

Church of the Cross Child Protection Policy

Purpose of Policy

Church of the Cross (COTC) highly values children, community, and healthy intergenerational relationships. The purpose of this policy is to foster a positive, proactive, and protective culture in which all children and adults can thrive in relationship together.

1. Communication/Awareness

This policy shall be disseminated widely to the COTC community through publications, public discussion, educational opportunities, training programs, and other appropriate means of communication that will raise awareness and create a safe environment for our children. Specifically, the most current version of our policy shall be:

- posted on the COTC website.
- made available in print form upon request.
- provided in new member packets.

2. Training

COTC will provide training on this child protection policy to all new staff and volunteers and will strive to provide additional and ongoing training on a regular basis. All staff and volunteers will be required to attend these training events.

3. Employee and Volunteer Screening

COTC desires to fill our family ministry with dedicated and joyful volunteers who are committed to the health, safety, and discipleship of all children.

- 3.1 In keeping with our values of protecting the children in our care, COTC will administer screening procedures for any person whom the church employs or any person who volunteers with children, student, or family ministries.
- 3.2 COTC aims to hire employees and recruit volunteers to work with children who fit our vision, culture, theology, and values. COTC is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), a theologically conservative, traditional denomination. The EPC is a family of churches, reformed and Presbyterian, defined by shared core values and bonded by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The EPC is a church family centered upon the good news of what God has done for the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- 3.3 An individual will be considered for any volunteer position involving interaction with children after s/he has been involved with or known by the COTC community for a minimum of six (6) months.

- 3.4 A national criminal background check is required for all employees and volunteers, regardless of position, as defined above. COTC may limit opportunities to serve children for any community members who have offenses on their background check that are not related to children (e.g., DUI). If the background check reveals any offenses related to children, that person will not be permitted to serve in any ministry related to children and students.
- 3.5 All individuals seeking to fill a teaching, long-term, or overnight role must complete and sign a written application. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, COTC affiliation, and references, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at COTC.
- 3.6 For teaching/long-term/overnight roles—upon completion of an application, a brief interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.
- 3.7 For teaching/long-term/overnight roles, references may be checked. Documentation of reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at COTC.
- 3.8 COTC may review the applicant’s social media presence.

4. Protective Practices

The guidelines are intended to foster the healthiest and most lifegiving interactions between adults and children.

4.1 General Guidelines for Interaction Between Adults and Children:

- 4.1.1 COTC values all community-building activities and events. In an effort to foster a healthy and safe community, we must guard against the abuse of spiritual authority as well as the negative impact of staff burnout. For these reasons, COTC prohibits all paid children, student, or family ministry staff members from engaging in home babysitting or other private, unobservable interactions with the children/students currently in their area of children, student, or family ministry.

This restriction does not apply to staff members who have a previous and personal relationship with a family before they came on staff.

COTC staff members who don’t work in children, student, or family ministries should always be mindful of protective child-safe practices when interacting with children on and off campus. Staff members are

required to communicate all plans/instances of private, in home babysitting for those in our community to a pastor or an elder.

Staff members who are parents of COTC children/students may interact with the peers of their own children outside of COTC ministries with parent permission.

- 4.1.2 Adult-child interactions with children should always be observable and interruptible. During all children, student, or family ministry programming and activities, a minimum of two unrelated leaders (16 or older) will be assigned to each classroom/group. If one leader needs to step away briefly, the remaining leader's behavior should always remain observable in common/public areas.

In the event that one leader is an adult and the other a student under 16 years of age, an additional third person must be available to drop in as needed multiple times during the course of the programming. In this situation, any student leader must be 13 years or older in order that they are able to have a full background check.

4.2 Registration and Attendance:

- 4.2.1 Registration information will be collected for all children who attend activities and programs. The registration will record who may safely pick up a child from an event and other helpful information about the child, such as emergency contact information and allergies.
- 4.2.2 Attendance will be taken at all events. Once a child's attendance is recorded for an event, it is COTC's responsibility to supervise children in attendance from the time they are dropped off until the time they are picked up by a caregiver. COTC staff and volunteers will ensure that safe pick-up and drop-off practices and procedures are observed for children of all ages. Children 6th grade and older may be released without parental sign-out from regular ministry events.
- 4.2.3 We desire for our children to feel at home while at COTC. We also want them to be as safe as possible while traveling from place to place while on location where we are worshipping. This will be possible if we all work together to ensure that children remain in observable areas. Children 5th grade and younger must walk with an adult or older student (6th grade and older) to and from programming spaces.

