationships, physical abuse, and emotional abuse with minors can lead to a felony conviction and imprisonment. Workers for The Heights Church should also understand that The Heights Church's insurance policy may not provide them with a legal defense of a sexual, physical, or emotional misconduct charge, or pay any portion of a jury verdict assessed against them because of such conduct.

6. Records Maintained by the State

If the agency finds that there is sufficient evidence of child abuse, neglect or sexual abuse to confirm the allegation, a report will be submitted to the appropriate law enforcement officials; that record will be kept by the state agency, and information concerning the victim and the alleged perpetrator will be entered into the Child Abuse/Neglect Central Registry. A person who is placed in the registry as an abuser or neglecter is barred from employment, residence or volunteering in child care facilities, and the information may be given to other governmental agencies who have a need to know.

If the report is unfounded, the record will be kept for two years and then destroyed. No information will then be entered into the Central Registry or be shared with other governmental agencies.

7. Public Statements

Under no circumstances is anyone affiliated with The Heights Church, other than its Elders or their designate(s), permitted to make a public statement.

The basic content of the public statement will be as follows: *"An allegation was received by the Human Services Department. They (Human Services) are investigating the allegations, and we are wholly cooperating. There is no additional information I can share until the Human Services department completes its investigation."*

8. Follow-up Care

The Heights Church recognizes the trauma and stress that victims and their families suffer when an abusive situation is suspected. Therefore, The Heights Church will offer to provide up to six (6) counseling sessions each for the victim and his or her family. This should not be interpreted as an admission of guilt or liability on the part of The Heights Church.

Should the alleged perpetrator be a Heights Church staff member or volunteer team member, up to four (4) counseling sessions will be offered for that person during the investigation, or after it is determined the charges were unfounded and the staff or volunteer returns to work.

D. Heights Church facilities being rented or used by non-Heights Church groups

When a non-Heights Church group uses any of The Heights Church's facilities, they are fully responsible for their own programming, supervision, child protection, safety procedures and emergency preparedness.

Although a Child Protection Policy cannot be readily enforced with non-Heights Church groups who use the facilities, it is still our duty to execute due diligence in the protection children and youth. Therefore, it will be contractually understood that if it becomes known or suspected to any staff member of a possible allegation of abuse on any Heights Church property, Heights Church staff have the right to question the leadership of the group to ensure proper attention has been given.

In the event of an unsatisfactory response, Heights Church leadership will contact at least two members of the group's leadership. If still unsatisfied, the Heights Church may make a hotline call to the Child Welfare Division of Family Services (**1-844-264-5437**). If abuse is witnessed or takes place in the presence of a staff member, a hotline call or appropriate action will be taken immediately.

E. Screening Process for Adult Staff and Volunteers Who Work Directly with Children

1. Position Description

Each applicant will receive a position description that defines the qualifications for that position.

2. Application

A complete application should be on file for each staff and volunteer.

3. Interview

Whenever logistically possible, a face-to-face interview will be conducted with applicants. In the event that a face-to-face interview cannot happen, a thorough phone screening will be conducted.

4. Background Checks

The final stage for accepting an applicant is the SRS and Criminal Background checks in the states to candidate has resided over the past five years. Background checks will be completed for all staff and volunteer applicants.

5. Training

Required training will include the following, with regular refresher courses:

- a) Instructions as to the specific role in order to assure competence to perform their assigned tasks
- b) Child abuse prevention training, including the following:
 - A basic understanding of children's physical and emotional development
 - Definition of child abuse
 - Sexual and physical abuse symptoms
 - Familiarity with organizational policies regarding child abuse and neglect
 - Rationale behind screening procedures

- Civil and criminal consequences of misconduct
- Reporting procedures for observed or suspected misconduct
- Understanding of the chain of authority
- Review of the Rules for Conduct with Children and Youth
- Access to “Forms for Reporting Abuse”
- Understanding the right of each staff or volunteer to make a hotline call Giving contact information for at least two leadership staff including the Child Protection Coordinator

F. Supervision of Children or Youth

Even though a comprehensive hiring and screening process is used and reasonable care has been taken in selecting part-time and volunteer workers, maintaining proper supervision of children and youth is also necessary.

Programs that involve children and youth must always have adequate supervisory personnel. Events that do not have adequate supervising adults should be canceled. When questions arise, contact the Child Protection Coordinator, Heyden Peery. Heyden's primary number is (512)653-1893.

G. Guidelines for Conduct with Children and Youth

Except as otherwise noted, the following guidelines shall apply to all paid and volunteer kids and youth team members, including full-time staff, part-time staff, regular volunteer staff, and adults who occasionally accompany youth on trips and other special activities.

