



**BUFFALO**  
FREE CHURCH

**2051 50<sup>th</sup> St. NE**  
**Buffalo, MN 55313**  
**763-682-6846**

**SAFE PLACE POLICY**

Approval Date: February, 2016  
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*"...Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Luke 18:16*

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**Forward:**

Those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ, living and serving in the United States in the twenty-first century must come to grips with the ever-worsening moral condition of the culture in which we live. The policies which follow may be viewed as a loving means of protecting that which is important to us and to God. They are necessitated by the moral and legal climate of our contemporary world.

The alternatives to what may sound like strict and demanding policies are even less attractive. The harm done to a child or youth by sexual abuse is incalculable. The harm done to a church volunteer or employee by a spurious allegation of improper conduct is also considerable, as is the harm done to a local church by a sexual abuse allegation or actual incident. These are the scenarios we seek to avoid.

Going beyond avoidance, we also seek to demonstrate to the community we are trying to reach for Christ that we care about their children’s well-being and are willing to go to any length to protect their safety.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the staff with recommendations given to the Elder Board for changes, and corrections.

## **Adult Volunteer and Employee Application Process for Children's/Youth Ministry**

Anyone 18 years or older, who is involved in working with children or youth at Buffalo Evangelical Free Church (hereafter: BEFC), including in the Nursery, will be screened according to the following guidelines:

1. All new volunteers and employees (18 years or older) who will work with minors on a regular basis must complete the *Application for Children's/Youth Ministry* (page 12). The release statement attached to the application must be signed.
2. Applications will be distributed by the appropriate Ministry Director.
3. Applicants will return their completed applications to the Ministry Director or Staff Pastor. The Ministry Director and Lead Pastor will confer to prevent anyone getting lost in the system.
4. A Trak-I Technology criminal background report will be completed on all individuals who complete the *Application for Children's/Youth Ministry* or *Employment Application* and the Trak-I disclosure form. Criminal background checks may be repeated for those who continue serving at BEFC over an extended time period. Persons who leave the church and return, will be re-screened.
5. An applicant for Children's/Youth Ministries must be a regular attendee of BEFC for at least 6 months prior to serving with children/youth. Exceptions will be made for individuals who are transferring from a congregation where they have served with children and are willing to list at least one reference from that church as a reference.
6. Applicants from sister evangelical churches may serve in some ministries, such as the AWANA program, if they have been members or attendees in that church for at least six months and if a reference is provided who is a leader in that church.
7. Volunteers may not serve in this ministry until their applications have been approved.
8. Volunteers who work in occasional or one-time ministries such as a 5 Day Club or a Vacation Bible School may serve without completing this process. However, those supervising them will ensure that they are trained in and follow the guidelines of this Safe Place policy.

*“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them, so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Hebrews 13:17*

### **Under age 18 Assistants in Nursery/Children’s Ministry, Application Process**

Young people between the ages of 13 and 17 may serve as Assistants in the Nursery and/or Children’s Ministry with their parents’/guardians’ permission. In order for these volunteers to be able to work in the Nursery and/or Children’s Ministry, the following guidelines must be followed:

1. Volunteers between the ages of 13 and 17 must complete an *Application for Nursery/Children’s Ministry Assistants* (obtained from the Ministry Director). The application must be signed by a parent or guardian. Applicants will return their completed applications to the Ministry Director.
2. The qualifications for young workers include:
  - i. The desire to model Christ-likeness in all behavior and especially as they serve in ministry to children at BEFC.
  - ii. The desire to demonstrate respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy and maturity.
  - iii. The following behaviors are not acceptable:
    - Physical abuse – e.g. strike, spank, shake, slap
    - Verbal abuse – humiliate, degrade, threaten
    - Sexual abuse – inappropriate touch or exposure
3. An applicant must be an individual who has been a regular attendee of BEFC for at least 6 months prior to serving.
4. Volunteers may not serve in these ministries until they have been approved.
5. Children under age 13 may accompany a *parent or guardian* in the Nursery.
6. Cell Phone Usage – It is requested that all volunteers working with children not use their cell phones during their ministry time.

