



SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Rationale for an Abuse Prevention Policy

1. To reduce the risk of allegations of abuse involving programmes sponsored by the Church which involve children or disabled persons;
2. To set out clear guidelines for screening volunteers and for dealing with or reporting allegations of abuse involving programmes sponsored by the Church;
3. To qualify for insurance which includes coverage for liability claims.

General Outline

It is recommended that there be specific rules for particular activities sponsored by the Church. At present, that activities involving minors (those under the age of 18) include the nursery (daytime only), catechism classes (no individual classes), GEMS (girls only), Cadets (boys only), Vacation Bible School, "The Link" youth group, and the young people society. Generally, personal contact outside of the activities between the adult supervising the activities and children in such activities is not recommended.

Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children and Youth

Human warmth expressed through appropriate touch can foster a sense of acceptance, belonging and significance. Inappropriate touch can create feelings of violation, confusion and isolation which leave lasting scars. It is the responsibility of adults to maintain appropriate boundaries; this is *not* the responsibility of children or youth.

The following are examples of ways in which adults can show warmth to children while protecting their own integrity.

- a) Make a point of showing affection in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. In determining whether the touching is of a sexual or inappropriate nature, ask yourself the question, "How would a reasonable observer interpret this touch?"
- b) Classrooms and meeting places should be managed to create a feeling of public

space, yet be conducive to good teaching. Leave the windows in the room uncovered and the door standing open whenever possible.

- c) If you and a child need to talk to each other in confidence, avoid isolating yourselves. Have another adult present or stay within view of the group. If you and a child *must* be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d) If a child is hurting physically or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same gender as the child is present in the room with you. Do not force the child to remove clothing for an examination.
- e) If a child is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with the child's permission, show support by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug.
- f) Be cautious about any conversations that involve sex. Children may ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening, with respect for the child, is appropriate. When responding, be sensitive to the values and standards that are taught in the child's home and to a discussion that may cause conflict or confusion with those standards.
- g) Within the context of our mentoring program, there are often situations where it is appropriate for an adult to be alone with a child. By allowing the child to participate in the mentoring program, the parent has already given written consent. Even so, in such cases, be absolutely sure that the child's parents are well aware of your plans for your time together.
- h) When supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards.
 - i. Ensure that congregational awareness and parental consent of the activity is clear.
 - ii. Under no circumstances shall an overnight event be supervised by fewer than two adults.
 - iii. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks. If sleeping space is to be shared, adults and children must have separate beds.
 - iv. Avoid situations in which you or a child may have to change clothing, such as swimsuits or sports clothes, in the other's presence.
- i) Always respect the integrity of the child. Allow the child to back away from your well-intentioned affection if s/he so wishes. Some children may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact.
- j) Use your common sense and good judgement to guide you in protecting the personal space and well-being of the children in your care.

Specific Prevention Guidelines

Specific Guidelines for the following activities are appended.

1. Church Nursery
2. Vacation Bible School (VBS)
3. "Youth Groups": GEMS, Cadets, Catechism classes, "The Link" youth group, Young People's society

Future Activities

If the Church Council approves the establishment of youth clubs or other activities involving the youth, it will only do so once specific prevention guidelines are adopted.

Screening Procedures

Any person wishing to volunteer for any activities involving minors must be a member of good standing in the Cornerstone congregation (or in a neighbouring congregation in which we have an ecclesiastical relationship) and must be approved via the screening process. (see attached policy)

Discipline Policy

1. Corporal punishment is not permitted. Corporal punishment includes, but is not limited to, slapping, hitting, pushing and touching in an aggressive manner.
2. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes, but is not limited to, yelling, hurling insults, verbally embarrassing a child and threatening a child expressly or by implication.
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.
4. Concerns about a child's behaviour or the appropriate response to a child's behaviour should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehaviour is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children's/youth's behaviour must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
8. 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.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

The government has a legitimate, God-given role in dealing with and punishing criminal behavior. God has commanded that his people submit to the state in passages such as Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. There are a number of other weighty reasons why the church should involve the state:

1. God expects his people to be passionate about justice being done.
2. Those guilty of sexual abuse tend to minimize the abuse and their denials can be difficult to unmask. The church does not have the resources that the state possesses.

3. There is often a greater risk of reoffending when the state is not involved.
4. Victims of abuse need to know that the church treats sexual abuse as a serious crime. Failure to do so may result in people becoming disillusioned and feeling that the church has failed them. Furthermore, trivializing or covering up sexual abuse causes Christ's name to be blasphemed; conversely, where churches deal with sexual abuse in an exemplary fashion, Christ's name is honoured.

It is the first responsibility of the consistory in an abuse situation to seek the safety of the child. If child sexual abuse has occurred or if there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion of sexual abuse of a child this must be reported to:|

- The Hamilton Police (905) 546-4925, or
- Hamilton Children's Aid Society (905) 522-1121 or after hours (16:30) weekends, and holidays at (905)522-8053.

