

HIGHLANDS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY CODE OF ETHICS & CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I. Purpose

- A. To help Highlands Christian Academy provide a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of ministry life.
- B. To help Highlands Christian Academy reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.

II. Biblical Foundation

Highlands Christian Academy seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and youth and to minister to victims of abuse and their families. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth; anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! Matt 18:5-8

Our goal in response to these Biblical mandates is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow: a place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

III. Child Abuse Prevention Policy

Highlands Christian Academy desires to be a safe place for all children and adults who attend any activity. Individuals they know and trust sometimes victimize children. The ministry is not immune to such abuse, either by its members or by those in leadership positions. Incidents of child abuse or neglect cut across racial, social, economic and religious boundaries. Although no organization or individual can assure complete protection, this Child Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures Manual reflects Highlands Christian Academy's commitment to help protect children from harm. This manual applies to all volunteer and compensated workers of HCA.

Highlands Christian Academy will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this commitment not only reflects your concern about children's safety in this society, but also your willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects.

For the safety and protection of our children and workers, all people who participate in ministry-sponsored activities with children are required to comply with the guidelines provided in this manual.

IV. Definitions

In this manual the following definitions apply:

- A. **Adult**—Any person age 18 or older;
- B. **Child or Youth**—Any person under the age of 18;
- C. **Child Abuse**—An act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations apply in determining whether abuse of a child has occurred:
 - 1. **Physical Abuse**—A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, and stabbing wounds;
 - 2. **Physical Neglect**—The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or

a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition;

3. **Sexual Abuse**—Abuse that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including physical contact (fondling, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, voyeurism);
 4. **Medical Neglect**—Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical; mental; or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays;
 5. **Failure to Thrive**—A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors;
 6. **Mental Abuse/Neglect**—A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harms to a child's psychological or emotional health or development;
 7. **Educational Neglect**—The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study; and
 8. **Bizarre Discipline**—Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.
- D. **Compensated Worker**—Hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employee who works with children at any ministry-sponsored activity;
- E. **Volunteer Worker**—Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any ministry-sponsored activity;
- F. **Caregiver**—Any compensated or volunteer worker, sixth grade or older;
- G. **Mandated Reporter**—Any persons with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. Florida State law provides that if a caregiver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect or observes a child being subjected to

conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report or cause a report to be made to the Florida Abuse Hotline.

- H. Corporal Punishment**—Any punishment applied to the body including, but not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching, pulling, or squeezing.

V. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Highlands Christian Academy, several abuse prevention measures will be used. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements, provision for regular training on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, standards for appropriate classroom discipline and open classrooms.

A. Staff Screening

The following procedures reflect Highlands Christian Academy's commitment to provide protective care for all children and workers who participate in ministry sponsored activities.

1. All volunteer and compensated workers must complete the following procedures before participating in any ministry-sponsored child or student activities:
 - a. All volunteer and compensated workers must complete a standard application and disclosure form. References will be checked.
 - b. The staff person responsible for the area of ministry will conduct an interview.
 - c. All persons who work with children or students must attend orientation/training activities appropriate to the level of the volunteer or compensated worker involvement.
2. No adult individual, whether serving as a volunteer or a compensated worker, who has been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult, will provide services in any ministry-sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
3. All volunteer and compensated workers are subject to background checks for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal history or child abuse findings.

4. Applications and the results of any screening will be kept confidential by authorized ministry staff.

B. Classroom Discipline

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building.” If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table/desk to work alone away from the other students. If the child’s disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Principal and left under the supervision of the Principal. No corporal discipline or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child’s parents or guardian as soon as possible.

C. Open Classrooms

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by school staff, or parents. The Principal or her/his delegate will conduct brief observations of childcare rooms and classrooms during school and extended care hours.

D. Driving Policies

The designated leader of the event must know each person designated to provide automobile or van transportation to or from the school event. The driver must:

1. Be at least 18 years old;
2. Have a valid state driver’s license, qualified for the vehicle being operated;
3. Have no record of convictions for the past five years for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license or reckless endangerment;
4. Have proof of insurance; and
5. Never be alone in a vehicle with a child not his own.

E. Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible

school official. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

F. Overnight Trips

Situations where school staff members are taking children or young people out of the area for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned. Only known, proven staff will be permitted to sponsor/chaperone the trips. New staff or volunteers may be used as additional sponsors, but shall not be left alone with the children or young people in a situation where there is no other staff to observe. In no circumstance will one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing.

VI. Reporting Child Abuse

If Highlands Christian Academy receives an allegation of child abuse, it will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, Highlands Christian Academy's personnel will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that HCA takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

When it becomes necessary to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the legal responsibility of any person with responsibility for the care of children to report all cases of child abuse they observe, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the ministry, the observer or both. Highlands Christian Academy has determined that it is the responsibility of the program staff to report all cases of suspected child abuse to the proper legal authorities. While the confidentiality of the school/parent relationship is very important, reporting reasonable suspicion of child abuse has the potential for helping individuals receive help for a previous problem and may prevent further harm to a child, that person or others.

What is reasonable suspicion? Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse.

A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

Because we believe children are our most important concern, Highlands Christian Academy has adopted the following guidelines for reporting:

- A.** Treat each allegation of child abuse seriously.
- B.** Attempt to assure the safety and protection of persons who have been harmed.
- C.** Pray for the school and all persons affected by the allegation.
- D.** Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
- E.** Immediately notify the Headmaster, Principal, and Guidance Counselor. The Headmaster, Principal, Guidance Counselor will initiate an internal investigation of the allegations within 24 hours of notice.
- F.** Immediately notify the appropriate state office of the allegation.
- G.** Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the allegations.
- H.** Immediately notify the school's insurance company. As appropriate, the Headmaster, Business Manager shall immediately notify the school's insurance carrier of the possibility of a claim. If the abuse allegation does not implicate a school staff member or school volunteer, this step may be omitted.
- I.** If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the school, that person must be temporarily relieved of his duties until the investigation is concluded.
- J.** The Headmaster should extend whatever care and resources necessary. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the Headmaster or school representative, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an official investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.
- K.** It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the school's objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.
- L.** Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Headmaster.

- M.** Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or student is secured.
- N.** Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the alleged victim and his or her family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever counseling resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority. In some situations, schools have responded in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim. This can increase the anger and pain of the alleged victim and his or her family. Further reconciliation can then be more difficult and the possibility of damaging litigation increases.
- O.** Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a caregiver, that person should be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed.
- P.** If the media or other parties contact a school official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the Headmaster. Only the Headmaster or his designee should make comments about the allegations. The Headmaster will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the constituency. The prepared statement shall be made only after consultation with the school's attorney and will include the steps the school has taken to protect children, such as the development and implementation of this manual, and the care and concern the school has for all parties involved. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved shall continue to be of primary concern.

VII. Liability Protections

Any person, official, or institution participating in good faith in any act authorized or required by law, or reporting in good faith any instance of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect to the department or any law enforcement agency, shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability which might otherwise result by reason of such actions. (F.S. 39.203)

Any employer who discloses information about a former or current employee to a prospective employer of the former or current employee upon request of the prospective employer or of the former or current employee is immune from civil liability for such disclosure or its consequences unless it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that the information disclosed by the former or current employer was knowingly false or violated any civil right of the former or current employee protected under F. S. Chapter 760. (F.S. 768.095)

Important Contacts and Their Phone Numbers

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD

State Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-962-2873

HCA local contacts and departments 954-421-1747

Lisa Melone-Aftercare Robin Peters-K3-K4 Dawn Utz K5-5th grades

Ken Lopez Boys 6th-12 grades Shannon Ratzlaff Girls 6th -12 grades

Allegations involving a staff member contact

Dave Geyer 954-612-8532- school board member

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This is to certify that you have fully read and understand the policies and procedures of Highlands Christian Academy as outlined above.

Date

Sign

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