

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

adopted February 13, 2017

FOR PARENTS, VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH
in programs sponsored by churches (First CRC, God's Grace, New Dawn) on First CRC campus

INTRODUCTION

Study committee reports to Synod of 1992 and 1994 have communicated anguish over stories of abuse and the unspeakable damage done to children who have been victimized by parents, family members and church members. The abuser was almost always someone who professed to care about the child. The committee members translated the pain they were hearing into a call for justice and mercy. As a result, the Christian Reformed Church has taken bold steps to increase awareness about the devastating impact of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

The churches (First CRC, God's Grace and New Dawn) meeting on the First CRC Bellflower campus jointly and individually sponsor programs for children. Since these churches love and care for young people and children, we recognize that we must also take steps to consciously work for the prevention of all types of abuse. The children and adults of our churches need to be in a safe place where they can grow in the Christian faith and trust those who minister to them. **Therefore, to minimize risk and to protect children from abuse, we have developed the following guidelines and policies.**

Safe Church Policy for the Churches on First CRC Bellflower Campus

For the purposes of this policy booklet, individuals under the age of eighteen are children are designated as **youth** or **minors**. Those individuals that are paid by the church to serve a child or youth program and/or have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision are designated as **staff**. Individuals not paid by the church, but who serve in a children's or youth program and/or have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision are designated as **volunteers**. Individuals (whether regular volunteers or substitutes) who meet the qualifications to count in an official volunteer-child ratio are designated as **approved adults**.

General Policies

Screening

All individuals ministering with children and youth are to complete an application form (see Appendix C) *prior* to beginning to serve in any ministry with children or youth. This application will indicate length of membership at First CRC, God's Grace or New Dawn and/or previous church membership, as well as highlight past involvement with children or youth, and allow for personal reference checks, criminal background check and if necessary fingerprinting. The Safe Church Team (SCT) will review applications, and determine the extent of screening based on the staff/ volunteer profile and the level of interaction with youth/ minors. These materials will be kept on file with regular access limited to the Safe Church Team and/or, where warranted, the First CRC Bellflower Council President.

Compliance

Before beginning any ministry with children, staff and volunteers will receive training and complete screening procedures. All volunteers and staff must comply with First CRC Bellflower Safe Church policies.

A volunteer or staff person who refuses to follow Safe Church policies or who violates policies may be suspended from serving with children or required to relinquish his/her responsibility in a child or youth program.

Training

Volunteers and staff—including program directors and other leaders—of any program serving minors are expected to attend approved training events every three years on abuse prevention, receive/review Safe Church policies and complete the screening procedures. Ordinarily such training is part of a general orientation meeting conducted for staff and volunteers working in the children's and/or youth program.

Staff or volunteers who are recruited to serve in a child or youth program after the scheduled training event, are required to receive/review Safe Church policies with a designated member of the Safe Church Team and complete screening procedures **prior** to beginning to serve in children or youth ministries. Such persons are required to participate in the next available training event.

All persons serving with children on the Bell One campus are required to review the most current Safe Church policy every year prior to the start of church ministry season in the fall and complete an updated application form.

Program Specific Policies (First CRC Bellflower)

Nursery (For weekday or Sunday activities)

1. Two approved adults should be present. Children may not be left alone at any time. A ratio of one volunteer to six children is recommended.
2. Youth ages 14 and older may serve as an approved adult provided that the other approved adult is the age of 21 or older. Youth under the age of 14 may volunteer for service, but may not care for children without adult supervision, and do not qualify as an approved adult.

3. There should always be at least two approved adult attendants in the nursery whenever it is scheduled. If two attendants are not available, the parent of one of the children brought to the nursery must stay until a second attendant can be recruited to serve.
4. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in case of illness.
5. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parent(s). (e.g. injury, nosebleed, vomiting or anything unusual).
6. The diapering of an infant or toddler should take place in the nursery room (while another attendant is present).
7. An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for that particular service may not spend time in the nursery room(s) during or after the service. However, an approved adult or minor may be recruited to serve when the nursery is short-staffed.
8. Ushers and/or parking lot guards should check in with nursery attendants, but may not spend time in the nursery during or after the service.

