



Faith Community Church

A Christian Reformed Ministry

Guidelines for Creating a Safe Church October 2008 (updated – February 2024)

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Swagman, Beth. 1995. Child Abuse Prevention Program. CRC Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Immanuel CRC Abuse Prevention Policy Report, January 16, 1996

Leadership Manual for Children Abuse Awareness and Prevention – created March 10, 2005 (Adapted and edited by the Abuse Response Committee)

Revised February 2024 by the Safe Church Committee, Faith Community Church Milford NS

Faith Community Christian Reformed Church: Safe Church Policy Statement

Safe Church Mission

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain . . . *Isaiah 11:9*

God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the creator and redeemer of all that is, seen and unseen. He is a God of love and truth and He calls humanity out of darkness and into His marvelous light, into a love relationship with him full of splendor and grace.

The fall of the human race into sin and depravity has destroyed God's original design and intent for the world. The sin of abuse fills relationships with pain, grief and misery, distorts the image of God, and devalues and devastates its victims.

FCC has the responsibility of being a safe community that confronts the sin of abuse in all its forms, naming the sin for what it is, standing with victims and bringing healing to all those that suffer, while encouraging offenders to seek help. All children and youth need the church community to be a safe place that brings nurture, healing and renewal.

Goals

The goals of a Safe Community approach to abuse prevention are to:

- protect all children, youth, as well as vulnerable adults in our care
- ensure zero tolerance for abuse or neglect
- create an environment, which protects volunteers and employees from the possibility of false allegations
- meet the standards of our faith and society
- show that all leaders who care for others, do everything within their power to keep safe those in their care
- provide a process so that abuse issues are dealt with effectively and promptly
- bring healing and wholeness through supportive environments, Safe Church awareness and appropriate referrals

Safe Church Guidelines for Volunteers and Staff

Screening is for everyone in a senior leadership position, employees, and anyone who is sixteen years of age and older and wants to volunteer in activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. Volunteers must have attended FCC for at least six months. People who would like to volunteer for ministries involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, but are not currently attending FCC should have references and/or screening documented from their home church (e.g., invited speakers).

All senior leaders, employees and volunteers (sixteen and older) must:

- Complete a Safe Church Form, 2 references and a Vulnerable Sector Check.
- Submit and obtain approval for required paperwork to FCC Safe Church Committee before volunteering with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
- Follow the Discipline and Nursery Policy
- Attend an education session by the Safe Church Committee on abuse prevention and creating a safe church at least every three years. Annual attendance at these education sessions is strongly recommended.

Safe Church Committee

The Safe Church Committee at Faith Community Church reports to the church Council. It will consist of at least four members of the church, ideally two males and two females, who have been screened and have basic training, expertise and interest in abuse issues. The Committee will be appointed by Council and will provide quick response and leadership in the areas of:

Promotion of Safe Community Principles

Undergo training/education to support their ministry through methods such as self-learning, CRCNA Office of Abuse Prevention materials, involvement with Classis Safe Church Team, conferences, or seminars and professional activities.

Provide expertise and advice to Council.

Plan for regular education, through annual seminars for volunteers and Sunday school updates, periodic bulletins, announcements and awareness communications and workshops.

Review physical building issues and SCC policies.

Prayer and Support for Survivors

Provide crisis intervention prayer, personal support and referral.

Assist victims to ensure abuse stops.

Staff and Volunteer Education

Organize yearly staff and volunteer education. New volunteers must attend the next annual adult education session (yearly attendance is strongly encouraged and mandatory attendance is every 3 years).

Provide advice to Council to support their supervision of children's ministries.

Linking to Resources

Provide linkages to Department of Community Services Child Welfare Division, justice and police agencies.

Assist survivors and perpetrators to find appropriate counseling services.

Report of Possible Incidents

Know the nature of abuse and its warning signs, and share this knowledge with the church community.

Ensure that where a reasonable suspicion of abuse exists, it is investigated.

Inform Council of all alleged abuse incidents and incidents of concern and give advice regarding appropriate action.

Assist Council to contact reporting agencies where required by law.

Provide support to victims throughout the legal process.

Education

All pastors, leaders, and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults at Faith Community Church will be provided with an overview of:

- Signs and symptoms of abuse
- Nature and consequences of abuse
- Guidelines for a Safe Church Community
- The Safe Church Community principles will be shared with the entire church family by:
 - Abuse prevention curriculum in Sunday School classes
 - Posting the Nursery and Discipline Policies
 - A Ministry Toolkit for Program Leaders
 - Group learning sessions (i.e. Boundaries, “Wake Up!”, the CRC Video resource, child care seminars, etc.) that may be held periodically
 - Educational sessions will be held annually

General Guidelines

Supervisors are program leaders who oversee a ministry program. Volunteers are individuals 16 years of age or older who serve in a child, youth or vulnerable adult program or have direct contact with such people in the course of their program.

Staff are individuals paid by the church.

Children, youth, or minors are individuals who 1) have not graduated high school or 2) are under eighteen years old.

A vulnerable adult is an individual 19 years or older who, due to mental or physical abilities, is at increased risk of abuse.

Screening

All volunteers and staff will be screened.

Compliance

All volunteers and staff must agree and comply with the church’s Safe Church Guidelines and FCC Code of Ethics for serving in child and youth programs. The code of ethics is a reminder to volunteers and staff of the importance we place on a Safe Church and our responsibility to behave in an ethical manner.

Education

Supervisors and/or leaders of any program serving children, youth or vulnerable adult will be offered educational updates annually on the signs and symptoms of abuse, awareness of abuse, reporting suspected child, youth or vulnerable adult abuse, and the dynamics of abuse. This is mandatory every three years for Council, Pastors, other staff and those participating in ministries involving children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Internal Reporting

Church policies are designed to reduce and prevent abuse within church programs. Signs, symptoms and reports of abuse need to be taken seriously. Volunteers and staff who become aware of possible abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults in any church program, or that is committed by any church volunteer/staff person, **must immediately report the matter to a member of the SCC** (who is not the suspected abuser) **who will report to Council**. When required, people trained to

investigate the abuse of children, youth or vulnerable adults, must conduct an investigation. In the case of a child less than sixteen years of age, trained investigators are the Department of Community Services - Child Welfare Division and the RCMP

- When a child, youth or vulnerable adult shows signs of abuse, volunteers or staff in a program may be the ones to notice, or the abuse may be reported to a volunteer/staff. If this happens the volunteer/staff person **should not conduct an investigation of the matter**. Instead, volunteers and staff should communicate reports of abuse to the Safe Church Committee who will report to Council.

Volunteers/staff who work within child, youth or vulnerable adult programs may become aware of suspected abuse in a number of ways. A volunteer / staff person may actually witness an abusive incident or have an alleged incident reported to him/her by the victim or by another person. Some children, youth or vulnerable adults will not report an abusive incident because of their fear of the abuser or because they believe they deserved the abuse. Other children, youth or vulnerable adults are threatened by the abuser not to tell anyone of their experience, but volunteers/staff may observe signs that may lead them to suspect abuse.

The reporting procedures in the back of these Guidelines will help volunteers/staff to know how to deal with potential abuse.

