

Safe Place Strategy

Shades Mountain Baptist Church

It is the goal of Shades Mountain Baptist Church (Shades) to provide a safe environment for all minors participating in events sanctioned by Shades. All employees, volunteers, and members who supervise minors¹ at any Shades sanctioned event are required to abide by this strategy. As explained more fully below, any person who believes this strategy has been violated should report immediately such suspected violation to the Executive Pastor or any member of the Safe Place Oversight Team.

- I. **Purpose.** The purpose of this strategy is to provide a safe and spiritually nurturing environment for minors associated with the ministries of our church.

- II. **Oversight Team.** The Pastor is the Appointing Authority and shall annually appoint an Oversight Team comprised of not less than seven Shades members to serve for the implementation and maintenance of this strategy.

Appointed Safe Place Oversight Team members: Executive Pastor, Minister of Administration, Human Resources Director, Family Pastor, Minister to Preschool, Minister to Children, Special Needs Minister, Student Minister.

The committee shall meet at least annually in the month of April to:
 - a. Review ministry area compliance with this strategy.
 - b. Make recommendations to the Pastor for updates to this strategy.

- III. **Application.**
 - a. This strategy supersedes any previous Child/Minor Protection policies, written or otherwise communicated. This strategy extends to any Shades sanctioned activity. A sanctioned activity is defined as (1) any event, meeting, or gathering planned by Shades staff or lay-leadership and approved by a member of the Ministerial Staff for the purpose of furthering Shades' mission and (2) transportation provided by an adult leader to and from a sanctioned activity where minors are supervised by an adult leader other than their parent or legal guardian.
 - b. This strategy applies to all people (regardless of age, status, or training) who provide supervision to minors at Shades sanctioned activities.
 - c. This strategy is not exhaustive and cannot address all situations. Any questions regarding the applicability of this strategy should be directed to the Executive Pastor or a Safe Place Oversight Team Member. The spirit of Shades' mission statement should guide decisions in the absence of applicable written strategy.

¹ As used in this policy, minor includes any person under the age of 18 or any person over the age of 18 who remains under the legal care and guardianship of an adult.

- d. Ministries that involve people with special needs will use this strategy as a guideline for establishing protocols and broaden the term minor to include all persons dependent on care beyond that they are able to give to themselves.

IV. Personnel. All Shades employees will complete an onboarding process that includes: application, interview, national background check and reference check as detailed in the most recent version of the Employee Onboarding Process Checklist.

V. Adult Volunteer Leaders.

- a. An adult leader is any person 18 years or older who serves in any capacity as a supervisor of minors at a Shades activity.
- b. Adult leaders will complete an onboarding process that includes: application, interview, national background check and reference check as detailed in the most recent version of the Volunteer Onboarding Process Checklist.

VI. Training. All employees and adult leaders will complete a sexual abuse awareness curriculum approved by the Appointing Authority or his designee.

VII. Practices.

- a. **Adult Leader Conduct.** All adult leaders should conduct themselves in a way that reflects appropriate physical, emotional, and spiritual care and concern for minors. Sexual abuse, physical abuse, and verbal abuse is strictly prohibited.
- b. **Protection from Abuse.**
 - i. Sexual Abuse of a Minor is defined as violent or non-violent criminal act(s) that involve(s) a minor in sexual behavior including but not limited to sexual intercourse or deviate sexual intercourse regardless of consent, touching of a minor's sexual or other intimate parts for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of either party, exposure of sexual parts, sexually provocative verbal or scripted communication, exposure to pornographic material, or allowing a minor to witness a sexual activity.
 - ii. Physical abuse includes but is not limited to hitting, kicking, or striking another. Shades adult leaders will not use physical discipline (corporal punishment).