Recognizing the responsibility God has given to the government to protect children from harm, church leaders and volunteers must immediately report cases of physical, or emotional abuse or neglect – or suspected instances of abuse or neglect, to the Hamilton Children's Aid Society (905) 522-1121

Church leaders and volunteers aware of child abuse or neglect (whether it be in a church program or outside of church), or having reasonable grounds for the suspicion of abuse must also immediately report the matter to the pastor and appropriate ward elders (except if one of those persons is the suspected offender) The ward elders with the pastor shall make an initial, confidential report documenting the allegation and any supporting information. This report should be brief and kept till the authorities have complete their investigation. A summary if this report should be acknowledged by the consistory. Upon which time the police or children's Aid society complete their investigation and this "work of the state" is completed, then the principles of Matthew 18, and Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 85 will be followed with the suspected individual(s). Church leaders and volunteers should not attempt to interfere with the investigation in any way, or to interview the child in question about any signs and symptoms and must never suggest to a child that he or she has been abused. Guidelines on how to pastorally respond to a child who discloses abuse are set out in Appendix D.

Policy Requirements:

Council will review this Policy every year, to ensure it remains valid, up to date, and that all involved understand their role/requirements.

ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL AND MEMBERSHIP OF CORNERSTONE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCH.

DATED: June 2019

APPENDIX A: Nursery Rules

1. Minors may volunteer for service, provided that an adult (director, head nursery attendant) is present. Minors may not care for child(ren) without this adult supervision.
2. One adult attendant must be in the infant nursery with no more than four infants before an additional attendant is required. In any case, the ratio of adults to children must never exceed one adult to four infants. **The ratio in the toddler nursery must never exceed one adult to six infants.** If this occurs or is expected to occur, steps must be immediately taken by the attendant(s) on duty to bring in additional help. If additional help is required, only persons who have been formally approved by the church may be utilized. It is the responsibility of the scheduled attendant(s) to make a written note of the names and times of attendance of additional help on a sign-in sheet/record sheet. At least two attendants should serve in nursery whenever it is scheduled. *[Note: it is important to have a record of who was in attendance should an allegation of abuse be filed at a later date].*
3. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parent(s). For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who require assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery room **with the door ajar.**
4. Only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at any given time. A couple (husband and wife) should **not** serve in the nursery at the same time.
5. 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. The only exception would be a nursery attendant called in to assist with unexpected children and keeping the ratio of at least one adult to four infants.
6. The Discipline Policy applies to nursery programs.
7. Nursery doors must have a window or an unobstructed view of the room.
8. No one may take a child from the nursery without the consent of the parents except as outlined in # 3 above.
9. The parent(s) of any child requiring medical attention must be notified as soon as possible.

APPENDIX B: Vacation Bible School (“VBS”)

1. All VBS classes and activities will be 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. Volunteers/staff ordinarily should not physically restrain a child in their care. VBS leaders should ask for assistance if a child behaves in a manner that seems to require restraint. If the leader determines that restraint is needed, the child’s parent will be notified immediately and the child may be removed from the class until the parent arrives.
3. Children should not leave their classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom or other compelling reasons.
4. Classrooms held in off-site facilities such as a parsonage, activity building, or school should adhere to the same safety considerations as classrooms in the church building. Children should not meet in a confined space or without adequate supervision.
5. Church volunteers or staff transporting a child in a church vehicle must have parental permission to do so.
6. In the event that church members use their homes/yards for neighbourhood VBS clubs, a child’s parent must give consent for the child to meet in the home/yard. Two volunteers/staff (at least one adult) must conduct in-home programs. Children attending in-home programs must be able to use bathroom facilities without assistance. Children attending in-home programs should be able to walk to the home. If transportation is needed, it should be provided according to number 5 above.
7. The Discipline Policy applies to VBS programs.

APPENDIX C:
GEMS, Cadets, other Clubs, Young Peoples,
& Catechism (“Youth Groups”) Rules

1. Each year youth group leaders should sponsor a class about abuse for members of the youth group. Topics for this class might include date violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, awareness of the signs of abuse, a teenager’s response to a teenage victim or abuser, or prevention of abuse.
2. Youth group leaders may meet privately with a youth group member once or twice and thereafter only with the permission of a parent. Any such meeting should occur in public.
3. Youth group leaders may be single or they may be married couples, although only one spouse need attend a youth group function.
4. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders should provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders should not hold a youth group function without appropriate or sufficient supervision. Youth group functions must be under the supervision of more than one youth group leader. These guidelines also apply to activities away from the church site.
5. 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 should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-hand 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.

APPENDIX D

Guidelines for responding to a report of alleged child abuse

- Give the child your undivided attention.
- Take the child seriously. Endeavour to obtain clarification that abuse occurred so that you are comfortable reporting your suspicion.
- Do not try to convince the child that the story is untrue or did not really happen that way. Do not suggest an alternative explanation (such as a “dream”).
- **Try and ask open-ended questions, rather than leading questions.**
- Stay calm and reassure them that you will do everything you can to help them and their family.
- Do not overreact with fear, disgust, or anxiety or the child may stop talking or may believe that you think they have been bad.
- Do not promise not to tell anyone. Do say that you may need to tell people who will know how to help and the steps you need to take to ensure his/her safety.
- Reassure the child that it WAS GOOD to tell someone.
- Remind the child that whatever happened WAS NOT his/her fault.
- Remind the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- Do not frighten the child with talk about police or medical examinations.
- Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child’s clothing.
- Do not investigate. LISTEN closely and write down the information immediately after the conversation while it is still fresh in your mind.
- Remind the child of your care.
- If you feel it is appropriate, pray with the child. Keep the child, family, and situation in your own private prayers.
- Follow up in later weeks and months by showing concern and support; this will help reduce the shame.