

**COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN  
REFORMED CHURCH**

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION  
POLICY**

# INTRODUCTION

Child abuse...it's a sensitive issue...an emotional issue. It's an issue that we would rather not think about, or at least not believe that we would have to face in a Christian organization. Unfortunately, we must. Society – even the church – has become tainted by the presence of child abuse, and most of us have heard stories or experienced first hand what happens to a congregation when abuse is discovered in the church. Worse, children's lives have been severely and permanently damaged as a result of abuse.

That reason alone compels us to be on guard at all times, working to prevent child abuse before it occurs, and to respond properly if it does.

- Child Abuse Handbook  
The Calvinist Cadet Corps

Through education of abuse prevention we want you to be able to recognize signs of abuse. Even if abuse is not happening in your program, you should be able to detect the signs and take appropriate steps. Therefore we recommend that volunteers be familiar with the CCRC 'Child Abuse Prevention Policies' and attend any training sessions that CCRC has to offer. The purpose of this program is designed to:

- Reduce the risk to children and youth
- Protect persons involved from false or mistaken accusations
- Avoid unwholesome or unsafe situations
- Deal appropriately with abuse situations that do occur

Community Christian Reformed Church

# DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

To broaden the understanding of what child abuse is, we include the following definitions for physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse which can also be found in the *Acts of Synod, 1992*, or in the *Acts of Synod, 1995*.

- 1, *Physical abuse*. Any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a child – whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behaviour 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. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behaviour.
2. *Sexual abuse*. The exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact include fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.
2. *Emotional abuse*. Attempting to control a child's life through words, threats, and fear; destroying a child's self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivations. Emotional abuse weakens a child'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.

# DISCIPLINE POLICY

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
1. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, insulting, threatening) is not permitted.
1. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.
1. Concerns about a child's behaviour or the appropriate response to a child's behaviour should be reported to the program supervisor.
1. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehaviour is an ongoing problem.
1. Expectations of children/youths' behaviour must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
1. 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.
1. Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:
  - § distract the child/youth with another activity
  - § help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behaviour
  - § isolate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist
1. For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
1. When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers/leaders should get help before "losing their cool".

Be sure all discipline is carried out in love, not anger. Remember, the goal of discipline is not vengeance, but changed behaviour.

# **POLICIES FOR SPECIFIC CHILD/YOUTH PROGRAMS**

## ***Nursery Programs***

1. Youth may volunteer for service, provided that an adult is present.
1. At least two attendants should serve in nursery whenever it is scheduled, even if only one child is present.
1. An adult who is scheduled for nursery duty must have another adult to replace them should they be unable to serve.
1. Only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at a given time. A parent and child may serve in the nursery provided there is another non-related (immediate family) person in attendance.
1. A scheduled minor may not bring their friends to the nursery.
1. 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 attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who require assistance, the attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery under the observation of another attendant.
1. Parents should complete the instruction form each time they bring their child to the nursery.
1. This Nursery Program Policy will be posted in all nurseries.
1. Morning Services:  
Infants (0-18 months): Normally three attendants must be in the infant nursery.  
Toddlers (18 months – 3 years): Normally two attendants must be in the toddler nursery.
- Evening Services:  
At least two attendants should serve in nursery whenever it is scheduled, even if only one child is present.

## ***Church School Program***

1. All teachers appointed to be in charge of church school classes (including catechism classes) are required to sign The Code of Ethics form.
1. Only one adult member of a family should be in a classroom at a given time.
1. Three, four and five year olds require a teacher plus an assistant, minimum age of 12.
1. Bathroom assistance is conducted as in the nursery policy.
1. Children should not leave the classroom except for illness, bathroom privileges, or other compelling reasons.
1. Whenever church school is in session, the classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
1. The Discipline Policy applies to the Church School programs.

## ***Gems and Cadet Programs***

1. All leaders within the Gems and Cadet programs are required to sign The Code of Ethics form.
1. Gems and Cadet leaders and club members may meet individually in a public place once or twice and thereafter only after informing the youth's parent(s).
1. Gems or Cadets should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of the class, nor should they stay longer than ten minutes after the class.
1. Any activities should have at least two leaders who may not be members of the same family.
1. Leaders or designated volunteers transporting a child must have written consent from parents (form required each year).
1. The Discipline Policy applies to the Gems and Cadet programs.

