



**Johnson Ferry Baptist Church**  
**Caring Well Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**  
**July 2023**

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## **I. Purpose of Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church exists to help people find truth, belonging, and purpose in Jesus. With our mission in mind, it is the purpose and intent of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church to provide a safe, secure environment to teach and care for all vulnerable adults as well as their families. Constant protection of those who are most vulnerable is of utmost priority. Johnson Ferry therefore has zero-tolerance for any form of abuse of vulnerable adults (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and financial). The Johnson Ferry Baptist Church Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy therefore exists to educate and inform everyone of the safeguards put in place that empower life-changing ministry, while at the same time, keeping everyone safe.

This JFBC Vulnerable Protection Policy identifies vulnerable adults in the following 2 categories:

- Adults who are 65 years of age and older
- Adults who are 18 years and older who are medically considered to be mentally and/or physically unable to care for themselves on their own.

## **II. Vulnerable Adult Definitions**

- a. Any adult at or older than the age designated as an elder by applicable state law;
- b. Any adult who is infirmed or diminished in capacity due to age, illness, or disability;
- c. Any adult who is ministered to in their home (by Pastors, Ministers, Pastoral Care Visitors, Stephen Ministers, or others);
- d. Any adult who is wholly or partially dependent upon one or more other persons for emotional, psychological, or physical care or support. Such dependency may be temporary as in the case of an accident, illness, or birth of a child;
- e. Any adult who by virtue of a crisis, experiences vulnerability leading to dependency on another or lacks wisdom in a pastoral relationship as in the wake of death of a family member or job loss.

## **III. People Definitions**

**Adults** are individuals eighteen years or older.

**Minors** are individuals under eighteen years of age (under Georgia law and for most state laws).

- Child is identified in this specific policy as between the ages of 0-12
- Youth is identified in this specific policy as between the ages of 12-18
  - The age of 18 is included for youth who are still in high school even though considered an adult under Georgia law.

**Staff** are paid employees of the church. This category includes contractors who are not categorized as employees of Johnson Ferry, but are compensated by Johnson Ferry to perform various roles and responsibilities.

**Volunteers** are adults who work with minors and are not in the employment of the church. Volunteers can include, but are not limited to, childcare workers, team leaders, hall monitors, teachers, coaches, coordinators, vendors, etc. The term ‘volunteer’ will be used throughout this protection plan as an all-encompassing term for anyone who serves with vulnerable adults and is not church staff.

**Helpers** are minors who are at least one age group older than the children they are assisting and are assisting in some area of preschool/children’s ministry alongside at least two non-related adults.

#### **IV. ETHICAL STANDARD**

Johnson Ferry Baptist Church desires for relationships among members and guests to flourish well beyond the day-to-day ministry of the church. We seek daily to live in direct community with each other, and as a result, the body of believers here at Johnson Ferry will almost daily be involved in what constitutes as an endless array of informal gatherings with fellow believers that will often include vulnerable adults. Examples could include, but are not limited to, attending sporting events, vacations, trips, meals, etc.

It is therefore the expectation that all senior leadership, staff, lay leaders, and volunteers seek to always live a life in every scenario that is above reproach. Through your position as a senior leader, staff, lay leader or volunteer, you are given the blessed opportunity to reside in a position of authority, and in this instance a position of authority over vulnerable adults. Consequently, we are all held to a higher standard in every aspect of life that including all interactions with vulnerable adults.

Such a standard leads to the expectation that any interaction with a vulnerable that could be deemed questionable should be reported to the Caring Well Hotline.

#### **V. Prevention of Abuse and Neglect of Vulnerable Adults**

##### **Training**

All employees and volunteers are required to annually attend one of JFBC’s ministry specific training and equipping sessions before they are able to volunteer with vulnerable adults. Training is applicable to both new and existing volunteers. Anyone with questions about training are welcome to attend these sessions. All JFBC staff, regardless of direct/indirect contact with vulnerable adults, will receive training on vulnerable adult protection policies.