External Reporting

Potential abuse that does not involve any church program or facility, or any church volunteer or staff person, should be reported to the Safe Church Committee, who may pass on the information as required by law or suggest other actions. Be aware that dealing with situations outside the Church might lead to extra legal problems.

Modifying the Church Facility

The Safe Church Committee may suggest modifications to reduce the risk of church-related child, youth or vulnerable adult abuse or injury (e.g., modification of classroom doors to give an unobstructed view of the room during meetings with children, youth or vulnerable adults).

Discipline Policy

Volunteers and staff will follow the Discipline Policy guidelines.

Reducing the Risks: Avoid Isolation!

The greatest risk of an incident of abuse or an allegation of abuse occurs when a volunteer or staff person spends time alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult. One-to-one contacts that may be risky are lengthy, frequent, planned, or held in private and/or obscure places. These safety steps will be followed at Faith Community Church:

Two-person rule

During any meeting with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, at least two volunteers or staff are to be present.

Notify a parent

In general planned one-to-one contact meetings alone with a child, youth or

vulnerable adult are discouraged. If such a meeting is necessary, inform parents before the meeting. In the church facility, have a volunteer or staff person to observe one-to-one contacts. Outside of the church facility, ensure that one-to-one contacts occur in a public place or have a volunteer/staff person observe one-to-one contacts.

Two volunteers/staff on trips and at events

- Where transportation is involved, there should never be fewer than 2 children, youth or vulnerable adults in a vehicle.
- Hall Monitors
- Will observe volunteers/staff activities in a child, youth or vulnerable adult program and will monitor the facility for any suspicious behavior.

Screening Programs

- All pastors, staff, church leaders and volunteers will participate in abuse prevention processes, including screening
- Screening Safe Church Form
- All pastors, leaders and volunteers complete a Safe Church Screening Form.

Volunteer requirement

All volunteers must have attended Faith Community Church for at least six months, or for special events will be recommended by references and/or completion of screening from their home church. All others must be supervised by and with the consent of the ministry leader.

Interview

Council may choose in certain situations (e.g., salaried applicants for employment, new volunteers in leadership positions involving children, youth or vulnerable adults, council, Sunday school supervisor, to request an interview with a member of Council or Safe Church Committee.

Reference Check

All pastors, council members, paid staff and volunteers with child, youth, or vulnerable adult ministry exposure will obtain two letters of reference.

Vulnerable Sector Check

All pastors, Council members, paid staff, persons in leadership positions and volunteers with child, youth or vulnerable adult ministry exposure who are 16 years of age and older will require a Vulnerable Sector Check. This must be ***updated every 5 years***. The ***original*** Vulnerable Sector Check should be handed in to the SCC ***within 60 days*** of issuance by police.

Premises

- The building and grounds need to promote a safe environment.
- All classrooms, meeting rooms and the nursery must have windows in the doors.
- Hall monitors will be assigned to monitor the premises while meetings with children, youth and vulnerable adults are in session ...
- Children should not leave classrooms unattended while programs are in session.
- Areas of the premises not in use during child, youth and vulnerable adult programs are off limits

- Infants and small children should be picked up from nursery or special programs only by parents or designated guardians
- The Safe Church Committee and Council should perform a premises walk-about yearly

Reporting Mechanisms

A report of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse against a church leader or member by a child, youth or vulnerable adult should be reported to and investigated by the Department of Community Services - Child Welfare Division (if the child is under sixteen years of age) or the RCMP. The appropriate authorities are those who have jurisdiction in the location where the alleged abuse took place, regardless of where the alleged victim or alleged abuser lives at the time the allegations are brought forward. Any reasonable suspicion of abuse will be reported to the Safe Church Committee and to Council who will then advise authorities as required. Allegations of abuse may also be reported to the Safe Church Team (SCT) of Classis as per Synod guidelines for SCT hearing process.

Confidential Files

The Safe Church Committee, on behalf of Council, shall keep confidential files for Screening:

- Safe Church Form – once
- Police Record Check and/or Vulnerable Sector Check (original copy and updated every 5 years)
- References (x2) – once
- Records of Educational session updates (attendance required at least every 3 years)
- Incidents/Alleged abuse reports
- Interview reports
- Confidential communications
- SCC meeting minutes, letters and recommendations

Defining Child Abuse

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, or by a teacher or teacher's aide which occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation or maltreatment.

This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, and exposure to domestic violence. (Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal <http://www.cccw-cepb.ca/faqs#Q3>)

Types of Child Abuse

1. **Emotional** - Anything that causes serious mental or emotional harm to a child, which the parent does not attempt to prevent or address.
2. **Physical** - The intentional use of force on any part of a child's body that results in injury.
3. **Sexual** - The improper exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour.
4. **Neglect** - Any lack of care that may cause significant harm to a child's development or endangers the child in any way.

Duty to Report Child Abuse:

In Nova Scotia, everyone has the duty to immediately report to a child welfare agency even a suspicion that a child under 16 may be in need of protective services.

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/abuse/index.html>

Defining Abuse in General Terms:

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when one person attempts to control another person through words, threats, and fear; destroying a person's self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens one's mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem, all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

Physical Abuse

Any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to another person, whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. Physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It can be a single event, or it can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.

Physical Neglect

Harm or threatened harm by a person responsible for the health or welfare of a child, youth or vulnerable adult, as a result of the failure to provide the basic needs of life, such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is the exploitation or sexual closeness forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Sexual abuse can involve taking advantage of a child, youth or vulnerable adult who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve sexual contact.

- Non-physical sexual abuse – examples include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child, youth or vulnerable adult for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, “peeping Toms”, and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs).
- Sexual abuse involving physical contact – examples include fondling of body parts such as breasts, genitals, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.
- Sexual exploitation – examples includes allowing, permitting or encouraging a person to engage in prostitution, or to photograph, film, or depict a child, youth or vulnerable adult in a sexual act.

Improper Discipline and Touching

- Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing), abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening), or any behavior defined as physical or emotional abuse is a wrongful application of discipline.
- Proper discipline understands what will help given the age of the child, youth or vulnerable adult and informing parents and church program supervisors when behaviour starts to get out of control.
- Wrongful touching includes sexually suggestive or prolonged touching for the gratification of the person in authority, or any revenge-seeking behavior.

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

Children, youth or vulnerable adults rarely show just one sign that they are the victims of abuse. Some symptoms may also be typical developmental changes, or the effect of traumas in their lives other than abuse (e.g., living in poverty, family crisis, medical illness, mental or physical handicap, learning disabilities, etc.). It is also possible for abuse to be taking place without the child, youth or vulnerable adult showing any symptoms because of his or her ability to mask or deny what would otherwise be very confusing and painful to acknowledge. Generally, several signs observed over a period of time suggest that a child, youth or vulnerable adult may be suffering from abuse. This highlights the need for training among volunteers, staff, and program leaders.

Be aware that the presence of one or two of these signs does not always mean there is abuse happening, since there is no single good indicator for abuse.

