

## CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

This document has been formulated with the purpose of protecting both the children (anyone younger than 18 years) in our ministry and the people who work with them (staff, volunteers, leaders). It has taken into account similar documents and practices from other churches in South Africa and abroad. It is furthermore compliant with The Children's Act 38 of 2005 and seeks what is in the child's best interest. In the interest of the safety of the children and leaders, we have chosen to err on the side of caution.

### **Biblical Rationale for Child Protection Policy**

In the Bible, God reveals His heart for children. This is the foundation for our Christian approach to keeping children safe and protected. Our attitude toward children should reflect God's own attitude and our actions should reflect his character.

The Bible shows that children are precious to God. Psalm 139:13-14 reminds us how God creates each child uniquely and Matthew 18:5 shows Jesus welcoming children. As a school we aim to reflect this value for each individual child.

In the Bible God acts on behalf of the vulnerable. Psalm 10 reminds us that God is the protector of the weak: 'The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless' (v. 14). Because of His care for vulnerable children, God calls his people to protect and defend them (Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 82:3-4).

As Christians working with children we have a responsibility to make sure that Children thrive and are safe from harm. We acknowledge we must be accountable for our actions with children because 'nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account' (Hebrews 4:13).

### **Principles for the protection of children:**

- We believe that child protection is both an individual and a corporate responsibility.
- We believe that everyone must take precautions and responsibility to help create a safe, protective place for children. This begins with everyone being well informed and aware of child protection issues, as well as the procedures

for responding appropriately if abuse of a child is alleged, disclosed, discovered or suspected.

- We encourage openness about concerns relating to child protection matters because child abuse thrives on secrecy. The guidelines in this policy explain what should be done about those concerns.

## 1. DEFINITIONS

**Child:** A child is defined as anyone under 18 years of age.

**Child Abuse (legal definitions):** Child abuse can take many forms and can include, but is not limited to: physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse, as well as neglect, harassment and discrimination.

**Physical Abuse:** Directly injuring or excessively punishing a child or placing a child in a situation in which they are likely to be injured.

**Verbal/Emotional Abuse:** Repeatedly rejecting, humiliating or denying the work or rights of a child as a human being (both physically and verbally)

**Psychological Abuse:** Rejection, hostility, teasing, criticism or exposure to violence.

**Spiritual Abuse:** Using a position of influence and power to dominate and manipulate, while using religious terminology to justify unacceptable behaviour.

**Sexual Abuse:** Which includes direct or indirect sexual corruption or exploitation of a child by involving them (or threatening to involve them) in sexual activities.

Types of Sexual Abuse (that do not involve touch):

- Sexual remarks or comments
- Pornography (watching or participating in)

- Obscene phone calls (being involved in making or receiving calls)
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity
- Uncovenanted gender labelling

The Sexual Offences Act, section 15(1) and 16(1)(sections of the act which refer to children over 12 years and under 16 years old) states that a person who commits sexual penetration/violation with a child, is guilty of offence even if the child has consented.

**Neglect:**

Neglect is when a child is abandoned, or is denied food, clothing, shelter, appropriate care, supervision, education, stimulation or medical attention.

**Harassment:**

Unwelcome conduct through physical contact, following or stalking and unwelcome comments.

**Discrimination:**

The unjust, harmful or damaging treatments of different categories of people especially on the grounds of race, age, gender, religion or ethnicity.

## **2. LEGISLATION GUIDING THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Below is a summary of legislation guiding this policy and a summary of the relevant sections informing the policy:

### **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**

Section 28 of the Bill of Human Rights states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.

### **The Children's Act 38 of 2005**

Section 110 of the Children's Act mandates that abuse, neglect or maltreatment must be reported to a child protection agency. Teachers are specifically named as professionals mandated to report. Good faith principle applies: if you report without malicious intent you are protected against prosecution even if the claims are found to be invalid.

Section 126(3) all those serving shall be checked against Part B of the Child Protection Register (people unsuitable to work with children). No one may be employed (as having direct contact with children) if their name appears on Section B of the Register.

### **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007** (Act No. 32 of 2007; also referred to as the **Sexual Offences Act**).

Section 15 and 16 aim to protect children who are older than 12 years but younger than 16 years from sexual exploitation by adults.