4.3 Restroom Guidelines:

In the upholding of the following guidelines, COTC hopes to inform and encourage the safest and most intentional restroom practices for all ages.

- 4.3.1 Parents are encouraged to take their children to the restroom before or after class.
- 4.3.2 If we are on a campus with multi-stall restrooms in children/student areas, all multi-stall restrooms in those areas should be clearly labeled as a child/student restroom. All such restrooms will be equipped with a changeable sign on the door—designating when a child restroom is being used by an adult. Adults are encouraged to avoid child/student restrooms during programming time if possible. (In the event that we are renting a facility, such labeling and signage must first have approval of the owner.)
- 4.3.3 Leaders should check to make sure all restrooms are clear of adults before programming begins.
- 4.3.4 All diaper changes and potty-training efforts in the nursery and Early Childhood wing are to be in compliance with Alabama State guidelines.
- 4.3.5 It is an honor to partner with parents through the potty-training years. A potty-trained child is one who can very consistently use the restroom, manage clothing, and wash hands without assistance. We at COTC assume all children over the age of 5 are potty trained.
- 4.3.6 To ensure privacy and to foster safe norms, leaders of potty-trained children should avoid being alone with a child or student in a bathroom with the door closed. If a potty-trained child needs to use the restroom during programming:
 - A leader should maintain a line of sound or sight with the restroom at all times and be mindful of how long the child is inside.
 - If the restroom trip is taking longer than seems necessary, the leaders should ask the child if s/he needs help by calling from the doorway. If the child requires assistance, the leader should notify another leader before entering the restroom to quickly check on the child/student. The other leader should help maintain a line of sound while the first leader assists the child in the restroom.
 - Leaders who assist potty-trained children in restrooms should inform parents during pick-up- or within 24-hours.

4.4 Safe Touch:

COTC recognizes that children have an inherent need for healthy affection. We desire to meet that need. COTC requires that all touch between an adult and a child be appropriate, observable, and welcome. Adults should always understand and respect the fact that children do not always welcome touch.

- 4.4.1 Some examples of healthy affection are:

- high-fives/fist bumps
- pats on the shoulder or arm
- hugs

4.4.2 COTC prohibits the following touch:

- any touch that is unwanted by a child
- physically abusive, including all corporal punishment
- sexually abusive, such as touching private parts
- any intimate or unusual touch, such as touching stomach or thighs
- tickling
- wrestling
- lap sitting (for ages 3 and older)
- prolonged hugs

4.4.3 COTC discourages staff and volunteers from carrying children over the age of 3 years old, except in cases of emergency.

4.5 Discipline:

COTC acknowledges that discipline is a form of love and is necessary for discipleship. In all ways, we pursue discipline strategies that are positive, preventative, encouraging, and gentle. Age-appropriate examples of such strategies will be presented and modeled at leader trainings. Staff and volunteers should consult the pastor or children, student, or family ministry leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

4.5.1 Discipline that is physical is prohibited, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. COTC does not allow spanking, grabbing, hitting, or any other physical discipline.

4.5.2 Staff and volunteers should avoid any type of shaming or favoritism. If a leader or parent feels a child is in need of individual attention for the purpose of discipleship, please see section 5 of this policy.

4.6 Safe Communication:

Our goal is for all personal and digital communication to be effective and life-giving. We encourage all adults to engage children and students through appropriate methods of communication.

4.6.1 Digital communication should mainly be done through group messages and/or with the parents copied. Private communication between staff/volunteers and children should be short and infrequent. Staff/volunteers will immediately inform parents of patterns and/or concerns. Prolonged conversations between staff/volunteers and children should take place in person and in public following the guidelines

established in the Individual Discipleship section of this policy (Section 5).