## **Application Screening Process Followed By BEFC**

At this time, individual Ministry Directors (SS Director, Children's Church Director, Youth Director, AWANA Commander, Nursery Director) are responsible for the application screening process and will:

1. Distribute and process all applications, conducting any required telephone reference interviews. BEFC Ministry Directors may vouch for applicants who are personally known to him/her by signing on the appropriate "sign off" line of the application. Ministry Directors must do a telephone reference interview for applicants not personally known to them.
2. Supply the BEFC Office Administrator with copies of all applications so that she can conduct the necessary criminal background checks.
3. If detrimental information is uncovered during the application review process and there is continued interest in the candidate, the Lead Pastor will conduct a follow-up interview, and shall inform the Elders of the situation. In the event that the applicant is ultimately accepted as a volunteer, the reasons for overriding the detrimental information will be documented. The Lead Pastor will conduct an interview with all applicants who were abused as minors or decline to answer the application question about childhood abuse.
4. See the next section ("Confidentiality") regarding the secure storage of applications.

## **Confidentiality**

Information obtained through the application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in \*confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All confidential information discovered or obtained through the application process will be kept under the control of the Office Administrator. All completed applications will be kept in a secure location by the Office Administrator (not the Ministry Directors).

\* "in confidence" means that this information will be known to the Office Administrator, the Lead Pastor and the Elders only.

## **Nursery Guidelines**

1. Due to issues of gender, there must always be at least one approved adult female worker present in the Nursery. Approved workers are individuals who have been cleared to work in the Nursery by way of the application/screening process.
2. Individuals between 13-17 who have been approved may serve in the Nursery as Assistants. (As above, younger children may accompany at least one *of their parents/guardians* in the nursery, but they are not considered to be “nursery workers.”)
3. Approved workers in the Nursery are required to wear an identification/name tag.
4. The Nursery will have at least one window.
5. Children AND parents/family/friends or guardians dropping the child off will be assigned matching security numbers.
6. Parents/family/friends or guardians picking up children must present the same number as the child’s in order for the child to be released to their care.
7. If a child is injured while under the supervision of a Nursery worker, the Nursery worker will complete a Child/Youth Injury Report and make two copies. The Nursery worker will give one copy to the parent, the second copy will be given to the Nursery Director and the original will be filed securely by the Office Administrator.
8. Nursery Guidelines will be posted in the Nursery.
9. All hands-on care of infants (6 months of age or younger) will be done by workers who are 16 years old or older.

### **Classroom Guidelines**

1. Whenever possible, two approved adult workers will be present in each classroom where children/youth are present. If this is not possible, a door will remain open at all times.
2. All classrooms will have at least one window.
3. If individual discipline/counseling is needed, children/youth will be disciplined/counseled by an adult youth worker/pastor of the same sex with doors open and the area easily accessible.
4. These guidelines will be posted in each classroom.
5. All substitute teachers/workers in any BEFC children's/youth ministry must be individuals who have been approved in accordance with the Safe Place policy.

### **Other Church Supervision Guidelines:**

1. All off-site activities for children/youth must be pre-approved by the Ministry Director responsible for the ministry.
2. Ministry Directors will assure proper supervision at both on-site and off-site activities.
3. Children/youth will not be transported alone by an adult worker of the same or the opposite sex except with written parental permission or in the case of an emergency.
4. One adult will not mentor or counsel a child/youth of the opposite sex. At least two unrelated adults must be present.
5. To the extent possible, BEFC events that are co-educational will have both male and female leaders.
6. Written parental permission slips will be obtained, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips.
7. If a child is injured while under the supervision of a children/youth worker, the worker will complete a Child/Youth Injury Report and make two copies. The worker will give one copy to the parent, the second copy will be given to the Ministry Director and the original will be given to the Office Administrator.
8. All children's and youth Ministry Directors must have an approved application for children/youth ministry on file for any overnight activities.

### **Training of Children/Youth Ministry Workers**

All workers in Children/Youth ministries at BEFC will be trained and familiarized with this policy. The initial training of each approved children/youth volunteer will be documented.

*“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4*

## **Behavioral Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers**

All staff and volunteers in Children/Youth Ministry will observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, pornography or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. Avoid all inappropriate touching of minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or staff member.
3. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Do not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
4. Children/ youth ministry workers are to report any suspicion of physical, emotional verbal and/or sexual child abuse to the ministry leader.
5. While we do not want children/youth workers to become overly suspicious, looking for abuse where it does not exist, we are also aware of the tendency on the part of church workers to deny to themselves and others their own well-founded suspicions. Respect or admiration for a church volunteer or staff member must not prevent a fellow worker from going to the appropriate supervisor with legitimate concerns. There exists both a moral and legal obligation to face and report the truth.