Infants and Preschool Children

- Regression to an earlier stage of behavior development such as baby talk, thumb sucking, or bed-wetting.
- Change in social behavior not associated with normal developmental stages: excessive crying or clinging, or becoming aggressive or withdrawn

- Physical manifestations such as loss of bowel control, bed-wetting, frequent urination, headaches, stomachaches, breathing difficulties, sore throats accompanied by gagging, stains in the child's underclothes
- Showing fear around a family member or a familiar person, or fear of a familiar place or object.
- Fear of being touched, shying away from physical contact. Resistance to being diapered or assisted in the bathroom
- Use of explicit language or sexual behavior that is beyond the child's comprehension or life experience.
- Attempting sexual behavior with other children or attending adults
- Unexplained injuries and/or bruises, repeated injuries blamed on the child's carelessness, multiple bruises sustained in one event, or bruises to child's head, mid-section, back or back of thighs; signs of scalding, burning, or distinctive bruising, such as in the shape of a belt buckle; multiple bruises in various stages of healing
- Name-calling toward other children, bullying behavior, sulking/brooding
- Fascination with fires; playing with matches or lighter

School-age children

- Physical signs as above and 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
- Unusual fears: a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences
- Poor concentration in classroom
- Exhibiting adult-pleasing behaviors, striving for perfection, acting miserable if failing
- Engaging in self-injury; engaging in excessive masturbation or masturbation in public setting
- Acting enraged and out of control; expressing anger through destruction
- Shyness about physical touch
- Showing 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 either because of being punished or to hide bruises
- Low self-esteem, particular sensitivity to criticism
- Hyper-vigilance: excessive and suspicious watching of other people; is easily startled
- Preoccupation with fire and setting fires

Adolescents

- Eating disorders, use of laxatives, unexplained and dramatic changes in weight
- Change in sleep patterns, including excessive sleeping, sleeping during the day, and insomnia
- Performance in school plunges
- Perfectionist behavior, excessive self-criticism, attempting to please adults, over reacting to any form of criticism or complaint
- Sexually provocative or asexual behavior, denial of body changes and sexual development; for females, seeking affection from older adult males.
- Experimentation with drugs and alcohol
- Self-abusive behavior including cutting self, preoccupation with danger and weapons, suicide attempts
- Truancy from school
- Cruelty to animals, bullying younger children
- Emotional numbness, inability to be emotionally supportive to others
- Having few friends, changing friends often
- Depression and other signs of withdrawal and avoidance
- Pregnancy
- Refusing to attend to basic hygiene
- Rectal and vaginal infections
- Hyper-vigilance: excessive and suspicious watching of other people; is easily startled

Signs of Neglect

- Appearing to be underfed, constantly hungry, underweight for size and age
- Begging for food, stealing food, hoarding food
- Lack of supervision, underage child supervising another child/children
- Chronic absenteeism from school, unattended educational needs
- Unattended medical, dental needs
- Consistent or frequent lack of hygiene, poor hygiene, or lack of cleanliness with odors
- For infants, failure to thrive

Parental Behaviors and Home Life that may Suggest Abuse

- Not attending meetings about the child, not showing an interest in the child, critical of child, uncomplimentary
- Constantly putting child down, using harsh words to describe child, using threats and unflattering language
- Describing child as underachiever, complaining that he/she lets people down, is unmotivated, achieves less than brothers and sisters
- Speaking of child in way that sounds romantic, too grown-up, too sugary, too perfect

- Hostile, closed-minded, overprotective, isolating, doesn't let others in the house, won't participate in activities with other parents, makes excuses about failing to do tasks, talks about things not being good at home
- Reports of past/other suspicious behavior, reports that an older brother or sister may have been mistreated
- Chemical dependency by one or both parents
- Sudden and dramatic changes in family financial security

Elder Abuse

- People may experience abuse at any age. Elder abuse may include physical, financial, emotional and neglect aspects. The elderly do not know who to speak to, what can be done, are afraid of retaliation, fear institutionalization, may not want to get involved, often think they have caused it, and are often ashamed that a family member mistreats them.
- There may be evidence of emotional problems: depression, fear, anxiety, passivity
- Unexplained injuries, dehydration, poor hygiene, bed sores, over sedation, poor living conditions, being left in unsafe places
- Money and possessions stolen, the senior forced to sell or give away property, evidence of fraud, forgery or wrongful use of power of attorney
- Treating an older person like a child, bullying, name calling, intimidation, uttering threats

Examples of Abusive Forms of Discipline

Children, youth or vulnerable adults engage in behaviors that adults find unacceptable and against their wishes. These behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs as well as in the family home. When these behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs, however, it is often a church volunteer/staff person who must intervene, especially when the child, youth or vulnerable adult is under his or her supervision. An adult can interrupt or stop an unacceptable behavior by teaching which behaviors are acceptable and which behaviors are not. By example and over time, the adult teaches the child/youth how to behave in a socially acceptable way and in a manner that is Christ-like.

An adult can also interrupt or stop unacceptable behavior by intervening with a mild form of discipline to the child, youth or vulnerable adult. (e.g., stating in directive speaking voice the child's name and saying "Stop <the behavior> now"). The discipline is intended to catch the child's attention and thus act as a deterrent and a reminder that a certain behavior is unacceptable. Discipline can turn into abuse when pain, injury, or humiliation results from the discipline, or it is used excessively in a short span of time.

Some examples of excessive or abusive discipline are listed below:

- Abusive Physical Discipline (corporal punishment)
- Slapping, kicking, punching, hitting, choking, pushing, shoving, hair-pulling, twisting, pinching
- Discipline that leaves a bruise, mark, wound, or cut
- Discipline administered with any device or object (such as a paddle, spoon, stick, book)
- Discipline followed by a request/threat to the child, youth or vulnerable adult not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline, or not to show anyone a mark or bruise
- Abusive Verbal Discipline
- Shouting or yelling, threatening, hurling insults or obscenities
- Discipline that is intended to humiliate
- Discipline by refusing to speak to a child, youth or vulnerable adult
- Discipline that involves bribery, coercion, or threats
- Discipline followed by a request/threat to the child, youth or vulnerable adult not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline

Guidelines for a Pastor and Ministry Leaders in Relationships with Church members

- In the church, all power and authority comes from Christ. Those who hold office or have leadership in the congregation are given power and authority through Christ. All relationships between members of the congregation and the pastor or others in leadership positions are based on this principle. With leadership comes the responsibility of showing Christian love and following the example of our Lord. All leaders must show self-discipline to prevent the abuse of power and authority which has been given to them. Abuse by a pastor or a ministry leader is always abuse of the power and authority given by Christ through the church. The trust of those who need pastoral care and spiritual direction is seriously betrayed

by such abuse. A pastor or a ministry leader, by virtue of the position held, has the authority to lead, protect, and enhance the spiritual lives of those in their care. To abuse that authority disregards a person's dignity in a relationship of unequal power at a time when that person is vulnerable.

