

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

Peoria Christian Reformed Church

Introduction

In a society increasingly aware of the possibility of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, Peoria Christian Reformed Church seeks to provide a nurturing and secure environment for all people in our fellowship. This policy protects especially the children, youth, and vulnerable adults among us.

In this policy:

- “Children” refers to people from birth through Grade 8.
- “Youth” refers to high school students.
- “Vulnerable adults” refers to the frail elderly and developmentally disabled people over 18 years of age.
- “Leaders” refers to paid staff and volunteers who assist, coordinate, or teach any of the above groups.

Safe Church Personnel

1. All persons selected to lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be approved by the Administrative Board.
2. All persons selected to lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will sign the Peoria CRC Leadership Covenant (Appendix A).

Safe Church Policies and Procedures

1. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse will not be tolerated.
2. A leader’s first priority in teaching, supervising, and leading a group is to seek their welfare spiritually, physically, socially, and educationally.
 - a. Leaders will model Christian behavior.
 - b. Leaders will encourage and correct in a way that shows Christian love.
 - c. Leaders will answer questions openly and honestly.
 - d. Pastor will undergo a background check before being hired or placed in a leadership position. Peoria CRC reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason, including a prior criminal record.
3. Leaders will work to earn and keep the trust of the group members. They will not abuse them physically, sexually, or emotionally. They will not use corporal punishment, hurtful language, or public humiliation as tools for discipline. Leaders will try to protect individuals under their leadership from all forms of abuse.
4. In situations where counseling is needed, leaders they will use sound judgment. If they meet with a member of the group, it will be in a public place, within sight and sound of others.
5. When leaders provide transportation for minors, they will include another adult. Parents/Guardians can give permission in advance if a second adult is not available.
6. Volunteers and/or leaders must have a valid driver’s license and proof of insurance before transporting children and youth.
7. Volunteers and/or leaders must abide by all traffic laws and safety regulations.
8. When possible, two or more non-related adult members of Peoria CRC will be present at church activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

In regards to very young children:

 - a. If a second adult is not available when toileting assistance is required, the assistance should be provided with open doors.
 - b. When possible, diapers will be changed in the presence of another adult.
9. If leaders become aware of abuse or suspect that a group member is being hurt by abusive attitudes, bullying, or actions of another person, they will inform a member of the Safe Church Team.

10. Leaders will work with the group members to set up agreed guidelines for acceptable behavior. They will expect members to act according to the guidelines. If the group member is a minor and consistently breaks the rules, leaders will seek help from parents and others to assist them in responding to and correcting this behavior.
11. Leaders will hold group functions with appropriate and adequate supervision. When possible, functions will have more than one group leader present.
12. Leaders will keep relationships between themselves and the group members appropriate. They will not accept gifts, phone calls, electronic communication or letters of an inappropriate nature, nor will leaders initiate them.
13. Leaders of youth and children will provide group program schedules to parents, including beginning and ending times for activities.
14. Leaders will let group members know that they care about them, offering positive encouragement and comfort. Leaders' ministry of touch will always be appropriate, in the presence of other people, and respectful of the personal boundaries of the group member.
15. Leaders will pray for all group members regularly, lifting each of them up to our Father in heaven.

