

## **Abuse Policy Draft**

### **Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church**

As a community, Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores their cry (Psalm 9:9, 12). Our community seeks to embody Jesus's priority of justice for the vulnerable, especially children.

Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Abuse is sadly a common reality in this world. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents." (Matthew 10:16) We all must become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy.

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, many within the church have acted in predatory ways toward vulnerable people and bad actors will often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what we all must take ownership of in our community as we walk with God who loves justice and hates oppression.

#### **Definitions [For more thorough definitions see our full policy: [www.culpeperbaptist.org/abuse-policy](http://www.culpeperbaptist.org/abuse-policy)]**

In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, leader, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable (e.g. a child, someone who is sick, elderly, or disabled, student, supervisee, intern, immigrant, etc.). That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.

Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church stands against any and all types of abuse including child abuse and neglect, elder abuse, intimate partner violence, clergy abuse, sexual assault and harassment, and stalking. Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church stands against any and all forms of abuse: sexual, physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, etc.

#### **Administrative Policy**

##### *Safeguarding Team*

The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping the community of Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church for effective prevention and response. Currently, our Safeguarding

Team is comprised of a group of 4-6 members and is at least 50% women. Our current team is [insert team here]. You may reach them [insert contact information here.]

*For details about the role of the Safeguarding Team and how we screen and train at Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church, see our full policy at [www.\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://www._____).*

## **Healthy Boundaries**

At all times our community upholds the following standards of respect and safety.

Show respect in physical touch, space, and visibility:

- Appropriate touch, whether an adult or child, is always welcomed by the person (If you are not sure, just ask - e.g. Can I give you a hug?).
- Touch within a significant power difference should be observable to others (e.g. between an adult and a child).
- Children who need assistance in the restroom outside of the children's ministry must be helped by their own parent or guardian. Within the children's ministry, all diapering or assistance must be observable by two screened adults.
- Be considerate of others and give them appropriate space: Notice the body language of others and be aware of your impact on others
- Stay in visible and accountable spaces: No one should be alone with a child who is not their own child (including giving rides)

Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others.
- Avoid any language that belittles or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a person's body or sexual attractiveness)
- Avoid sexualized comments including jokes, stories, experiences, or sharing sexualized content (such as images, video or other media) or engaging in any other sexualized communication.

Show respect in agency and personal boundaries:

- Healthy people do not seek to control others, but rather encourage and empower others to take healthy agency in their own life (e.g. making decisions for someone or taking control of an aspect of their life such as directing their finances or career or social life).
- Avoid volunteering inappropriately intimate information or asking someone to reveal intimate details or personal information when the person is not ready or comfortable doing so.
- Give agency to others (e.g. "Where would you be comfortable meeting up?")
- Always respect the "no" of others in setting personal boundaries.

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others. The following behaviors are unacceptable by any pastors, leaders, or staff at Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church:

- Any abuse of power as defined by this policy

- Sexual harassment of any kind, including unwanted sexual attention, comments, or unwanted physical touch
- Behavior or words that discriminate against anyone based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status.
- Any words that belittle or threaten

Abusers often use charm or other tactics to manipulate others. Targets of abuse often report feeling flattered and then later confused, upset, guilty, ashamed, and like it is all their fault. Victims should know that although it is normal to feel this way, abuse is never their fault. Those in positions of power and trust are responsible and able to respect appropriate boundaries.

Abusers are often skilled at explaining away concerning behavior. Anyone who experiences or has information regarding concerning behavior or a policy violation should document it and speak up as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team. All of us should be mindful of what is happening around us and speak up to the Safeguarding Team if anyone is demonstrating concerning behavior, crossing boundaries, or violating this policy in any way.

## **Responding to Boundary Violations**

Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety. Any person - staff, volunteer, parent, or church member - who witnesses a violation of this policy is expected to intervene if you feel safe to do so or get someone who can. Then speak up to the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible. Furthermore, any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability. Any concerns about the Safeguarding Team may go to the Leadership Council/Committee.

## **Responding to Abuse and Harassment**

Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any allegations or findings of abuse or harassment within our church. We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to abuse, Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons. It is hard for victims to come forward in most circumstances. Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church will do its best never to blame victims for struggling to come forward, delaying disclosure, or other common disclosure behavior.

### *Immediate Response Protocols*

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911. After the call, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team.

2. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse or neglect against a minor (age 17 or younger) all adults<sup>1</sup> must immediately report to the Virginia Child Protective Services (CPS) hotline at (804) 786-8536 or appropriate local Department of Social Services (DSS) office<sup>2</sup> (this includes offenses potentially committed by a minor against another minor). Any potential child abuse or neglect should also be reported to a local police or sheriff's department. Similarly, with a vulnerable adult (e.g. elder abuse, or abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities), all adults within Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church must immediately report to the Virginia Department of Social Services Adult Protective Services (APS) Hotline by calling 1-888-832-3858 or contacting the appropriate local DSS office.<sup>3</sup> Any potential vulnerable adult abuse or neglect should also be reported to a local police or sheriff's department.

