

GENERAL POLICIES

Safe Church Ministry Best Practices



SAFE
CHURCH

References:

This policy integrates elements and recommendations from Safe Church initiatives, along with CRC Church Policies, CRCNA Synodical Reports, & Doves Nest Model Policies.

Disclaimer:

Safe Church Ministry is not responsible for possible litigation against a church who uses this policy.

This policy reflects the mission of a Safe Church Ministry:

To build communities where the value of each person is honored; where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse; and when abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

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1. Introduction

A. Vision: Our church exists to inspire people to become fully engaged followers of Jesus by creating a safe place on Sundays and at all events for that to happen.

In instituting this policy, we commit to protecting and supporting the value and dignity of each person, especially the most vulnerable among us, and to being a community that makes every effort to prevent abuse in our midst.

B. Scope:

This policy is intended to systematically prevent all forms of abuse and the misuse of power within our congregation and ministries.

C. Purpose of this Policy:

1. To educate staff, leaders, and volunteers (dream, teamers) about abuse, the dynamics of power, and especially the responsibility required by people in positions of power.
2. To ensure that clergy, elders, trustees, staff members, and volunteer (dream team) leaders are following appropriate boundaries and have appropriate structures of accountability and support.
3. To reflect the high value that Jesus places on those who are vulnerable. As Christ's church, we reflect Christ by ensuring that honor and dignity are shown to every person created in God's image.
4. To provide a safe place for any person to come forward with a disclosure of abuse and receive help.
5. To equip the church leadership and congregation with clear guidelines for how to respond effectively with justice and compassion to situations of abuse.
6. To create opportunities to talk about abuse and increase awareness. Abuse thrives in silence and secrecy, and we must not let it thrive in our communities (Eph. 5).
7. To practice the diligence required as the church and also to abide by the laws of our state or province, and country.
8. To satisfy requirements from insurance companies and to limit the risk of abuse or harm.

2. Definitions:

A. Misconduct

As a church, we are committed to holding our leaders and volunteers to the highest standard of behavior. Therefore, the following definitions of abuse go beyond legal definitions to include any form of ungodly conduct, misuse of power, misuse of spiritual authority, sexually inappropriate behavior, neglect, and abuse of office. These are behaviors that violate the trust and well-being of individuals and the community of believers, and they taint the office held by the offender.

1. Physical Misconduct is:

- a. Threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a minor or vulnerable adult, or
- b. Offensive or harmful contact with an adult;
- c. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult.

2. Sexual Misconduct is:

- a. Exploiting or grooming (preparing) a minor or an adult – regardless of consent or circumstances – for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the minor and/or adult;
- b. Unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, co-volunteers, or
- c. Sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.
- d. The development of or the attempt of a ministry leader to develop a sexual or emotional relationship with a participant in the ministries of the church.

3. Emotional Misconduct is:

A pattern of behavior in which a person insults, humiliates, and manipulates an individual or group in order to establish or maintain control over them. Emotional misconduct includes:

- 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;
- Delivering constant criticism; or
- Emotionally blackmailing or harassing a person.

4. **Spiritual Misconduct is:**

A form of emotional and psychological abuse, characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. Spiritual misconduct may include:

- manipulation and exploitation by appeal to religious convictions and beliefs,
- censorship of decision making,
- requirements for secrecy and silence,
- coercion to conform [inability to ask questions]
- requirement of obedience to the abuser
- the suggestion that the abuser holds a 'divine' position
- isolation as a means of punishment.

B. Concepts of Abuse of Power

Power: Power is the ability to influence or affect an outcome. We all have power as human beings; some of us are given more power as a result of our role or our status within a community. When power is stewarded well, it brings flourishing to all people as an expression of the shalom of the kingdom of God.

Abuse of power: Abuse of power is misusing power to harm another person, or using power and influence for personal gain at the expense of another person. Power can be used to harm another person intentionally or through ignorance, subtly or overtly, to advance one's own desires without regard for the needs or desires of others in ways that disturb the flourishing of others. At the core of all types of abuse are behaviors related to acquiring, maintaining, and misusing power and control. The same power dynamics show up in all types of abuse, whether it be sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or spiritual abuse.