Administration of Safe Church Policies

1. The Safe Church Team is responsible for administering the Peoria CRC Safe Church Policy.
 - a. The Safe Church Team will be composed of five members of the congregation, appointed by the Church Council. The team will be composed of members of both sexes. The Safe Church Team will elect its chair and secretary. Members will include:
 - i. One member of the Church Council
 - ii. One member with a leadership role in a youth ministry of the church
 - iii. One member with a leadership role in the children's ministry of the church
 - iv. Two at-large members
 - b. Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team are:
 - i. Annually review the Safe Church Policy, and adjust the list of included groups as needed. The date of the last review will be noted at the end of the policy.
 - ii. Serve as members of the Abuse Response Team to handle all allegations of abuse.
 - c. At or near the beginning of the church's Fall activity season, the Safe Church Team will distribute the Safe Church Policy and Safe Church Covenant to all members of the congregation who lead groups of children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These groups include: Cadets, GEMS, Church School, Youth Group, Vacation Bible School, and Church Nursery. This distribution includes both leaders who are members of Peoria CRC and leaders who are not members. It includes adult nursery attendants but not nursery attendants who are minors.
 - d. Collect and store signed covenants from leaders.
 - e. Collect copies of driver's license and proof of vehicle insurance from volunteer drivers.
 - f. Make available a copy of the Safe Church Policy to all parents or guardians of minor children who participate in church related functions.
 - g. Educate the congregation on Safe Church issues as the Safe Church Team judges necessary and appropriate.
2. The Abuse Response Team is responsible for handling all allegations of abuse.
 - a. The Abuse Response Team will consist of:
 - i. All members of the Safe Church Team. (If one of the team members is involved in the allegation, he or she will not participate in the team.)
 - ii. The chairman and secretary of the Safe Church Team also serve as chairman and secretary of the Abuse Response Team.
 - iii. The pastor of worship and administration.
 - iv. The president of the church consistory. (If the pastor is president of the church consistory, the vice president of consistory will fill this position.)

- b. Responsibilities of the Abuse Response Team are:
 - i. Respond to or investigate allegations of abuse.
 - ii. Determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred.
 - iii. If there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been harmed, or threatened with physical harm, or that sexual abuse or exploitation may have occurred, notify the appropriate civil authorities within 24 hours.
 - iv. If there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, make a full report to the church consistory. At this point the work of the Abuse Response Team is complete, unless additional responsibilities are delegated to them by the church consistory.

Reporting Policies and Procedures for Alleged or Suspected Abuse

1. All paid staff and volunteer group leaders for children, youth, or vulnerable adults are required to report any allegations of abuse or any suspected abuse to a member of the Abuse Response Team. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged or suspected abuse, but only to report the incident.
All parents or guardians of minor children or vulnerable adults are asked to immediately report concerns about any allegations of abuse or any suspected abuse to a member of the Abuse Response Team.
2. The chair of the Abuse Response Team does the following:
 - a. Immediately informs the parents or guardians of the abuse allegation.
 - b. Convenes the Abuse Response Team to make an initial determination whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred. Parents or guardians of the person involved will be given opportunity to provide input. All information regarding the alleged incident will remain confidential within the confines of those needing to know. Records of the reported allegations will be maintained and kept secure and confidential by the Abuse Response Team Secretary.
3. If the Abuse Response Team concludes there is reasonable cause, the following steps will be taken:
 - a. A report to the appropriate outside agency:
 - i. If the alleged victim is a child under the age of 18, a member of the team will report the suspected abuse to Children's Protective Services.
 - ii. If the alleged victim is an adult, the victim will be referred to an appropriate community services agency (Adult Protective Services, Domestic Violence Services, Police, Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Center, etc.).
 - iii. Notification of authorities by the Abuse Response Team will normally take place within 24 hours of receiving the report of an allegation of abuse, or as soon thereafter as a determination of reasonable cause can be made.
 - iv. Peoria Church will cooperate fully with Children's Protective Services and/or the appropriate law enforcement officials.
 - b. A report to the church consistory (elders and pastors): The pastor of worship and administration or president of the consistory may, at his discretion, convene a special meeting to address the issue. If the consistory determines there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, the consistory will:
 - i. Suspend the alleged abuser from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties.
 - (1) If the alleged abuser is the pastor, he will be suspended according to synodical rules with full pay and without prejudice pending a hearing.
 - (2) If the alleged abuser is a staff member or volunteer, he or she will be suspended from the church position (with full pay for staff) without prejudice pending a hearing.
 - ii. Notify the parents or guardians of the results of the investigation.
 - iii. Notify the congregation of the allegation and the reason for suspension, along with any other information it deems appropriate.

- iv. If the event attracts media attention, appoint one official spokesperson to communicate with the media.
 - v. If allegations are found to be unsubstantiated and/or charges are dropped, decide if the church leader may be reinstated into his or her previous position or duty.
 - vi. If paid staff or volunteer leaders are removed or dismissed from office, they will not be considered for re-entry or reinstated without advice of legal counsel.
 - vii. Deal appropriately with individuals found to have made false accusations.
4. All individuals and their families involved in the case will be supported with Christian compassion by the Abuse Response Team and the church consistory as appropriate throughout the hearing, investigation, and/or legal processes.

