

Condensed Abuse Policy Draft Westwinds Church

Purpose & Commitment

Westwinds Church is committed to protecting vulnerable people, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. Abuse is a serious sin and often a crime, involving the misuse of power or trust to harm another person. As a church, we reject denial and commit to awareness, prevention, and action.

Our goal is to cultivate a community where all people are safe, respected, and free from abuse through education, clear boundaries, and accountability.

Definitions (Summary)

Abuse: Misuse of power or trust to exploit or harm a vulnerable person (emotionally, physically, sexually, financially, or spiritually).

Sexual Abuse: Sexual behavior involving a power imbalance (e.g., adult–child, pastor–congregant), including contact and non-contact acts.

Consent: A freely given, informed “yes.” It cannot be given under coercion, intimidation, incapacity, or power imbalance.

Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome sexual behavior that creates a hostile or unsafe environment.

Intimate Partner Violence: Patterns of control, intimidation, or harm within a relationship.

Other Forms of Abuse:

- Emotional (control, humiliation, manipulation)
- Physical (intentional harm or intimidation)
- Financial (exploitation of resources)
- Spiritual (misuse of faith or authority to control)
- Stalking (repeated, fear-inducing behavior)

Safeguarding Structure

Safeguarding Team

A trained team (including at least one Elder and staff member) oversees prevention and response.

Responsibilities include:

- Enforcing all abuse policies.

- Training staff and volunteers
- Screening leaders and volunteers
- Receiving and responding to reports
- Coordinating responses to allegations

Screening & Prevention

All pastors, staff, and relevant volunteers undergo screening, which may include:

- Applications and interviews
- Background checks
- Reference and online reviews

Key Standard: Anyone with a history of abuse or violent/sexual offenses may not work with children or vulnerable individuals.

Training

- Required annual abuse prevention training for staff and volunteers
- Ongoing education for the church community
- Age-appropriate safety education for children and students

Healthy Boundaries

Physical & Environmental Safety

- Appropriate, consensual touch only
- Avoid one-on-one isolation with minors
- Maintain visible, accountable environments
- Limit private communication with minors

Communication

- Use respectful, non-sexualized language
- Avoid belittling, threatening, or objectifying speech

Power & Agency

- Respect personal boundaries and autonomy
- Do not control or manipulate others
- Disclose and manage power-imbalanced relationships appropriately

Responsibility: Those with greater power bear greater responsibility for maintaining boundaries.

Prohibited Behaviors (Staff/Leaders):

- Abuse of any kind
- Sexual harassment
- Discrimination
- Threatening or degrading conduct

Reporting & Responding to Concerns

General Expectations

- Anyone who observes misconduct should intervene if safe and report immediately
- All concerns are documented confidentially

Responding to Abuse

Immediate Danger

- Call 911
- Then notify the Safeguarding Team

Abuse of Minors or Vulnerable Adults

- Mandatory immediate report to law enforcement and protective services
- Do not investigate independently
- Then notify the Safeguarding Team

Abuse of Adults

- Support and encourage adult survivors in reporting abuse
- Respect the survivor's agency unless others are at risk

Response Process

The Safeguarding Team will:

- Ensure safety of victims and others
- Report to authorities when required
- Provide care and support
- Establish boundaries for the accused
- Coordinate with Elders on decisions

Possible Actions:

- Administrative leave
- Restricted access
- Formal discipline

If Accused Is In Leadership:

Anyone accused must be immediately removed from decision-making processes.

Ongoing Response

- Cooperate with investigations
- Support victims with resources
- Communicate carefully to protect privacy
- Document all actions

Independent Investigation

May be pursued when:

- Authorities decline a case
- Concerns remain unresolved
- Leadership is involved
- Patterns of misconduct exist

Independent investigators must be qualified and external.

Accountability

- Anyone who abuses power will not serve in leadership
- Retaliation against those who report is strictly prohibited

Caring for Survivors

We commit to:

- Listening without judgment
- Believing and supporting survivors
- Respecting privacy and agency
- Encouraging professional care

We will not:

- Blame the victim
- Force disclosure
- Minimize or dismiss harm
- Pressure reconciliation or forgiveness

Receiving a disclosure is a responsibility and privilege; responses must be compassionate and trauma-informed.

Policy on Known Offenders

Individuals with a history of abuse:

- Must disclose relevant history
- Must participate in a structured assessment process
- Must accept strict boundaries and accountability measures

Non-negotiables:

- No access to minors for those who abused children
- No leadership roles involving power or trust

Participation in church life may be limited or denied based on risk.

Priority: The safety of victims and the community always comes first.

Key Principles Summary

- Protect the vulnerable
- Take all concerns seriously
- Report appropriately and immediately
- Prioritize victim safety and agency
- Maintain accountability at all levels
- Foster a culture of transparency, education, and care