



# Counseling Ministry Policy

This policy provides a framework for the operation of our church counseling ministry, which adheres to the principles and ethical guidelines of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) and refers to the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC). The purpose is to ensure that counseling services are biblically sound and legally compliant.

## 1. Purpose Statement

The counseling ministry at WCBC exists to glorify God as we help people put their hope and trust in the sufficiency of Christ and the Bible (Col. 2:15, Pro. 1:7, Col. 1:28, Heb. 4:12).

## 2. Scope of Counseling

Our church counseling ministry provides support in areas such as:

- Marital and family matters
- Anxiety, depression, and other emotional challenges
- Crisis intervention
- Addiction and recovery
- Other spiritual, relational, and emotional struggles

If requested by the counselee, or if appropriate in the discretion of the counselor, a request to refer counsees to other like-minded professionals for issues such as mental health disorders, addiction, or physical illness may be initiated by the counselor. This referral process must be brought first to the counseling pastor and lead teaching pastor. Then, they will bring this referral to the Elder Council for final approval.

## 3. Counselor Qualifications

All counselors must meet the following requirements:

- Professional
  - Must be one of the following:
    - Certified or pursuing certification through [ACBC](#), [CCEF](#), or [NANC](#). Or have a Master's level or higher degree in Counseling, Bible, or Theology.
    - An approved elder, pastor, or ministry leader at WCBC.
  - Regularly participate in continuing education and supervision to maintain certification and develop counseling skills.
- Spiritual
  - Is a born-again believer.
  - Demonstrates a vital and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
  - Demonstrate a love for God and His people.
  - Shows evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit in all aspects of personal life.
  - Deeply committed to the sufficiency, inerrancy, authority and inspiration of Scripture.
- Personal
  - Be a member in good standing at WCBC and display spiritual maturity.
  - Exhibits warmth, friendliness, empathy, and sincerity; possessing an outgoing and friendly nature.
  - Is well-ordered and disciplined in spiritual and personal life; maintaining a fresh and vital personal prayer and devotional life as the basis for ministry; sustain active prayer for and care of people.

Counselors are expected to:

- Uphold biblical truths as their guiding framework for the counsel they provide.
- Abide by and agree with the Doctrinal Statement of West Cannon Baptist Church and the Standards of Teaching Statement of West Cannon Baptist Church.
- Participate in ongoing spiritual and professional development, including peer review and supervision when needed.

#### 4. Counseling Process

The counseling process includes the following steps:

- **Intake and Assessment:** If an individual seeks to participate in biblical counseling here at WCBC they must go through the following process.
  - Fill out the [Personal Data Inventory \(PDI\) form](#) on our website.
  - Turn in the PDI to the counseling pastor.
  - The counseling pastor will examine the PDI and decide which member of the counseling team would be best suited to meet the needs of the counselee.
  - The counseling pastor will pass along the PDI to the selected counselor and the counselor is expected to contact the prospective counselee within 24-48 hours.
  - Once the counselor has made contact with the counselee, the counselor must set up a meeting schedule with the counselee. We recommend meeting every week however, this may not be possible with all schedules. If you are not able to meet each week, please make sure to meet at least every other week in order to progress the counseling case.
- **Goal Setting:** Counselors and counsees will work together to set biblical goals for growth and healing. For helpful advice on what progress you should be seeing in your counseling case, follow the link to an ACBC resource titled “[Typical Progress in Counseling](#)”
- **Biblical Guidance:** Counselors will provide wisdom and guidance based on Scripture, encouraging repentance, spiritual discipline, and reliance on Christ (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- **Referral:** If needed, counselors will refer counsees to other like-minded professionals for issues such as mental health disorders, addiction, or physical illness. This referral process must be brought first to the counseling pastor and lead teaching pastor. Then they will bring this referral to the Elder Council for final approval.