C. Position Titles

Safe Church Team/Abuse Prevention and Response Team:¹ The Safe Church Team, or Abuse Prevention and Response Team, shall have at least 2 people, with one person being an ordained elder of the church, and all individuals having experience or training reflecting competency in one or more of the following: Abuse of Power, Trauma-informed Ministry, Healthy Boundaries, Circle of Grace program, Domestic Abuse/Intimate Partner Violence, and/or Restorative Practices.²

¹ Churches that have Safe Church teams are more effective at preventing abuse and responding to abuse with compassion, justice, and care when it occurs. Safe Church Ministry strongly encourages each church to have a Safe Church or Abuse Prevention and Response Team.

² Training is available through the Safe Church Ministry.

Ministry Leader: Any person, paid or volunteer, ordained or unordained, in a position of leadership over an area or aspect of ministry at Souls Church. (This could include pastors, directors, elders, trustees, ministry leaders, youth leaders, etc.)

Ministry Staff Leader/Pastor: Any paid staff, pastor, or director who has a position of spiritual authority over other volunteers or members of the church.

Adult Volunteer: Any volunteer over the age of 18 who leads or assists ministry programming.

Premises Monitor: A volunteer specifically tasked with monitoring each group of children or youth that does not have two adults present. Checks on each group must be done at least every 15 minutes.

Helper: A youth who assists a volunteer in a program.

Child: Children 0 - 10 years of age.

Youth: Children from 11 to 18 years of age.

Vulnerable Adult: A person over the age of 18 who is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation because of a mental or physical impairment or advanced age.

3. General Guidelines and Expectations of Ministry Leaders

All who serve in the life of the church are called to use their position and power, not in ways that lord it over others or seek to control others, but in ways that are patterned after Christ himself. According to Philippians 2, Christ did not consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage, but used his power for the thriving of others. These guidelines are designed to help ministry leaders steward their position and power well and cultivate cultures that resist abuse.

- A. Each ministry leader shall sign and commit to conducting themselves according to the Honor Code of Conduct. The church office will keep a signed copy of the Code of Conduct for each ministry leader on file.
- B. All ministry staff leaders/pastors shall commit to participating in abuse of power training within 12 months of being hired as well as a refresher course every 3-5 years (see Safe Church Ministry for abuse of power training opportunities).

- C. All ministry staff leaders/pastors and adult volunteers will agree to a criminal background check, and Central Registry/Child Abuse registry check at the beginning of their time of service. Background checks will be refreshed every 3 years.
- D. All ministry leaders, adult volunteers, and helpers must attend a yearly training session on the Safe Church Policy. Training sessions will be held at the beginning of each church program year and thereafter as needed.
- E. Topics related to abuse prevention, healthy boundaries, and support for survivors will be addressed at least annually in Sunday school classes, sermons, newsletters, prayers, and other areas of church life.
- F. In addition to a background check, new prospective volunteers must attend or be associated with Souls Church for at least six months before supervising children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- G. Felony convictions or indictable offenses are wide-ranging from theft, drug trafficking, physical or sexual assault, each with varying degrees of harm caused; the uniqueness and level of risk of each conviction should be carefully assessed should this person be given the privilege of doing ministry with those who are vulnerable. A person with a felony conviction may serve in ministry only with another approved adult present at all times. For those with a felony conviction to be considered as a volunteer, the following is required:
 - a. A signed letter from a psychologist or counselor indicating that the person is not a danger to the community;
 - b. A covenant of accountability and support outlining the terms and conditions under which the person may volunteer.
- H. All ministry leaders and volunteer leaders are required to report any suspected abuse of a minor (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect) to the civil authorities. For more guidance, see "Responding to a Disclosure of Abuse from a Child."
- I. All ministry leaders and volunteer leaders are required to use their access to the church internet and technology belonging to the church (computers, laptops, cell phones, etc.) in ways that are legal, reflect godly conduct, and conform to network etiquette, laws and courtesies.
- J. Depending on the situation, the church may have funds available to provide financial support for counseling for those who have been victimized by abuse. For more information, speak to our Leadership Team.
- K. Information about domestic violence, abuse and where to go for help are posted in all bathrooms.

