



Faith Communities Keeping Children & Youth Safe

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Model Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy

[name of church]

Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children and youth. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children. Sadly, child abuse is prevalent. It is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. No faith community is immune. According to _____ [replace with your state's or province's laws]:

1. *Physical abuse* exists when a child has a non-accidental injury.
2. *Emotional abuse* is injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.
3. *Sexual abuse* exists when an adult uses a child as a part of any type of sexual act.
4. *Emotional neglect* is when the child suffers from an adult failing to give chances for feeling loved, wanted, secure, and worthy.
5. *Physical neglect* is when an adult does not provide basic needs or supervision.
[www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/identifying]

We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday school, youth activities, vacation Bible school, and nursery. We commit to:

1. Offer trainings.
 - a. Training and materials on abuse prevention will be offered annually to all adults in the congregation and especially to teachers and leaders of children.
 - b. Training will be provided every ____ [two is recommended] years for all children, covering topics such as safety, empowerment, and boundaries. This training will be appropriate to the child's age group. [After adults are trained and made aware of this policy, consider using *Circle of Grace*, a Christian safe environment curriculum.]
 - c. Topics related to abuse prevention, healthy boundaries, and support for victims will be addressed at least annually in Sunday school classes, sermons, or other areas of church life.
2. Make our church facility safe for children.
 - a. Windows will be placed in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (e.g., Sunday school rooms, pastor's office).
 - b. A fully stocked first-aid kit will be available in the church building.
 - c. Areas where children or adults and children could easily be alone together unsupervised will be locked or restricted.
 - d. Practice handwashing, sanitize high touch areas and toys, and instruct sick or symptomatic children to stay home.

3. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children.
 - a. We will follow a *two-adult rule*: one adult should never be alone with one child. It's also best to avoid one adult with multiple children, although that's better than one-on-one.
 - b. A youth/minor will never teach/care for children alone without supervising adults available.
 - c. Prior consent will be obtained from a parent or guardian if a child is to be transported away from church facilities.
 - d. We will practice and model appropriate touch and healthy boundaries.
 - e. Guidelines will be implemented for child-to-child and youth-to-youth contact.
 - We will expect respectful behavior at all times.
 - Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.
 - There will be no inappropriate wrestling or roughhousing.
 - Only one child or youth may use a bathroom stall at a time.
 - f. No physical discipline (e.g., hitting, slapping) will be used. When a child misbehaves, we will use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child will be taken to their parent. If a parent is not available, we will speak with them as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will ensure the child's safety but remove him or her from the activities to minimize disruption.

4. Attend to related personnel issues.
 - a. Annually, each teacher and leader of children will be presented with a copy of the congregation's child protection and abuse response policy and be asked to acknowledge that he or she has read and will abide by the policy.
 - b. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on final candidates for all church staff positions—including the pastor and custodians—before hiring. A background check will also be conducted on all adult volunteers working with children/youth. These background checks will be conducted in all the states the individual has lived in during the previous twenty years. Background checks will be repeated every three years.
 - c. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before they are permitted to become a teacher or leader of children or youth.

5. Deal appropriately with allegations of abuse.
 - a. If a child discloses abuse or child abuse is suspected, the person who the child disclosed to or who has the suspicions will immediately make a report to Child Protective Services [insert the correct term and phone number for your state or province].
 - b. When the victim and alleged offender are both in the church community, we will follow these additional steps:
 - Immediately attend to the victim and his or her family's safety and needs through church leadership *and* an outside agency (like a child advocacy center), *keeping the victim's needs at the center of any process*.
 - Immediately relieve the alleged offender from all responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation.
 - Within 48 hours, notify all parents whose children may have encountered the alleged offender. Let them know that allegations have been made and reported. [Leadership needs to consider the likelihood that more than one individual has been harmed.]
 - Keep victims and alleged offenders separated during the investigation. [Support child victims in engaging in age-appropriate activities. If the alleged offender is an adolescent, find alternate activities for him or her.]

- Inform area conference leadership [or the equivalent].
 - After the investigation, follow all legal implications for the offender. Inform the entire church, as secrecy not only makes children unsafe, it also does not help offenders.
 - Even if the abuse is not confirmed, attend to the dynamics that prompted the allegations and carefully consider the degree to which individuals involved need to remain separated.
 - Make pastoral care available to all involved, prioritizing the needs of the victim.
- c. Any known or credibly accused child abuse offender will not be allowed to be around children or youth unsupervised and will not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal). [Work with an external organization or resource, such as Dove's Nest, when considering including an individual with an offending history.]
 - d. The church community will be notified if there is a registered or known sex offender attending the church at the time this information becomes known. New families to the church will be notified of this information within two months of beginning to attend church.
6. Consider technology, video conference, and social media concerns.
- a. Adults will limit one-on-one electronic communications with children.
 - b. Parents or other adults will be copied on emails and kept apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations.
 - c. Communication will be traceable.
 - d. Photos of children or youth will not be shared on personal social media platforms without permission from a parent/guardian.

This policy will be implemented and facilitated by a child protection team of at least two individuals, appointed by the congregation. It will be posted on the church website and posted in the building. It will be reviewed and updated every ___ years.

Updated: _____ (date)

Best Practices to Consider

Utilize this list as you create your policy and/or packets of materials for adult volunteers as well as during adult volunteer trainings.

- In general, decrease isolation and secrecy. Increase supervision and accountability. Ensure all activities are observable and interruptible.
- Consider the vulnerability of children whose parents or guardians are not members of the faith community. Communicate protection policy information to these parents as part of the relationship-building work with them.
- If you have a mentoring program with youth, create a policy for that program following best practices: <https://dovesnest.net/mentoring-the-safe-way>.
- Children need love. At times, affection can be appropriately expressed through physical touch that is in the view of others. Touch will not be based on the adult's emotional need, nor will it ever be forced on a child. Adults should ask before initiating touch, such as prior to giving a side hug or handshake. Touch will be age appropriate, will never involve private parts (except as needed for diaper changing/wiping), and will only be as a response to the child's need. More on touch can be found here: <https://dovesnest.net/Appropriate-Touch-Guidelines>.
- More information on technology and safety can be found here: <https://dovesnest.net/7-Tips-on-Electronic-Communication-for-Churches>.
- Learn more about child-on-child abuse. Approximately 90 percent of child sexual abuse is committed by people the children know and trust; of these, 30–50 percent of perpetrators are under age 18, according to Safe Communities director Linda Crockett. However, these youthful offenders are not mini-adults and should not be labeled predators. They are known as children with sexual behavior problems. It is important to understand what is considered normal sexual behavior among children to be able to identify what is inappropriate, harmful, and abusive in home, school, and church settings. More information can be found here: <https://dovesnest.net/Child-on-Child-Abuse>.
- Communities themselves need healing from crisis. This can happen through informational meetings with time for Q&A, circle gatherings to hear harms and feelings, and formulation of a task force for future prevention. Dove's Nest can assist in these areas.

What to remember when reporting suspected abuse:

- You do not need evidence or proof.
- Do not do an investigation yourself.
- Child abuse is not an issue to deal with through church leadership.
- After a notification of abuse is made, the pastor and/or a member of the child protection team should be informed at once.
- Cooperate with the professionals who investigate.