- Abuse may take the form of non-accidental injury, exploitation of another for personal gain or sexual gratification, systematic diminishment of another, failure to provide proper supervision for those served by church programs, or coercion or control of another. The harmful effects of these types of abuses are (a) the increased personal power and wrongful gratification of the abuser, and (b) the weakened spiritual life and personal power of the victim. The imbalance of personal power casts shame, doubt, and fear upon the victim, and creates the risk of ongoing secrecy to protect the abuser and allow these behaviors to continue.
- The sin of sexual abuse by a pastor or ministry leader is extremely serious, because human sexuality is a gift from God and is rooted in divine creation. The expression of human sexuality is physical, emotional, and spiritual in relation to another person. It assumes a loving commitment to and responsibility for the other person. Extramarital sexual contact between a member of the congregation and a pastor or ministry leader is always abuse, because of the authority entrusted to leaders. The abuse of another's sexuality, the misuse of commitment and responsibility to another are never acceptable, permissible, or justifiable.
- It is the responsibility of the pastor or ministry leader in a position of authority or power to make sure that no abusive behavior occurs. The consent of the other person is never a reason to justify abuse.

Pastors and Ministry Leaders should follow these Guidelines:

1. Set clear boundaries in your relationships

- Appointments for counseling should be during daytime hours; if evening appointments are necessary have someone else in the building or at the appointment.
- Be aware of the risk of meeting alone in a person's home. If required to do so, try to bring another office bearer to such a meeting, or make sure before the meeting that there will be another person in the home during the meeting. Inform the secretary of your schedule.
- When meeting with a child, youth or vulnerable adult get the consent and knowledge of the parent or guardian. Avoid transporting a minor alone or meeting in isolation.
- Limit the display of physical affection to a brief hug or a pat on the back or forearm. Avoid giving gifts to members of the congregation.
- Be accountable to a colleague, spouse, or peer to ensure that you are maintaining proper boundaries in your relationships. Openly discuss the threats to those boundaries with a colleague, spouse, or peer.

2. Pay attention to your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

- Maintain a healthy attitude toward your ministry.
- Be alert to the dangers of negative attitudes in ministry and the potential for

temptation and self-destructive behavior.

- Listen earnestly to feedback and counsel of others who supervise you or to whom you report when they express concern about your behavior or attitudes.

3. Be sensitive and honest about your sexuality and needs

- Ensure appropriate avenues for proper fulfillment and mastery of those needs so you conduct yourself in a responsible, moral way.

4. Promote spiritual and interpersonal growth and healing

- Use your office to promote the spiritual and interpersonal growth and healing of individuals, the congregation and the denomination you serve.
- This may take place through sermons, personal visits, planning church activities, developing new programs, selecting and hiring new staff and office bearers, and training volunteers or staff.

5. Follow the guidelines of your profession

- Ensure the requirements of the church's liability insurance are met.
- Notify local police authorities, child protection authorities, or legal counsel when faced with allegations of abuse against a church member or church leader. Do not investigate these matters on your own.
- Know the laws governing the reporting of child abuse. Failure to report is a criminal act.
- Keep accurate records of all allegations brought to you and any actions taken.
- Keep accurate, confidential records of any pastoral care sessions.
- Conduct screening of all paid staff or volunteer staff that will have direct contact with children.

Response to Report of Child Abuse (Child/Youth under 16):

“Everyone has the duty to immediately report to a child welfare agency even a suspicion that a child under 16 may be in need of protective services”.

<http://novascotia.ca/coms/families/abuse/index.html>

1. Observe. Volunteers/staff who work in child and youth programs should be trained to look for the signs and symptoms of neglect, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. These signs and symptoms could be either physical and/or emotional. A volunteer / staff could also note that the behavior and attitude of a parent or the way a family functions could lead to an abusive environment. As part of the training, volunteers/staff should learn how to respond to a child if he /she reports abuse.

2. Report. Volunteers/staff who see signs and symptoms of abuse, or who have abuse reported to them, should discuss this immediately with a member of the Safe Church Committee. If the suspected abuser is a member of the Safe Church Committee of FCC, then the volunteer/staff person should speak with a different member of the SCC. When a volunteer/staff person sees what may be a sign of abuse (i.e., bruises), it is appropriate to **ask** the child how the sign appeared. **However, the volunteer/ staff person should not interview the child. It is never appropriate to suggest to the child that he or she has been abused.**

3. Write Down. When a child or youth reports an incident of abuse or a volunteer/staff person sees signs of abuse, that person must write down the specifics of what the child said or what signs were noted and the date of the child's report or the date when the signs were noted. Try to use the child's exact words if possible. This report should be written as soon as possible after the contact with the child, and **given to a member of the Safe Church Committee within twelve hours** if possible.

4. SCC/Council Review. The Safe Church Committee members will review the report and if they believe a reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists they will report this to the Chairperson or Vice Chair of Council and the Pastor (unless this person is the alleged abuser). The role of the SCC of Council is to review and report, not to interview the child.

5. Report to Authorities within 24 hours. SCC/Council will report to the appropriate Child Protection Agency: Nova Scotia Community Services – regular hours: 1-888-919-4236. Holidays and weekends: 1-866-922-2434 or the RCMP as required. The person who heard directly from the child or witnessed the signs should be available to speak directly with the agency if possible, supported by a Safe Church Committee member. If the child's parent or guardian is the suspected abuser, the police or child protection officials will notify him/her of their investigation. Note: Notification of the local police or child protection authorities of a reasonable suspicion of abuse must occur promptly *within twenty-four hours* after contact with the child or youth.

6. Review by full Council. All written reports of abuse will be brought before full council at the next meeting. The role of the SCC is to assist the Council to:

- file a report with authorities
- inform the liability carrier
- establish a support plan for the child and family, and alleged abuser if possible
- **Council (or Executive, if urgent) may take one of several courses of action**
 - Suspend the accused from office, position, or duty pending the outcome of the investigation. Suspension is carried out with full pay (for paid staff) and without prejudice.
 - Suspension of an office bearer is carried out according to the Church Order articles 82-83. The suspension is carried out for the safety of the children in the congregation, as well as for the safety of the church leader, who may be subject to rumor, gossip, or prejudice if he/she remains in a position of leadership. A council member is appointed to disclose to the congregation only the facts as known at the time.
 - **At each stage those who receive information should be very careful to ensure that the allegations and surrounding circumstances are not shared with anyone other than described in these guidelines or as may be required by law. Similarly, accuracy is of the utmost importance when disclosing allegations or surrounding circumstances. Wrongful or inaccurate sharing of allegations of abuse can potentially lead to adverse legal consequences.**

7. Disclosure. There may be sufficient reason for Council to tell the church family of an allegation of abuse against a church volunteer / staff person (i.e. volunteer / staff are placed suspension or have a high risk to reoffend). If so, the identity of the child or youth will not be revealed .The SCC may also review child abuse prevention

policies with the church family.

8. SCC/Council Liaison. After a report of suspected child abuse is filed with the proper authorities, one of the members of the SCC or Council who filed the report should become the liaison between the legal authorities/child protection and the church. This person also serves as the liaison between the Council and the authorities if the report leads to an investigation, criminal charges, arrest, trial, conviction, or dismissal of charges.

9. Pastoral Care & Support. Pastoral and supportive care of the child and his or her family should begin as soon as possible, respecting the wishes of the family. Pastoral intervention and care for a volunteer or staff of the church who is the alleged abuser is also a priority.

10. Disciplinary Action. There may be sufficient grounds for Council to carry out disciplinary action, or for allegations to go forward for review by the Classical Safe Church Team process. If the alleged abuser is a member of another congregation, the Council of the church where his or her membership resides will be notified.