## ***Teen Club/Young People***

1. All leaders are required to sign The Code of Ethics form.
1. Youth leaders may meet individually in a public place with a member of the youth group once or twice and thereafter only after informing the youth's parent(s).
1. Youth group functions must be supervised by two adults.
1. Leaders or designated volunteers transporting a youth must have written consent from parents (form required each year).
1. Appropriate displays of affection are often part of conveying support and encouragement. Displays of affection between youth leaders and youth group members should be limited to actions like a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-handed pat on the back, or a handclasp. A youth leader or member's right to refuse such display of affection will be respected.
1. The Discipline Policy applies to the Teen Club/Young People program.

## ***Vacation Bible School (when run by Community CRC)***

1. All teachers are required to sign The Code of Ethics form.
1. Classes and activities will have two supervisory people, at least one of whom is an adult. A helper must be a minimum of 12 years old.
1. A teacher or helper should not meet privately with a child.
1. Adults transporting a child in their vehicle must have written consent from parents. (form is required)
1. Bathroom assistance is conducted as in the nursery policy.
1. Every attempt should be made to have rooms with an unobstructed view where possible.
1. The Discipline Policy applies to the Vacation Bible School program.

## **Child Abuse: The Law and the Church**

Dealing with child abuse requires co-operation between the church and local legal authorities. While there may be disagreement at times, each has an important role to play.

### **Legal Duty to Report**

There are two duties to report under the Child and Family Services Act of Ontario:

1. The duty to report situations where a person believes that a child is or may be in **need of protection**;
1. The duty to report situations where a person has **reasonable grounds** to suspect that a child may have suffered abuse.

Abuse, for the purpose of reporting, includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, failure to protect a child from abuse, and failure to obtain medical treatment.

In case of uncertainty about a duty to report, church representatives can consult with the Children's Aid Society by phone, on a confidential basis.

### **Church Policies and Procedures for Reporting**

The church has both a moral and a legal responsibility to take reasonable measures to ensure that churches are safe places for children.

Churches can face civil liability suits relating to negligence in the selection or supervision of personnel, even if church officials were not aware of the actual incidence of abuse committed by personnel associated with church programs.

Establishing clear policies and implementing them consistently is the best prevention and the best defense against any possible charges, including false allegations. Clear statements that abuse will not be tolerated can be accompanied with preventive measures, staff training, and reporting procedures that provide support and accountability for volunteer staff as well as hired personnel.

Classis Eastern Canada has established an independent abuse response team, who can assist church councils in dealing fairly with allegations in their church, using a process adopted by Synod. In the case of child abuse, church officials must report reasonable suspicions to local authorities, who do the investigation.

In addition, the church has its own responsibility to prevent abuse and deal appropriately with abusers and members who have been abused. Whatever measures are taken or not taken by legal authorities, the church can provide pastoral care, support for a child in need and the families involved, and appropriate disciplinary actions.

## DISCLOSURE

### **Recommended Responses to A Child's Report of Abuse**

The most reliable indicator of child abuse is the child's verbal disclosure.

1. Avoid asking leading questions. Listen carefully to what the child tells you. Respond in a supportive, non-judgmental manner. Disclosing abuse is a scary thing for a child, and he/she needs to know they are supported. Do not express shock or criticize the child's alleged abuser.
1. Do not attempt to assess the truthfulness of the child's disclosure – that will be for a trained professional to decide. Assure the child you believe him/her and that you are sorry the abuse happened.
1. Tell the child that the abuse was not his/her fault, that they are not bad or to blame.
1. Reassure the child that he/she did the right thing by telling you. Tell the child that you will support him/her as much as possible and then do so.
1. Do not promise not to tell anyone. Tell the child that you will do what you can to make the abuse stop; that means that you are required by law to report the abuse to someone who can help.
1. Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint; instead, share with the child that other people need to know about what happened, and they will talk to the child later.

