

## **Abuse Policy Brief Westwinds Church**

Westwinds Church is committed to being a community where every person is safe, respected, and free from abuse. We believe abuse—whether emotional, physical, sexual, financial, or spiritual—is a serious violation of trust and power, and stands in direct opposition to the way of Jesus. Because abuse often occurs within relationships of trust and authority, we recognize our responsibility to remain aware, proactive, and accountable in protecting the vulnerable and responding wisely and justly to harm.

Abuse occurs when someone uses power, position, or trust to exploit or harm another person, particularly those who are more vulnerable. This includes sexual abuse and harassment, intimate partner violence, coercion, manipulation, and any behavior that intimidates, controls, or diminishes another person's dignity or agency. Consent must always be freely given and cannot exist where there is pressure, fear, or a significant imbalance of power.

To uphold a culture of safety, Westwinds maintains a Safeguarding Team responsible for training, screening, and responding to concerns. All staff and volunteers in key roles undergo screening and ongoing education in abuse awareness and prevention. We expect everyone in our community to practice healthy boundaries, including: respecting personal space, using appropriate language, avoiding isolated situations (especially with minors), and honoring the autonomy of others. Those in positions of leadership carry a heightened responsibility to model and maintain these boundaries at all times.

We take all concerns seriously. Anyone who observes or experiences behavior that violates this policy is encouraged to report it promptly. When abuse is suspected, especially involving minors or vulnerable adults, reports must be made immediately to law enforcement and appropriate protective services. The church does not investigate these situations independently but cooperates fully with authorities while also providing care and support. In all cases, the safety and well-being of the victim are our highest priority.

When concerns or allegations arise, the Safeguarding Team, in collaboration with church leadership, will respond with care, discretion, and accountability. This may include ensuring safety, connecting individuals with professional resources, and establishing appropriate boundaries or restrictions for those accused. Retaliation against anyone who raises concerns or participates in a report is strictly prohibited.

We are committed to caring for survivors with compassion and respect. We will listen without judgment, honor privacy, and support each person's choices about how to move forward. In situations where individuals with a history of abusive behavior seek involvement in the church, participation will only be considered through a structured process that prioritizes transparency, accountability, and safety, with strict limitations as necessary to protect the community. Through these commitments, Westwinds seeks to be a place of safety, healing, and integrity, where abuse is taken seriously and all people are treated with dignity.