In limited circumstances, reasonable physical intervention may be used by an adult leader where:
 - a. physical force is necessary to prevent injury in emergency situations; or

- b. appropriate physical force consistent with training and experience is used within the Special Needs ministry to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals served by that ministry.
- iii. Verbal abuse is language directed toward a minor that is unwelcome, threatening, offensive, embarrassing, degrading, diminishing, or hostile. Adult leaders should use clear instruction and positive reinforcement when engaging with minors.
- c. **Duty to Act.** Adult leaders should make reasonable attempts to stop abuse that they witness at Shades activities.
- d. **Reporting.**
 - i. Shades requires all adult leaders to report immediately any suspicion of any form of abuse of a minor to the Executive Pastor or any Safe Place Oversight Team member, who shall ensure that the matter is reviewed and where required by state law reported to the Alabama Department of Human Resources.
 - ii. All Shades Leadership should be aware that abuse can and does occur at a peer-to-peer level. The duties to act and report listed above apply in cases of questionable peer-to-peer interactions.
- e. **Two-Adult Rule.** Adult leaders will make reasonable efforts to ensure that during activities one adult is not left alone with a minor or minors. Generally during activities, two adult leaders should be present when a minor or more than one minor is present.
 - i. Because of the professional exemption extended to educators, the Early Learning Center (ELC) is not bound by the Two-Adult Rule, but the leadership of the ELC should be diligent in conducting inspections of teaching areas.
 - ii. If circumstances present that prohibit the application of the Two-Adult Rule, a Ministerial Staff member may (but is not required to) authorize the activity to continue if the following conditions are met:
 - 1. Doors to the specific activity remain open,
 - 2. A monitor is assigned, and
 - 3. At least two minors are present.
 - iii. Pastors and Ministers may authorize one-on-one counseling, but they should ensure that either:
 - 1. Adult leaders meet minors in a highly-trafficked public place and situate themselves conspicuously, or
 - 2. Doors to the meeting room remain open.
- f. **Activity Monitor.** When more than one group is meeting in a single facility, the activity organizer should ensure that an adult leader is assigned as an activity monitor. The activity monitor should:
 - i. Remain conspicuous in the vicinity of the groups, and
 - ii. Make random non-intrusive inspections of the groups that help ensure compliance with this strategy.
- g. **Transportation.** When transportation is involved as part of a sanctioned activity Ministers may approve a lone adult to drive an automobile when at

least two minors are also in the automobile. An adult should never drive an automobile when there is only one minor passenger.

- h. ***Communicating with Parents/Guardians.*** Activity organizers should secure consent from a minor's custodial parent or legal guardian for a minor to attend an off-campus activity (such consent may apply to multiple events but should be renewed annually).
- i. ***Communication with Minors.***
 - i. General. When communicating with minors in any form, adult leaders should not use any threatening, demeaning or sexually provocative language or tones. Adult leaders should not joke with minors in any way that might be construed as sexually suggestive.
 - ii. Electronic Communication.
 - 1. Every ministry at Shades should encourage parents to check electronic communications of their minors regularly.
 - 2. Adult leaders should communicate with minors with the assumption that parents or guardians are monitoring.
 - 3. Generally, if adult leaders use electronic communication with minors group messaging is preferred. Group messaging should include at least one other approved adult.
 - a. Should adult leaders deem it necessary and appropriate to communicate with a minor individually they should only communicate with minors via text message.
 - 4. Adult leaders should not communicate with minors via video communication.
 - 5. All Shades ministry social media accounts should have a minimum of two leaders with access to the account.

- VIII. Facilities.** Facilities include, but are not limited to, all buildings, grounds, vehicles or other structures owned, leased or used by Shades to facilitate sanctioned activities.
- a. Where possible and practical activity organizers will make reasonable efforts to ensure that access to the portion of any facility used is limited to participants and support personnel of the activity.
 - b. Activity organizers should make reasonable efforts to ensure that the minors in their charge stay within confines of the assigned activity space.
 - c. When activities are held in rooms inside a facility:
 - i. Activity organizers should make reasonable efforts to choose rooms that are:
 - 1. Located in areas of the facility that affords the most practical opportunity for inspection by other adult leaders or assigned monitors.
 - 2. Well lit.

3. Located in corridors that are well lit.
4. Fitted with a transparent window that allows an unobstructed view of a reasonable portion of the room. If windows are not available Activity Organizers should ensure that doors are left open sufficient to allow a visual inspection by other adult leaders or monitors.
 - ii. Adult leaders assigned to specific rooms should as much as practical position themselves in an area of the room that is easily seen from the window or door.
- d. If minors move from one space to another during a Shades activity, minors must be supervised by an adult leader during movement from one space to another.

This Strategy adopted May 1, 2022.
Chad Cossiboom
Executive Pastor