

Child Abuse Prevention

Abuse Prevention for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults



2023 - 2024

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What We Believe

We believe: it is our intention to protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our care. Children, youth, and parents need to know we have taken every reasonable step to ensure their child's safety in our ministry.

We believe: it is our intention to protect our ministry. By requiring child protection training and implementing screening and supervision policies, we are modeling reasonable safety procedures to others who look to our church as an example of an effective ministry to children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

We believe: it is our intention to protect employees and volunteer workers in our ministry from being exposed to false accusations of sexual misconduct. To this end, we have screening and supervision policies in place to protect our ministry employees and volunteers.

Mandatory Requirements

We acknowledge that our faith compels us to provide protection and welcome all children, youth, and vulnerable adults and those committed to ministering to them as employees and volunteers. Immanuel Church has deemed it necessary to outline policies and procedures that can:¹

1. prevent any abuse from occurring in our churches (**SCREENING**)
2. provide a safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults (**SUPERVISION**)²
3. disclose abuse; and safeguard the volunteers and employees who minister to children, youth, and vulnerable adults (**REPORTING**)
4. prepare our churches to respond appropriately (**RESPONSE**)

¹ Immanuel Church adheres to the following policies and procedures outlined in this document.

² Any person who is known or suspected to pose a threat to children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving these groups.

1. Screening

One strategy to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is through a thorough screening. It is time-consuming and costly but necessary to ensure that every ministry involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults has the most dependable, dedicated, and experienced employees and volunteers.

Employees and Volunteers

All, whether they are an employee or volunteer, will complete the following forms:

1. Application
2. Permission to Obtain a Background Check (form) — all employees and volunteers will be screened using a third-party investigator.^{3,4}
3. Personal References⁵
 - a) **Volunteers:** provide two (2) references, either personal or professional. (References *should not* include Immanuel's pastors, ministers, or church employees.)
 - b) **Short-term, Occasional, or Event Specific Volunteer:** exempted as long as they are with a trained employee or volunteer who has completed "Child Abuse Prevention" Training.

Six-month Waiting Period (Volunteers)

Volunteers should be a part of our congregation for at least six months before serving. Exceptions can be made if either of the following two requirements are met:

1. The person asked to serve has been in ministry with children, youth, or vulnerable adults for at least six months in their prior church.
2. The person can provide a reference(s) from a staff member who worked at the prior church.

If an exception is granted, a personal interview with the minister may be necessary.

Personal Interview (Employees and Volunteers)

The interview aims to determine why a candidate desires to work more closely with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Training Employees and Volunteers

Child Abuse Prevention training will be provided to new hires and volunteers at the start of their work and at least once every three years.

³ All original documentation will be kept securely by Immanuel. Applications and the results of all forms of screenings will be kept strictly confidential by authorized employees. Access to said documentation will be maintained by the church administrator/executive minister, children's minister, youth minister, worship minister, or childcare center directors. No information will be given about any person without the proper release form or legal documentation.

⁴ Background checks will be conducted every three (3) years unless a ministry specifies, in writing, owing to state or federal requirements. Our current provider is ClearStar (7/23), which conducts tri-state area and nationwide background checks.

⁵ Employees: reference the Employee Manual regarding references.

2. Supervision

The following basic guidelines will be followed to provide the best protective care for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, employees, and volunteers in any church-sponsored activity or ministry.

1. **The Rule of Three:** A minimum of one (1) adult and (2) children or youth should be present. If less than two (2) children or youth are present, two (2) adults should be present supervising.^{6 7}
2. All persons supervising children or youth shall be four (4) years older than those they supervise.

Parent Obligation

1. We urge parents and guardians to always know where their children and youth are, who they are with, and what they do when on the grounds.
2. It is strongly advised that children under ten (10) not play in unsupervised areas.
3. We encourage parents and guardians to quickly pick up their children or students once a worship or ministry event is concluded. Employees and volunteers often have engagements or plans.

Supervision Guideline Specifics

1. On-site will be an adult (employee or volunteer) who has attended Child Abuse Prevention Training and passed a background check. The individual will be referred to as a qualified employee or volunteer.
2. A qualified adult will oversee rooms, activities, events, childcare, music lessons, etc.
3. An “occasional” volunteer may not have passed the necessary background check or completed Child Abuse Prevention Training. Still, an employee or a qualified volunteer will always accompany the “occasional” volunteer. It is inappropriate to leave the “occasional” volunteer alone with the participants.

