

## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

It is the policy of NHBC and its ministries to provide a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of ministry life. NHBC seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. Our 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.

*The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: "Don't push these children away. Don't ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in." Then gathering the children up in his arms, he laid his hands of blessing on them. (Mark 10:13-16)*

*Whoever becomes simple and elemental again, like this child, will rank high in God's kingdom. What's more, when you receive the childlike on my account, it's the same as receiving me. But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a millstone around your neck. Doom to the world for giving these God-believing children a hard time! Hard times are inevitable, but you don't have to make it worse – and it's doomsday to you if you do. (Matthew 18:5-7)*

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.

NHBC 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, our child abuse prevention requirements reflect NHBC commitment to help protect children from harm. These requirements apply to all volunteers and employees of NHBC.

North Hills Baptist Church will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Employee cooperation in this commitment not only reflects our concern about children's safety in this society, but also our willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects. For the safety and protection of our children and employees, all individuals who participate in ministry-sponsored activities with children are required to comply with these guidelines.

### **Appropriate Professional Boundaries with Children**

Keeping children safe and providing a safe environment for North Hills students is an essential part of our responsibility as employees. North Hills employees, especially those who work with children, are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and maintain appropriate physical, emotional and sexual boundaries at all times. North Hills employees are expressly prohibited to connect with students using social networking sites, cell phones, or texting.

Violation of professional boundaries with children and incidents of misconduct involving children are taken seriously and will be addressed in a prompt, confidential and thorough manner through the school, the School Board, or the appropriate local authority.

North Hills expects all employees to limit the opportunities for molestation by responding quickly and appropriately to suspicious situations, and taking actions or filing a report when warranted. Employees are expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

- While there are occasions when employees may be alone with a child, should this be the case they are expected to be in an open or accessible public area.

- Monitor on campus volunteers and visitors to ensure they meet these requirements.
- Report any misconduct or questionable behavior.

## **Mandated Child Abuse Reporters**

Any employee or volunteer with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. California state law provides that if such an employee or volunteer 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.

## **Reporting Child Abuse**

If NHBC or any of its ministries 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, NHBC personnel will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that NHBC 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. NHBC 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 pastor/parishioner 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.

Any employee or volunteer with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter and as such if they have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect is expected to use the following procedures:

- Do not confront the suspected abuser/molester.
- Maintain confidentiality. Information about suspected child abuse is only to be given out or discussed on a “need to know” basis and is not to be shared with fellow employees, parents, students, or anyone outside the school other than law enforcement.
- You must file a report when you have a “reasonable suspicion” that a child is being abused or neglected.
- Contact local law enforcement (sheriff or police) for abuse occurring outside the family).
- Contact Child Protection Services for abuse occurring inside the family.
- Child in immediate danger/risk – call local police or sheriff immediately.
- Leave the investigation to the experts!

North Hills will not knowingly employ anyone who has been convicted of child abuse or sexual molestation. North Hills requires clear fingerprinting and a background check on all employees as part of our hiring practices. Overnight chaperones also undergo fingerprinting and background checks. Volunteers who drive for field trips undergo background checks. We receive notice should a background check history change in any way.

## **Reasonable Suspicion of Child Abuse**

Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence of a discrepancy 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.