4.6.2 COTC encourages positive verbal interactions, including:

- encouragement
- kind words
- positive reinforcement\
- appropriate humor

4.6.3 COTC acknowledges that sexual language is more than mere jokes and is a serious boundary violation. As such, it prohibits:

- sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits
- uploading, downloading, or viewing of pornography
- music, video games, and videos/movies with sexual themes

4.6.4 If COTC staff or volunteers want to give a lecture or organize a program to help children/students understand age-appropriate questions about their body or sexuality, the event must be planned in advance and parents notified beforehand. When children/students raise questions about their body or sexuality, COTC staff and volunteers will answer the question at hand in an age-appropriate way and inform the child's parents as well as a supervisor.

4.7 Transportation:

The following guidelines should be followed when transporting children:

- Written parent permission must be in place. Written permission may include group text messages that include a staff member.
- A child should never be alone in a car with a staff member or volunteer.
- The driver must travel directly to the destination as planned with no last minute/impulsive stops.
- The driver should never be using a cell phone when driving children.

4.8 Student Childcare Workers:

At times it is necessary or desirable for students (paid or volunteer) who are under age 18 to assist in caring for younger children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to student childcare workers:

- All paid nursery workers must be 16 years old or older.
- Volunteer leaders should be 6th grade or older and at least 2 grades above the children they are serving. These young volunteers must always be under the supervision of an adult worker. (One exception to this is if a student worker is assisting a child in traveling from place to place. See section 4.2.3).

- All student workers (paid or volunteer) must be screened and trained by a staff member.

4.9 Medication Administration:

Non-prescription medications will not be administered to children under COTC care without parent permission. Prescription medications for a non-contagious condition or after a child is determined to no longer be contagious may be administered at the request of a parent. These medications will be kept by the designee of the pastor or ministry leader and administered according to the instructions on the original prescription bottle. Parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions, such as asthma or severe allergic reactions, should address their situation with the pastor or ministry leader to develop a plan of action.

4.10 Accidental Injury:

In the event that a child/student is injured while under the care of COTC, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries and bruises, leaders will provide first aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent and/or guardian of the injury at pick-up.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be contacted in addition to the leader's supervisor. If warranted by circumstance, an ambulance will be called.
- For all injuries to children, an accident report must be completed by the leader present.

4.11 Sick Child:

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at COTC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child in the care of COTC. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Child has nasal discharge (thick or continual clear discharge, green, or yellow).
- Child has vomited or had diarrhea within the last 24 hours.
- Child has been on an antibiotic for less than 24 hours.
- Child has a fever or has been on fever-reducing medicine within the last 24 hours.
- Child has an unexplained rash or showing signs of pinkeye or any type of infection.

Children who are observed by staff or volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent/ guardian will be contacted to pick up the child immediately.

5. **Individual Discipleship**

COTC values all large group, small group, and individual discipleship. Individual discipleship is mostly, but not exclusively, practiced in student ministry (middle and high school). The following practices are to encourage healthy one-on-one relationships between students and their leaders:

- 5.1 We encourage our youth leaders to pursue students individually mainly for the purpose of “checking in” or following up.
 - 5.2 Individual discipleship should be occasional and never exclusive.
 - 5.3 Leaders must inform the pastor or student ministry leader of any 1:1 discipleship arrangements beforehand.
 - 5.4 All 1:1 meetings must be in an observable, public setting (library, restaurant, coffee shop, etc.). For example, an adult leader might invite a student to a mall for walk/talk. (See section 4.7 for student transportation guidelines). Individual discipleship meetings in a private residence are prohibited unless in common/observable areas of the home and with a parent present.
 - 5.5 Occasionally, a need for a more regular, focused, and intentional form of individual discipleship might arise. In this case, a written plan* is required which includes the following:
 - parental consent (by at least one parent)
 - estimated time frame
 - general purpose
 - documentation of meeting times and locations (See section 4.7 for student transportation guidelines)
 - a stated goal to provide general updates to parents and to the pastor or student ministry leader at the end of the time frame, if not before.
- *Note: written plans may be in the form of an email or a document with leaders and parent/s signatures or copied.

6. **Off-Site Trips and Events**

COTC values the intensive, experiential, and fun discipleship that comes from weekend retreats and ministry trips.