### **Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

1. All suspicions/allegations of child abuse must be taken seriously and be handled confidentially.
1. Do not conduct an investigation yourself or attempt to substantiate allegations. It is important to document immediately on paper exactly what you have been told and observed.
1. Reporting a reasonable suspicion of child abuse is mandatory by law. Before reporting any suspicions to the authorities, it is recommended that you speak first to one of the members of the Child Abuse Prevention Committee or the Pastor

### **CCRC Response to Allegations**

1. Before any legal action is taken, the following steps must be followed:
  - a) The "Child Abuse Prevention Committee" consisting of 3 members of the congregation and the Pastor, is responsible for investigating all allegations.
  - a) The committee must keep careful and confidential documentation.
  - a) A spokesperson for the committee will be responsible for reporting the abuse.
  - a) Limit contact of the accused to accuser or any children/youth of the congregation, or suspend duty pending the outcome of the investigation.
  - a) A full report of committee investigation shall be given to Council.
1. Council must decide if an attorney, church insurance company, and/or Director of Abuse Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church should be contacted.
1. If congregation and media become involved, one person shall be appointed by the Executive to act as a church spokesperson.
1. CCRC will ensure that any victim receives immediate and appropriate pastoral care, as well as referrals to other professional counselling services.

## **Suggested Procedures and Guidelines for Handling Allegations of Child Abuse against a Church Leader**

1. A person who receives a report of allegations of child abuse against a church leader (paid staff, officebearer, or appointed volunteer), and concludes that the allegations create a reasonable suspicion that abuse has occurred, should report the matter to local police or child-protection authorities within twenty-four hours of coming to that conclusion.
  
1. As soon as possible after notifying the appropriate authorities, the person who reports the matter should contact the person (hereafter, designated person) within the accused's church who has been designated to receive any report of alleged child abuse. The person who reports the matter should describe the allegations of abuse and/or the circumstances that support the allegations of abuse to the designated person. In addition, the person who reports the matter should inform the designated person if the alleged abuse occurred in the church or in connection with a church-sponsored program.
  
1. The designated person should contact (1) the pastor, if the minor has not implicated the pastor; (2) a member of the church's leadership team, if the minor has not implicated this team member; (3) the church's legal counsel; and (4) the church's insurance agent. If the alleged victim and alleged abuser are not members of the same church, each church should appoint a designated person. Together, the designated persons should maintain contact about the progress of the investigation. Church officials may conduct their own investigation after civil authorities have begun theirs. However, church officials should not reveal the nature of the allegations to the alleged offender until the civil authorities have met with him or her.
  
1. If the alleged abuser admits wrongdoing against the victim at any stage of this process, the admission of guilt should be brought to the attention of the governing body of the church of the accused. The governing body should deliberate and determine outcomes according to established church policy and procedures.
  
1. When the designated person determine (1) that the authorities have concluded that the allegations merit serious investigation, or (2) that there is the possibility of formal charges, the designated person should notify the governing body of the alleged abuser's church.
  
- 2.

- a. The designated person should present to the governing body a written document that specifies the nature of the allegations and any information that is known.
- b. The governing body should give the accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- c. In light of the information presented, the governing body should implement one or more of the following actions:

§ Supervised contact at church between the accused and any minors;

§ Prohibited contact at church between the accused and accuser or between the accused and any minor in the congregation;

§ Suspended responsibilities from office, position, or duty with pay, when applicable, and without prejudice pending the outcome of the investigation.

1. If and when the designated person learns that the authorities have filed criminal charges against the accused, then the designated person should report this information to the governing body of the alleged abuser's church.

- a. The designated person should present to the governing body a written document specifying the nature of the allegations and any information that is known.
- b. The governing body should give the accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.
- c. In light of the information presented, the governing body should implement the following actions:

§ Prohibit the accused from contact with minors at church;

§ And suspend the accused from office, position, or duty with pay, when applicable, and without prejudice pending the outcome of the charges.

1. When criminal proceedings have concluded, the governing body should promptly revisit the matter, whether the result is conviction, acquittal, or dropped charges. If the criminal charges are dropped or prosecution does not result in a conviction, the governing body should decide whether or not to rescind its earlier action and/or take additional action.

