

**East Hill Foursquare Church**

***Policy to Reduce The Risk of  
Child Sexual Abuse***

**REVISED DECEMBER, 1996**

East Hill Church makes every effort and takes all reasonable precautions to create a sanctuary for children. We intend to provide a safe place for children to grow in Jesus Christ, and to understand His love and acceptance. Our policy is to nurture children by properly equipping compassionate, responsible adults. This policy covers every ministry in the church which involves young people under the age of eighteen (“minors”).

In addition to this policy, screening forms, procedures, and concise definitions are developed for use in the four major areas covered by this policy. Each staff pastor who oversees activities which include minors is responsible for implementing and maintaining this policy as well as all of the specific procedures. The church administrator will endeavor to review those departments at least twice a year to make certain there is adequate screening, training, record keeping and follow-up by the departmental pastor.

The four major areas covered by this policy are: (1) Worker selection; (2) Worker supervision; (3) Reporting obligations; and (4) Response to allegations.

## *Worker Selection*

All workers who have any contact with minors will be thoroughly screened. This includes those in positions, roles and functions that are paid, unpaid (volunteer), full-time, part-time, ministerial and non-ministerial. Each applicant is required to complete an application-screening form which contains the following information:

- Applicant's name, address and other biographical information;
- Area of ministry the applicant is interested in;
- Any training or education in the area of ministry;
- A description of all volunteer work over the past five years;
- Present and past (for the preceding five year period) church membership or affiliation;
- Present employment;
- A description of any youth work at churches or other organizations over the past five years;
- A full explanation of any prior criminal convictions for sexual abuse, molestation or related crimes;
- Whether or not the applicant was abused as a child (this may be left blank, but will need to be reviewed with the applicant by a pastor unless answered no);
- The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of at least two personal references;
- Completion of a criminal records check authorization form;
- Each applicant will be required to sign a release and authorization in favor of East Hill Foursquare Church to references, other churches, employers and other entities that have knowledge of applicant, authorizing full disclosure of all information relative to applicant's character and fitness for working with minors, and releasing all of these parties from any liability relating to the disclosure or exchange of this information;
- Oregon Driver's License or other photo identification.

Before a worker is authorized to work with minors, the department supervisor who is trained to screen and evaluate children and youth workers, will conduct at least one personal interview.

Contacting all references and other known sources of information about the applicant, and documenting these contacts is vitally important. The type of people contacted should include personal references, present employers, previous supervisors of the applicant in other youth work, and present and past pastors, staff or elders of churches the applicant was or is a member of or affiliated with. These contacts are of little value without proper documentation. That documentation should consist of a written summary of each contact, which includes the date of the contact, method of contact (e.g., telephone interview, personal interview), the person initiating the contact, the name, address and telephone number of the person contacted, and a summary of the information obtained. This documentation should be placed in the applicant's personnel file.

Prior to participation in activities with minors, workers must have regularly attended East Hill Foursquare Church for at least six (6) consecutive months and be known to church leadership preceding the youth work.

All new workers beginning 1/1/97 are required to have Oregon State Police background checks.

Persons who have been convicted of any form of sexual or physical abuse of a minor or any other crime involving minors, will not be permitted to work with minors at East Hill.

Because of the high statistical correlation between persons who are victims of abuse and those who abuse minors, any applicants with this history will be closely questioned. Applicants who are adult survivors of abuse will be required to meet with a qualified pastor and discuss all relevant issues, and fulfill any additional requirements imposed, prior to being permitted to work with minors at East Hill. Such persons *will not be disqualified* from youth work, but the church, in fulfilling its paramount duty of protecting its youth, will need to make all reasonable efforts to verify that the applicant has dealt with the issue in a healthy manner.

Finally, the applicant must sign and agree to follow church policies and procedures with respect to working with minors.

## ***Worker Supervision***

One of the most important things East Hill can do to safeguard its children is to follow the "Two Worker Rule". Under this rule, during any church activity, two properly screened and trained workers, one of which is at least 18 years old, are present in each room that includes minors. Preferably, both workers will be at least 18 years of age. If two adults are not available, one of the workers may be a Junior Leader who has been properly screened and trained. This rule extends to transporting minors to and from church activities, and activities both on and off church premises. The presence of a second worker not only reduces the risk of abuse, but also the risk of false accusations.

Exceptions to the “Two Worker Rule” should be rare, limited to very low-risk situations and subject to the prior approval of the church administrator and/or the child’s parent or legal guardian. An example of a low-risk situation would be where a female adult worker, known to the church for ten years, drives a female teenager home after a youth group meeting. However, a male worker driving a female teenager home after a youth group meeting would always be considered a high-risk situation.

All classrooms or locations where minors meet should have windows for viewing the room from the outside. At the very least, doors will be left open. Supervisors are encouraged to periodically, without prior notice, visit the meeting to observe.

Programs that involve children should always include adequate supervisory personnel. Supervision is maintained before, during and after an event, until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians, or until all youth have left the premises. Special care and attention is given to overnight activities. All adult chaperons and supervisors must be screened in advance by the staff pastor who is responsible for overseeing the activity.

All church staff should be sensitive to observing any marked personality change in minors involved in church activities. This could indicate a problem that needs attention.

East Hill’s Early Childhood Ministry and preschool (Discovery) areas use special identification procedures to make certain that children are returned to the proper person.

A child’s parent or legal guardian must sign the church’s parental permission form to participate in most church-sponsored activities. These forms are available from the staff pastor.

All individuals who work with minors at East Hill Church are notified as to what constitutes child sexual abuse, and that such activity can result in a felony conviction and imprisonment in the state penitentiary. A full definition of child sexual abuse is available from Multnomah County’s Services to Children and Families. The church’s insurance policy will not provide for the worker’s defense in such cases.

