

Reporting and Preventing Sexual Misconduct/Abuse Staff & Volunteer Policy

At Maury Hills Church we take our responsibility to care for others very seriously. These policies are intended to protect each individual and provide a safe and healthy learning environment. Everyone who teaches, helps, or cares for children in any affiliation or serves in any ministry capacity with Maury Hills Church's programs and activities must agree to follow these policies. They represent minimum requirements. Leaders of individual ministries may develop additional guidelines or recommended practices as appropriate to the ministry setting.

Background Checks—All paid ministry staff and children/student ministry volunteers at Maury Hills Church must consent to a background check and be informed of these policies prior to being released to work/serve. Additionally, new volunteers must have attended the church for a minimum of three months to begin serving in children/student ministry.

Classroom Precautions—Doors will be open, or security windows left uncovered so the view into a classroom remains unobstructed. Children ages 3 and under will be cared for in rooms with gates provided to keep them from leaving the classrooms without supervision. Nursery changing tables in classrooms shall be in full view of all nursery workers. Children shall never be left in a classroom without teachers present and all classrooms should remain locked when not in use.

Registration—Parents of children 4th grade and under are asked to register their children every Sunday and provide emergency contact information. At registration parents will receive a printed tag for themselves and one for their children. Pick-up requires them to show the appropriate tag so ministry staff can match them before releasing the child.

Restroom Use—Volunteers should take children to the restroom in groups whenever possible. They are asked to use the "kids only" restrooms in the children's ministry hallway. Adults are not to enter the restroom. If they must enter to assist a child, the door must remain propped open and assistance should only be provided when asked. Under no circumstances shall any adult be alone with a child in the restroom or stall with the door closed. Parents are encouraged to take their children to the restroom before class begins.

Staffing and Supervision—The Children's Pastor or Student Pastor approve teachers and other volunteers. All volunteers will be assigned and/or trained by the appropriate leadership prior to their active involvement with children/students. If a student or parent makes a complaint regarding a teacher or other volunteer that is non-abuse related, the Children's Pastor or Student Pastor will review the incident and discuss it with the volunteer involved. Parents will be notified of any actions that result from the complaint. For the safety of students and for the protection of volunteers, at least two (2) adults should be present in each classroom, exceptions can be made where one adult teacher is present if the following additional requirements are met: The doors to the classroom should remain open or security windows should be clear of obstruction. There are no less than three (3) children/students present in the room. Parents are welcome to check on their children's classes at any time.

Accusation of Child Abuse—Maury Hills Church practices a zero-tolerance and mandated reporting policy concerning child abuse in any form. The laws of the State of Tennessee require all accusations to be reported to either the Department of Children’s Services or the police. Additionally, any abuse or suspected abuse shall be reported immediately to the Children’s Pastor or Student Pastor who is to inform the Lead Pastor. Reports of abuse will not be covered up and will be reported immediately to parents, elders, and the authorities in accordance with church policy and state law. Additional details regarding allegations of abuse are provided below as well as sexual harassment policies.

Preventing Child Abuse—For purposes of this policy, child abuse is any action, or lack of action, which endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. For the purposes of this policy, a child is anyone under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes:

- **Physical Abuse:** any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns or biting. It also includes a parent or caretaker’s failure to protect a child from another person who has perpetrated abuse on a child.
- **Emotional Abuse:** emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, persistent teasing or constant family conflict.
- **Sexual Abuse:** any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between two children when one exerts power over the other, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, penetration or external touching of a child’s intimate body parts, incest, exposure to pornography or manufacturing child pornography and performing sexual acts in front of a child. Sexual abuse also includes the willful failure of a parent or caretaker to make a reasonable effort to stop sexual abuse by another person.
- **Neglected Abuse:** depriving a child of their essential needs to the extent there is harm or risk of harm to the child’s health or safety. This may include lack of supervision, lack of personal hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition that places the child below their normal developmental level, insufficient shelter or clothing and lack of necessary medical or dental care.