11. Follow up Guidelines. It is the responsibility of church leaders and SCC members to be trained about the signs and symptoms of abuse and to assess whether a reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists.

The volunteer/staff person to whom the child reported the abuse or who noticed signs of abuse in a child should be notified that the appropriate agency has been notified (if they do not speak directly with the agency themselves). They should be given guidance on how to respond if the child, the parent(s), or the authorities call him/her.

If the authorities choose not to follow up the report, and if there is still concern for the child's well-being, then the volunteer or staff person who first reported observing signs of abuse or who heard the child's report of abuse should be notified by a member of the SCC. A **written log** of any further signs and symptoms that may reflect an ongoing pattern of abusive behavior or that may lead to detection of another difficulty in the child's life may be kept. Of particular note would be a pattern of increased frequency of signs, symptoms, or complaints of abuse.

12. Outcome of Criminal or other Investigations. Sometimes criminal charges are dropped, or prosecution does not result in conviction. Conviction or lack of it is not the only criterion the church uses to discern safe conduct. An alleged abuser is not reinstated to a previous position of leadership unless the Council, in consultation with the police/child protection authorities, legal counsel, and child abuse experts, deems it safe and proper to do so.

In the event of prosecution resulting in conviction, the abuser should not be restored to his or her previous position or duty within the church. Pastors and office bearers are removed from office by the Council according to Church Order articles 82 and 83.

Dealing with a Child's or Youth's Report of Abuse

Do...

- Take the child or youth seriously when he/she tells the story.
- Tell the child or youth that you believe what he/she is saying.
- Tell the child or youth that he/she is very brave to come forward.
- Tell the child or youth that whatever happened was not his/her fault.

- Tell the child or youth that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened to him/her.
- Tell the child or youth that you want to find help so this doesn't happen again.
- Share with the child or youth that other people need to know what happened, and they will talk to the child later.
- Reassure the child or youth that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- Offer to support the child or youth and remind him/her that you care.
- Listen to the story and take notes immediately afterwards while it is still fresh in your memory.
- Speak to the child or youth and offer support in the weeks and months ahead.

Do Not...

- Show strong emotions (i.e. frightened, disgusted) since this may cause the child to stop talking. He/she may think you are upset with him/her
- Try to convince the child or youth that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way he/she reports it did.
- Make statements that are judgmental, such as "I think you just had a bad dream."
- Make promises to the child that you will not tell anyone what has been shared with you.
- Offer a child a reward for telling the story or promise a gift if the child tells another adult.
- Frighten the child or youth by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint.
- Ask the child or youth to show you any bruises that are beneath his/her clothing.
- Ask leading questions or try to investigate the child's or youth's story.
- Tell the child or youth he/she has been abused.

Responding to Parents Who are Notified of Abuse Allegations

Do...

- Listen to any information a parent may offer about the incident and record it immediately after the conversation. Report this additional information to the authorities.
- Remain calm and non-judgmental.
- Offer parent(s) support.
- Suggest resources for parent(s) including books or literature that may be helpful to them.
- Allow parent(s) to express their disbelief, anger, and grief. Parent(s) may be in shock or denial at the mention of abuse allegations.
- Assure parent(s) of the confidential nature of the report and the need to maintain confidentiality unless disclosure is necessary to protect the well-being of other children.

Do Not...

- Identify the reporter unless you are given permission to do so.
- Share any statements with a parent or relative who is implicated by the child or youth as an abuser.
- Share the child's or youth's statement with anyone other than the authorities until the identity of the abuser can be determined and authorities have determined whether or not the child or youth can be protected from contact with that person.
- Attempt to convince a parent that the alleged abuse happened or did not happen; do not attempt to discredit the child nor cast suspicion on the alleged abuser.
- Investigate with a parent what may be happening in the home
- Share information with a parent that has not been shared with the authorities.
- Make promises to a parent about the outcome of the investigation.
- Minimize the type of abuse, its impact on the child, or its harm to the child.

Responding to Alleged Adult Victims (16 and over)

Everyone has a duty to report to Adult Protection Services, adults 16 years and older who are living in a situation of significant risk of self-neglect, or experiencing abuse or neglect by others, which results in serious harm to the person and their inability to protect themselves from the abuse or neglect by reason of mental or physical incapacity.

If you know of an adult in need of protection, you must report it immediately to the Department of Health and Wellness by calling 1-800-225-7225. http://www.gov.ns.ca/health/ccs/Adult_protection/AP_Fact_Sheet.pdf

- When allegations are brought forward to the SCC, an alleged victim has the choice of pursuing legal action or pursuing an internal investigation or church hearing through the Safe Church Team of Classis. This ecclesiastical process is called an Advisory Panel Process. If an internal investigation or church hearing is chosen, the procedure will be explained to the alleged victim.
- An internal investigation through the Safe Church Team of Classis is especially important if the alleged abuser was in a position of leadership within the church at the time of the alleged abuse.
- If the alleged abuse involves a vulnerable adult or elder abuse, the SCC may assist by reporting, based on the Adult Protection Act. Confidentiality will be maintained as much as possible, although it cannot be guaranteed. Approval to share or release information must be obtained in writing from the alleged victim or their guardian.

Internal investigation will follow these steps:

1. The SCC will take a written statement from the alleged victim documenting all of the details. This statement should be reviewed and signed by the alleged victim.
2. The SCC will send a summary of the report to the alleged abuser with a cover letter.
3. A copy of all communications will be forwarded to Council. The SCC may give an opinion on the advisability of an investigation. Council may arrange pastoral care follow-up with each party.

4. An interview between the SCC (at least two should be present) and the alleged abuser to offer the opportunity for the individual to respond to the complaint. The interview will be documented and signed by the individual and all SCC members present.
5. The SCC will review the interview and any other written submissions from both the alleged victim and abuser, assess the validity of the allegations, and advise Council on appropriate action.
6. The alleged victim may wish to forward a complaint to the Classis Safe Church Team for an Advisory Panel Process. Contact information will be provided if desired.
7. If the adult wishes to pursue an Advisory Panel Process, the Council will review *The Advisory Panel Process: A Guide for Church Councils* (Safe Church Ministry, Christian Reformed Church North America, 2012)

<http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/The%20Advisory%20Panel%20Process%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Councils%20-%20Final.pdf>

Responding to an Alleged Abuser of an Adult

- When definite suspicions of abuse are present in a particular instance, the SCC will send a summarized report to the alleged abuser along with a cover letter. This should be hand delivered by a member of Council who may act as support to the individual.
- Where the alleged abuser is a member of a church other than FCC, the Pastor or Executive Council member of that church will be contacted and given the name of the alleged abuser and a summary of the allegations. The summary, cover letter, and a copy of FCC's Safe Church Guidelines on abuse prevention will be sent by registered mail to the contact person or Council, who will then be advised to hand deliver the letter to the individual.

The cover letter to the alleged abuser will include:

- The nature of the complaint
- The right to reply to the complaint if he/she wishes
- The proposed date and location of an interview with the SCC
- The right to an advocate. If this right is declined, he or she should sign a waiver.
- An alleged abuser who is presently a volunteer or staff member within FCC will be asked to give up his/her duties until the investigation is completed.