Regarding Restrooms and Changing Diapers

To properly supervise bathroom visits:

1. Accompany children to and from the restrooms.
2. Children age five (5) or younger should be assisted as needed in the restroom by a volunteer or employee. Leave the bathroom door ajar with a second adult nearby for additional accountability.
3. The restroom should be checked to ensure that it is safe.
4. Avoid being alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult inside the restroom.
5. If assistance is required, two adults should be present or prop open the door so that a second adult can visually or verbally monitor the assisting adult.
6. Never touch the private areas of a child, youth, or vulnerable adults except when necessary, as in the case of changing a diaper.

⁶ Two-Adult Rule: When possible, the two-adult rule shall be used for infants and preschoolers.

⁷ The only exception is the music establishment. See School of Music Specifics for further details.

Regarding Physical Touch

1. Look for opportunities to give numerous high fives, fist bumps, handshakes, etc.
2. Hugs may be administered in public and should be brief. Regarding hugging someone of the opposing gender, side hugs are best.
3. No employee or volunteer may have a sexual relationship with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. In addition, touching in sensitive areas is prohibited (breast, buttock, genitals) or in any way that may be generally perceived as unwanted (gratuitous).
4. Minimize sitting on laps.
5. Take care not to be overly aggressive with children or youth during games where they may accidentally be injured or feel threatened.

One-On-One Interactions

Occasionally, one-on-one interactions are inevitable but should be avoided wherever feasible. Employees and volunteers should avoid situations in which they are isolated with children, youth, and or vulnerable adults. In rare instances, a child, youth, or vulnerable adult may need a one-to-one interaction. The following guidelines should be followed.

1. Conduct one-to-one interactions at a time when others are nearby, and interactions may be seen easily. For instance, consider meeting in a public area such as the Wesley Hall or sitting outside on steps.
2. If a conference behind closed doors is necessary, it should be held in a church room or office with a window as well as a window on the door, and the door should remain unlocked. When available, have an individual sit nearby in the hallway.
3. Notify the minister or director of any frequent one-on-one interactions.

Playground Use

The playground shall be treated as a children's room, and as such, all guidelines shall apply to its use in conjunction with Immanuel-provided ministries.

Sign In & Pick Up of Children

1. Parents or guardians of infants through fifth-graders will register their children at the Children's Welcome Center or other designated spot.
2. Parents or guardians will complete the sign-in process and receive a two-part, numbered sticker for infants through fifth grade.
3. After signing in, the parent or a trusted person will deliver the child(ren) to the assigned room.
4. Infants through preschoolers will be released to a parent, guardian, or trusted person who possesses the other portion of the sticker (not necessarily the same adult that signed the child in). The parent's and guardian's are encouraged to Inform the team before finalizing the sign-in process if a different individual will be picking up the child(ren).

Other Ministry-Specific Guidelines

Transportation

Employees and volunteers may occasionally need to transport children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Follow these guidelines:

1. Drivers must be licensed to operate the type of vehicle involved. Verification is required
2. Transport to the destination with a minimum number of stops.
3. Avoid transporting a single minor without parental or guardian permission.
4. Seat belts must be worn when in a moving vehicle (buses and motorcoaches are exempt when not available). Maintain the correct ratio of passengers per seatbelt.
5. It is the responsibility of drivers to adhere to all state and federal laws.
6. Drivers will not use mobile phones while driving (other than GPS for directions). An exemption is permitted only in cases of evident emergency, and a temporary, safe stop is recommended.
7. Drivers must be a minimum of 25 years old to operate rented or owned 15-passenger vehicle .
8. Drivers of non-15 passenger vehicles must be 21 years or older.
9. If an event or trip requires transportation from the rendezvous point, a minor may not drive themselves or others to that event or trip location. When needed, Immanuel will provide transportation to off-campus events or trips.
10. Drivers are responsible for carrying the proper auto insurance coverage.

Overnight Events

Certain children's and youth ministry events may necessitate overnight accommodations for children, youth, and employees/volunteers. If a particular activity requires overnight accommodations, employees and volunteers shall adhere to the following guidelines:

1. The **Rule of Three** will apply (section 2 – Supervision)
2. The minister or director (an employee) responsible for nighttime events should approve sleeping arrangements.
3. Separate sleeping areas for biological males and females should be provided.
4. An adult of the same gender as the child or youth should be present for all overnight events. When possible, at least one adult will sleep in the same room as the participants or in an adjacent room with the doors open when appropriate.
5. No open nudity.
6. Appropriate, modest sleepwear is encouraged.
7. No employee, volunteer, child, or student is permitted to share a bed.⁸
8. Refrain from being alone with a child or youth in a room with sleeping accommodations.