Children's Worship/ Little Lambs (Coffee Break Children's Program)

1. Two approved adults should be present. Children may not be left alone at any time. A ratio of one volunteer to six children is recommended.
2. Youth ages 14 and older may serve as an approved adult provided that the other approved adult is the age of 21 or older. Youth under the age of 14 may volunteer for service, but may not care for children without adult supervision and do not qualify as an approved adult.
3. Children should not leave the worship center/ classroom except for illness, bathroom use, or other compelling reason.
4. Any medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parents/guardians (e.g. injury, nosebleed, vomiting or anything unusual).
5. Parents will encourage their children to use bathroom facilities before and after class. Only adults may assist children with bathroom needs. For children who do not require assistance, an adult attendant should accompany the child to the bathroom. The bathroom should be checked ahead of time to make sure the bathroom is vacant and the attending adult should stand in the open doorway while the child is using the bathroom facilities.

6. Whenever Children's Worship/ Little Lambs is in session, the worship center door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
7. An appointed rover should check in with Children's Worship/ Little Lamb volunteers, but may not spend time in the worship center during or after the service.

Sunday School

1. An approved adult should be present at all times in each class. If an approved adult is available to serve as a rover, one adult may teach the class. However, if a rover is not available, a second approved adult should assist in teaching the class. Children may not be left alone at any time.
2. Youth ages 14 and older may serve as an approved adult provided that the other approved adult is the age of 21 or older. Youth under the age of 14 may volunteer for service, but may not care for children without adult supervision and do not qualify as an approved adult.
3. Children should not leave the classroom except for illness, bathroom use, or other compelling reason. Any medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parents/guardians (e.g. injury, nosebleed, vomiting or anything unusual).
4. Parents will encourage their children to use bathroom facilities before and after class. Only adults may assist children with bathroom needs. For children who do not require assistance, an adult attendant must accompany the child to the bathroom. The bathroom should be checked ahead of time to make sure the bathroom is vacant and the attending adult should stand in the open doorway while the child is using the bathroom facilities.
5. Whenever Sunday School is in session, the classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.

Catechism

1. An approved adult should be present at all times in each class. If an approved adult is available to serve as a rover, one adult may teach the class. However, if a rover is not available, a second approved adult should assist in teaching the class. Whenever class is in session, the classroom door, when open, should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
2. Before and after class, the door to the room shall remain open as long as the teacher and/or one or more students are present.

3. Teachers should identify to students what constitutes abusive behavior and bullying behavior among minors in their program. Teachers should state expectations and a policy to prevent these behaviors.

GEMS, Cadets

1. Counselors/Leaders should provide adequate supervision of the counselees. Each program function should be supervised by at least two persons; an adult leader and another volunteer at least four years older than the oldest counselee.
2. If a child needs medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.
3. Children in these programs should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of the class, nor should they stay longer than ten minutes after the class. Two counselors must be present at these times.
4. Leaders in these programs should identify for counselees what constitutes abusive behavior and bullying behavior among minors in their program. Leaders should state expectations and a policy to prevent these behaviors.
5. When planning activities away from the church facility, out of town, or overnight, leaders should ensure that these are conducted in compliance with the aforementioned policies and recommended/approved Cadet and GEMS guidelines for such events.
6. While the appropriate display of affection between counselors/leaders and counselees is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another such displays can be misinterpreted. For that reason, displays of affection should be limited to such actions as an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict these displays to a public area. A Counselor's/leader's or counselee's right to refuse any of these will be respected.

Mid-school & High School Youth Programs (Shema and other youth programs)

1. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders should provide appropriate and sufficient supervision of the youth in their care. Two youth group leaders will be present at all times.
2. Scheduled one-to-one interactions between youth and leader take place in public. The leader will notify the program director and fellow leader prior to and subsequent to these meetings taking place. Normally, after two meetings, parents should be notified.
3. If a child needs medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.

4. Leaders in this programs should identify for youth what constitutes abusive behavior and bullying behavior among minors in their program. Leaders should state expectations and a policy to prevent these behaviors.
5. Each year, youth group leaders should include in their programming a discussion relating to the subject of abuse. Topics might include date violence, biblical guidelines for dating, relationships, and awareness of the signs of abuse, a teenager's response to a teenage victim or abuser, or prevention of abuse.
6. Regardless of their relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth leader and a youth group member to date each other. Similarly, a youth leader should not date the close friend of a member of the youth group.
7. While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Therefore, displays of affection between youth leader and youth group member ought to be limited to such actions as an arm around the shoulders, an open handed pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict these displays to a public area. A youth group leader's or member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
8. Youth group leaders should avoid exclusive and "special" relationships with particular group members (e.g. special gifts, numerous and lengthy phone calls, letters of an inappropriate nature to a youth group member).