### **3. SCREENING PROCEDURES**

All staff and any person at El Shaddai Christian Church wishing to work with anyone below the age of 18, connect with the ministry/initiative leader and go through this policy, relevant screening forms and ministry expectations and

1. Agree to sign, and adhere to this Child Protection Policy and the requirements expressed herein.
2. Complete and sign the applicable screening forms and provide documents required as per the specific signed form (e.g. copy of ID and character references, personal information, etc. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the El Shaddai Christian Church offices.)
3. Obtain a clearance certificate against Part B of the National Child Protection Register.
4. Obtain a Police Clearance Certificate at their own cost. No one who has been convicted of a crime involving the abuse or neglect of children will be allowed to work with children at our church. Any other criminal record will be considered on a case-to-case basis in discussion with the congregational

eldership team and ministry leaders. If an offender or suspected offender moves to a different church, it is then incumbent on the leaders of the church they are leaving to inform the new congregation of the risk.

NOTE:

1. Any applicant under the age of 18 must provide a signed declaration by their parent or guardian stating declaring they have never been involved in any activity that was harmful or potentially harmful to children.
2. Foreign nationals, who are from a country that does not have a register or an assessment process need to obtain a police clearance from their country of origin.
3. A volunteer's involvement will be reviewed by the Ministry Leaders on an annual basis.
4. NCPR and other clearance checks will be done bi-annually for volunteers who continue in the ministry.

### **3. SAFEGUARDS**

In any settings where children are present, employees and volunteers should implement as many of these safeguards as possible, with a minimum of at least one of the following safeguards.

1. **Visibility**
  - When interacting with children the adult positions themselves in a place that is visible to other unrelated adults.
  - This can be accomplished by such things as planning activities in areas where other adults are present, or staying within view of the window in the doorway or keeping doors open.
2. **Accountability**
  - Prior to any need to engage a child in one-on-one, notify the child's parent and an unrelated employee in the vicinity.
  - This can be accomplished by a counsellor phoning a colleague in the building at the beginning and end of a counselling session or a volunteer phoning a parent before driving a child home.
3. **Balancing Control**
  - Adults, by virtue of their age, size, strength, and authority, exert control over children. Balancing control enhances child safety.
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- This can be accomplished by sending two children of the same age to the bathroom together with a teenager or adult helper; having a friend play in the room while talking to a child after an event; asking the children to sit in the back seat of a vehicle; or inviting two or more children to work on a project.

Each of the following safeguards further improve safe interactions and the safety of all children within the church community:

### **1. Discipline and Behaviour Management**

For the purpose of this policy, it is important to clarify the difference between discipline and abuse.

Children need discipline and boundaries set in a secure and loving environment. This is essential for them to develop into a person that feels secure and loved; is self-confident, self-disciplined, and able to deal with the stresses of life. The goal of discipline is to help the child learn right from wrong; respect the rights of others, and to know what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Thus discipline should involve not only the correction of wrong or negative behaviour and actions but also the rewarding and praising of acceptable, or positive, behaviour and actions,

No form of physical contact is ever used to discipline a child. The only time that physical contact is allowed to be used in a behaviour management situation is if a child has to be physically restrained to protect themselves or another person, or to avoid an accident.

It is important that all staff, volunteers and affiliates:

- remain in control of their own emotions;
- manage the children's behaviour in ways that are non-violent
- ensure that children are never degraded or humiliated.

Any form of abuse of any kind, as defined above, will NOT be tolerated (see definitions of abuse).

### **Positive examples of appropriate discipline include:**

- Use age appropriate classroom management strategies that allow for smart choices
- issuing a warning
- time-out – separation from the group or activity

Appropriate discipline also includes making sure the child is aware of why they are being disciplined. It is important for them to realise that the behaviour they were engaging in was wrong, and inappropriate, and they should be offered ways to correct their behaviour.

### **Ways to Avoid Problematic Behaviours**

- Come prepared
- Keep things moving
- Be sensitive to the moods of the children in the group
- Provide enough “elbow room”
- Set clear expectations with the children

### **When Children Require Discipline or Guidance**

- Use a firm but gentle voice to address the behaviour
- Remove the child from the activity
- Focus your remarks on the behaviour you want to see
- Don't use words or a tone of voice that shame or frighten a child
- Don't use sarcasm or scream at a child
- Never make remarks that: put down the individual as a person by making negative references about appearance, race, or gender
- Never use corporal punishment or spanking of any kind
- Use touch in affirming ways:
  - Appropriate examples: high fives, pat on the back or shoulders, etc.
  - Inappropriate examples: demanding/expecting hugs, slapping on the butt, kissing, etc.