#### 5. Confidentiality and Legal Matters

- Confidentiality is an important aspect of the counseling process, and we will carefully guard the information our counsees entrust to us. Counseling at WCBC, including statements made during counseling sessions, shall remain confidential with the following qualifications and exceptions, which should be documented per the Confidentiality Report:
  - When there is concern that someone is being or may be harmed without intervention by other persons or protective services.
  - When the counselee expresses clear and specific suicidal intent, the counselor shall take reasonable measures for the safety of the counselee. Reasonable measures may include notifying police if the Counselee will not cooperate to involve him or herself in a watch care program or facility.
  - If the counselor has reasonable cause to believe that an adult is in need of protective services, the counselor shall take reasonable measures to prevent harm. Reasonable measures may include directly advising the potential victim of a threat or intent and/or informing the appropriate protective and/or law enforcement agencies.
  - If there is a claim of, the observance of, or clear reasonable cause to suspect the physical or sexual abuse of a child with whom the counselor comes into contact or who is associated with someone to whom the counselor is in contact with, reasonable measures shall be taken to ensure the child’s protection and/or to fulfill the legal mandate to report

such harm to the appropriate governmental protection agencies. We will seek to reasonably notify other individuals who might be victims, or potential victims of, the person, including parents if they are minor children.

- When the counselor becomes aware of any other criminal activity the counselee is engaged in, and the counselee refuses to bring to the appropriate biblical and/or legal authorities and/or victims.
- When counseling someone who is under familial authority (e.g. wife to husband, child to parent) and if deemed safe by the counselor, he/she may encourage the counselee to inform their familial authority of critical issues and/or the counselor may inform the familial authority (Ephesians 5:22-6:4).
- When a person refuses to renounce a particular sin and/or refuses to confess it to those impacted, the counselor may in their discretion, seek the assistance of a trusted member or leader of any involved church to encourage repentance and/or reconciliation (Proverbs 15:22, 24:11; Matthew 18:15-20).
- When the counselor deems it appropriate or necessary to discuss information with a training observer or an assisting advocate who is involved or observing counseling.
- When the counselee makes a complaint against their counselor, handling it biblically may involve sharing information with an assisting pastor and/or the appropriate person(s) within our church and/or the ACBC organization for complaint resolution purposes. Please be assured that we strongly prefer not to disclose your personal information to others (if not needed) and will make every effort to help you find ways to resolve a problem as privately as possible.

## 6. Mandatory reporting

As mandatory reporters, all counselors at WCBC must inform the proper authorities immediately upon hearing allegations of abuse<sup>1</sup>. If this situation arises in your counseling, refer to the items on the list below:

- Suicide Hotline **(988)** – If you believe there is a risk of harm to self
- Emergency **(911)** – If you believe there is risk of harm from the counselee to another
- Child Protective Services Hotline **(855) 444-3911** – If you suspect there is child abuse
- National Sexual Abuse Hotline **(800) 656-4673** – If you suspect there is sexual abuse
- Eldercare Hotline **(800) 677-1116** – If you suspect there is elder abuse
- National Adult Protective Services Association **(202) 370-6292** – If you suspect abuse of an adult with special needs

## 7. Referral Policy

While West Cannon's counseling ministry is rooted in biblical principles, we recognize that some counsees may require additional professional services. In such cases, the following referral procedures apply:

- Counselors will refer to an approved list of like-minded licensed mental health professionals, medical practitioners, or legal experts when a counselee's needs fall outside the expertise of the counselor. This list is available in the WCBC Counseling packet.

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<sup>1</sup> The following is ACBC's official statement on abuse.

(<https://abuse.biblicalcounseling.com/#:~:text=WE%20AFFIRM%20that%20abuse%20is,perpetuate%20oppression%20and%20unbiblical%20control>.)

We affirm that abuse is the pattern of sinful, selfish mistreatment of another made in God's image, whereby moral agency, freedom of conscience informed by God's Word, and God-given human dignity is violated by harmful acts (physical, sexual, verbal) or schemes to perpetuate oppression and unbiblical control.

- All referrals will be made in consultation with the counselee, and whenever possible, we will seek to refer to Christian professionals who share a biblical worldview. If none can be found, all counselors must seek approval from the Counseling and Lead Teaching Pastors.
- WCBC will not be liable for any outcomes, actions, or services provided by third-party referrals.

