



Shepherding Redeemer's Children on  
behalf of our Children's Redeemer

## Child Safety Reporting Policy

Redeemer Church has zero tolerance for child abuse in our programs and activities. It is the responsibility of every volunteer and staff member at Redeemer to act in the best interest of children – not only during official programs but in the informal life of the church. Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”* (John 10:10-13 ESV) It is our desire to take seriously the calling of under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd, and care for the sheep by facing any wolf that may seek to deceive and destroy in our church. Redeemer does a number of things to fulfill that calling. Redeemer Church requires all persons who desire to work with children to go through MinistrySafe training and pass a criminal background check. Redeemer has also adopted separate Policies and Procedures (the “Policy” or “Policies”) for working with children and youth.

It is important to understand the difference between a violation of Redeemer’s **Policies** for working with children and youth verses suspected child abuse and neglect. Not every violation of the **Policies** constitutes abuse and neglect. This Child Safety Reporting Policy (“the Reporting Policy”) provides you with the steps you and the church takes in each of those scenarios. In order to properly report, you must be fully versed in Redeemer’s Policies.

**Policy Violations:** In the event that volunteers, parents, or staff members observe any inappropriate behaviors or violations of the Policy, it is their responsibility to immediately report the observations to the Child Safety Team (4 people – both men and women – commissioned by the Children and Youth Committee to meet with those concerned and ensure the safety of children at Redeemer). Contact Zack Owens to be directed to the Child Safety Team (601-941-4166). Not every inappropriate behavior can be set forth in the Policies. Experts in detecting and treating victims of child abuse recommend being aware of signs of “grooming.” Grooming is a range of otherwise innocent behaviors. The key is not whether a particular behavior is present, but how it is being used (secrecy/deception/isolation). Grooming is not only directed at children, but towards those who care for them, in order to gain trust and access to children.<sup>1</sup>

**Suspected Abuse and Neglect:** Mississippi Code Annotated § 43-21-353 requires any person “having reasonable cause” to suspect abuse, neglect, commercial sexual exploitation or human trafficking to make or cause an oral report

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<sup>1</sup> See “Understanding Sexual Abuse Risk” article included in this packet.

to be made immediately by telephone and followed as soon thereafter as possible in writing to the Department of Child Protective Services (“CPS”). If you suspect neglect or abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual/within the church or at home), it is every individual’s responsibility to 1) report this to the CPS (Child Abuse Hotline: **1-800-222-8000**). It will conduct an objective, thorough investigation. Then, 2) notify the Child Safety Team (**601-941-4166**) that this report has been made to the to ensure that the Session of Redeemer Church can act appropriately in relation to church ministries and cooperate with the investigation undertaken by CPS. Also, it is best if the person who witnessed or observed the suspected abuse or neglect make the reports. If you need assistance or have questions, the Child Safety Team is happy to meet with you. See *What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms* attached hereto to learn more.

**Enforcement and Consequences of the Policies:** Redeemer Church staff members who supervise other staff members and volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Redeemer Church policies. Violations of the Policies are grounds for suspension, reassignment or immediate dismissal from positions for both volunteers and staff members as the circumstances dictate. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Session of Redeemer Church. A single Policy violation may not warrant dismissal from employment or volunteering, but all violations must be documented and considered. The Child Safety Team (working with the Staff and Session of Redeemer) has the discretion to immediately suspend that person from all child interaction and Redeemer Church activities. This is not an accusation or judgment of guilt, but a precautionary and preventive act. This suspension may continue during any investigation by law enforcement or CPS. Failure to report a violation of the Policies act is also a violation of the Policies with the same consequences.

**Reporting to the affected families and congregation:** In the event that a credible allegation of child sexual abuse is made against a church member, staff member, or volunteer of Redeemer regarding a child under their care, the Session will notify potentially affected families that an investigation is under way. The Session will determine whether a credible allegation has been made based on the information, opinions and facts obtained from staff, law enforcement, or other persons as warranted. The privacy of the victim and their family is of utmost importance in this process. The Session will determine whether, when and what to communicate to persons other than the Session and those involved. Other persons could include the congregation.