Discipline Policy for Children and Youth

- Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child or youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
- Concerns about behavior or the appropriate response to a child or youth's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.
- An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
- Expectations of children/youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
- Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting.
- Older children and youth may benefit from having expectations in written form.
- Discipline policy is to be reviewed by program leader with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season, with periodic reminders as needed.

Tips for positive discipline

Discipline is a form of teaching a child. When discipline is positive, its goals are to:

- Protect the child from danger
- Help the child learn self-control
- Help the child learn a sense of responsibility
- Help instill values

What makes discipline work?

The best way to deal with challenging behaviours is to prevent them.

There will be times when a child acts in a way that is not okay. When this happens, the child needs to see discipline as fair. Discipline that's not consistent (the same whenever possible) is confusing to children. If you discipline a child with respect and make sure that it's consistent and fair, you'll have lasting positive effects.

How can I help a child learn good behaviour?

- Offer praise and affection regularly
- Know what to ignore
- Plan transitions from one activity to the next, and talk to the child so he knows what to expect
- Offer limited and realistic choices you can live with
- Accept mistakes
- Be a role model
- Let a child know what you expect and the rules for good behaviour
- Remind him/her regularly about rules and limits

A good limit:

- Is appropriate to a child's age and stage of development
- Helps a child learn self-control
- Protects a child and others
- Is explained using simple language
- Is enforced firmly, respectfully and kindly

Dealing with Misbehaviour

How you discipline will depend on a child's age, stage of development, personality and many other factors.

Here are some strategies to help:

Redirect to another activity

- Redirection—switching from one activity to another—works well with toddlers and sometimes older children.
- When you redirect a child, be sure to explain with words that teach him/her what you don't want her to do.

Use logical consequences

- Apply clear consequences for a child's action that relate to the behaviour.
- When there isn't a clear consequence, you can take away a privilege. For young children this must happen right away. For example, a child who is playing too roughly can be made to play away from other children for a short time

Encourage problem-solving

- Solving problems helps your child learn about the consequences of her actions. Allow your child to help find a solution to misbehaviour and he/she will be more likely to make it happen.

Use a time-out

- A time-out is one way to take a child out of a situation where he/she is doing something unacceptable. They are best for children who are at least 2 years old. Amount of time is based on age (i.e. a 3 year old would be in time-out for a maximum of 3 minutes)

Dealing with Temper Tantrums

Tantrums are a normal part of child development. They are caused by strong negative emotions that a child isn't able to control or express in other ways. You can prevent some tantrums by:

- Praising good behaviour
- Reducing triggers whenever possible, such as being hungry or overtired
- Distracting and redirecting with other activities
- Asking a child to express herself in another way: "Do you feel angry?"

Tantrums can often be shortened by

- Stepping in before a child loses complete control
- Speaking in a calm voice and acknowledging his/her frustration i.e. "It is okay to be angry, but you can't hit"
- Helping a child work out a problem or frustration

When a tantrum does happen

- Ignore the behaviour
- Watch from a distance to keep the child safe. Move furniture, toys or other children out of the way
- If a child becomes so upset and out of control that he/she might hurt himself or others, you should hold him, using just enough strength to restrain him. Do this carefully to avoid hurting him.
- **At no time should you spank or use any other physical punishment.**
- When the tantrum is over, offer a drink of water or a face wash
- Redirect to a new and interesting activity

Adapted from Canadian Pediatric Society (November 2013)

http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/tips_for_positive_discipline

Nursery Guidelines

- Volunteers under the age of sixteen may help in the nursery provided that an adult volunteer is present.
- One adult attendant must be in the nursery with no more than four children before an additional attendant is required. At least two attendants should serve in nursery whenever it is scheduled.
- Attendants may take children from the nursery only for a 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 under the observation of another attendant.
- Only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) should not serve in the nursery at the same time.
- An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for that particular service may not spend time in the nursery room except to cover the scheduled person's duties.

Storytime and Sunday School Guidelines

- Only one adult member of a family should serve in a classroom at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) should not serve together in the same classroom at the same time.
- Whenever Storytime is in session, two volunteers, including at least one adult, should be present.
- During Sunday school, the hall monitor acts as the second volunteer.
- Only adults may assist children with bathroom needs. Bathroom assistance is conducted as in the nursery policy. Children will be encouraged to use the bathroom facilities before and after class.
- Children should not leave the worship center or classroom unless they have a very good reason (i.e. illness or to go to the bathroom)
- Whenever Storytime or Sunday school is in session, the worship center or classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.

Child & Youth Program Guidelines

- Youth Group leaders may be single. Married couples may also serve as leaders provided there is always a third leader present at all functions.
- All 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 or youth without another adult or leader nearby to observe.
- Volunteers/staff should not physically restrain a child in their care. 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 or youth may be removed from the class until the parent arrives.
- Children and youth should not leave their classroom, while a program is in

session, unless they have a very good reason (i.e. illness or to use the bathroom)

- Events held in off-site facilities must have parental consent. Two volunteers (at least one adult) must conduct off site programs. Children and youth must be able to use bathroom facilities without assistance. Children and youth should be able to walk, or if transportation is needed it should be provided with parental consent and proper supervision.
- Leaders should identify abusive behaviors in their program and discourage these behaviors.
- Leaders should not meet with children or youth in a one-on-one, isolated fashion. If a one-on-one meeting is required, it is to occur in a public place and with parental permission.
- If a child or youth needs significant medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately and an incident report completed (found in FCC Ministry Leaders Tool Kit and on the clip board in each classroom)
- A good rule is for Program participants to arrive not more than ten minutes before the start, nor stay longer than ten minutes after the event.
- If a child or young person arrives for a program and only one leader is present, that leader should ask the parent to stay until the second leader or more children arrive.
- If one leader has to leave before the last child is picked up, the other leader should ask a parent to stay until the final child is picked up to avoid a one-on-one situation.
- If a leader is asked by a parent to transport their child or youth, it is done in a way that ensures the adult is never alone with one child (i.e. leader has his/her own child or youth in the vehicle too).
- Displays of affection should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-handed pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. A counselor's or counselee's right to refuse any of these will be respected.
- Children and youth in Sunday school and other programs may be offered instruction about abuse issues. Topics for older youth might include dating 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. A curriculum for use in Sunday School is available from the CRC Office of Abuse Prevention/Faith Alive.
- Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a Youth Group leader and a Youth Group member to date each other. Similarly, a Youth Group leader should not date the close friend of a member of the Youth Group. No gifts, phone calls, or letters of a personal nature should be directed to a Youth Group member by a Youth Group leader.
- In the context of group activities, Youth Group leaders should provide adequate supervision of the youth in their care. Youth Group leaders should not hold a function without appropriate or sufficient supervision. There should always be more than one Youth Group leader supervising a Youth Group function.

Transportation Guidelines

- All volunteers who transport children, youth and vulnerable adults to and from program events must:
- be familiar with and agree to these transportation guidelines
- have a valid driver's license
- must have undergone screening as per FCC guidelines for screening of volunteers
- have written permission from parents/guardians for off-site activity
- never be alone in a vehicle with a child that is not their own
- arrange transportation for an activity in advance as much as possible
- ensure a seatbelt is used by each passenger in the vehicle
- Drivers are to be a leader, adult chaperone or an adult not participating in the event, who has received adequate sleep

Hall Monitoring & Youth Ministry Visitor Supervision Guidelines

Hall monitoring and visitor supervision provides a level of safety and security for children and youth during and after church services, Sunday school, ministries to children and youth and certain special events, where parents or guardians may not be providing direct care.