## 8. Supervision and Accountability

All counseling activities will be subject to regular supervision and accountability:

- **Supervision:** Counselors, particularly those in training, will meet regularly with a supervising ACBC counselor to review cases, discuss challenges, and ensure adherence to ethical standards.
- **Accountability to Church Leadership:** Counseling activities will receive oversight by the Counseling Pastor and Lead Teaching Pastor to ensure alignment with the church's mission and values. Significant concerns, including those that might involve church discipline, will be addressed in collaboration with the church's Elder Council.

## 9. Fees and Donations

- The church counseling ministry operates as a service to the church and local community and is provided free of charge. Counselors are not compensated for their services but serve as a ministry to the body of Christ and to our community.
- As mentioned above, all counseling at WCBC is provided free of charge. However, a situation may arise in which a counselee may desire to give a gift to their counselor once the counseling has finished. Counselors at WCBC are welcome to accept gifts from their counsees while using their best discretion to determine the motivation behind the gift. As counsees may desire to give a gift as an outward expression of their gratitude for the help the counselor has given, it may be more harmful to reject the gift than to accept it. If the counselor does not feel comfortable accepting the gift and using it, they are free to donate the gift to the WCBC Counseling or Church Care Fund.

## 10. Ethical Guidelines

The ministry adheres to the following ethical guidelines:

- **Biblical Authority:** All counseling will be based on biblical principles, and counselors are responsible for accurately applying Scripture to life issues.
- **Non-Discrimination:** Counseling services will be offered without discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, or personal background. However, counsel will always be consistent with biblical values, including teachings on marriage, gender, sexuality, and moral conduct.
- **Like-gender Counseling:** The counseling ministry at West Cannon will operate under the following rules regarding counseling between the genders.
  - Any one-on-one counseling for a male will be done by a male counselor
  - Any one-on-one counseling for a female will be done by a female counselor.
  - In agreement with our stance on biblical leadership within the church, marriage counseling will be led by a male counselor. However, it may often be the case that a female counselor will take part in marriage counseling.

## 11. Termination of Counseling

Counseling relationships may be terminated during under the following conditions:

- The counselee has met their counseling goals and is ready to end the counseling process.
- The counselor determines that the counselee is no longer benefiting from counseling.
- The counselee consistently fails to attend sessions or engage in the counseling process.

- The counselor identifies that the counselee's needs require specialized services beyond their abilities or gifting.

Counselors need to inform the Counseling Pastor of any potential termination of counseling cases.

## 12. Counseling Minors

- The counseling ministry at WCBC will counsel those who are under the age of 18. Sadly, because of the sin in our world, teenagers and children suffer in the same way that adults do. Therefore, the counseling ministry at WCBC will follow the following guidelines when counseling minors.
  - WCBC counselors will involve the parents of the minor in all aspects of counseling. This includes:
    - Parental approval of all books, sermons, resources etc. before assigning them as homework.
    - Regular updates of the progress of the counseling case.
    - Any discussion on issues such as gender, sexuality, self-harm and threats to harm oneself or another.
  - WCBC counselors will take great measures to keep their conduct above reproach.
  - WCBC counselors will not counsel a minor of the opposite gender.
  - WCBC counselors must be willing to counsel with parents in the room.

## 13. Grievance and Complaint Resolution

If a counselee has concerns or complaints about the counseling process or counselor, they may:

- Address the concern directly with the counselor.
- If unresolved, escalate the issue to the counseling pastor, lead teaching pastor or a designated church elder.
- Grievances will be handled with care, confidentiality, and a commitment to biblical reconciliation.

## 14. Indemnification (Hold Harmless)

The counsees must acknowledge and agree that the counselors at WCBC are providing assistance, guidance, or counseling in good faith and with the intent to support the counselee's personal growth and Christlikeness. The counselee understands that the Counselors are members of the Counseling Ministry at WCBC and are acting within the scope of their duties to provide help and support.

In consideration of the above, the counselee, upon entering the counseling process, agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless the Counselors, as well as the Church and its affiliates, from any claims, liabilities, damages, or expenses, including legal fees, that may arise from the counselee's participation in the counseling services. This includes any dissatisfaction with the counseling received or any outcomes that may result from such counseling.

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This policy reflects our commitment to uphold the highest biblical and ethical standards while offering Christ-centered counseling in accordance with ACBC guidelines.