6.1 General Guidelines:

Parent/Guardian permission forms and medical consent forms must be completed prior to all off-site trips. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirements of the planned activities. For middle school trips, leaders must be high-school age or older. For high school trips, leaders must be 18 years or older. All volunteer chaperones must be screened, trained, and have a

volunteer application on file. Under no circumstances may one leader alone take or accompany children/students on an overnight outing or be alone in an unobservable space with a child. On a trip, no child/student should ever be left alone in a room/cabin or alone beyond a line of sight.

6.2 Rooming Arrangements:

- 6.2.1 In situations where one large sleeping area is provided, two or more leaders shall be assigned to each group of the same sex. If one leader needs to step away briefly, the remaining leader's behavior should always remain observable - in common/public spaces. A child should never be alone in a cabin/hotel room or any unobservable space with a leader.
- 6.2.2 In trips for high school trips that require smaller, hotel-size rooms, two leaders of the same sex may have rooms that are adjoining the student rooms when possible or will at least be in proximity of sound of the student rooms.

6.3 Medical:

- 6.3.1 Each child/student and adult staff/volunteer leader must submit a completed medical/insurance form. Each child's form must be signed by a parent/guardian. A designated leader should have a copy of all medical forms, which should be kept on the event site for the duration of the event. All leaders should have access to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.
- 6.3.2 First aid supplies will always be available on the event site. All leaders will be informed of the location of first aid supplies.
- 6.3.3 Required prescription medication will be kept by a designated leader and administered to children/students according to stated directions on the container. Any accidents, unplanned medication administration, medical emergencies, or injuries will be documented and communicated to parents.

7. **Abuse**

Our hope is to educate our community and beyond about the signs, dangers, and types of abuse. This education is to empower us all to take proactive, calm, and preventative measures that protect the vulnerable among us.

- 7.1 Abuse is a misuse of authority and power that breaches Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relation to gain advantage over another for personal pleasure in an abusive, exploitative, and unjust manner. Even if someone such as a church member, client, employee, or student initiates or invites sexual content in the relationship, it is always the responsibility of the pastor, teaching or ruling

elder, officer, employer, volunteer, counselor, supervisor, teacher, or adviser to prohibit a sexual relationship.

7.2 Abuse, in any form, will not be tolerated by COTC. The goal of this policy is to establish proper preventative measures to protect individuals against sexual misconduct, as well as to specify courses of action in the case of allegations or an actual incident regarding sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct involves not only unwelcome touching and demands for sexual favors, but also any unwelcome sexually-oriented behavior or comments which create a hostile or offensive environment.

7.3 Sexual Abuse: Defined as physical contact with a sexual or intimate part of the body, or other forms of sexual activity, conducted without consent, or engaged in for the purpose of sexual gratification or to degrade or abuse.

7.3.1 Physical contact includes, but is not limited to:

- Touching, grabbing, patting, slapping, pinching, rubbing, fondling, groping, poking, or other forms of contact, whether over or under clothing.
- Rubbing one's genital area up against another person or touching another person with one's genitals, whether over or under clothing.
- This includes instances when an individual acts as though the rubbing was inadvertent but in fact it was intentional.
- Sexual intercourse of any kind.

7.3.2 Sexual or intimate body parts include, but are not limited to:

- Breasts
- Buttocks
- Genitals
- Groin area
- Upper thighs

7.3.3 Other forms of sexual activity include, but are not limited to:

- Photographing, videotaping, or making any other visual, descriptive, or auditory recording of sexual activity or sexual or intimate body parts.
- Displaying to another person any writings, photographs, videotapes, or other visual or auditory recordings of sexual activity or sexual or intimate body parts.

7.3.4 Lack of consent may involve, but is not limited to:

- Explicit indication of lack of consent.
- Physical/verbal force or intimidation, whether express or implicit.
- When one individual is an adult and the other individual is a child. Children can never legally consent to sexual activity with an adult.

- Being too intoxicated to say “no.”
- Being asleep.
- Lack of knowledge of the activity’s occurrence.
- Not having the physical or mental capacity to consent.