⁸ Encourage children and students to bring sleeping bags or provide separate blankets when renting a hotel room or staying in a place without individual beds.

9. Showering:

- c) Strive to arrange individual showers for males and females.
- d) In the absence of individual showers, bathing suits should be used for privacy.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Employees and volunteers are encouraged not to engage in sexually related conversations with children or youth and to abstain from providing inappropriate or explicit information about their relationships, dating, or sexual activities. It is expected, however, that children and youth ministries talk or lecture on appropriate touch, impurity, dating, sex, and human sexuality in the context of Biblical teachings. In addition, we recognize that children and youth may have questions/struggles in this area and require the counsel of a reputable adult leader.

The following suggestions are advised while discussing sexual topics:

1. All are responsible for teaching children and youth a biblical viewpoint on these topics.
2. Refrain from discussing sexual issues with the youth of the opposite gender. The exception is teaching a group about the subject from God's Word.
3. It is recommended to have another adult present.
4. If questions or comments on a sexual subject become too detailed or graphic in a group setting, exercise judgment and schedule another time to meet.
5. Volunteers who schedule a meeting with a youth or a child to discuss sexual matters need to notify their ministry designee. (Example: children's director, student minister, executive director of the school of music, their program director, etc.) It is at the discretion of the ministry designee to inform the parent or guardian of the conversation.
6. If there is uncertainty as to whether a communication may be perceived as "sexually-oriented," volunteers are encouraged to treat the interaction as sexually-oriented and adhere to the above guidelines.

Online Digital Interactions with Children and Youth

Given that many of today's children and youth communicate via mobile phones, social media, and other kinds of electronic technology, our employees and volunteers should maintain "above reproach" boundaries with children and youth.⁹

1. Avoid discussing sexual topics with children or youth via digital technology.
2. We advise against following or befriending children or youth with no existing relationship. For children and youth who are known to an employee or volunteer, it is advised that if a friend request is initiated, keep the relationship ministerial in nature.
3. If friends of a minor, be cautious about what is published on social networking networks. Our personal lives should serve as a positive Christian example. Be cautious with what is posted and public positions; they may become grounds for removal from a volunteer position or employment.

⁹ Above Reproach: such that no criticism can be made.

4. Care should be taken for all communications with a child or youth to be caring, and Christ-centered. This includes digital communications. Volunteers should refrain from having extended private (non-group) text conversations with a child or youth. On occasion, employees may contact a child or youth to notify them of an upcoming event, rehearsal, or ongoing ministry activity (with interns, student leaders, etc.) Group messaging is preferable to individual communications.
5. Volunteers should remember that all digital communications are public communications. Even those which are intended to be private messages can become public. These can be viewed by youth and children. Avoid language, gossip, or other subjects that would cause you embarrassment if a child or youth sees it. Be a role model for children and youth in all phases of your life, including your digital life.
6. No employee or volunteer should ever electronically transmit a sexually explicit message (sexting) to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

Transgender

There is an ongoing conversation about how best to address the growing diversity of lifestyles in our world. One of those is transgender. We believe that God loves every single individual in the world, regardless of their circumstances, opinions, or outlooks. And we hope to display God's love to every individual at our church. We want to walk alongside transgender children, youth, or vulnerable adults, loving them with both grace and truth—helping them experience the love of Christ.

The reality about transgenderism (or gender dysphoria) is that changing your gender identity does not change your biological sex. Still, it does create additional issues, and the following guidance is provided to Volunteers:

Bathroom

1. We will request that everyone use the restroom, corresponding to their biological sex. Priority is given to the safety and privacy of our other children, youth, adults, volunteers, and employees. Lakeside Campus: If desired, the single-occupant bathrooms located on the first level behind the NextGen Center stage or on the third level may be used.
2. Boone Campus: If desired, the single-occupant bathroom located on the first level in the children's wing may be used.

Sleeping Arrangements

1. All participants will stay with their biological gender. If there are any concerns, we will provide a separate room or make alternative arrangements with the presence of a parent or guardian. We desire to protect everyone from discomfort. Additional expenses may apply.

School of Music Specifics (ISM)

1. The **Rule of Three** will apply.
 - a) Throughout the private one-on-one lesson, the parent or guardian should maintain visible or audible contact with the student and instructor.
 - b) Rule of Three Exception
 - Parents or guardians who permit their ISM student to drive must sign the Private Lesson Permission and Medical Release Form notifying the parent/guardian of the accommodations to the lesson. The document will be maintained in perpetuity by ISM.¹⁰
2. Each private one-on-one music lesson will take place in a room with a window or with the door open if there is no window.