Ministry staff or volunteers serving children or youth have opportunities to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children in our care. In the State of Tennessee, all persons who work with children are considered mandatory reporters of suspected abuse. That means not only church staff and leadership, but volunteers, are directed by law to make an official report to state authorities. The following outlines what steps shall be taken if you suspect abuse in the life of a child involved with our church programs and activities:

1. Individuals suspecting or witnessing abuse shall report their observations to the appropriate staff member. The staff member shall report the circumstances by contacting local authorities, including Child Protective Services or the Police.
2. The staff member and the individual witnessing or suspecting the abuse will complete a written report at the time of the contact. Both persons will sign the document as testimony the report was made. The documentation will be kept in a secure file in the church office.
3. The Lead Pastor will be immediately notified of the situation and will notify the Elder Board. Further action and steps will be determined by the ministry staff, Lead Pastor, and elders in full legal cooperation with local authorities.

Allegations of Abuse—An accusation of child abuse can occur in any church, no matter how many precautions it takes. We must always be prepared to listen to and hear any allegation of abuse. The following policies help us address situations of this nature with respect to all those involved.

Church Response—The church adheres to these requirements when an allegation of abuse occurs:

- All allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and reported in accordance with legal requirements. Situations will be handled immediately, yet with due respect to people's confidentiality and privacy.
- Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement authorities with the guidance of legal counsel.
- Appropriate care will be given to victims and the alleged abuser will be suspended from service until an investigation can take place. During the process, prudent precautions will also be taken and documented to prevent the alleged abuser from further exposure to any church-related ministry activities involving minors.
- The Elders of the church, church's legal counsel and insurance company shall be informed of any report made.
- After the required report is made, any conversations with any party involved in the alleged abuse case will be documented in written form and kept in a secure.
- If media becomes involved during an investigation of alleged abuse, the church will appoint a staff member or elder as spokesperson to respond to all inquiries.
- The church will provide proper assistance and outside counseling (if desired) for the victim and accused. The accused will be suspended from work duties and volunteer opportunities until the incident is resolved. Return to work or service will depend on the incident's resolution and actions will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- Further steps regarding appropriate legal actions will be determined by the civil authority's investigation and at the discretion of the Lead Pastor and Elders. The Elders will provide guidance and appropriate communication to the congregation.

Violent Behavior Policy—Maury Hills Church has absolutely zero-tolerance for violence. If a staff member or volunteer threatens or displays violence, he or she will be subject to immediate disciplinary action, including oral or written warnings, a meeting with the Lead Pastor or Elders, or termination depending upon the circumstances. In addition, the staff member or volunteer may be subject to criminal proceedings, as appropriate. Violence generally includes physically or verbally harming another, including things like pushing, shoving, coercion, or intimidation. The church reserves the right to broaden this definition based on actual incidents or additional information. Volunteers are asked to report any incidents to the appropriate staff member and the church will investigate all such reports.

Sexual Harassment Policy—Maury Hills Church is committed to providing an environment free of sexual harassment, as well as harassment based on factors such as race, physical or mental disability, marital status, age, and sex. Harassment includes verbal, physical, and visual conduct that creates an offensive or hostile environment. Such conduct constitutes harassment when:

- Submission to the conduct is a stated or implied condition for continued employment or ministry involvement or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for employment or volunteer position.
- The harassment interferes with work or volunteer performance or creates an offensive, intimidating work environment.
- Threatening reprisals result after a negative response to sexual advances.

Prohibited unlawful harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, invitations, or comments.
- Visual conduct such as derogatory and or sexually oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings, or gestures.
- Physical conduct such as assault or unwanted touching.
- Threats and demands to submit to sexual requests.
- Retaliation for having reported or threatening to report harassment.

If at any time you feel harassed at church or at a church-sponsored event, report the incident immediately to the appropriate staff member or Elder. Every reported complaint will be investigated thoroughly, promptly, and in a confidential manner. All reported incidents will be investigated by a staff member that is not involved with the incident and a follow-up report will be provided to the person reporting the incident. A confidential record of the incident and the investigation will be kept in a secure file in the church office. If the investigation establishes harassment, the violator of this policy will be disciplined. Discipline can range from oral or written warnings, a meeting with the Elder Board, or termination, depending upon the circumstances.