### **The following actions may involve abuse and are to be avoided.**

- Derogatory name-calling, ridicule, humiliation, shaming, publically singling out a child for negative treatment or exclusion, yelling at a child or other forms of hostile treatment
- Hitting, slapping, or any behavior that assaults a child
- Pushing or holding a child against their will outside the goals of protecting them from danger, providing them medical care, or keeping them from harming themselves or others.

All behavioural issues should be reported to the Ministry Leader after the meeting.

Should a leader need to speak to a child privately, they may ask the child to step away from the rest of the group, as long as they are still visible to the rest of the group. Sensitive discussions can be held in another venue, as long as there is visibility, accountability and balancing of control. Never be alone with a child in a room with a closed door.

## **2. Appropriate Touch**

Touch should be in response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult. Any physical contact with a child should be in public; be appropriate to the age of the child and their needs, and generally be initiated by the child. **Safe areas** to touch are lower legs, arms, shoulders, upper back and head. If at any time a child shows discomfort with such a touch, remove your hand immediately. Your physical contact with the children must be above reproach, so be wise in how you physically interact with the children.

### **Appropriate ways to touch a child:**

- An arm around the shoulder/side hug
- A brief pat on the back or shoulder
- Handshake
- High five
- Side hugs

### **Inappropriate ways to touch a child:**

Chest hugs  
Kisses  
Allowing children older than three to sit on your lap  
Touching bottoms, chest or genital areas  
Occupying a bed with a child  
Wrestling with children  
Tickling children  
Piggyback rides  
Any type of massage given by a child to an adult  
Any type of massage given by an adult to a child.  
Touching of underwear, even if it is covered by other clothing, such as giving “wedgies” or snapping bra straps.

### **The following actions may involve abuse and are to be avoided.**

Touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs - except for keeping young children clean or healthy  
Any touching not conducted in a public place  
Any form of affection that is resisted or unwanted by the child  
Any behaviour that could be interpreted as sexual in nature, including

flirtatious or seductive looks

Assisting the child with anything of a personal nature that children are able to do themselves, including dressing and bathing



### **3. Wholesome and Above Reproach Communication**

All verbal, nonverbal, and digital communication with children will be guided by principles of integrity and conducted with caution and discretion.

Social media includes, but is not limited to: WhatsApp, blogs, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, the publishing of photos, and videos and other online services.

No photos or video recordings of any child or activity may be taken without the permission of the Ministry Leader. When permission is granted the content must be transferred to the ministry leader's device and deleted, without exception, from the original device in the presence of the ministry leader.

Any official ministry social media account must be held and administered by the ministry leader. Photos posted on official social media accounts may not include children's faces and their identities. Any social media communication groups (e.g. WhatsApp) that are formed must include the ministry leader as one of the administrators, and include the POPIA clause in its description.

Staff and volunteers should not submit "friend" requests to children. Children may request friendships with adults, and adults should discern and disclose the level of contact they will maintain with the child prior to responding to these requests. Consent must be obtained from the child's parent or legal guardian.

#### **Unacceptable behaviours include, but are not limited to, the following:**

- shaming; belittling; humiliating; name calling; using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate the child, cursing or making derogatory remarks about the child, their family, and/or their place of origin; comments that relate to physique or body development or any sexually suggestive comments, pictures, images or videos
- private messaging via phone messaging, social media and/or online gaming communities
- following student accounts or adding them as friends on any social media platform
- exclusion of others, or excluding children in a derogatory or embarrassing way in the presence of others.

### **4. Health & Safety**

All children Grade 6 and younger have to be signed in and out by a parent or guardian at all Children's Church events or services.

A minimum of two unrelated leaders need to be present in each venue where there are children, and one of them must be an adult.

All leaders need to be vigilant in ensuring that the activities the children participate in, and the spaces in which the children are hosted, are safe.

Leaders must ensure that the venue is safe, that there is nothing lying around that could be potentially harmful, and that electrical outlets are covered in venues that are for young children.

Leaders must ensure that they know where the fire extinguisher is kept, and how to use it, as well as, emergency exits for the venue.