##### **Screening Procedure**

To ensure safe and quality care, JFBC has established a screening procedure to approve all volunteers who work directly with our vulnerable adults:

- All volunteers, before serving, will be required to complete a Safe Harbor application, have references checked, and a thorough criminal background check completed. Safe Harbor approval is required for renewal every three years.
  - A background check is completed at the local, state, and federal level.

- State and Federal Sex Offender Databases are utilized as well.
- In addition to the Safe Harbor application, a volunteer must be a member of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church or regular attendee for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who has not been a member or regular attendee of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church for at least six (6) months does not meet these membership requirements and may serve only upon recommendation of the appropriate age-group ministry leader.
  - Exemptions to the membership requirement apply to JFCA, Wee School, and Childcare. All JFCA, Wee School, and Childcare staff must be able to articulate that they have a personal relationship with Jesus via their Safe Harbor application, and in accordance with our Employee Handbook, agree to our JFBC membership expectations.
- All completed records of screening procedures will be kept securely along with the original application.
- In addition to the above volunteer requirements, if a youth (6<sup>th</sup> grade and older) desires to be a volunteer working with vulnerable adults, his or her parent or guardian must sign the Safe Harbor application in the appropriate place indicating that the parent or guardian knows no reason why the minor should not be allowed to work directly or indirectly with vulnerable adults.

JFBC reserves the right to reject any applicant for volunteer service or dismiss an existing volunteer for any reason, including, but not limited to, refusing or failing to complete the Safe Harbor application; failing to provide requested information; providing information that is subsequently determined as false or misleading; sin or suffering issues that compromise the applicant or volunteer's ability to care for youth/children; any criminal report or charge; obtaining information from references or criminal record checks that suggest that the applicant is not suitable to help with vulnerable adults.

- JFBC may consider specific charges that would disqualify an applicant from serving in vulnerable adult ministry as well as case-by-case assessment of charges that are dated/non-violent criminal charges (e.g. traffic violation, under-age drinking, possession of a fake ID, possession of marijuana, misdemeanors not related to abuse that are dated, etc.)

Any volunteer, staff or Elder team member (or any JFBC member) who learns of or has knowledge of misconduct by either an applicant, as well as a current staff member or volunteer must report that knowledge to the Safe Harbor Administrator. He or she must also be personally responsible for any legal obligation that he or she may have to disclose such information to the authorities. Any individual involved with the care of vulnerable adults is to immediately notify JFBC if they are charged or convicted of a criminal offense or are named in a civil lawsuit that contains allegations of abuse, assault, or any other behaviors involving vulnerable adults.

## **VI. Offsite Visits**

### **Visits to Private Residences**

The safety of all individuals and healthy boundaries are essential when visiting a vulnerable adult in a private home.

- Avoid situations that might compromise privacy; common examples include:

- Visiting behind closed bedroom doors;
- Sitting on the bed of the person being visited; or
- Visiting a person while they are not fully clothed.
- Visiting private residences requires at least two non-related individuals (adult or child) in addition to the vulnerable adult to be present at all times. If it is not possible for another non-related individual (adult or child) to be present, a member of the vulnerable adult's household should be present. If neither is possible, the individual visiting the vulnerable adult must notify a church staff member of his or her intention to visit a vulnerable adult at a private residence before entering. It is important to include documentation of the time, the duration of visit and general matters discussed. Any pastoral concerns should be provided as soon as possible after the visit.
  - Unless the vulnerable adult is bed-ridden, it is requested that all connections take place in a common area of the home.
  - In instances where a widow or widower is the only one present, such visits should be intentional, but short in duration.
- If physical assistance of a vulnerable adult is ever provided, a staff member, lay leader or volunteer should notify a ministry leader. Examples include interactions where physical touch is involved, such as helping a vulnerable adult who has fallen and needs assistance. Notification should be done as soon as possible.