- L. The name and contact information of a representative of the Safe Church Team will be posted in public and visible places with the following message: "If you have concerns or witnessed something in our church that may be defined as abuse or neglect, please reach out to our Safe Church Team Member: _____ by email _____ or phone _____."

4. General Guidelines Pertaining To Criteria For Safe Supervision of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

These guidelines are designed to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from harm while attending and participating in church-sponsored events.

A. Two-Adult Rule & The Rule of Three:

At Souls Church, all church-sponsored functions involving the supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, either the *Two Adult Rule* or the *Rule of Three* will be practiced. No staff or volunteers should be alone with a single child, youth, or vulnerable adult in locations where they cannot be clearly observed by others.

1. **The *Two-Adult Rule*:** At least two, unrelated, screened adults must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
2. **The *Rule of Three*:**
 - a. When there is not a capacity to abide by the *Two-Adult Rule*, it may be acceptable to use the *The Rule of Three*: At least three individuals must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. One of the three must be a screened adult. If the child is under 6 years of age, the second individual must be at least 13 years of age.³
 - b. When the *Rule of Three* is used there must be another unrelated screened adult volunteer nearby or in proximity monitoring the group. Additionally, there should be a clear and unobstructed view into the room/space where the supervision is taking place.

B. One-to-One Meetings:

In children and youth ministry, there are times when a ministry leader or volunteer leader

³ Each local/state/provincial jurisdiction has different recommendations and cautions for using the Rule of Three and what fulfills the duty of care.

seeks to meet one-to-one with a youth or child. Because the imbalance of power is particularly pronounced when a child or youth is alone with an adult, it is crucial that ministry leaders and volunteer leaders follow safe protocols.

1. The meeting should take place in a public place (i.e. restaurant, coffee shop, bookstore, etc.) with the permission and knowledge of the parents.
2. The ministry leader or volunteer should notify the director of the ministry or another designated church leader and also record the meeting in a log that is reviewed monthly by the director or supervisor of the ministry.

C. Transportation:

1. Any person who transports a child or youth for any church sponsored event must be 21 or older, have a current Volunteer Driver Form and a copy of current insurance and driver's license on file.
2. To transport children or youth, there must be an adequate safety belt for each passenger and they will be worn any time the car is moving.
3. Transportation by one adult leader of one minor should be avoided. In the event that it is unavoidable, the following provisions must take place:
 - a. A clear consent from the parents/guardians of the child or youth is received;
 - b. A clear communication with the youth director or designated volunteer leader when the adult leader leaves with the child or youth;
 - c. A clear communication notifying the staff that the child/youth arrived safely and is no longer under their care or supervision.

D. Discipline:

When children or youth act out during church events, ministry leaders and volunteers will take care to address the misbehavior in ways that are consistent with the following guidelines:

1. Corporal punishment is not permitted (spanking, pinching, hitting).
2. Parents are to be informed whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior develops.
3. An aide or parent should be involved in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
4. Appropriate types of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff annually.
5. Whenever possible, leaders should address disruptive behavior by:
 - redirecting the child/youth to another activity
 - helping the child/youth focus on a more acceptable behavior
 - taking the child/youth aside if another adult volunteer/staff person is available to assist

E. Guidelines for Using Electronic Communication (Social Media Messaging, Email, or Texting):

Electronic communication (email and texts) and use of social media has become the preferred means for communication for many people, especially youth. While seeking to use technology to encourage good connections between ministry leaders/volunteers and youth, it is also important to provide guidelines that safeguard youth from potential abuse. To that end, all ministry staff leaders and volunteers will abide by the following Electronic Communication and Social Media Usage policy in their interactions with youth and children.

1. Communication should not take place with young people between the hours of 9:00 pm and 7:00 am or on staff members' days off, unless in an emergency.
2. Once permission is given via the [annual media release/consent form](#) (see Appendix H), staff and volunteers (small group leaders, mentors, coaches and children's group leaders) can hold email addresses for young people in their care.
3. Emails, messages, texts, or phone calls should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
4. Ongoing conversations or lengthy personal communications should not be done through email or text.
5. If a digital communication raises any child protection concerns, the staff or volunteer will inform their Supervisor.
6. When a volunteer leaves a ministry involving youth due to misconduct of any kind, staff should request that this volunteer not contact any youth - and that all youth contact information must be removed from that adult volunteer's devices.