Any incident must be reported to the ministry leader, who will report it to the parents. An incident report has to be filled in for serious incidents.

If a child hurts themselves during the meeting, an adult leader needs to take charge of the situation. Each venue has a basic first aid box with gloves and the necessary items to clean wounds. If the injury is serious, the parents and the ministry leader need to be called immediately.

Sick children are unable to be accommodated or cared for at gatherings. If a child becomes sick during the meeting the parent will be called and a leader will stay with the child until the parent arrives, whilst adhering to the 3 basic safeguards. The leader must gently explain to the child that they cannot re-join the meeting until the condition has cleared up. No medication can be administered.

Children with diarrhea, vomiting, excessive coughing, and infectious diseases such as mumps, measles, and chicken pox etc. and high fever, will not be allowed into the meeting.

In the event of a fire, raise the alarm as quickly as possible. Do this by calmly getting everyone's attention and moving the children out of the building at the nearest exit, and gather in the designated safe area. Leaders are responsible for checking that everyone from their small group/class is in the safe area.

## **5. Toilets & changing of nappies**

Changing of nappies by church staff or volunteers is not allowed. The parent must be called from the service to change the nappy.

Leaders accompanying a child to the toilets must take another child with them. Buddy up! The leader needs to wait outside of the ablutions. If a young child needs assistance, a leader may assist as discreetly and quickly as possible, but never behind a closed door. A leader may not enter ablutions of the opposite gender. If a potty-trained child has an accident, the parents need to be called.

## 6. Transporting and visiting

If leaders are going to be transporting children for an offsite outing, parents have to give written consent.

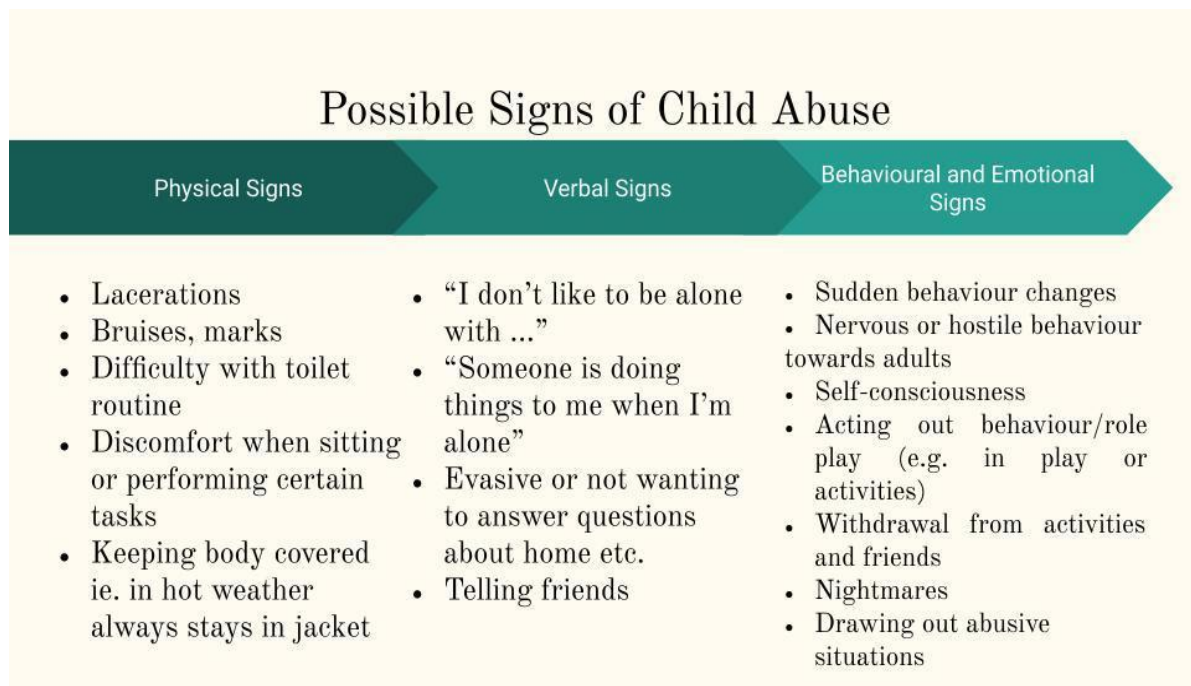
Leaders may not leave a child alone at the venue if their parents are late to fetch them.