Responsibilities of Hall Monitors and Youth Ministry Visitor / Supervisors

The following is not a complete list of duties, but rather those that deal specifically with Safe Church Guidelines:

- Follow Faith Community Church's Guidelines for Creating a Safe Church.
- Ensure all children, youth and vulnerable adults entering or leaving worship services and child and youth events without parents or guardians are safe and accounted for at all times.
- Frequently monitor the hallways, rooms and grounds of FCC property, to ensure a safe and secure environment.
- Ensure children do not leave the building while unattended.
- Ensure that no one has inappropriate access to children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Ensure that children do not wander through the premises unattended, and that they return to the common area (i.e. Sunday school class, worship service) promptly (i.e. when they are going to the washroom).
- Provide information and liaison to senior leadership (i.e. Sunday school superintendent, Safe Church Committee, Council) in the event of a problem.

Visitor Guidelines

- Visitors to children and youth ministries are welcome to observe the activities in which their child participates. However, this is limited to one or two occasions with the permission of the leader/supervisor, or during Open House or

parent/child events.

- The leader/supervisor is responsible to oversee visitor parent/guardians. For larger events leaders should ensure appropriate levels of supervision are available.
- Visitors who plan to attend more than one or two youth events should undergo regular screening and be familiar with FCC Guidelines for Creating a Safe Church.

Ministry Leaders Tool Kit

The Ministry Leaders Tool Kit has been developed as a separate Appendix to this document to provide Program leaders with materials and guidance in support of their efforts to create and maintain a Safe Church at Faith Community Church. This Tool Kit contains Safe Church Forms, Reference Forms, Parental Consent and Travel Forms, advice to leaders on monitoring, the Code of Ethics, Incident Report, Attendance Records and other important tools. These tools are a continuation of and an essential part of FCC Guidelines for Creating a Safe Church.



Christian
Reformed
Church

Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders

As approved by synod, June 2023

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Background

A code of conduct provides clarity about attitudes, behavior, and accountability that can be expected of church leaders in the practice of a healthy and safe ministry.

The CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders resulted from the direction of Synod 2019. Synod 2018 had instructed the Council of Delegates to appoint a team to bring recommendations “regarding how the CRCNA can address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination” (*Acts of Synod 2018*, p. 523), and that team presented recommendations that were adopted by Synod 2019. One of those recommendations was to produce a code of conduct, and a draft copy of such a code was presented to Synod 2022 and was referred to the churches for feedback. A revised version of the code then came to Synod 2023, which adopted the document along with further revisions recommended by its advisory committee.

The approved final version of the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders is presented on the following pages.

When it approved the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders, Synod 2023 also recommended that the code be included in Church Order Supplement, Article 5, and that a change be made to Church Order Article 5, requiring that “all officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders.” In line with Church Order Article 47 and its Supplement, which states that proposed changes to the Church Order must be adopted by a following synod, the recommended changes are now proposed for adoption by Synod 2024.

Since the code of conduct has already been adopted by Synod 2023, however, churches may begin implementing it at any time.

Synod also encouraged councils and classes to implement the code of conduct for all staff (nonordained as well as ordained) and for volunteers who provide leadership in the church or classis, and synod mandated the general secretary to oversee the development of training modules that orient ministry leaders to the code of conduct.

Introduction

Congregations and ministry leaders are both well served by clearly identifying expectations for Christlike behavior. A code of conduct enables churches to be proactive in educating staff and volunteers about expectations rather than reactive when unspoken expectations are not met.

When implemented well, a code of conduct helps to shape the culture of a congregation, particularly with respect to how people are treated, fostering a culture in our churches where the value of every person is protected and where everyone is free to worship God and grow in faith free from harm.

Key to cultivating a culture of dignity and respect in the church is creating safe and receptive avenues for reporting abuse or misconduct. Those who have been harmed need to be heard and cared for by the church. This posture, however, does not assume the guilt of the accused. Allegations of violations should be examined and assessed through a fair process. The local church council is responsible for deciding the best way to follow up on the allegations.

Ministry leaders have a significant amount of authority and spiritual influence over the people who participate in the ministries of the church. People extend a great deal of trust to ministry leaders, inviting them into their lives at times and on occasions of significant vulnerability: birth, death, sickness, times of fear, doubt, joy, and suffering. It is a rare privilege to come alongside and support someone in their faith journey, being the presence of Christ to them. The stewardship of such power is a great responsibility—responsibility to use this power in ways that lead to shalom.

Typically, ministry leaders are mature Christians who exemplify good character and integrity, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Still, like all human beings, they are prone to sin, and they make mistakes. Stress, anxiety, burnout, and disappointment may lead them to act out of their old selves rather than their new life in Christ. As a result, they may fail to use their authority in redeeming ways and instead use it in a way that brings about harm. When this happens, the congregation's flourishing and the integrity of the church's gospel witness are affected. For this reason, it is crucial that the church put in place tools and measures of accountability that help ministry leaders use their authority and influence responsibly in order to build up the people to whom they are ministering.

The implementation of the Code of Conduct is the responsibility of the local council that holds the membership or credentials of the ministry leader. A classis has responsibility to implement the Code of Conduct for classical ministry leaders and employees. For CRCNA staff members, this oversight is shared with the Human Resource departments for denominational staff.

The assembly that implements the Code of Conduct is also responsible for determining how to enforce the Code of Conduct and the ramifications for people who violate it based on the gravity of the offense and the harm done. Safe Church coordinators, denominational Safe Church staff, and the Dignity Team are available for consultation and advice as needed.

The Bible is our guide for faith and life. The confessions are systematic summaries and interpretations of the Bible around which we are united as a denomination and which we confess to be faithful and true to the teachings of Scripture. The Code of Conduct is a document that establishes Biblical standards of behavior and practices for contemporary realities, addressing appropriate interpersonal relationships, confidentiality, financial integrity, pastoral leadership, and mandatory reporting. It is a summary of Christian standards for contemporary ministry leadership. It clarifies for ministry leaders what is required for healthy and safe ministry, and it communicates to parishioners what they can expect from ministry leadership.

Preamble

Mark 10:35-45 displays two very different approaches to the use of power. The disciples are exposed as being power hungry and vulnerable to a worldly expression of power. Jesus intervened by clarifying that a worldly view of power “lord[s] it over” those whom it influences. Jesus proclaimed, “It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (v. 43, ESV). Jesus displays that power and influence are not negative in themselves but are a gift of God for good. However, Jesus also insists that a misuse of power is not acceptable for leaders in his kingdom. Rather, he demands that they lead as humble servants for the glory of God and the thriving of others. After all, they follow the one who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45).

All of us who are united to Christ by faith and who serve in the life of the church are called, in this passage and others (Phil. 2:1-10), to this way of being. Jesus himself, in response to the desire for power expressed by his disciples, called them (and us) to use power to bring glory to God and serve people—a way of holding power that confronts and contrasts with the ways that the world uses power.