1. If the accused whom the governing body has previously removed or suspended from office is found not guilty of the allegations, the governing body should not reinstate the accused to his or her previous position of leadership until they, in consultation with the police and/or child protection authorities, legal counsel, and child abuse experts, deem it safe and proper to do so.
1. If the accused is found guilty, the governing body may (1) subject a determined abuser (hereafter abuser) to further suspension, deposition, or termination of employment, or (2) take such other action against the abuser as the circumstances may dictate.
1. A church leader (1) who has made a confession of child abuse, (2) who has been convicted of child abuse in a court of law, or (3) whom the governing body has adjudicated guilty of abuse of a minor should not be reinstated to the position from which he or she has been removed or suspended without the advice of the church's legal counsel.
1. The governing body should notify the congregation when a church leader is removed or suspended from office, position, or duty pending the outcome of an investigation into any allegations of child abuse. This notice should be in writing and should protect the identity and confidentiality of the accuser. This disclosure should be pastoral, objectively factual, and not exceed the scope of the information known about the matter at that time. In addition, the governing body should not attempt to state any legal conclusions about the guilt or innocence of any person unless and until the governing body determines that a church leader is an abuser.
1. Subject to the best interest of the abused, the governing body should notify the congregation in writing if they conclude that a church leader is an abuser. This notice should protect the identity and confidentiality of any innocent parties, including the abused person. This written communication should be pastoral and objectively factual.

## **Screening Procedures**

To be considered for any volunteer position involving children/youth, an applicant must be a member of Community CRC for at least 6 months unless approved by council.

All volunteers and paid employees involved in children/youth programs must sign the Code of Ethics form.

Any information obtained will remain confidential.

Additional screening steps may be taken at the discretion of church officials.

## **Policies That Govern the Screening Process**

### **1. Personnel Files**

Personnel files will be kept for all volunteers and staff. The files will be kept with the clerk with access limited to those individuals who make decisions about placing applicants in available positions.

Personnel files may not be altered or destroyed. Personnel files of individuals who have left the position or the church are to remain intact.

Only verifiable information will be placed in a personnel file. If information obtained is unsubstantiated, it should be labeled as such. Any supporting documentation of any charge or allegation of wrongdoing will clearly identify the source.

**Code of Ethics**  
**For Volunteers, Pastor, and Leaders in Child and Youth Programs**

Believing that God is calling me to serve children or youth in this congregation...

1. My first priority in teaching/supervising/leading children or youth will be to seek the welfare of the children/youth physically, socially, educationally, and spiritually.
1. I will also try to understand and respect the child's/youth's cultural background.
1. I will give the parent(s) full information about the program I am teaching/supervising/leading and what time it begins and ends.
1. I will not do anything that will damage a child's or youth's trust. I will try to protect the child/youth from all forms of abuse while he or she is in my care.
1. If I suspect that a child/youth may be hurt by the abusive actions or attitudes of another person, I will report that suspicion to a responsible person so that it can be investigated properly.
1. If I wish to talk to the child/youth alone, it will be within the sight and sound of other people.
1. I will answer a child's/youth's questions openly and honestly.
1. I will work with the children/youth to set some agreed guidelines for acceptable behaviour within the group. I will expect the children/youth to act on the basis of those guidelines, and if a child/youth consistently breaks them, I will seek help from parents and others to assist me in responding to the child/youth.
1. If a child/youth is distressed, I will try to offer comfort and help. I will encourage the child/youth to find the appropriate help for their needs.
1. I will pray for each child/youth regularly and let them know that I care about them.

Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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Name (Print)	Signature	Date
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# **TRANSPORTATION CONSENT FORM**

(to be completed each season)

GROUP:      Cadets  Gems  Junior Young People  Vacation Bible School

DATE: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form authorizes the designated volunteers of Community Christian Reformed Church to transport my child(ren) to and from activities involved with the above mentioned group, and to take any action deemed necessary for the well-being of my child(ren).

Community Christian Reformed Church will ensure that you child(ren) will be transported by a volunteer who holds a valid Ontario Drivers licence.

CHILD(REN) NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PARENT OR GUARDIAN: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Needs Assessment Checklist***

- We currently screen all paid employees, including clergy, who work with youth or children.
- We currently screen all volunteer youth workers for any position involving work with youth or children
- We do a reference check on all paid employees and new volunteers working with youth or children.
- We train all of our staff who work with children or youth, both paid and volunteer, how to carry out our policies to prevent sexual, physical, and verbal abuse.
- We take our policies to prevent abuse seriously and see that they are enforced.
- Our workers understand provincial laws concerning child abuse reporting obligations.
- We have a clearly defined reporting procedure for a suspected incident of abuse.
- We have a specific response strategy to use if an allegation of sexual abuse is made at our church.
- We have insurance coverage if a claim should occur.
- An attorney has reviewed our policies.
- We are prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.