Online exploitation of children should be reported to the Cyber Tipline at 800-843-5678 or online at [www.CyberTipline.org](http://www.CyberTipline.org).

DO NOT try to investigate the matter. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team.

If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. The only exceptions are if the abuse occurred within our church community and/or the name of the perpetrator is known.

3. If there is a disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse against an adult, all persons within Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church must report as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team or Leadership Council/Committee/Council.
4. After receiving any information from any above steps, a Safeguarding Team member shall inform the entire team (except a person or family member of a person who is involved in any allegation) and document the information. If there are concerns or allegations involving a member or members of the Safeguarding Team, the report may go to any member of the Leadership Council/Committee.
5. The Safeguarding Team and Leadership Council/Committee shall ensure reports have been made to proper authorities (law enforcement and social services when applicable) in situations of potential abuse, as explained above, including child abuse and neglect, elder abuse, abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities. In other cases involving an adult victim, the Safeguarding Team and Leadership Council/Committee will respect the agency of any adult victim(s) with regard to whether the adult victim(s) reports personally to the appropriate authorities. The decision of a survivor to personally report

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<sup>1</sup> While not all adults in Virginia are legally mandated to report child abuse and neglect, all Christians have an ethical obligation to report. For more information and resources for mandated reporters visit <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/abuse/mr.cgi>

<sup>2</sup> Visit <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/localagency/index.cgi> to find your local DSS office.

<sup>3</sup> Visit <https://www.dars.virginia.gov/aps/AdultProtServ.htm> for more information.

adult abuse and/or cooperate with authorities is ultimately their choice. However, the Safeguarding Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way. There may be situations where the Safeguarding Team will report information pertaining to a potential crime against an adult or child even when the victim is not ready to do so. When reporting is required or is in the judgment of the Safeguarding Team in the best interest of the safety of others, the Safeguarding Team may coordinate with the Leadership Council/Committee as well as consult with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault, or threats). The Safeguarding Team will also seek to communicate as sensitively as possible the reason for reporting to the victim.

6. After receiving any information from any above steps, the Safeguarding Team will coordinate with the Leadership Council/Committee on critical response issues including:
  - a. Assessing Safety
  - b. Assessing Accountability or Boundaries for Alleged Perpetrators
  - c. Implementing Care for any Victims and Families
  - d. Connecting to Specialized Resources

When the alleged perpetrator is within the church, the Safeguarding Team shall make any recommendations regarding administrative leave, suspension, other restriction, or discipline to the Leadership Council/Committee. This will be reevaluated as necessary as the situation develops. It is strongly recommended that any person, but especially clergy or other leader, is put on leave with restricted access to any vulnerable persons by the local Leadership Council/Committee when there are credible or substantive allegations of abuse as defined above. This would be a temporary step until the completion of any investigations and/or the Leadership Council/Committee has sufficient information to make a determination concerning any personnel decisions, credential status, and/or other accountability.

Any person facing an allegation of abuse, and any family member or close mentor of such a person must recuse themselves from these response protocols, whether a member of the Safeguarding Team or Leadership Council/Committee.

#### *Further Response Protocols*

Whenever possible, the Safeguarding Team should refer the victim(s) to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations such as Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-422-4453), The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE), The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673), or SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP).

Our local abuse resources include:

Nearest Domestic Violence Shelter: Services to Abused Families (SAFE) Contact Information: (540) 825-8876 or (800) 825-8876 website: <https://www.safejourneys.org/>  
[Nearest Child Advocacy Center - Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_]

[Other Local Resources: \_\_\_\_\_]

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church to share certain information in order to safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate further appropriate response including but not limited to:

- Ensuring all potential crimes against children have been reported to appropriate authorities according to the policy above
- Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons
- Facilitating cooperation with any investigations including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the church or with others
- Ongoing, appropriate care for the victim(s) including helping them connect with professional trauma informed care if desired
- When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward victims
- Maintaining contact with the alleged offender during any investigations or administrative leave to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially with regard to controlling the narrative, retaliation, and access to other vulnerable people
- Caring for others in the church and coordinating with outside resources as needed
- Documenting relevant actions and information related to the case
- Reaching out to qualified experts with questions or when an Independent Consultation or Investigation is appropriate

*For information pertaining to how our church may utilize independent consultation or investigation in certain circumstances, please see our full policy at [www.\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://www._____).*

Those who use any position of power to abuse as defined by this policy shall never again serve in any formal role within Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church.

#### *Retaliation*

Culpeper Baptist/Maranatha Church prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Leadership Council/Committee. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation and will be held accountable under this policy.

*For information pertaining to Caring for Survivors, Known Sex Offenders, and Potential Indicators of Child Abuse, please see our full policy at [www.\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://www._____).*