Not only do we have this call from Christ, but we actually have Jesus living and growing within us (Gal. 2:20). As a result, we find ourselves being transformed into the kind of people who hold and use power in a Christlike way.

That being said, until Christ returns and brings us to perfection, we will continue to wrestle with the urge to misuse power and abuse others. Ugly realities such as verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse are found among us. The power that we hold by virtue of our person or our position can always be twisted into the

project of building up ourselves and our own kingdoms at the expense of others. This is true for pastors, lay ministry leaders, and church members alike.

In awareness of these ugly realities and in the beautiful hope of Christ's transforming work, the following code of conduct is offered for ministry leaders. It is shaped by Scripture and by commitments found in our confessional statements and contemporary testimonies. (See Belgic Confession, Article 28; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A's 55, 107, 111.) It emerges out of a response by Synod 2018 to patterns of abuse that had been brought to its attention and is aimed at preventing such abuse in the future. May God's peace be among us.

Code of Conduct

"Ministry leaders" are all officebearers (ordained ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons), CRCNA staff members, and members of the Council of Delegates. Local church councils are also encouraged to regard all church staff (whether or not they are ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church as ministry leaders. Ministry leaders have been empowered by God and the church to serve the body of Christ for good. They are called to resist all temptations to abuse their power through the misuse of position, authority, or influence.

Abuse of power is often defined as misusing power to harm another person or using power and influence to take unjust advantage of another person. All abuse by ministry leaders within the church is also spiritual abuse and has spiritual impacts that often heighten the harm caused to individuals and to the family of God. For more on the use and misuse of power, see the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee (*Acts of Synod 2019*, pp. 587-615).

As a ministry leader, I will, to the best of my ability, commit to the following:

Relationships

1. I will speak and act, in all my personal and professional relations, in ways that follow the pattern of Christ, who used his power to serve (1 Pet. 5; Mark 10; Phil. 2; 2 Tim. 4:2).
2. I will respect, love, and treat with integrity and truthfulness people of every position, status, race, ethnicity, gender, age, or ability.
3. I will maintain appropriate emotional, physical, and sexual boundaries in all relationships.
4. I will keep all my relationships free from inappropriate, unwanted physical contact, emotional or sexual intimacy, sexual comments, gestures, or jokes.

Safety

1. I will actively promote a welcoming and respectful environment where all persons are treated with dignity and value, and where any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place.
2. I will report known or suspected cases of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of minors or vulnerable adults to the proper authorities.
3. I will support those who disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in a way that empowers the person who has been victimized to seek out justice and healing.

Pastoral Leadership

1. I will promote truthfulness, transparency, and honesty in all of my work.
2. I will use my power, authority, and position to build up the community of believers and seek first the kingdom of God.
3. I will work within my trained competence, especially in counseling situations, and I will refer individuals to other professionals as appropriate.
4. I will preach, teach, admonish, or discipline in ways that are biblical and Christlike, promoting the shalom and flourishing of those to whom I am ministering (2 Tim. 3:16).
5. I will refrain in my pastoral care and counseling from using references to Scripture or God to manipulate, coerce, or threaten another person.
6. I will disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest.

Confidentiality

1. I will maintain and uphold confidentiality appropriately, which means I will hold in confidence whatever information is not mine to share.
2. I will not use information shared with me in confidence in order to elevate my position or to depreciate that of others.

Finances

1. I will ensure that funds for which I am responsible or which are under my control are used for their intended ministry purposes.
2. In all financial matters, including the acceptance of gifts, I will act with scrupulous honesty, transparency, and appropriate accountability.
3. I will appropriately use and encourage accepted accounting practices and regular reviews and/or audits of ministry funds.

In the event that I misuse my power, either intentionally or unintentionally, in my dealings with others, in word or deed—if I fail “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly”

(Mic. 6:8) as outlined in the Scriptures and our confessions—I will acknowledge the harm that has been caused and the trust that has been broken, and I will actively seek restoration with justice, compassion, truth, and grace. I will humbly submit to the insight and accountability of the body that implements this Code of Conduct to ensure that I use any power entrusted to me fully in service to Christ.

In the beautiful hope of Christ's transforming work, in all I do, I will seek to use my position, power, and authority prudently and humbly to support and encourage all the members of his body in my care.

CLASSIS EASTERN CANADA SAFE CHURCH TEAM COUNSELING FUND

Purpose of the Fund:

To provide Christian counseling for members of churches within Classis Eastern Canada who need help to deal with abuse and its impact on their lives, and who have inadequate finances to obtain such counseling.

Basic Principles:

No abuse survivor should go without necessary counseling because of inadequate finances.

Confidentiality will be respected.

Counseling fund is available for needs within all churches and will be replenished as required by appeals to the congregations.

Guidelines for Use of the Counseling Fund:

The following factors will be considered prior to approval of requests for assistance from the Counseling Fund:

1. Membership in one of the churches within Classis Eastern Canada or regular participation in a church-sponsored program, such as Coffee Break.
2. Participants in counseling programs will be encouraged to make some contribution towards the cost if possible, as an expression of their personal commitment to the program.
3. Other possible sources of financing will be considered and used whenever possible, such as employment-related benefit plans.
4. In keeping with the principle of confidentiality, endorsement of a request for assistance by a deacon, elder or SCT committee member will be accepted without disclosure of detailed information from the participant. Financial accounts are managed between the SCT treasurer and the counseling agency, using case numbers to protect identity.
5. For confidentiality, assessment of financial need may be included in the pre-session interview by the counsellor, who will then make a recommendation to the SCT executive.
6. A member of a family will be considered eligible for assistance, even though the family could afford to pay, if another member of the family does not think counseling is necessary and refuses to pay for it.

TREASURER - Wilma Mulder
401-3099 Carling Avenue
Ottawa, ON K2H 5A6
(613) 829-8096
awmulder@sympatico.ca

CLASSIS EASTERN CANADA SAFE CHURCH TEAM COUNSELING FUND

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Classis Eastern Canada Counseling Fund is available for those in need of financial support for counseling services while preserving confidentiality of the individuals. (See “Guidelines for Use of the Counseling Fund”)

1. The pastor, elder, deacon or friend of a member or participant of a CRC church in the Classis of Eastern Canada contacts Wilma Mulder, Treasurer of the CEC Safe Church Team Counseling Fund, (or another member of the SCT Executive) indicating:
 - a. A request for counseling has been made by a member of _____ CRC and
 - b. The name of the agency or counselor who will be submitting the invoices.
2. The counselor/agency can forward invoices directly to Wilma. No name is necessary, just a case number. This number will be the only identification of the client throughout the process.

Wilma Mulder
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3. Once the counselor has had a few sessions with the client and/or their family a general outline of the case management plan is required. This is done in order that we know the approximate amount of support required and can set aside the necessary funds.
4. Should long term counseling be required we will advise the counselor/agency as to the length of time we can offer assistance. The latter depends very much on the number of caseloads the fund is supporting at the time.

CEC Safe Church Team Executive:

Chairperson – Gayla Postma (Williamsburg) 613-330-3145 gayla@thepostmas.ca

Secretary/Treasurer – Wilma Mulder (Ottawa – Calvin CRC)