Registered Sex Offender in Attendance

The following actions should be followed if a member of Immanuel becomes aware of a registered sex offender within our church community:

1. Notify the senior pastor and/or church administrator/executive minister/executive minister of the church.
2. The senior pastor and/or church administrator/executive minister will meet with the individual and the parole officer to discuss the case's terms, including possible parole and probation restrictions.
3. As a safeguard, the senior pastor and church administrator/executive minister will decide on a case-by-case basis to what extent such individuals' access to specific ministries should be restricted or curtailed. The senior pastor and/or church administrator/executive minister will notify the executive team of the church council for feedback.¹¹
4. The senior pastor and/or church administrator/executive minister will notify the appropriate employee about the individual's status and any restrictions.

¹⁰ I consent to my child transporting themselves to weekly private lessons at the Immanuel School of Music (ISM). I authorize ISM to make special accommodations for the weekly private lessons, such as an open door during the lesson, a roving adult, or video recordings of each lesson since I will not be present. I am aware that the implementation of our child protection policies will be facilitated by these special provisions.

¹¹ Executive Team of the Church Council: senior pastor, church administrator/executive minister, lay leader, and the chairpersons of the following teams: trustees, church council, finance, trustees, and the staff parish relations (SPR).

3. Reporting

Should it become necessary to report suspected abuse, the protection of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults is the most immediate concern. It is the moral, ethical, and legal obligation of any person responsible for caretaking children, youth, or vulnerable adults to report any case or sign of abuse. Failure to report could lead to liability, both criminal and civil, on the part of the church, the observer, or both. The phrase “*reasonable suspicion*” is essential in these situations. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that the abuse has occurred or was directly witnessed. Reporting is a *request for* an assessment of the condition of the child or student.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times in the event of suspecting or observing abuse.¹²

1. Upon observing or suspecting abuse, the employee or volunteer will immediately ensure the safety of the child, student, or vulnerable adult.¹³
2. Employees or volunteers should seek the counsel of the ministerial leader or church administrator/executive minister unless one of these individuals is suspected. Then the ministerial leader or church administrator/executive minister shall consult the senior pastor.
3. If known, the employee or volunteer shall provide the following information to the ministerial leader or church administrator/executive minister.
 - c) alleged victim’s name
 - d) address of victim (if possible, not necessary)
 - e) parent or guardian name(s)
 - f) cell phone number of parent or guardian
 - g) school information if known
4. The employee or volunteer shall call the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) **(1-877-597-2331)** under the consultation of the ministerial leader or church administrator/executive minister.¹⁴
5. The employee or volunteer must document in writing the actions taken in response to the accusation. The report should be concise and contain only relevant factual information. It needs to be kept in a secure location in the church administrator/executive minister’s office.
6. Notify their direct ministry report or the church administrator/executive minister of the report.
7. The church administrator/executive minister or the team leader of the trustees will contact the insurance provider. The insurance provider may offer guidance on handling the situation, including legal counsel.

Clergy Suspected: Notify the church administrator/executive minister or SPR chairman.

¹² Confidentiality State of Kentucky <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/statute.aspx?id=48578>.

¹³ The law requires that the source of a report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation is kept confidential unless court-ordered to be released. Kentucky’s mandatory reporting laws are codified in: KRS 600.020 and KRS 620 for child abuse, and KRS 209 for adults with disabilities.

¹⁴ Report online <https://prd.webapps.chfs.ky.gov/reportabuse/home.aspx>.

4. Response Plan

Our goal is to provide a timely, compassionate, and organized response to any abuse complaint from the church administrator/executive minister. Accusations will be adequately examined. Official investigative organizations must be consulted in alleged or seen abuse situations. Prayer is necessary throughout the process.

Response Plan (Media Requests)

Requests for media statements should be sent to the senior pastor or church administrator/executive minister. The senior pastor will then notify the district superintendent.

Before communicating with the media, it is essential to consult the insurance company for direction. Our current insurance provider will safeguard Immanuel's ministry and may provide interview scripts and other necessary material.¹⁵

Response Plan (Congregation)

In the unlikely event that the media becomes involved in an accusation, the senior pastor or church administrator/executive minister and either the church council or executive team of the church council will convene to develop a communication strategy.

There will be one and only one press spokesperson. The senior pastor, church administrator/executive minister, and executive team of the church council will select one individual to represent Immanuel. No other church employee, lay leader, volunteer, etc., should speak to the media on behalf of Immanuel Church.