*“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” Matthew 18:6*

## Allegations of Misconduct

All youth ministry (under 18 years) volunteers and staff are required by BEFC and by Minnesota statutes to report any suspicions of any kind of child abuse to their BEFC supervisor. BEFC will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of child/youth abuse associated with church-sponsored activities. All accusations of abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful of the needs, rights and feelings of those who allege abuse and those who have been accused of abuse.

When an allegation is made involving any kind of abuse of a child/youth, the complainant is to be referred to the Lead Pastor and informed by him regarding the guidelines and the procedures which are followed by the church. The individual will be asked to immediately complete a "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" (available from ministry leaders or the office). The Lead Pastor will inform the Elders of the situation and conduct a preliminary investigation (as described below) so that the incident can potentially be reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities *within 24 hours of the allegation, as required by Minnesota law*. The Lead Pastor will:

1. Interview the complainant, after reviewing the written report.
2. Determine by means of telephone or personal inquiries whether or not the allegation is credible enough to warrant reporting to the authorities. (Could it have happened? Was the individual charged actually at the scene of the alleged incident, etc.?)
3. The Lead Pastor is not expected to determine the guilt or innocence of the individual charged but only whether or not the incident *could* have occurred. State law dictates that the church must report any credible allegation.
4. The Lead Pastor will consult with the Elders regarding the disposition of the case. Whether or not the allegation is reported to law enforcement, a written account of the investigation by the Pastor and the disposition of the allegation must be made.
5. If the incident is reported to law enforcement the Lead Pastor or his designee will:
  - a. Communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel and/or other consultants of BEFC.
  - b. Make and maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian during the investigation, and inform them of the actions taken.
  - c. Make and maintain contact with the alleged perpetrator (possibly with legal counsel), and inform him/her of the actions taken.

6. The Lead Pastor or his designee will also:

- a. Report the matter to the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) North Central District Superintendent.
- b. Report the matter to BEFC's insurance carrier.
- c. Communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
- d. Hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to the news media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of BEFC's attorney. (In the event of the arrest of the alleged perpetrator, the Elders will consider issuing a proactive news release.) The spokesperson will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey the news to the congregation.
  - i. BEFC will be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved
  - ii. Only a designated spokesperson, appointed by the Elders will speak to the media
  - iii. Youth workers and church members in general will be asked to allow the designated spokesperson to answer questions from the media

7. All BEFC leaders will:

- a. Treat the child/youth making the accusation, as well as the accused, with dignity and pastoral concern:
    - i. Treat the allegation itself with the utmost concern
    - ii. Whether or not the accusation turns out to be true, appropriate representatives of BEFC will respond in such a way as to make the safety and well-being of the child/youth its first consideration.
  - b. Respond in a calm and helpful manner. BEFC leaders will seek to be a source of stability, strength, and calm confidence for the child, his or her family and all others involved in the situation.
  - c. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
8. BEFC will suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender while the investigation is being conducted. The Lead Pastor will explain to all persons aware of this action that this action is being taken as a necessary precaution and does not imply that the church believes the accused is guilty of the charge.

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...a time to be silent and a time to speak." Ecclesiastes 3:1,7*

## **Definitions of Sexual Abuse:**

The definition of child sexual abuse differs from state to state. In general, it is any sexual exploitation of children/youth under 18 years of age, even if the child/youth seems to consent. Child sexual abuse may be violent or nonviolent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the consequences. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially and developmentally ready. It includes behaviors that involve touching and activities that do not involve actual physical contact. Types of abuse that involve touching include: fondling, oral, genital or anal stimulation/penetration, non-violent intercourse, incest and forcible rape. Types of abuse that do not involve touching include: verbal comments, exposure to pornographic videos or photographs, obscene phone calls or text messages, exhibitionism, "peeping," and causing or allowing children to witness sexual activity. Other forms of abuse (non-sexual) include physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

## **Symptoms of Sexual Abuse:**

Signs of child sexual abuse can be detected by an alert parent or childcare worker, and this information should be incorporated in the training of all children's workers in the church.

*Physical symptoms may include:* Redness or swelling in the anal area, vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching or swollen genitals, pain in urinating or defecating, unusual odors in the genital area, vaginal infections, discharge or sexually transmitted disease, torn, stained or bloody underclothing, unexplained persistent sore throat or gagging, difficulty in walking or sitting, physical complaints with no apparent physical cause.