1. All meetings involving a worker and an individual youth of the same or opposite sex should occur in a public place where other people are present. Some examples of public places where other people are gathered include restaurants, parks, or a sporting event. With planning it is possible to have a confidential conversation without being out of view.
2. Under no circumstances shall any worker be alone with an individual child or youth (excluding transportation, *if absolutely necessary*).
 - a) When providing rides to youth of the same or opposite sex, youth workers should have a third person in the car whenever possible. Although situations can require the driver to be alone in a car with a student of the same sex (i.e., picking up the first student or dropping off the last student), this should be the exception rather than the norm and parental consent must be obtained. Care should be taken to PLAN AHEAD to avoid finding oneself in these situations. Under no circumstances shall any worker be alone in a car with an individual youth of the opposite sex.
 - b) As a general rule, child and youth workers shall not be alone in a room with an individual youth of the same or opposite sex. If the situation becomes unavoidable (e.g., last one out of the cabin or dorm), the adult shall wait outside the room or close to an open front door.

3. In group sleeping arrangements (e.g. Camp, youth group trips, Missions trips) two adults must be present with any number of youths during the stated “lights out” time. Under no circumstances shall any worker share a bed with a youth.

4. Although physical affection can have an appropriate place in ministry, workers shall use discretion as to the frequency and type of physical affection they provide to youth of the same or opposite sex. Specifically, workers should typically refrain from giving a student a back massage or a front-to-front hug. Workers should never have students sit on their laps, or vice-versa.

5. Leader:child ratio for the Heights Kids classrooms will be observed as listed below in accordance with the State of Colorado’s standards for adult supervision for children.

- a) For children 3 years and younger: An adult/leader:infant ratio of 1:5.
- b) For children 3-5 years: An adult/leader:toddler ratio of 1:8.
- c) For kids 5 years+: An adult/leader:child ratio of 1:10.

6. An adult/leader:youth ratio of 1:12 (maximum) for overnight events, will be observed. A leader may occasionally be a minor. Any leader who is a minor must be under direct adult supervision at all times.

7. If touching does occur, it should be in response to the need of the child and never to the need of the adult. It should always be with the child’s permission. A team member shall never, under any circumstances, touch a student’s breasts, buttocks, or groin or vice versa.

8. Physical restraint should be used only in special circumstances and in order to protect the health and welfare of the student, other students, volunteers or staff. Corporal punishment is never permissible.

9. When operating a motor vehicle to transport minors on behalf of The Heights Church, team members are not allowed to use a cell phone.

10. Social Networking (IM’s, Facebook, Texting, Twitter, Etc.) should be used with care when communicating to children and youth. Youth workers should try to keep digital communication public, during normal waking hours (7am-8pm), and appropriate to the student. Organization leadership can review all digital communication between the youth worker and children or youth at any time.

When questions arise, contact the Child Protection Coordinator, Heyden Peery. Heyden’s primary phone number is: (512) 653-1893. The Heights Church’s primary phone number is (720) 446-9145.

The Heights Church

FORM FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

It is the policy of The Heights Church to report suspected cases of child abuse. Any person who suspects that a child has been subjected to physical, mental, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, can and should report that matter. Please give this completed form to a paid staff supervisor or the Child Protection Coordinator. Please ensure that at least two paid staff members are aware of this report.

Current Date: _____

About the Child/Youth:

Name _____

Age _____ Birth Date ____/____/____ Sex M / F

Address _____ City _____

County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Alternate Phone _____

Parents or Guardians of Child/Youth:

Full Name(s) _____

Address _____ City _____

County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

About the Alleged Perpetrator

Name _____ Age _____ Sex M / F

Address (if known) _____ City _____

County _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Alternate Phone _____

How does the minor know the alleged perpetrator? _____

The report was made as a result of:

- a. ____ Observing physical and/or behavioral indicators which led to the suspicion of abuse.
- b. ____ A statement made by the child.

If based on the child's statement, write what was said accurately and objectively.

(Attach a Detailed Statement)

What were the circumstances surrounding the disclosure (When, where, and how were the facts disclosed to you?)

(Attach a Detailed Statement)

What is the child's condition, including the nature and extent of injury? Note date, time, and place where alleged abuse took place.

(Attach a Detailed Statement)

Who else has been told? _____

Has it been reported to the authorities? Yes / No If so, When? _____

If so, To Who? _____ By whom? _____

Additional comments, concerns, or observations: _____

(Attach a Detailed Statement)

Person making this report _____ Job Title _____

Please print

Phone _____ Alternate Phone _____

E-mail _____

Reporter's Signature _____ Date ____ / ____ / ____

Staff Person Receiving this Report: _____

2nd Staff Person Who is aware of this Report: _____