### **Visits to Residential Facilities & Hospitals**

The safety of all persons and healthy boundaries are essential when visiting a vulnerable adult in a residential facility or hospital. Best practices include:

- Facility or hospital staff should be informed of the visitor's presence;
- Avoid situations that might compromise privacy; common examples include:
  - Visiting behind closed bedroom doors;
  - Sitting on the bed of the person being visited;
  - Visiting a person while they are not fully clothed.
- Unless the vulnerable adult is bed-ridden, it is requested that all connections take place in a common area of the residential facility or hospital.

## **VII. Financial Stewardship**

At no time should a staff member or volunteer advise a vulnerable adult regarding his or her finances. On occasion, a vulnerable adult may request assistance regarding power of attorney, creating or updating a will, as well as updating or creating a trust. In such scenarios, Johnson Ferry staff and volunteers should fully refrain from offering any type of assistance or recommendations. Even in such scenarios, Johnson Ferry staff and volunteers should not recommend an individual accountant, financial advisor, or attorney. If a vulnerable adult requires financial assistance, regardless of the need, they should be referred to Pastoral Care.

- If at any point a staff member or volunteer has suspicion that a vulnerable adult is being financially abused, such staff member or volunteer should call the Johnson Ferry Caring Well Hotline.
- Signs that a vulnerable adult is possibly being abused financially include but are not limited to the following:
  - Checks or bank statements that go to the perpetrator;
  - Forgeries on legal documents or checks;
  - Large bank withdrawals or transfers between accounts;
  - Missing belongings or property;
  - Mood changes (such as depression or anxiety);
  - New changes to an elder’s will or power of attorney;
  - The elder signed strange documents they didn’t understand;
  - The elderly person does not understand their financial situation;
  - Unpaid bills and eviction notices;
  - Utilities being discontinued if bills weren’t paid;
  - Unexplained withdrawals that the elderly person could not have made.

**VIII. Forms of Abuse**

Vulnerable adults are susceptible to certain forms of abuse in much the same way that children and youth are. Such forms of abuse can include but are not limited to physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, all of which are in addition to financial abuse or exploitation. Additionally, while self-neglect is not a crime, self-neglect can put a vulnerable adult in harm’s way. In instances where self-neglect may occur, we do not have a duty to report it, but we can still act to minister and serve.

<https://aging.georgia.gov/report-elder-abuse/abuse-neglect-and-exploitation-risk-adults-georgia>

**IX. Physical Touch w/ Vulnerable Adults**

**Appropriate Physical Interactions**

While appropriate physical contact with vulnerable adults can be an effective means of aiding in communication, redirecting attention, calming restlessness, or showing godly love and care, it can also be misinterpreted. Particularly in our interaction with vulnerable adults, we want to be blameless and above reproach. The following will help staff and volunteers to avoid any compromise or concerns in this area.

- Always remain in open sight of other adults.
- Appropriate touch is positive physical contact that nurtures vulnerable adults and develops a sense of emotional security and maturity in their interactions with adults. Appropriate touch is applied to meet the needs of vulnerable adults.

Appropriate Physical Interaction	Inappropriate Physical Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Side hugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-frontal hugs</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoulder-to-shoulder hugs</li> <li>• Pats on the shoulder or back</li> <li>• Handshakes</li> <li>• High-fives and hand slapping</li> <li>• Verbal praise</li> <li>• Pats on the head when culturally appropriate</li> <li>• Touching hands, shoulders, and arms</li> <li>• Arms around shoulders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kisses</li> <li>• Showing affection in isolated area</li> <li>• Attaching or clinging to legs</li> <li>• Any type of massage</li> <li>• Any form of unwanted affection</li> <li>• Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas</li> </ul>
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- Never touch a vulnerable adult out of frustration or anger. Physical discipline is not an appropriate means of correction.
- Appreciation and respect for boundaries that vulnerable adults communicate to others is always important to listen to and follow.

## **X. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Utilizing Technology to Connect with Vulnerable Adults**

The following are guidelines that must be followed when connecting with vulnerable adults in all situations that involve electronic communication. Electronic communication includes, but is not limited to, text messaging, group messaging, video calls, messaging via social media, etc.