Leaders must get permission from the ministry leaders and the child’s parents before visiting a child at home and adhere to the 3 basic safeguards at all times.

**Remember, child safety is protective, not restrictive. Let’s learn new behaviour to still love and support our kids.**

## 4. POSSIBLE SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

This policy recognises that a child may experience more than one type of abuse at a time, if you observe any form of abuse please follow the recording and reporting steps outlined in section 6 below



## **What about a child's privacy and confidentiality?**

Should a child's right to protection from abuse or neglect override his or her right to privacy and confidentiality? The simple answer is, yes.

## **5. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUSPICION AND DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE**

**Suspicion refers to observed behaviour without a verbal disclosure, such as:**

- Behaviour - nervousness around adults, sudden behaviour changes, withdrawal from usual activities.
- Drawings - explicit images or violence.
- Indirect statements - "I don't like being alone with..." or through play with peers.
- Physical signs - bruises or marks.

**Disclosure is being told directly by the child (or witnessing the event yourself) of any form of abuse.**

- Disclosure: A child tells you (discloses) abuse of any form to you. It may start with a drawing/play, but then they tell you the details.
- Witness: You directly witness an event.

Please see the section on reporting disclosure of abuse for the steps to follow.

## **6. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

### **1. Suspected abuse outside of the church context**

We are required, by law, to report any child/ren we suspect are suffering abuse in any way. In the case of any leaders becoming concerned of the potential abuse of a child happening outside of the church/ministry environment, the following processes must be followed.

Process to follow when you have a suspicion:

1. Inform the ministry leader immediately and every time you see signs or

- suspect abuse.
2. Ministry leaders must make and gather detailed (dated) notes and inform the Senior Pastor.
  3. The Ministry Leader and Pastor will ask other ministry leaders if they have any suspicions, and “compare notes” to get a bigger picture and evaluate their concern,
  4. They will then determine the next step, which may include:
    - o Trying to gather more information from the child.
    - o Involving a trained counsellor to formulate a plan of action.
  5. If the eldership and ministry leader still feel there is legitimate cause for concern, they must document their concerns (and possibly, fill in form 22) and immediately contact an appropriate support structure, and report it appropriately to a designated child-protection organisation. The case will then be referred to a social worker for investigation.

Process to follow when you have disclosure (confession) of abuse:

1. **LISTEN:** If a child shares information with you about a potentially abusive situation, do not react with obvious shock. Reassure the child that they have the right to be safe and that they have done the right thing by speaking to you. Do not ask detailed questions, only ask open-ended questions, such as, “can you talk more about what happened?” Explain the process to the child and that you must report the matter. Do not promise them that you can keep
2. things a secret but promise them that you want them to be safe. Do not speak to the parents about your concern if the concern could possibly be related to the parents or family in any way, as this may further endanger the child. Do not speak widely about your concern.
3. **DOCUMENT:** Write down exactly what the child said or what you have observed and what you are concerned may be happening. Sign and date the page and take it to your ministry leader.
4. **REPORT IMMEDIATELY:** The ministry leader must immediately contact the Senior Pastor and/or appropriate elders. Form 22 must be completed and a Child Protection Agency contacted.

The eldership and ministry leader will follow up and provide continued support to the child and family involved.

## 2. Accusation of abuse within the church context:

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at church or during our activities/initiatives, or by one of our staff members or volunteers, the following procedure shall be led by the congregational elders:

1. The parent or guardian of the child, the ministry leader, and the entire eldership team must be informed immediately. Elders then lead this process.
2. The leader or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave and/or be withdrawn from the ministry team pending an investigation, and will be instructed to remain away from the premises and ministry events during the investigation. He or she will be instructed to have no contact with the alleged victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be immediately reported to the civil authorities for a thorough and independent investigation, and the church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse and the judicial process. The church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The church will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or misconduct. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
5. A pastoral visit (through the eldership) will be arranged for those who desire it, both for the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator (if appropriate). This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
6. Any person who is found guilty of the alleged abuse or misconduct by the law, will be removed from their position of working with children.
7. Eldership (together with the civil authorities and professionals) will determine appropriate ongoing boundaries in response to the outcome of the investigation.

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-  +27 21 975 1983
-  [info@escck.co.za](mailto:info@escck.co.za)
-  [escck.co.za](http://escck.co.za)