7.3.5 Consider the possibility of sexual abuse if a child has:

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty, pain or blood in the genital area when walking, sitting, or using the bathroom
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Injuries (e.g., bruises, tearing, bleeding), itching, or swelling in the genital, vaginal, or anal area
- Urinary tract infections, yeast infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy

7.3.6 It is atypical for children to engage in the following sexual behaviors:

- Placing mouth on sex part
- Asking others to engage in sexual acts
- Trying to have intercourse or imitating intercourse
- Undressing others, especially if done forcefully
- Imitating sexual positions with dolls
- Inserting an object into vagina or anus, especially if child continues to do so despite pain
- Manually stimulating or having oral or genital contact with pets
- Making sexual sounds
- Inserting tongue in mouth when kissing

7.4 Physical Abuse:

Defined as non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of grabbing, pushing, punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child. (see section 4.5 for COTC’s policy regarding corporal discipline during programming).

7.4.1 Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, burns), especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of injury.

- Injuries may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments.
- Injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body.

7.5 Emotional Abuse:

Children suffer from emotional or psychological abuse when they are repeatedly ridiculed, blamed, humiliated, or compared unfavorably to others. This may include threats, unrelenting pressure to meet impossible expectations, name callings, put-downs, or deliberate coldness.

7.6 Spiritual Abuse:

Defined as abuse administered under the guise of religion. Including, but not limited to:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm a child.
- Compelling a child to engage in religious acts against his/her will.
- Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church).
- Abuse perpetuated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor).
- Invocation of divine authority to manipulate a child into meeting the needs of the abuser.

7.6.1 Consider the possibility of emotional/spiritual/sexual abuse if a child:

- Shows a pattern of bed-wetting or bed soiling that has no medical cause and is not age appropriate.
- Expresses frequent psychosomatic complaints (e.g., headaches, nausea, abdominal pains).
- Has not attained significant developmental milestones or suffers from severe developmental gaps.
- Dresses differently from other children in the family.
- Has deprived physical living conditions compared with other children in the family.
- Has severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression.
- Has severe symptoms of self-destructive behavior (e.g., self-harming, suicide attempts, drug or alcohol abuse).
- Is overly compliant, too well-mannered, too neat and clean.
- Displays attention-seeking behaviors or displays extreme inhibition while at play.
- Copies negative behavior and language used at home while at play.

7.7 Neglect:

Neglect can be manifested in a variety of forms, including:

- Physical: Failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision.
- Medical: Failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment.
- Educational: Failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs.
- Emotional: Inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs.

7.7.1 Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- is obviously malnourished, listless, or fatigued.
- begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger.
- is consistently dirty or has severe body odor.
- lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- suffers an untreated illness, injuries, health (e.g., unfilled cavities), or serious educational needs.
- regularly has broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aid, or other necessary aids or equipment.
- stays at school outside of school hours.
- is frequently absent or has significant academic struggles.
- is inappropriately left unsupervised.
- abuses alcohol or other drugs.

7.8 Polyvictimization:

COTC takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We are aware of the research on polyvictimization, which tells us that children who are maltreated in one way are at significantly increased risk of being maltreated in multiple ways. Therefore, as our church becomes aware of an indicator or report of a child being maltreated in one way, we will be alert to the possibility that this child might also be maltreated in another way, and will take steps to protect the child from known risks and be extra attentive to and supportive of the child.

7.9 Impact of Abuse:

Though a child's injuries may be hidden from the untrained eye, child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment can result in immediate and/or lasting impact in all realms of the person's well-being. Understanding how child sexual abuse can traumatize the child and have lasting impact in the life of a surviving adult is a critical first step in preventing abuse and responding compassionately. Not every child will display the impact of their maltreatment and not every adult will experience the long-term consequences of their traumatic childhood experiences, but all are at increased risk.

7.10 Perpetrators of child maltreatment:

People who sexually abuse children utilize authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse. The three primary categories of people who sexually abuse children are the stranger, the acquaintance, and the intra-familial offender.

8. **Reporting**

Upholding policy requires a team effort. COTC desires that every member would be watchful, mindful, and active advocates of all areas of this policy and of children.

8.1 When adults report suspected child abuse, their report could save a child's life. In contrast, silence about suspected abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. All adults are expected to report observations of abuse, policy violations, and any "abnormal situations" within 24 hours.

8.2 Reporting Abuse:

8.2.1 By Alabama law, mandatory reporters of child abuse are any person whose profession brings them in contact with children on a daily basis, including: employees at hospitals, clinics, and sanitariums; social workers; child care employees; clergy; school teachers and officials; public and private K-12 employees, employees of public and private institutions of postsecondary and higher education; physical therapists; dentists; peace officers; law enforcement; mental health professionals; pharmacists; nurses; doctors, physicians, surgeons, and medical examiners; podiatrists, chiropractors, optometrists, osteopaths, and coroners.