Response Plan (Alleged Victim)

The senior pastor or church administrator/executive minister will notify the alleged victim's parents and take necessary steps to ensure the child, youth, or vulnerable adult's safety and well-being until the parents arrive.

Take all allegations seriously and make contact with the victim and their family. Exhibit compassion and assistance to prevent additional harm. Provide any necessary pastoral support. Remember that the victim's care and safety are our top priorities. Respond with positivity and compassion to the victim and victim's family.

Response Plan (Accused)

When it is alleged that an employee or volunteer has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the employee or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with the current Book of Discipline.¹⁶

At the time of removal, the accused should NOT be informed of the specifics of the alleged abuse. When removing an employee or volunteer from an activity or ministry, care should be taken to do so discretely, realizing that either state or church authorities will conduct an investigation.

¹⁵ Brotherhood Mutual is the current provider as of 2023.

¹⁶ Refer to the employee handbook for compensated employees.

The church should provide a supportive environment for all affected, offering objectivity and empathy to foster a healing environment.

Insurance Coverage

Immanuel should maintain appropriate insurance coverage to safeguard the church and its workers (both compensated and unpaid) in the case of a child abuse claim.

General Definitions

Adult: denotes a person who is 18 years or older.

Adult-on-site: refers to the adult responsible for the room or rooms in use.

Minor: a person under 18 years of age.

Child or Children (Minor): denotes a person between the ages of 0 and 12 or infant through fifth grade (or the equivalent for home-schooled children).

Youth (Minor): signifies a person between the ages of 12 and 17, or 6th through 12th grade (or the equivalent for home-schooled youth).

Employee: refers to a compensated employee of Immanuel.

Supervision/Supervisor: is an individual who monitors and directs events either being an employee or volunteer.

Church Council: is the established leadership of the church.

Vulnerable Adult: Indicates an adult who, because of mental or physical incapacity, is incapable of managing their own resources, performing daily activities, or protecting themselves from neglect, exploitation, or a dangerous or abusive situation without assistance from others.

Abuse Definitions

Abuse: signifies physical or emotional harm/threat posed by a parent, guardian, or other person to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of emotional or physical injury by means other than accident; (b) the creation of risk or allowing the creation of risk to a child by means other than accident; and (c) the commission or facilitation of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution against the child.

Physical Abuse: is non-accidental physical trauma or injury. It also includes a parent's or a caretaker's failure to protect a child from another person who perpetrated physical abuse on a child. Physical abuse is likely to cause great bodily harm or death in its most severe form.

Physical Neglect: is the failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm to the child's health or safety. Physical neglect may include, but is not limited to abandonment, lack of supervision, life-endangering physical hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition that places the child below the normal growth curve, lack of shelter, lack of medical or dental that results in health-threatening conditions, and the inability to meet basic clothing needs of a child. In its most severe form, physical neglect may result in great bodily harm or death.

Sexual Abuse: includes penetration, external touching of a child's intimate parts, unwanted touching, indecent exposure, and/or any other sexual act performed in a child's presence for sexual gratification, sexual use of a child for prostitution, or the manufacturing of child pornography. Child sexual abuse is also the willful failure of the parent or the child's caretaker to make a reasonable effort to stop child sexual abuse by another person.

Emotional Abuse: includes verbal assaults.

Sexting: is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones. The term was first popularized around 2005, where the latter is meant in the wide sense of sending a text, possibly with images. Sexting that involves people sending explicit photographs of themselves to their peers has led to a legal gray area in countries that have strict anti-child pornography laws, such as the United States. Some youth who have texted photographs of themselves or of their friends or partners have been charged with distribution of child pornography, while those who have received the images have been charged with possession of child pornography; in some cases, the possession charge has been applied to school administrators who have investigated sexting incidents as well. The images involved in sexting are usually different in both nature and motivation from the type of content that anti-child pornography laws were created to address.

Rev #	Revision Dates	Description	Approved By	App. Date
1.0	Unknown	First version	Church Council	11/10/2015
2.0	May 2022 – Sept. 2022	A full revision of the document.	Church Council	9/14/2022
2.1	September 27, 2022	Style revision Torey Teer	NA	9/27/2022
3.1	August 8, 2023	Removal of UMC details	Church Council	8/3/2023
3.2	September 4, 2023	ISM Exception to rule of three	Church Council	9/4/2023
3.2a	September 11, 2023	ISM Exception to rule of three	Trustees	9/18/23