F. Guidelines for Social Media Groups:

Each ministry group/class may have a Social Media (Facebook/Instagram) group provided they follow the guidelines below:

1. The group must be "closed" or "private" so that it is not public information. Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group see them.
2. Ministry staff/volunteers may not use any image of a child or youth without written consent of the parents and only in ways that protect the value and dignity of those pictured.
3. The group must be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights.
4. Young people, staff, and volunteers may become a member of this group provided they are 13 or over.
5. While direct 1:1 messages should be avoided between youth and volunteer leaders, communication can occur openly through comments and posts on the page.
6. Church events can be posted on the page.

7. Church volunteers are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information of any child under the age of eighteen. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.
8. As an exception to this policy, a child whose parent or other legally responsible adult has signed may be identified by name in photographs or videos posted to an official social media account.

5. Program-specific Guidelines for Abuse Prevention of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

A. Nursery Guidelines Pertaining To Child Abuse Prevention

These nursery guidelines are designed to protect children from harm while they are placed in the care of nursery volunteers during church-related events.

1. A nursery supervisor will be assigned to each shift. Only adults who are screened and have completed the Safe Church policy training sessions will be able to serve as the adult volunteer in the nursery. On a particular Sunday, the assigned adult nursery volunteers will be unrelated.
2. No child should be left unattended in the nursery at any time.
3. Parents must sign in each child on the designated form when they arrive in the nursery. If the parent is unknown to the nursery supervisor, they will then be given a numbered token that matches the number assigned to their child. Special care instructions (including restroom assistance) must be noted on the sign-in form. A name tag must be attached to each child and to each child's diaper bag.
4. Our team does not perform any diaper changing. A parent or approved caregiver may use the diapering station and within eyesight of other caregivers. An adult supervisor should provide minimal assistance for a child who is able to use the bathroom. Only one child should use the bathroom at a time.
5. Accidents or illnesses must be reported immediately to the child's parent/guardian. An accident or incident report should be filled out in case of accident or injury, one copy for the child's parents, and one for the Nursery Coordinator.
6. Children in infant or toddler nurseries are to be picked up only by their parents, or by the person who brought them unless prior arrangements have been made. They will be dismissed after proper identification is made, either because the Nursery Supervisor knows the parent or upon return of the coordinating numbered token.

B. Guidelines for Kids Church On Sundays

1. Bathroom procedures:
 - a. **Preschool:** Children are not to go to the bathroom by themselves. Rather, they are to choose a buddy that can accompany them to the bathroom, along with an adult. If a buddy does not want to go, 2 adults must accompany the child to the bathroom (this can include the hall monitor so that there is always the correct number of adults overseeing children in the main space). Should a child require assistance, keep the door open to the stall, stand in the doorway and assist. No adult should ever be in a closed stall with a child.
 - b. **Elementary:** Children are not to go to the bathroom by themselves. Rather, they are to choose a buddy that can accompany them to the bathroom. The accompanying adult remains outside the bathroom, although they can prop the outside door of the bathroom open.

C. Guidelines For Middle and High School Programs

1. Parents/guardians must return the Participation/Release Form to the youth department at the beginning of each church program year. Program leaders will inform parents of relevant policies either via a letter or a parent meeting.
2. For scheduled classes and events:
 - a. At programs and functions involving the supervision of youth, at least three individuals must be present in each separate classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area. In each such case, at least one of the three individuals must be a screened adult.
 - b. A premises monitor will randomly observe classrooms or enclosed areas where the "Rule of Three" is practiced.
 - c. During scheduled classes or events, group leaders should know where the youth are at all times.
 - d. If a young person leaves an event without permission, the parents/guardian will be called immediately.