Mandatory reporters also include any other person with responsibility for the care of children. All members of COTC take vows of "supporting and participating with this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability" (*Book of Order*, "Book of Government," 8-3.B.3.d). Likewise, at baptism, members "assume responsibility with these parents for the spiritual nurture of this child" (*Book of Order*, "Book of Worship," 3-2.G.c.1). Therefore, members of COTC are required by state statute to report abuse/neglect when they have reasonable cause to suspect a child has been or is being abused/neglected, or if a child is observed as being subjected to such conditions or circumstances.

Reports of suspected abuse should be made within 24 hours. Reports can be made by phone at to the Jefferson County Child Abuse Hotline at (205) 423-4850. The state asks for verbal reports to be followed by written reports, through filling out form DHR-FCS-1593 and either mailing it to P.O. Box 11926, Birmingham, AL 35202-1926, or fax to (205) 423-4398

Links for reporting in Jefferson County, Alabama:

Instructions for form DHR-FCS-1593

<https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/1593Instructions.pdf>

Form DHR-FCS-1593

<https://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ChildAbuseForm1593.pdf>

Contact information for Jefferson County

<https://dhr.alabama.gov/county-office-contact/>

- 8.2.2 After a church member has reported abuse, they should then notify the pastor, who will then notify the Session, and the appropriate children, student, or family ministry leader, in coordination with legal counsel.
- 8.2.3 Under the following circumstances, COTC will consult with an outside organization (e.g. GRACE) to determine if an independent review should be pursued:
- When a suspicion of child maltreatment is reported to the civil authorities and they decline to investigate or prosecute the alleged abuses.
 - A district attorney has not pursued legal prosecution because no suspected criminal behavior is reported; however, COTC leadership believes the individual's behavior might still violate the church policy, be immoral, be inappropriate, or be unsafe.
- 8.2.4 If an investigation is deemed necessary, COTC will retain an organization that meets the following criteria:
- Completely independent of COTC.
 - Experienced in proper investigation techniques.
 - Up-to-date on child maltreatment research.
- 8.2.5 Additional steps that will be followed as necessary:
- Staff will be terminated immediately from employment.
 - Volunteer will be immediately and permanently removed from volunteer status and church discipline will be initiated in accordance with the EPC Book of Order.
 - Appropriate pastoral care and professional intervention for victims, their families, and others involved in congregational and employment settings.
 - Appropriate pastoral care for the accused will be provided in consideration for conflict of interest.
 - Crisis management team will be formed and tasked with the responsibility for communicating relevant information to respective families, groups, individuals, and other organizations if/as appropriate.

8.3 Reporting Policy Violations:

COTC takes policy violations seriously. Any staff, volunteer, parent, or church member who witnesses violation of this policy which does not fall into the category of abuse is expected to contact the person over that area of ministry and the pastor.

8.4 Reporting Things that “Don’t Seem Right”:

We value the intuition of everyone in the COTC community. Anyone who witnesses or hears of something in relation someone else’s emotional, spiritual, or physical health that just “doesn’t seem right” or that can be described as “abnormal” is expected to contact the staff person over that area of ministry and the pastor.

8.5 Accountability:

The pastor and children, student, and family ministry leaders are accountable for the oversight of the COTC Child Protection Policy. The pastor and/or ministry leaders will communicate any above reports to other leaders and volunteers as necessary.

Last approved by: **Pastoral Team and Administrative Commission**
Date: **September 2023**

Acknowledgement of Receipt and Understanding

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand this Church of the Cross Child Protection Policy and understand that it is my responsibility to follow it carefully and uphold it for others as well.

I also understand and acknowledge that my employment or volunteer status at COTC is “at will” and that, just as I may terminate my employment or volunteer status at any time with or without notice or cause, COTC may do the same.

I understand that a violation of the COTC Child Protection Policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including being separated from employment, volunteer status, and/or church membership.

Staff/Volunteer Signature

Date

Staff/Volunteer Name (printed)

This form should be signed and returned to COTC for filing.