Vacation Bible School

1. All VBS classes and activities are conducted with at least two volunteers/staff, at least one of whom is an adult. Volunteers/Staff should not meet alone with a child without another adult or leader nearby to observe.
2. Whenever VBS activities take place in classrooms or other enclosed spaces, the room door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
3. Children should not leave their classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reason. For younger children who do not require assistance, an adult attendant must accompany the child with the bathroom door ajar.
4. If a child needs medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.

Discipline Policies (Note that this policy applies to all of the above programs)

1. Expectations of children/youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Expectations should be stated at the outset and over the course of program's meetings. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
2. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
3. Discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
4. Whenever possible, leaders should discipline by choosing one of the following options:
 - a. Distract the child/youth with another activity
 - b. Help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behavior
 - c. remove the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist
 - d. for young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child.
5. An aide or parent should be involved in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
6. Concerns about a child's behavior or questioning the appropriate responses to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor, immediately.
7. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) and physical restraint is not permitted.
8. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, insulting, threatening, etc.) is not permitted.
9. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.

Reporting Requirements

All church workers should know what constitutes an occasion for reporting, the reporting channels they should use, and their obligations to make a report of suspected inappropriate conduct or abuse. Pastors and members of the Safe Church Team receive training in what constitutes child abuse, legal requirements for reporting, and the nature and content of the report.

Any inappropriate conduct (or relationships) between adult worker and child or youth should be confronted and investigated by the supervisor of the ministry involved.

1. Contact shall be made with a member of the Safe Church Team. In all cases the report should immediately notify the pastor of the church most directly involved with the allegation. In the case of church currently without a pastor, the president of the church's council will be notified. Documentation shall begin.
2. The Safe Church Team member who receives the report will serve as a support to the reporting person(s), empowering them toward firsthand communication to including, but not limited to: council leadership, pastoral staff, classis leadership, Child Protective Services. While Child Protective Services requires first hand reporting of abuses, the identity of the reporting person with respect to other parties shall remain confidential subject to disclosure only with the consent of that person or by judicial process.

(In consultation and cooperation with Child Protective Services, the following steps will also be taken.)

3. A member of the Safe Church Team or the church council's president (not the pastor) will contact the church's insurance carrier.
4. The member of the Safe Church Team most closely connected with church of the child or youth involved in the incident will contact the parents.
5. The alleged offender shall be informed of the allegations at the appropriate time by one of the pastoral staff. He/she shall be treated with dignity and support. At the same time, depending on a number of factors (timing of allegations and internal investigation, recommendation of church insurance company, recommendation of classis leadership, status of any legal/ judicial process, etc), the First CRC Bellflower council/ Executive committee will make a determination as to whether or not he/she/ shall be temporarily relieved of ministry.

Safe Church Team (SCT)

The Safe Church Team will be made up of at least three members of First Christian Reformed Church Bellflower. The council of each of the churches on campus will appoint a member to this team's sub-committee. The SCT will assume the following responsibilities:

- 1) Receive advanced training in what constitutes child abuse, legal requirements for reporting, and the nature and content of this report.
- 2) Review applications from staff and volunteers. These materials will be kept on file with access limited to SCT and church staff.
- 3) Review Safe Church policies with new staff/volunteers who begin their service after designated training events or annual updating of application forms. Such persons must complete application process prior to beginning to serve in children or youth ministries.

- 4) Receive reports of inappropriate conduct or relationships from supervisor of ministry in which alleged incident occurred.
- 5) Review Safe Church policies and recommend changes as needed.
- 6) Recommend to the church councils training events and monitor with the First CRC office annual compliance with the policy.
- 7) Schedule the necessary meetings to accomplish the above-listed tasks

Reports of suspected abuse within the church family can be brought to SCT and the pastor of the church with the involved member. The SCT does not conduct an investigation into the matter. Rather, the SCT should handle such matters as empowering the reporting person(s) to file a report with authorities, referring to local agencies that deal with abuse prevention, informing the pastor, establishing a care plan for the abused person and family. The pastor of the affected church may be called upon to assist the SCT in establishing a care plan for the child and family.

Response Plans

All reports of suspected inappropriate behavior must be taken seriously. They must be handled forthrightly with respect for people's privacy, confidentiality and adequate care shown for the well-being of the victims.

The Council will designate a spokesperson through which all public information will be issued. The church will assist all individuals involved in the alleged abusive situation in obtaining counseling and support. The Pastor or council president of the affected church will prepare for disclosure to the congregation if deemed necessary.