

Naomi,

Thanks so much for reaching out and regarding this topic as it relates to churches in our area and, as I'm sure you're aware, nationwide.

Forest Hill's commitment to the safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults began almost 30 years ago when few churches were implementing practices like Safe Sanctuary and others. We continue to lean into new findings and best practices as it relates to child protection and hope that as an organization we are continually improving and implementing practices that protect kids, youth and vulnerable adults.

In fact, we are in the process of becoming a charter member of the Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention (ECAP.) This accreditation group, much like the ECFA for church finances, works to regularly audit child protection policies, suggest improvements and then accredit a church for having best practices as it pertains to child protection.

We are glad to share a high level overview of our child protection policy, but will refrain from giving specifics because those details like camera placement, when they're viewed, etc...could provide a roadmap for someone to manipulate those systems in order to do harm.

Like many churches, we do employ an outside agency, in our case, Checkr, to do background checks on any staff person or volunteer working with children, youth or vulnerable adults. We verify one reference during the background check process in addition to the criminal background check. All feedback is then given to the hiring manager and/or risk manager, one of whom will then follow-up with their own interview process before approving any volunteer. Before being considered, any direct volunteer with children, youth or vulnerable adults must have attended Forest Hill for at least six months and be in good standing.

Adults who have been convicted or accused of either emotional, physical or sexual abuse are not permitted to be involved in any church sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

In addition, all approved staff are required to attend periodic, in-depth trainings to ensure that appropriate practices are implemented to reduce the risk of abuse. This training covers:

- Protection of children, youth and or vulnerable adults, specifically watching for any type of grooming process.
- Protection of providers from exposure to "high-risk" situations.

There are also certain ways we operate that have now become standard operating procedure:

- Two Leaders/Open Door policy. There will always be two leaders present and doors will always remain open. This two leader rule also pertains to vehicles.

- Forest Hill prohibits one-on-one contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults unless approved by both pastoral staff and parents.

In response to your question about how we respond to any incident of abuse:

- All facts and circumstances of the allegation must be documented within the first 24 hours. This includes questionable and inappropriate behavior as observed by others.
- The victim must first be safeguarded, and the parents will be immediately notified of the allegation.
- Abiding by (and in support of) the mandatory reporting requirement in NC, the church reports the allegation to the authorities as detailed in S.L. 2019-245
- Investigation is completed and the allegations are cleared or formally brought against the accused.

Thanks again for reaching out. When do you anticipate running this story?

Please let us know if you have any further questions and we'll do our best to respond.

Merry Christmas,

Senior Leadership Team, Forest Hill Church (Mike Boulware, Jonathan Scott, Doc Hanberry)