



NORTH SHORE

COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

**Safety and Protection Guidelines
for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Populations**

Updated November 2024

Introduction

To help protect children and vulnerable populations, NSCBC has adopted the following Safety and Protection Guidelines. It is important that all NSCBC staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to provide the safest environment possible for those who participate in our activities and ministries. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of guidelines, and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children, youth and vulnerable populations.

Purpose

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and staff.
2. Assist NSCBC in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children, youth and vulnerable populations.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of sexual abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of sexual abuse made against volunteers.

Definitions

The following terms used herein and are defined as follows:

1. **Staff:** Any pastor, minister, or employee who receives compensation from NSCBC.
2. **Children/Youth/Minor:** Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
3. **Adult:** Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or as defined by state law.
4. **Volunteer:** Any unpaid person leading or assisting in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. **Vulnerable populations:** an adult who is or may be for any reason unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
6. **Participant:** Any child, youth or vulnerable adult participating in activities at our church.
7. **Sexual Abuse:** The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor or adult to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of minor or adult, or incest with a minor or adult, or as defined by federal and state law. This includes and is not limited to unwelcome sexual remarks, jokes, advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures; sexual touching, fondling, molestation, assault, or other intimate physical contact; compelling another person to engage in a sexual act by threats or fear or undue influence; and providing or displaying pornographic materials to another person.
8. **Child Emotional Abuse:** Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying or as defined by state law.

Volunteer Screening Procedures

The following screening procedures are to be used with volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All screening procedures must be completed before a person can serve. All information collected shall be maintained in confidence.

1. **Volunteer Application:** Any volunteers who will work with children, youth or vulnerable populations must complete the Community Safety Volunteer Application along with any ministry-specific application or registration. The release statement attached to the Application must be signed by the individual completing the Application to apply for and qualify for service. Our Community Safety Volunteer Application includes questions regarding:

- Current address.
- Volunteer experience.
- Criminal history information.
- Personal References

Applications include a statement certifying that statements provided in the application are true and complete, and any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of the applicant. This statement authorizes NSCBC to contact any individual or organization listed in the application.

2. **Personal Interview:** Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant. If detrimental information is uncovered but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is accepted as a volunteer, document the reasons for overriding the prior information.
3. **Reference Checks:** Upon completion of the application, references may be checked. These references should not be personal or family references, but preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children, youth and/or vulnerable populations in the past. Documentation of any reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file with the applicant's Volunteer Application.
4. **Criminal/Sexual Offender Background Checks:** NSCBC will conduct criminal/sexual offender background checks on all volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All background checks will be updated periodically.
5. **Six-Month Rule:** All volunteers will be required to have been a regular attender of NSCBC for a minimum of six months and have reviewed and signed the Safety and Protection Guidelines. Exception may be made to the six-month rule at the discretion of the ministry leader on a case-by-case basis. In the event the applicant is accepted as a volunteer, the volunteer application should be documented with the reasons for overriding the six-month rule.

Confidentiality

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference checks, interview, and criminal background checks will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted if possible. These materials will be archived.

Youth-aged Volunteers

We believe that the best way to train youth to become volunteers as adults is to let them begin to volunteer as a youth. The following guidelines apply to such volunteers:

- Youth volunteers must be at least in 6th grade.
- Youth volunteers will be screened as specified above.
- Youth volunteers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.
- Youth volunteers may only volunteer for positions in which the children being ministered to are under the age of 12 and there should be a 5-year age difference between them and the children they are supervising.
- Children under 6th grade may accompany their parents as they volunteer in children's ministry but will not be counted as a volunteer. If the child becomes a distraction to the parent's ability to minister effectively, the ministry leader will talk to them about ways to keep this from happening in the future.

General Safety Guidelines

Two Leader Rule

- A reasonable effort will be made to always have a minimum of two responsible volunteers with classes and activities.
- Ministry leaders should make it a best practice to have someone circulate among rooms whenever children's, youth or vulnerable adult activities are being held.

