

**NorthPointe Church
Guidelines and Procedures
For the Prevention of Child Abuse/Molestation**

Why do we have policies to prevent child sexual abuse/molestation?

NorthPointe Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for children and youth entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage children, youth, and their families to come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and to grow in their relationship with Him. Establishing written guidelines and procedures is a part of providing a safe and secure environment.

Following these guidelines and procedures will help prevent the occurrence of child sexual abuse/molestation and will provide protection for our preschoolers, children, youth, volunteers, and entire church family.

What is "child sexual abuse/molestation" ?

Child sexual abuse/molestation includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. Child sexual abuse/molestation may be physical or verbal, violent or non-violent. Child sexual abuse/molestation is a crime with severe sanctions.

What are some symptoms of abuse/molestation ?

Workers and staff should be alert to the signs that abuse or molestation may have occurred.

Physical signs may include lacerations and bruises, nightmares, irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area, difficulty with urination, discomfort with sitting, torn or bloody underclothing, and venereal disease. Behavioral signs may include anxiety when approaching church or nursery area, nervous or hostile behavior toward adults, sexual self-consciousness, "acting out" sexual behavior, and withdrawal from church activities and friends. Verbal signs may include the following types of statements: "I don't like [a particular church worker]", "[a church worker] does things to me when we're alone", "I don't like to be alone with [a church worker]", or "[a church worker] fooled around with me".

Please keep in mind that there are many reasons, other than child sexual abuse/molestation, that children may exhibit some of the above symptoms or actions.

Who is eligible to serve in children's and youth ministries?

Volunteer workers who serve on a regular basis must be regularly attending members of NorthPointe Church for at least three months before serving in a children's or youth area of ministry. Non-members must be approved in advance by the Pastor.

A person who has been charged or convicted of a crime related to the sexual abuse or molestation of children may not serve as a worker in NorthPointe's children's or youth ministries.

NorthPointe will work to help such persons find other areas of ministry in which to serve.

Potential workers who have themselves been victims of sexual abuse or molestation as minors are not automatically excluded from serving in children's or youth ministries. However, they are required to discuss with the Pastor how their experience might affect their service.

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What is NorthPointe's "Open Door" policy?

Wherever it is practical and facilities permit, workers should ensure that there is an unobstructed view by passersby into classrooms or other area where children or youth are present. This means, for example, that blinds should be left at least partially open and door windows should not be covered.

What is NorthPointe's "Team Approach" ?

An adequate number of adults must be present for all activities involving children or youth, taking into consideration the location and nature of the event, the number and age of participants, and the training and experience of the adult leaders.

When there are not two or more adult workers present in group teaching, ministry, and social situations involving children and youth, at least one other adult should be in close proximity (i.e. within shouting distance). This includes activities occurring either on or off church premises.

One-on-one (one worker with one child or youth) situations will only be allowed with prior parental permission and the approval of the pastor or ministry leader. Without this, there should always be at least one other adult worker present. In emergency or other unplanned circumstances where a one-on-one situation is required, without the opportunity to request parental permission, the worker should immediately notify the Pastor or ministry leader and take steps to end the one-on-one situation as soon as possible.

All workers have the responsibility of ensuring they do not inadvertently find themselves in a one-on-one situation (i.e. withdrawing from the group with a child or youth or allowing all other children or youths and adult workers to leave an activity before the last child or youth is picked up). Likewise, all workers share responsibility for not leaving other workers in a one-on-one situation, even for just a short time.

What is my part in keeping other workers accountable to NorthPointe's policies and procedures?

1. Be aware of NorthPointe's policies and procedures and point out to other workers instances where their behavior could be misinterpreted or questioned, or where set policies and procedures are not being followed.
2. If you have shared responsibility for a group of children or youth, it is important you are present for the entire time.
3. Do not leave another worker in a one-one situation with a child or youth.
4. Do not hesitate to notify the Pastor or a ministry leader of any suspicions or concerns you might have regarding another worker.

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What should I do if I suspect that child sexual abuse/molestation may have occurred?

All allegations of sexual abuse/molestation will be taken seriously and acted upon immediately.

The well-being of the alleged victim is of paramount concern. All situations will be handled with due respect for privacy and confidentiality and with the care and safety of the alleged victim as the first priority.

Unless you feel that a child is in imminent danger, do not act single-handedly or confront the alleged abuser yourself. Any suspected incident of sexual abuse/molestation is to be reported immediately to the Pastor or the ministry leader where the incident occurred. That person will take the appropriate action to ensure the safety of the child or youth and notify other appropriate leaders or legal authorities.

What is required of people who want to work in children's or youth ministries?

Anyone who has the desire to work in children's or youth ministries at NorthPointe should complete the Preschool/Children/Youth Ministry Leadership & Workers Application. You will be asked to authorize NorthPointe to obtain a criminal records background check.

We need your help at NorthPointe and are glad you are willing to serve God in this way. This process is not intended to hinder or discourage your serving. Our intention is to provide our children and youth the safest possible environments.