

Reporting Potential Child Abuse and/or Neglect

Covenant Life Revised Policy, July 8, 2015

Covenant Life Church (“CLC”) cares deeply about children and desires to prevent all child abuse and/or neglect. CLC wants any suspected child abuse and/or neglect reported immediately to legal authorities, in accordance with Maryland state laws. CLC believes that it is the moral responsibility of every Discovery Land (“DL”) volunteer to report to local law enforcement authorities if the volunteer has reason to believe that child abuse and/or neglect has occurred.*

DL volunteers should exercise sound judgment in reporting potential child abuse and/or neglect. If a DL volunteer has reason to believe that a child has suffered abuse and/or neglect, that individual must immediately follow a two-step reporting process:

First, to the local department of social services or to a local law enforcement agency, **and**

Second, to the Discovery Land director (Becky Ferleman). If Becky Ferleman is not available, the report must be given to a CLC pastor.

Because CLC provides police security for all Sunday morning services and other DL events, CLC has sought and received assurances from local law enforcement departments that volunteers can accomplish step 1 by reporting directly to any of the law enforcement officers on duty at CLC. (An officer is usually available at the Info Center in the main church lobby.) If a law enforcement officer is not available at that time, the volunteer must contact the Montgomery County Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (240-777-4417) or the Montgomery County Police non-emergency line (301-279-8000). Proof of abuse and/or neglect is not required before reporting.

To protect children still further, CLC requires DL volunteers to report any suspicion whatsoever of child abuse and/or neglect to the DL Director even if the suspicion does not rise to the level of state-mandated reporting based on a “reason to believe” standard.

When reporting their reasonable belief about abuse and/or neglect to the local law enforcement officer on duty at CLC and the DL director, DL volunteers should state the following, to the extent of their knowledge:

1. The name, age and home address of the child
2. The name and home address of the child’s parents or other person who is responsible for the child’s care
3. The whereabouts of the child
4. The nature and extent of any potential abuse and/or neglect of the child, including any evidence or information available to the reporter concerning possible previous instances of potential abuse and/or neglect
5. Any other information that would help determine (a) the cause of the potential abuse and/or neglect, and (b) the identity of any individual responsible for the potential abuse and/or neglect

*(*Important note: In Maryland, the legal standard for reporting potential abuse and/or neglect is “reason to believe,” not just “suspicion.” As a practical guideline, having a “reason to believe” means that there should be something objectively observable — and not just intuition or “a gut feeling” — that can be rationally explained to a third party and supported by the type of evidence that is indicative of abuse.)*

DL volunteers should be aware of the physical and behavioral signs of child abuse and / or neglect. Some of the more common indicators are summarized below (taken from Montgomery County Family Crimes Division website):

1. Physical Abuse

a. Physical indicators may include:

- i. Unexplained bruises on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs
- ii. Multiple injuries in various stages of healing
- iii. Bruises/welts
- iv. Human bite marks
- v. Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.
- vi. Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions

b. Behavioral indicators may include:

- i. Reports he or she has an injury caused by his or her caretaker
- ii. Uncomfortable with physical contact
- iii. Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably
- iv. Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)
- v. Afraid to go home
- vi. Chronic runaway (adolescents)
- vii. Behavior extremes (e.g. withdrawn, aggressive)
- viii. Apprehensive when other children cry

2. Physical Neglect

a. Physical indicators may include:

- i. Consistent hunger, poor hygiene
- ii. Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- iii. Consistent lack of supervision
- iv. Abandonment

b. Behavioral indicators may include:

- i. Reports that he or she has no caretaker at home
- ii. Beggars, steals food
- iii. Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class
- iv. Extended stays (early arrival and late departure)
- v. Shunned by peers

3. Sexual Abuse

a. Physical indicators may include:

- i. Sexually transmitted disease
- ii. Pregnancy
- iii. Difficulty walking or sitting

- iv. Pain or itching in genital area
 - v. Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
 - vi. Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia
 - b. Behavioral indicators may include:
 - i. Reports sexual abuse
 - ii. Highly sexualized play
 - iii. Detailed, age-inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior
 - iv. Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
 - v. Chronic runaway
 - vi. Seductiveness
 - vii. Suicide attempts (adolescents)
 - viii. Deterioration in academic performance
 - ix. Sudden, noticeable behavior changes
4. Emotional Maltreatment
- a. Physical indicators may include:
 - i. Speech disorders
 - ii. Delayed physical development
 - iii. Learning problems
 - b. Behavioral indicators may include:
 - i. Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking in older child)
 - ii. Antisocial, destructive
 - iii. Passive and aggressive behavior extremes
 - iv. Appears to derive pleasure from hurting others or animals

(Important note: Volunteers should recognize that it could be significant if a child exhibits multiple indicators, while also understanding that in and of themselves, such indicators do not prove abuse and/or neglect.)

For more information, visit the Maryland Department of Human Resources' Child Protective Services website at www.dhr.state.md.us or the Montgomery County Family Violence Division's child abuse website at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/sao/units/family>.