Open Door Policy

- Doors will be left fully open if one volunteer needs to leave the room temporarily, and during arrival at the class or event before both volunteers are present.
- Speaking to a participant one-on-one should be done in public settings where staff or volunteers are in sight of other people.
- It should be possible to see into a classroom at all times – either through an open door, or a door with a window.
- When possible, in rooms with half doors, the top of the door should always be open.
- Doors should never be locked.
- Parents/guardians are welcome to check on their participants at any time.

Physical Activity

Leaders are to monitor playful, physical activity between participants and use their discretion to end the activity if:

- There is the potential for serious injury.
- Someone is being bullied, disrespected or degraded in any way.
- The nature of the activity is sexual in any way.

Accidental Injuries to Participants

In the event that a participant is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes and bruises volunteers will provide First Aid (band-aids, ice etc.) as appropriate and will fill out an injury notification form and give this to the ministry leader. You or the ministry coordinator should notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care. First Aid kits are available in every room.
- Medication including antibiotic creams, pain relievers and fever reducers will never be given to the child by volunteers.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be called. If warranted an ambulance will be called.
- Epi-pen use and allergy response will follow protocol on file and prior parent consent.

Fire Procedures

- All volunteers should be aware of the location of fire extinguishers on campus.
- Fire safety information, emergency evacuation routes and other emergency information will be posted in every room.

- In case of fire, classes should exit following the emergency evacuation route posted in the room and make their way to the lawn. Once they have exited the building, classroom teachers/ leaders should make sure that all students are present and accounted for.

Safety Guidelines Specific to Children through Grade 5

Restroom Policies

- Changing diapers is to be done in sight of at least one other ministry volunteer. No child shall be left unattended on a changing table at any time.
- When taking children to the restroom, volunteers should stay at the restroom door until the child is finished.
- Volunteers may enter to assist only when absolutely necessary and then should leave the outside door propped open.
- For the protection of all, volunteers should never be alone with a child in a restroom with the door closed and never be in a closed stall with a child.
- If possible, the volunteer escorting the child to the restroom should be of the same sex as the child.
- Children in grades 1 – 5 may be sent to the restroom in pairs or to single restrooms alone.
- Strict hand washing must be practiced by children and volunteers after going to the restroom and assisting in toileting or diapering.

Sick Children

For the general health and safety of our children we follow American Academy of Pediatrics standards, and we will not accept a sick child. This includes the following:

- Fever of 101 degrees within 24 hours
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Any symptoms of the usual childhood diseases such as Scarlet Fever, German measles, mumps or chicken pox
- Common cold, sore throat, croup
- Any unexplained rash or skin infection
- Pink eyes and other eye infections.

Check in and Release of Children

Children through 2nd grade must be checked in electronically at the hospitality desk and given a security label in order to enter any classroom/nursery space. Children may only be released to an adult with the matching security tag.

Nursery/Classroom Access

Only approved children's ministry volunteers and parents/guardians are allowed to enter the nursery or classroom space where children are present.

Worker to Children's Ratios

We strive to follow the best practice ratios below:

<u>Age of Children</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Babies – 1's	1:3
2's – Pre-K	1:5
K – 5 th grade	1:8

Food in Classrooms

When possible, a notice will be placed beside any door where food may be served. It will be the responsibility of the parent and/or guardian to note any food allergies at the time of check in and alert the classroom teacher or activity leader of any allergies. A list of known allergies will be provided to all classroom teachers.

Overnight or Retreat/Mission Trip Safety Guidelines (6th – 12th Grade)

- There will be separate male and female sleeping areas.
- Leaders and students are to be fully clothed wearing pajamas or appropriate clothing, at all times in sleeping areas whether they are cabins, dorms, hotel rooms or tents.
- A reasonable effort must be made by leaders and students to change clothes out of sight of others (such as in a private bathroom).
- Leaders are to refrain from lying on a teen's bed at any time.
- Leaders and students are not to sleep together in the same bed under any circumstance.
- Students will not sleep more than one per bed for twin beds and two per bed for double beds and larger.
- When only group showers are available, leaders and students must shower at different times. When individual shower stalls are available, leaders will make reasonable effort to shower at a different time from the students.
- Leaders and students are to be fully clothed while walking to and from the shower area. Towels around the waist or torso are not acceptable.
- There is to be no non-emergency physical contact between two people in the shower area.