- For vulnerable adults, staff and volunteers are discouraged to not have contact with vulnerable adults before 7 a.m. and after 10 p.m. Only in cases of emergency should staff or volunteers respond to a phone call or message from a vulnerable adult between the hours of 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.

## **XI. TRANSPORTATION**

### **Transportation of Vulnerable Adults**

- Ministry opportunities will at times provide situations where staff or volunteers may need to transport a vulnerable adult to and from a ministry event. Vulnerable adults must consent to such transportation beforehand. If a person is unable to consent, then prior approval by a guardian, spouse, or trusted family member is required; Vulnerable adults must be transported directly to their destinations. No unauthorized stops may be made.
- All adult drivers should be at least 21 years of age, and be licensed and insured.

## **XII. ALCOHOL AND DRUGS**

- Under no circumstances should staff or volunteers distribute tobacco and drugs to a vulnerable adult. Tobacco and drugs put both adults and vulnerable adults in compromising situations



which can lead to potential situations of abuse. Additionally, alcohol should never be served at any JFBC ministry event or function.

- Staff and volunteers should not, under any circumstance, assist vulnerable adults with receiving prescription drugs. Even if assistance is requested to pick up and deliver prescription or non-prescription medication, staff and volunteers should respectfully decline.

### **XIII. Gifts for Vulnerable Adults**

#### **Gift guidelines**

- While it is deemed appropriate on certain occasions (Christmas, birthdays, graduation) to share gifts with vulnerable adults, adults should never single out one vulnerable adult to provide gifts to over another. Gifts should never be given in secret. The overall cost of a gift should be reasonable so as not to cause suspicion of additional motives.
- If a vulnerable adult should ever solicit funds due to financial circumstances that require a need, the family of the vulnerable adult is to be referred to Pastoral Care.

### **XIV. DRESS CODE**

#### **Dress Code/Personal Appearance**

JFBC asks that all staff and volunteers dress modestly and appropriately in what they choose to wear to work or to volunteer. All JFBC staff and volunteers should be clean and neat in appearance each day.

### **XV. Restroom Utilization for Vulnerable Adults**

In the event that a vulnerable adult requires assistance using a restroom here at Johnson Ferry as well as off campus, staff and volunteers should not provide assistance. Only a family member or a registered nurse should assist. The only exception would be in case of an emergency, where a medical need arises. In such situations, staff and volunteers may assist. In situations where restroom assistance to a vulnerable adult is provided, a staff member, lay leader or volunteer should as soon as possible notify a ministry leader.

### **XVI. BULLYING**

1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional, is repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. JFBC will not tolerate any bullying behavior from senior leadership, staff, volunteers, or members.
2. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
  - Physical bullying is when one person engages in or threatens physical force against another person (e.g., hitting, punching, pushing, kicking, pinching, or restraining another).

- Verbal bullying is when someone uses their words to hurt another (e.g., belittling or calling another person a hurtful name, utilization of crude or sexual jokes, and unwelcomed comments).
  - Nonverbal or relational bullying is when one person manipulates a relationship or desired relationship to harm another person. This includes social exclusion, friendship manipulation, or gossip. This type of bullying also includes intimidating another person by using gestures.
  - Cyberbullying is the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technological tool, such as email, instant messages, text messages, digital pictures or images, or website postings (including blogs). Cyberbullying can involve:
    - a. Sending mean, vulgar, or threatening messages or images.
    - b. Posting sensitive, private information about another person.
    - c. Pretending to be someone else to make that person look bad.
    - d. Intentionally excluding someone from an online group.
    - e. Hazing is an activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person regardless of that person's willingness to participate.
  - Sexualized bullying is when bullying involves behaviors that are sexual in nature. Examples of sexualized bullying behaviors include sexting, bullying that involves exposures of private body parts, and verbal bullying involving sexualized language innuendos.
3. Anyone who sees an act of bullying, and who then encourages it, is engaging in bullying.
  4. This policy applies to all participants in Johnson Ferry's programs and services, and those using Johnson Ferry's building, including senior leadership, employees, and volunteers.