## ***Reporting Obligations***

The paid staff members of East Hill Foursquare Church are considered mandatory reporters of child abuse unless the information is revealed to a licensed pastor in the course of a confidential counseling session. Even then, the pastor may have to report if a child’s safety is still in jeopardy.

### WHAT DOES REPORTING TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES MEAN?

- We report any “reasonable suspicion” of child abuse according to Oregon law.

- Services to Children and Families or the local police will assess the information we give them, and take further action if necessary.
- The reporter's name will be kept confidential to the accused. Only a court of law can order a reporter's name released.
- More comprehensive information on the symptoms of abuse and the law is available from Services to Children and Families.

#### WHAT MUST CHILDREN'S MINISTRY WORKERS DO?

If a worker suspects child abuse in any form, he or she must take the following steps:

1. Report the incident immediately to the staff pastor in charge of the activity. If the staff pastor is not available contact the church administrator, Marc Gale (work 661-4444, ext. 311; home 669-7434).
2. Document the details of the incident in writing and give the write up to the staff pastor.
3. **Maintain confidentiality!**

### *Response to Allegations*

Should an allegation be brought against East Hill Foursquare Church, or one of its staff members or Children's Ministry workers, the following steps will be taken:

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. We will respond only if the reporter puts the allegation in writing.
3. Report the incident immediately to the administrator, Marc Gale (work 503-661-4444, ext. 311; home 503-669-7434). If he is not available, contact the staff pastor, Linda Zirk (work 503-661-4444, ext. 226; home 503-666-4959). They will contact our attorney and insurance company.
4. Full cooperation will be given to civil authorities under the direction of our church attorney.
5. All efforts in handling the incident, including date, time, etc. will be documented.
6. Only the Senior Pastor or his designee will respond to the press. The confidentiality of all involved will be safeguarded.

*“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*

John 8:32 NIV

## ***Response to Allegations & Reporting Abuse***

(Further information for paid staff)

East Hill’s policy regarding child sexual abuse adheres to four additional important principles if an allegation is ever brought against the church, its workers or clergy. The principles are as follows:

1. All allegations are taken seriously and must be in writing.
2. Situations are handled forthrightly with due respect for people’s privacy and confidentiality.
3. Adequate care and sensitivity is shown for the well-being of victims.
4. Victims are not held responsible in any way.

If an allegation against a worker or staff member occurs, East Hill responds as follows:

1. Documents all efforts at handling the incident.
2. Reports the incident immediately to the Administrator, Marc Gale, of Staff Pastor, Linda Zirk, who will contact our attorney and insurance company.
3. Contacts the proper civil authorities following the guidance of our attorney and insurance company.
4. Uses people outside the church, such as our attorney or independent social workers, to investigate allegations of sexual abuse to enhance the objectivity of the investigation, in appropriate cases.
5. Notifies the parents.
6. Does not confront the accused until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
7. Does not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Extend pastoral resources. The care and safety of the victim are our first priority.

8. Treats the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person is relieved of duties until the investigation is finished. If a staff member is accused, the Administrator will decide if income will be maintained or suspended until allegations are cleared or substantiated. If more than thirty (30) days transpire, the church Council will decide.
9. Responds to the press through the church spokesperson only. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved will be safeguarded.

***Child abuse includes the following:***

1. Any non-accidental physical injury to a child including an injury which appears to be at variance with the explanation given.
2. Any mental injury to a child caused by cruelty to the child.
3. Sexual abuse, including rape, sodomy, unlawful sexual penetration and incest as defined in the Oregon Criminal Code.
4. Sexual exploitation, including employing, authorizing, permitting, inducing or encouraging a child to engage in performing for people to observe, or the photographing, filming, tape recording or other exhibition which depicts sexual conduct, or allowing, permitting, encouraging or hiring a child to engage in acts of prostitution.
5. Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including failure to provide adequate necessities of life.
6. Threatened harm to a child, which means subjecting a child to a substantial risk of harm to the child's healthy or welfare.

A child is an unmarried person under the age of eighteen (18) years. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided that child is not less than three (3) years older than the victim.

As a church, our general rule is to report all suspected child abuse in accordance with ORS 418.755. An oral report is made immediately by telephone or otherwise to the local office or Services to Children and Families or to the police by dialing 911. If child sexual abuse occurs on church property or in the context of ministry or church activities, the reporter should inform the staff pastor who oversees the department involved, as well as the senior pastor, who will assist in making the report to proper authorities.

The reporter remains anonymous unless required to testify in court. The reporter is immune from any civil and criminal liability for making the report as long as the report is based upon reasonable grounds and is made in good faith. Failure to report may be punishable by a fine and subject the church to civil liability.

In Oregon, clergy are not required to report if the information is privileged under the clergy-penitent privilege. Clergy is a minister, ordained or licensed by that denomination who in the course of the practice of the church or denomination is authorized or accustomed to hearing confidential communications, and under the discipline or tenets of the church or denomination, has a duty to keep the communication secret. The communication must be confidential and made to the member of the clergy in the member's professional character for the clergy to be excused from the duty to report. Difficult questions of whether a particular communication is privileged should be reviewed by the church's attorney. A decision not to report by clergy could result in civil liability if abuse continues.

Determining whether there are reasonable grounds to believe that child abuse has occurred is often a difficult question. East Hill clergy, staff and other workers are encouraged to weigh the nature of the suspected abuse, credibility of information obtained and likelihood of additional victims, and to resolve all doubts in favor of reporting.

All children and youth workers receive periodic training (at least once every six months) on how to identify and report suspected child sexual abuse. The church endeavors to make training available to all new workers on such topics within the first two weeks of service.