General Youth Safety Guidelines (6th – 12th Grade)

- Take care to avoid situations that may compromise the integrity of the church, Youth Ministry or yourself.
- When talking or meeting with a youth on an individual basis, volunteers must make a reasonable effort to not be isolated with the youth.
- Leaders should not minister to intimate, gender-specific needs of a youth of the opposite sex (e.g., menstrual issues, sexual sins & struggles, etc.) either in person, by phone or by electronic means. Redirect teens of the opposite sex to their same-sex small group leader (past or present) when such needs arise.
- Intimate relationships with youth are inappropriate.
- There will be both male and female chaperones for events and retreats in which both male and female youth will be attending.
- When transporting students, leaders are not to ride alone with a teen of the opposite sex.

Behavioral Guidelines for Volunteers

Show of Affection

- A show of affection between leaders, children, youth and vulnerable populations should be managed appropriately by the volunteers.
- In the event a participant initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the participant that such touching is inappropriate.
- The following are acceptable ways to show physical affection:
 - Side-by-side hugs
 - Touch on the shoulders or upper arms
 - Non-lingering frontal hugs

Prohibited Items

Volunteers should not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.

Discipline

- Never engage in physical discipline of a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
- Reasonable physical restraint of a participant may be necessary to ensure the safety of others.

Abuse

- Volunteers shall not abuse children, youth or vulnerable populations in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
- Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the ministry leader immediately for handling.

Disqualification and Response to Criminal Background Check Results and/or DCF Investigations

The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors and vulnerable populations:

- Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
- A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug related offenses, or family violence.
- A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

Closed DCF investigations in which the potential volunteer was exonerated will not prohibit said volunteer from serving.

Other circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis, including:

- A background/sexual offender report that indicates other offenses not listed above
- An open/ongoing DCF investigation
- DCF investigations that ruled against a potential volunteer

In these circumstances, the following procedure will be followed:

1. The person who receives the background check results or notice of DCF investigation (past or present) will notify the elder board of any questionable results.
2. An Elder representative will be appointed to represent the Elder Board.
3. The Elder representative will be in contact with the individual in question, who will be given the opportunity to speak to the circumstances surrounding the offense.
4. The Elder representative will report back to the Elder Board with a recommendation for a decision regarding the person's ability to volunteer. Staff and ministry leaders may be consulted as needed.
5. The Elder representative will notify the individual in question of the final decision regarding their ability to volunteer.

Response to Allegations of Sexual Abuse by a Volunteer

NSCBC will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of sexual abuse. All accusations of sexual abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege sexual abuse and those who have been accused of sexual abuse.

When an allegation is made involving sexual abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The Chair of the Elder Board will lead the investigation into the allegations and may use the assistance of legal counsel or other consultants. If the Chair of the Elder Board is the individual accused of sexual abuse, then another member of the Elder Board will lead the investigation. It is recommended that an investigative team comprised of equal numbers of male and female members be appointed by the Elder Board. Those eligible to serve on the investigative team include staff, ministry leaders or other highly qualified members of NSCBC. The Elder Board may use their discretion in appointing this team.

The investigation will be conducted as follows:

1. Report the incident to appropriate authorities in accordance with the state mandatory reporting laws.
2. Report the matter to NSCBC's insurance carrier.
3. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
4. NSCBC will suspend the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
5. The investigative team (and legal counsel or other consultants) will then meet with the Elder Board of NSCBC and present a report on their investigation, which will include findings and recommendations of actions.
6. An official of NSCBC will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
7. An official of NSCBC will meet with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
8. During the investigation, an official of NSCBC shall maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian and inform them of the actions taken and assist them in their process of healing.
9. An official of NSCBC (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts.
10. An official of NSCBC will communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel of NSCBC.
11. An official of NSCBC will communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
12. If the need shall arise, NSCBC may hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of NSCBC's attorney.