## **APPENDIX A: STEPS FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE AT JFBC**

### **Initial Process for Handling Abuse Accusations When the Victim Is an Adult**

1. Privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance when processing accusations of abuse, especially those where a minor is involved. Only the HR Director, Executive Director of Operations, Elder team, and the Caring Well Committee will have access to information regarding the victim's suspected case of abuse. Additional parties with access to information include a trained trauma informed and licensed therapist, our Pastoral Care team, as well as the Pastor/Minister and Executive Pastor who oversees the area of ministry where the vulnerable adult is directly involved.
2. If an individual has personally experienced, or, has knowledge of a situation where suspected abuse has occurred, especially in cases that are directly or indirectly related to abuse against a church leader, team member or volunteer should as soon as possible report the matter utilizing the Caring Well hotline phone number. Johnson Ferry Baptist Church is considered by the state of Georgia to be a mandatory reporter for any suspected cases of abuse involving an adult who is 65 years and older, as well as adults 18 years and older with a disability who do not reside in long-term care facilities. As a mandated reporter, we are required to alert the Department of Human Services (Division of Aging Services) as soon as possible regarding suspected abuse. The Human Resources Director reports the allegations to the state of Georgia as required as soon as possible after initial report is reviewed. In situations where the adult is perceived to be in

imminent danger, the Human Resources Director in conjunction with the Executive Pastor, Operations will contact local authorities.

- <https://aging.georgia.gov/report-elder-abuse/adult-protective-services-aps>
3. If the reporter or suspected victim is perceived to be in imminent danger, please initially dial 911 before utilizing the Caring Well Hotline to report suspected cases of abuse.
  4. This policy prohibits retaliation against claimants and reporters, including JFBC employees who bring, in good faith, abuse accusations or who assist in the investigation of such accusations. Any such employee shall not be adversely affected in terms or conditions of employment, nor discriminated against or discharged because of such activity.

## **APPENDIX B: Definitions of Abuse**

The following definitions are given to further assist the church in understanding the types of behaviors that might constitute inappropriate conduct, misuse of power, sexually inappropriate behavior, and so forth:

1. **Sexual Abuse** means a person's employing, using, persuading, inducing, enticing, or coercing any minor or adult who is not such person's spouse to engage in any act which involves:
  - Grooming;
  - Sexual molestation;
  - Sexual harassment;
  - Showing or possessing pornography;
  - Words/conduct that have sexual connotation around an individual of any age who does not welcome, consent to, is unable to consent due to age or incapacity, or who assents due to the offender's use of power or positional authority, etc.
2. **Physical Abuse means:**
  - Threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a minor or adult;
  - Offensive or harmful contact with a minor or adult;
  - Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult;
  - Physical misconduct can include, but is not limited to pushing, grabbing, punching; beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with hand or other object), burning, or otherwise causing physical harm or threat of physical harm.
3. **Harassment/bullying means:**
  - Pattern of behavior in which a person insults, humiliates, and manipulates an individual or group in order to establish or maintain control over them;
  - Threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones;
  - Isolating a person from family, friends, and acquaintances;
  - Demeaning, bullying, belittling, shaming, or humiliating a person;
  - Emotionally blackmailing or harassing a person.
4. **Financial Abuse means:**

- Taking money or property without consent;
- Forging an older person's signature;
- Getting an older person to sign a deed, will, or power of attorney through deception, coercion, or undue influence;
- Using the older person's property or possessions without permission;
- Promising lifelong care in exchange for money or property and not following through on the promise;
- Telemarketing scams. Perpetrators call victims and use deception, scare tactics; exaggerated claims to get them to send money. They may also make charges against vulnerable adults' credit cards without authorization.

**5. Neglect means:**

- Failure or refusal by a caregiver to provide food, water, shelter, medical care etc., leading to harm or potential harm to a vulnerable adult.
  - <https://aging.georgia.gov/report-elder-abuse/abuse-neglect-and-exploitation-risk-adults-georgia>