

Grand Avenue Baptist Church (GABC)

Child Safeguarding Policy

The first purpose of this document is to provide standards and procedures of a proactive culture of protection and safety of the children of GABC. This document is also for the protection of staff, volunteers, and the whole church.

1. Defining child abuse

The definition used will be used by the State of Iowa (<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/232.68.pdf>). The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) has the legal authority to conduct an assessment of child abuse when it is alleged.

2. Child abuse prevention

A. Screening

In keeping with our values of protecting the children in our care, as we hire employees or recruit volunteers, GABC will require written applications, background checks, Internet/social media searches, reference checks and interviews. This screening also includes all staff, elders, deacons, ministry leaders, and volunteers working directly with children. Background checks will be renewed at least once every five years. Volunteers under the age of 18 years may serve under the supervision of an unrelated qualified adult who is responsible for their adherence to the Policy.

B. Safe Behaviors

Two unrelated adults will be required to supervise, lead or observe all GABC-sanctioned children's activities. The more an interaction is observable and interruptible, the better.

GABC requires that staff and volunteers adhere to the following standards for physical touch:

- a) Appropriate touch should be ***a response to the child's need*** for comfort, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based on the adult's emotional needs.
- b) Volunteer workers or employees ***should not force affection*** on any child. Physical contact should always be with the child's consent.
- c) Anyone observing inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a minor should immediately contact pastoral staff regarding suspected abuse or neglect according to the Policy.

Outside of the communication of Biblical truths, sexual language is a serious boundary violation. As such, the following are prohibited for leaders and ministry participants of all ages:

- a) Sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits
- b) Uploading, downloading, or viewing of pornography
- c) Music, video games, and movies with sexual themes

C. Routine Protective Measures

At the beginning of each ministry year, GABC will create or update a registration for any child who attends activities and programs. The registration will record who may safely pick-up a child from an event and other helpful information about the child. Attendance will be taken at all events. Once a child's attendance is recorded for an event, it is the church's responsibility to supervise those children from the time they are dropped off until the time they are picked up by a caregiver.

3. Policy Violations

Any staff, volunteer, parent, or church member who witnesses a policy violation is expected to respond in an appropriate way. This may include reporting a violation as outlined in the "Reporting of Abuse" section of the Policy. GABC expects all adults to practice bystander intervention when they see a Policy violation by taking immediate action beginning with questioning/confronting, ideally with others, with the goal of preventing/stopping child abuse.

4. Limited Access Agreements

GABC utilizes Limited Access Agreements to clarify safe behavior around children for church community members who have:

- a) Violated the Policy repeatedly
- b) Have committed offenses that are not related to children (e.g., stealing, drug use, DUI, etc.)
- c) Questions raised through the screening process

A Limited Access Agreement is a written and agreed-upon boundary between an individual and GABC wherein specific concerns are outlined about an individual's behavior, detail appropriate behavior toward children, and plan ongoing accountability for the individual. Limited Access Agreements apply to members of the GABC church community. They do not apply to known child sex offenders or church staff members. Known offenders wanting to participate in the church community will be dealt with after counsel has been taken with a child protection expert to determine the best way forward. If a staff member violates the policy, they will be formally warned and then fired if the violation occurs again and subject to a limited access agreement. Violation of a limited access agreement is grounds to begin church discipline and notification to other area churches.

5. Reporting of Child Abuse

The abuse of children is a serious crime. GABC community members must contact church staff immediately regarding any case of possible abuse. GABC mandates that church staff contact authorities immediately when they witness child abuse, or when they observe signs of abuse. A report should be immediately completed with pertinent information about the victim(s), parents(s), caregiver(s), alleged perpetrator(s) and circumstances regarding the disclosure.

6. Independent Reviews Following a Charge of Child Abuse

Under the following circumstances, GABC will consult with a child protection expert to determine if an independent review should be pursued:

- a) When a suspicion of child maltreatment during involvement in the church's ministry is reported to the civil authorities, they decline to investigate or prosecute the alleged abuses.
- b) A district attorney has not pursued legal prosecution because no suspected criminal behavior is reported; however, the children's ministry leaders believe the individual's behavior might still violate the Policy, be immoral, inappropriate, or unsafe.

If an investigation is deemed necessary, GABC will retain an organization that is:

- a) Completely independent of GABC
- b) Experienced in proper investigation techniques
- c) Up-to-date on child maltreatment research

7. Ongoing Survivor Support

The first purpose of this Policy is to prevent occurrences of child abuse. But if GABC becomes aware that a child has been abused while involved in the church's ministry, it will take the following steps to clearly communicate support for the child and the child's family:

- a) *Terminate/Suspend.* Immediately suspend the alleged perpetrator of abuse from any church positions s/he may hold, pending the results of an investigation by civil authorities or independent child protection experts. If an investigation proves the allegations then termination from the position will become effective. Assign a liaison to maintain contact with the alleged perpetrator.
- b) *Support Person.* A member of the church's leadership will be designated as a "Support Person(s)" and will reach out to the child and the child's family within twenty-four hours of learning of the alleged abuse to express the church's support. The Support Person will seek permission from the child and the child's family to continue offering support on an ongoing basis for up to one year. This support will include:
 - i. Showing up
 - ii. Listening
 - iii. Affirming
 - iv. Offering to accompany the child/family in filing a police report, meeting with DHS, to court hearings or trial and other related meetings, interviews, or hearings
 - v. Asking the child and the child's family how else the church can offer support

- c) *Mental Health Treatment.* GABC will offer to help the family find a qualified mental health practitioner with expertise treating victims of child abuse and their family members. If the family requires assistance paying for mental health treatment, the church will offer to subsidize such treatment or connect the family to resources that may be able to assist in this regard. If the church was negligent or otherwise complicit in allowing the child abuse to happen, the church will reimburse the cost of treatment (not covered by insurance and allowed by law) for the child and the child's family members for up to one year.
- d) *Public Support.* GABC commits to protecting the privacy of all victims of child abuse that relate to our church community. In the event that a victim of abuse is publicly attacked or disparaged for the abuse or their response to the abuse, the church leadership will—with the victim's permission—make a public statement denouncing and prohibiting such treatment of the victim and urge the community to offer support instead.
- e) *Creating A Culture of Ongoing Support for Victims of Childhood Abuse.* GABC aims to create a space that is safe for all victims of childhood abuse—both those we know about and those we don't.

8. Training and Dissemination

This Policy shall be disseminated widely to the church community to raise awareness and create a safe environment for our children. Specifically, the most current version of our Policy shall be:

- a) Posted on the church website
- b) Readily available in the church office, lobby, and nursery
- c) Included in membership class materials
- d) Mentioned where appropriate in church teaching sessions and services

The church requires that all staff, volunteers working with children, and church leaders annually take prescribed child safeguarding training approved by church leadership. The church requires all staff, volunteers working with children, parents, and church leaders to sign an affirmation indicating that they have read and agree to abide by the terms of this Policy, as a precondition to engagement with the church or receiving access to children. Affirmations will be stored in the church's office files.

D. Evaluating and Updating the Policy

This Policy is adopted by action of the elders of GABC on this 4th day of August, 2020.

This Policy was last reviewed by the leaders of the Nursery, Preschool, Children's and Youth Ministries of GABC:

_____ on _____