*Behavioral symptoms may include:* Extreme changes in behavior such as sudden loss/increase in appetite, a sudden refusal to do something previously enjoyed, a sudden refusal to be with someone previously liked, recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns and fear of the dark, regression to more infantile behavior such as bed-wetting, soiling of underclothing, thumb-sucking, excessive crying, unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters, expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of his/her age, acting in an unusually seductive way with peers or adults, unusual sexual themes expressed through the child's schoolwork, art, poems and stories, fear of a person or an intense dislike of being left somewhere or with someone, aggressive, disruptive or self-abusive behavior, withdrawal, running away, failure in school, an unwillingness to undress or to participate in physical education classes.

*"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." Romans 14:13*

## **Safe Place Policy Acknowledgment**

**(For ministry volunteers and employees who have received training in the Safe Place policy)**

These guidelines have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. Buffalo Evangelical Free Church (hereafter: BEFC) reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with BEFC or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received a copy of and been trained in the use of BEFC's Safe Place policy. I understand that it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained herein. I understand that these policies are the property of BEFC. I agree to submit to the warnings or admonitions of my ministry leader in the performance of my ministry and I understand that I will be suspended from my ministry (without an automatic assumption of guilt or innocence) if there is an allegation of abuse made against me.

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Print Name

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Signature

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Date

## Application for Children's/Youth Ministry

*This form must be completed by all applicants for positions of ministry to persons under age 18 at BEFC, and is being used to help the church to provide a safe environment for all children and youth who participate in our ministries. Ministry in any of our children's ministries requires a criminal background check. Your cooperation is appreciated.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print)

Present Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Tell us which BEFC Children's or Youth ministry or ministries you're interested in serving with:

\_\_\_\_\_

When would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to a crime? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If yes, please explain. You may attach a separate page for this if you prefer. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Were you a victim of sexual or physical abuse or molestation as a minor? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If you prefer, you may decline to answer this question and instead discuss your recovery with the Lead Pastor. Answering "yes" or declining to answer the question will not automatically disqualify you for ministry at BEFC. The high correlation between childhood abuse and adult victimization of others necessitates that we ask this question.

Do you have a current, valid driver's license? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

Name of any church of which you are currently a member: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the names and locations of other churches you have attended (not visited) during the past

five years: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List all work you have done in children’s or youth ministries in any of these churches: \_\_\_\_\_

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List any work you have done with children or youth with organizations other than churches in the past five years:

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List any gifts, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for work with children/youth:

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We need a personal reference other than an employer or relative. Applicants who are attendees/members of “sister” evangelical churches should list a ministry supervisor from the church where they worship on Sundays.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ email address \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print)

Present Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, churches or other organizations listed above to give BEFC any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for youth work. I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs or family on account of compliance or any attempts to comply with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the policies of BEFC and to refrain from conduct which is contrary to the teachings of the Bible in the performance of my services on behalf of the church. I further state that I have carefully read the foregoing release and know the contents thereof and I sign this release as my own free act. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Ministry Leader Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Office Use: Background Check Completed On \_\_\_\_\_ (date); Reference Check Completed On \_\_\_\_\_ (date) OR reference

check "sign-off" by BEFC Ministry Leader (signature here) \_\_\_\_\_

**Briefly share how you became a follower of Jesus Christ.**

**What do you do to help yourself continue to grow as a Christian?**

## Application for Under 18 Nursery/Children's Ministry Assistants

*This form must be completed by all under age 18 applicants for serving in the BEFC Nursery or other children's ministries. It is being used to help the church to provide a safe environment for our little ones. A criminal background check is not performed for under 18 assistants.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print)

Present Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

When would you be available to begin? \_\_\_\_\_

How often are you willing to serve? \_\_\_ Weekly \_\_\_ Monthly \_\_\_ Every other month \_\_\_ Quarterly

Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty to a crime? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

If yes, please explain. You may attach a separate page for this if you prefer \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been a victim of sexual or physical abuse? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no If you prefer, you may decline to answer this question and instead discuss it with a parent or guardian and the Senior Pastor. Answering "yes" or declining to answer the question will not automatically disqualify you for ministry at BEFC. The high correlation between abuse and the victimization of others necessitates that we ask this question.

List all work you have done in children's ministries in this or church or any other organization:

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A personal reference other than an employer or relative:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, churches or other organizations listed above to give BEFC any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for youth work. I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs or family on account of compliance or any attempts to comply with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the policies of BEFC and to refrain from conduct which is contrary to the teachings of the Bible in the performance of my services on behalf of the church. I further state that I have carefully read the foregoing release and know the contents thereof and I sign this release as my own free act. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Youth Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Ministry Director's Use: Reference Check Completed on (date) OR reference check "sign-off" by BEFC Ministry Leader (signature here) \_\_\_\_\_