6. Guidelines for Pastoral Visitation

Formal pastoral care is care carried out by church representatives - ministers, elders, deacons, or a pastoral care team, on behalf of the church community. Such care is an important ministry of the church, reflecting the love, compassion, and presence of Christ to those who participate in the ministries of the church.

Some forms of pastoral care involve one-on-one visitation, such as with those who are experiencing a time of suffering or grief, with those who are housebound, or with those in the hospital. In these cases, pastoral visits are made to offer spiritual friendship, help, support, and contact with the community of faith. These visits may include practical help, giving information, and/or supporting people as they make difficult decisions. Listening well is fundamental to all good pastoral care.

The following guidelines are provided to ensure safe and healthy practices of pastoral visitation:

1. Pastoral care visits should be conducted in the morning, afternoon, or early evening.
2. Ordinarily, two unrelated pastoral care visitors will meet with a congregant when the visit is in a private location.
3. If a pastoral care visitor meets alone 1:1 with a congregant, text or call a member of the Lead Team (or designated person) before and after the visit.
4. When a pastoral care visitor believes the person being visited may have a 'dementia-like' condition, a pastoral care card (with the name of the visitor(s), address of church, and contact info) must be left at the residence.
5. All pastoral care visitors will honor the limits of their role in giving care, referring congregants as the situation requires to the services of counselors, spiritual directors, and others who are better trained and resourced to meet a congregant's needs.
6. The Lead Team and Elders are responsible for overseeing that risk is being assessed and these pastoral care guidelines are properly adhered to.

7. Responding to Abuse

A. Reporting/Responding to Disclosures and Allegations of Abuse of Minors or Vulnerable Adults

The following steps are to be followed in cases of suspected abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult. Responding to Disclosure of Abuse from a Child and the Safe Church Ministry [Responding to Abuse Toolkit](#).

1. All ministry leaders/volunteers who have a reasonable suspicion of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse or neglect of a minor or vulnerable adult are responsible to report it within 24 hours to the Child Protective Services/Children's Aid Society 24-hour hotline. If you are uncertain of whether what you heard or saw constitutes evidence of abuse,

consult with a member of Souls Church Leadership Team Member (See: Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse for guidance).

2. If a minor or vulnerable adult is in immediate physical danger (either on church property or off the property) then the police (911) should be notified immediately.
3. The ministry leader/volunteer who suspects abuse should also contact the Safe Church Team leader to fill out an incident report (Accident or Incident Report) in order to record their observations and follow-up actions. This documentation will be kept in a confidential, locked location in the church lounge office.
4. Neither the ministry leader/volunteer nor the Safe Church Team leader will try to investigate the abuse concerns. Additionally, they will not seek to notify the alleged offender of the allegations against him or her. These tasks should be left to the police and/or CPS/CAS.
5. Inform the lead pastor and oversight (church overseers, elder or lead team member) of the concerns or allegations of abuse. Note that confidentiality is important in all cases of abuse but especially when a minor is involved: Confidentiality for protecting confidentiality and need-to-know reporting).
6. If the abuse happened during a church/ministry-sponsored activity or by a ministry leader/volunteer, in addition to ensuring that the police and/or CPS/CAS have been contacted, the Safe Church Team leader shall notify the church's insurance agent and legal counsel.
7. Together with the pastor and the leadership team, develop a plan for responding to the abuse in ways that provide care for the one who has been victimized by abuse and respects the dignity of all involved. The plan will include:
 - a. Putting the ministry leader on administrative leave with or without pay (or suspending a volunteer) for up to 90 days or until the conclusion of the investigation, whichever is sooner.
 - b. Providing support and care for the minor and their family. This should be done in a way that puts the needs of the minor and his/her family first.
 - c. Determining who will be the primary contact with the police and/or CPS/CAS.
 - d. Determining how to deal with media inquiries.
8. After the accused has been contacted by the authorities and the investigation is underway, the elders will provide an opportunity for the accused to respond to the allegations.

