

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
607 N. Maguire St., Warrensburg, Missouri 64093

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Purpose Statement

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH (BLC) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in BLC programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting BLC staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term “worker” includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with children.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between BLC leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous Church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any accusation of, participation in, or conviction of sexual misconduct. The application form will be maintained in a locked file in Pastor’s Office. A face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position and include the following:

1. Review the Application and Background Check results
2. Discuss/clarify any questions or adverse information
3. Review the Child Protection Policy and Guidelines for Acceptable Behavior

c) **Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants’ references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH.

d) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in BLC school/preschool/daycare center;
- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;
- Those counseling children;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children (such as, church sponsored athletic team coaches and vehicle drivers).

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH Head Elder on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in a locked file in Pastor's Office.

Two Adult Rule

It is BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH's goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. Some youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on BLC's premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers who become aware of suspected abuse or neglect of the children under our care should report immediately to the BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH Head Elder for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified, and BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH will comply with Missouri's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. BLC will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH's insurance company will be notified, and BLC will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH Head Elder will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved. BLC will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with the Pastor, Parent(s), Chairman of the Board of Education, or Sunday School Superintendent if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Training

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.