Suspected Child Abuse Reporting

Under Massachusetts law, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency that receives all reports of suspected abuse and/or neglect of children under the age of 18. State law requires professionals whose work brings them in contact with children to notify DCF if they suspect that a child is being abused and/or neglected. DCF depends on reports from professionals and other concerned individuals to learn about children who may need protection.

Definitions of Abuse and Neglect

The following definitions may be found under the Department of Children and Families Regulations (110 CMR, section 2.00):

Abuse: the non-accidental commission of any act by a caretaker upon a child under age 18 which causes, or creates a substantial risk of, physical or emotional injury; or constitutes a sexual offense under the laws of the Commonwealth; or any sexual contact between a caretaker and a child under the care of that individual. This definition is not dependent upon location (i.e., abuse can occur while the child is in an out-of-home or in-home setting).

Neglect: Failure by a caretaker, either deliberately or through negligence or inability to take those actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care; provided, however, that such inability is not due solely to inadequate economic resources or solely to the existence of a handicapping condition. This definition is not dependent upon location (i.e., neglect can occur while the child is in an out-of-home setting).

Emotional Injury: an impairment to or disorder of the intellectual or psychological capacity of a child as evidenced by observable and substantial reduction in the child's ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior.

Physical Injury: Death; or fracture of a bone, subdural hematoma, burns, impairment of any organ, and any other such nontrivial injury; or soft tissue swelling or skin bruising, depending upon such factors as the child's age, circumstances under which the injury occurred and the number and location of bruises; or addiction to a drug or drugs at birth; or failure to thrive.

Signs of Abuse and/or Neglect: Volunteers should be alert to the physical, behavioral and verbal signs of abuse that a child may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below:

Physical Signs may include:	Behavioral Signs may include:
Lacerations and bruises – particularly bruises of different colors suggesting repeated beatings	Anxious, nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
Difficulty walking	Excessive fear of being approached or touched

Nightmares	Sexual behaviors or references that are bizarre, unusual or too sophisticated for the child's age
Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area	Behavior that is withdrawn, fearful, infantile or filled with fantasy
Difficulty with urination	Fear of going home
Discomfort when sitting	
Evident malnutrition	Verbal signs may include the following statements:
Unattended physical or medical problems	"_____ does things to me when we're alone"
Inadequate clothing	"I don't like to be alone with _____"
Distinctively shaped injuries suggesting an object (such as belt buckle or rope) or human bite marks	"_____ fooled around with me."
Pressure bruises around the neck, ankles or wrists	"I'm afraid of _____"

Mandated Reporters:

Massachusetts law requires an individual who is a mandated reporter to immediately report any allegation of serious physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse or neglect to the DCF by oral communication. A written report must then be completed within 48 hours. **All church volunteers and employees working with children fall within the guidelines defining mandated reporters. When suspected abuse is reported to the volunteer, the person in charge, and not the volunteer, is required to make the report. All reporters are immune from liability and in almost all cases, the reporter's name is not revealed to the family.**

Sometimes people are unsure if a situation is abusive. If in doubt, immediately share your concerns with paid ministry staff. See below for reporting procedures.

Reporting Procedures:

1. Any person working with minors on behalf of NSCBC who suspects any signs of abuse or neglect must immediately report this to the ministry leader. If the ministry leader is not reachable, then they should report it to another staff person.
2. If the ministry leader is not a staff person, then the ministry leader will report it to the appropriate staff person – i.e., Minister of Children and Families or Youth Minister. The staff person in conjunction with other staff will determine if there is “reasonable cause” to believe abuse or neglect may be occurring or may have occurred. If there does not seem to be “reasonable cause,” then a report will be kept with the staff person.
3. If there is “reasonable cause” then a decision must be made whether or not a report will be made.
4. If a report is to be made, it should be made by the paid staff person responsible for the ministry area and volunteer who reported to them.
5. Anyone who falls within this reporting chain must keep all information in the strictest of confidence.