9. If the accused is found guilty or admits guilt, the elders may (1) subject a determined abuser (hereafter abuser) to further suspension, deposition, or termination of employment, or (2) take such other action against the abuser as the circumstances may dictate.
10. Should the determined abuser be an office bearer, the elders will follow the specifications for admonition and discipline in the church bylaws.
11. Subject to the best interest of the person victimized by abuse, the governing body should notify the congregation in writing if they conclude that a church leader has perpetrated abuse. This notice should protect the identity and confidentiality of any innocent parties, including the person who was victimized by abuse. This written communication should be pastoral, succinct, and objectively factual. Referencing public police reports, charges, or court verdicts may be used.
12. If law enforcement decides not to investigate or charge an adult leader of the congregation who has been accused of abusing a child or vulnerable adult, an independent investigation should be considered in consultation with legal counsel and [Safe Church Ministry](#).

B. Responding to Allegations of Abuse of Adults:

If an adult (the claimant) reports abuse to a member of the Leadership Team, the lead pastor, or a member of the overseer committee, the pastor, and the elders (or a few members of the council) will do the following⁴:

1. Assign the claimant an advocate who can walk alongside, support, and represent the claimant throughout the reporting and investigation process.
2. Meet with the claimant and/or the advocate to hear the complaint, the impact it has had on the complainant and what the claimant feels needs to happen for them to feel safe at Souls Church again. The claimant may present their testimony orally but should also submit their statement in writing or alternatively, an incident report can be filled out at the meeting and signed by the claimant. The written statement or incident report will be kept in a confidential, locked location in the church office.
3. Suspend the accused from their duties without prejudice until the allegations have been investigated.

⁴. Safe Church Ministry (safechurchministry@crcna.org) offers a 60-minute online orientation and training on abuse awareness and response.

4. Based on the information gathered, develop a plan for assessing the veracity of the allegations. Ordinarily, the plan will involve at least one of the following processes:
 - a. An informal response led by a designated investigation team who meets with the accused to follow up on the allegations.⁵ The conversation shall include:
 - i. A report of the event as the claimant experienced it
 - ii. An account of how the claimant was impacted by the accused's actions
 - iii. An opportunity for the accused to respond to the allegations
 - iv. A request that the accused not contact the claimant directly until further notice.
 - v. A report of the conversation, detailing the accused's response that is filed with the incident report.
 - b. An advisory panel process exploring the gravity and probability of the allegations of abuse.
 - c. An independent investigation into the allegations of abuse. It is strongly recommended that councils make use of a third party investigator when:
 - i. The accused is a prominent leader in the community or region such that impartiality is especially elusive;
 - ii. The accusations consist of multiple victims or multiple jurisdictions;
 - iii. Real or perceived conflicts of interest make impartiality especially elusive.
 - d. If the accused is an office bearer, the elders/council will follow the [Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader](#) and include the church visitors in their initial deliberations about the best way forward.
5. Based on the information gathered (and the recommendations of the informal investigation team, the advisory panel or the third party investigators), the Safe Church Team leader, claimant's advocate, pastor, and elders (or a few council members) will determine a plan of action for responding to abuse. If the allegations are found credible, the plan will include:
 - a. A determination of appropriate measures of discipline and opportunities for restoration. This could include suspension of church leadership for a period of time, counseling, abuse of power training, mentoring, oversight and accountability, a written apology to the claimant, or if an office bearer is involved, deposition.
 - b. A plan for providing ongoing care and accountability for the accused.
 - c. A plan for providing ongoing care and support for the claimant.
 - d. Provisions for counseling for the claimant.
 - e. If the claimant desires, an opportunity to participate in a restorative conversation with members of the council, members of the church, and/or, the accused (Information on Restorative Circle Processes may be found in our bylaws.

⁵ This option is only appropriate when both the nature of the incident and/or the harm done are relatively minimal. The claimant must agree to this informal response.

6. Throughout the process, every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality and dignity of the claimant and the accused.
7. The internal leadership team and an external support team are available for support, counsel, and resources throughout the process.

Appendix A: State/Provincial Definitions

State/Provincial Definitions: The State of Minnesota has defined child abuse and neglect as the following:

- A. Child Abuse: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher's aide, or a member of the clergy.
- B. Child Neglect: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following:
 - a. negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, or
 - b. Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

Appendix B: Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse – School Age

Note: Children rarely exhibit just one sign indicating that they are the victims of abuse. Some symptoms may also represent typical developmental changes, or the after-effect of other kinds of trauma in their lives. Conversely, it is possible for abuse to be taking place without the appearance of any symptoms because of the child's ability to mask or deny what is very confusing and painful to acknowledge. Generally, several symptoms appearing at once *may* be an indication of abuse.

- Complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the child's bottom; smearing feces on walls or objects
- Pattern of injuries, multiple injuries, injuries about the face or neck; failure to complain about or explain an obvious physical discomfort; hiding bruises
- Unusual fears: a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences
- Poor concentration in classroom; inability to focus
- Exhibiting adult-pleasing behaviors, striving for perfection, acting miserable if failing
- Engaging in self-injury, engaging in excessive masturbation or masturbation in a public setting
- Acting enraged and out of control; expressing anger through destruction
- Shyness or fear about physical touch
- Exhibiting sexual behavior beyond comprehension or maturity level; behaving in a sexual manner with other children or adults
- Exhibiting signs of needing to be in control of others or situations; bullying others
- Hostility and distrust of adults, mood swings and irritability, violent disruptions
- Acting out, including hoarding food and toys, lying, stealing, assaulting
- Frequent absences from school or other scheduled events because of being punished
- Low self-esteem, particular sensitivity to criticism
- Hyper-vigilance, excessive and suspicious watching of other people; easily startled
- Preoccupation with fire and setting fires
- Eating disorders, use of laxatives, unexplained and dramatic changes in weight

Appendix C: Responding to a Disclosure of Abuse from a Child

For informational purposes, the following set of guidelines pertains to information that a child may wish to disclose to an adult.

1. If a child asks to talk with you at church, provide a room (with a window) in which to speak privately.
2. Listen carefully to what the child tells you and respond in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner. Disclosing abuse is a scary thing for children, and they need to know they are supported.
3. Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story, since this may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with him or her.
4. Avoid asking leading questions. Examples of what you could say: "Can you tell me more?" "Is there anything you need to add?" Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it didn't happen the way he or she reports it did.
5. Do not attempt to assess the truthfulness of the child's disclosure—that will be for trained professionals to decide. Assure the child you believe him/her and that you care about him/her.
6. Tell the child that whatever happened was not his or her fault and reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
7. Do not tell or suggest to the child that he or she has been abused.
8. Reassure the child that he or she did the right thing by telling you.
9. Do not promise **not** to tell anyone. Tell the child that you need to find help so the incident can be prevented from happening again.
10. Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint. Instead, share with the child that other people need to know what happened and that they will talk to the child later.
11. Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child's underwear or clothing; observe only those bruises that are accessible.
12. If you feel comfortable doing so, speak to the child and offer support in the following weeks and months.

Appendix D: Confidentiality

In order to protect the dignity and well-being of any person who has been victimized by abuse, it is important that their identity is kept confidential. The following measures are implemented to protect the privacy of all parties and to ensure that information about any alleged act is limited to essential persons:

- A. Need-to-Know: Those positions in the need-to-know category include the following: chair of council, pastor, the pastoral care elders for the claimant and accused, and the Safe Church Team/Abuse Prevention and Response Team.
- B. Situations of abuse involving minors or vulnerable adults require sensitive care and full transparency with law enforcement investigations. In situations of abuse involving minors or vulnerable adults, there shall be a designated Safe Church Team member, pastor, or elder who consults the CRCNA Safe Church Ministry or a Classis Safe Church Coordinator.
- C. The names and information in any abuse allegations shall be limited to the positions listed in paragraph A. Need to Know on this page. Any request to release names of any involved party must be first cleared by the congregation's legal counsel.
- D. Discussion by the Leadership Team and Elders shall be conducted without the actual names of involved persons being used. Instead, descriptions such as "reporter", "alleged offender", and "claimant" shall be used.
- E. A liaison between the legal authorities or Child Protective Services/Children's Aid Society and the church staff/council will be appointed.
- F. After law enforcement has officially charged someone of a crime or after a legal decision has been made, there will be a communication outlining ways that the church and community may be able to move forward with respect and responsible ways to process the harm within the congregation and community.