Safe Church Policy and Parents or Guardians of Minor Children or Vulnerable Adults

1. Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be made available to all members of Peoria Christian Reformed Church. Annually announcements will be placed in the church bulletin for three consecutive weeks, informing the congregation of the availability and location of copies of the policy.
2. Parents, guardians, or any member of the congregation are welcome to submit suggestions for improving the Safe Church Policy to the Safe Church Team.
3. All Peoria CRC activities for minor children and vulnerable adults have an open door policy. Parents and guardians are free to drop in at any time without notice as long as their presence does not disrupt an activity.

Safe Church Education

Because of the role which leaders play in the lives of youth, it is imperative that leaders do not engage in abusive or other potentially destructive behaviors. The consistory reserves the right to refuse the appointment of any leaders to any position if the person has been convicted of/pled guilty of child abuse or neglect. Should an allegation of abuse be made toward a leader, at the discretion of the consistory, there will be a leave of absence from the position. The consistory will provide for an investigation. If the allegation is false, the leader is free to resume his/her role as leader. If the allegation be substantiated, the leader will be terminated from the position immediately.

In similar fashion, because of the role which leaders play in the lives of youth, it is imperative that leaders follow biblically prescribed rules for relationships. God, in His wisdom, protection, and care, has ordained that the sexual relationship be confined to marriage – the husband and wife relationship. Thus, any sexual relationship outside of the confines of marriage is not acceptable. Moreover, any sexual relationship between individuals of the same sex is not acceptable.

During the investigation process and well beyond, it will be important to remember the church's role in caring for the accused – both the falsely accused and the justly accused. Both will be in great need of support from their church family.

Abuse Education

Types of child abuse:

More than one type of child abuse exists, but every type brings long lasting devastation to the emotional and physical well-being of the child.

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, a mark, or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more serious forms, such as choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. Physical abuse is sometimes a single event but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.
2. **Physical neglect** – not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of a child in his/her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a child's normal development.
3. **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, offers, or gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact.
4. **Emotional abuse** – attempting to control a child's life through words, threats, and fear; destroying a child's self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child's mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his/her contact with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem – all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

Preventing Child Abuse, Beth Swagman, CRC Publications

Recognition of abuse:

1. Possible **physical abuse** symptoms include the following:
 - a. Bruises and welts
 - b. Multiple injuries including abrasions, contusions, welts, and lacerations
 - c. Burns
 - d. Tethering abrasions (resulting from an area of the body being tied to something else)
 - e. Extreme shyness, avoiding physical contact with adults
 - f. Exhibits behavioral extremes – withdrawal to aggression
2. Possible **physical neglect** symptoms include the following:
 - a. Poor hygiene including lice, body odor, scaly skin
 - b. Untreated illness or injury
 - c. Poor attendance at school and extra curricular activities
 - d. Begging, hoarding, and stealing
 - e. Role reversal – assumes adult responsibilities
3. Possible **sexual abuse** symptoms include the following:
 - a. Frequent sore throats or urinary tract infections
 - b. Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, backaches
 - c. Sexual knowledge beyond the child's developmental level
 - d. Wearing extra layers of clothes and refusal to remove layers
 - e. Depression and withdrawal from activities and relationships
4. Possible **emotional abuse** symptoms include the following:
 - a. Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, backaches
 - b. Eating disorders
 - c. Difficulty with peer relationships
 - d. Exhibits behavioral extremes – withdrawal, compliance, aggression, anger
 - e. Very low self esteem

Approved by the Council of the Peoria Christian Reformed Church, April 2016.

Revised: _____

Appendix A
Peoria Christian Reformed Church
Leadership Covenant

I believe that God has led me to serve in a leadership role in the Peoria Christian Reformed Church.

1. I understand I am a representative of Peoria CRC and the Kingdom of God. I agree to conduct myself in a manner that models for others an active and growing Christian faith.
2. I understand that those I serve will look to me to support their growing faith in Jesus Christ.
3. I will follow the policies and principles in Peoria CRC's Safe Church Policy. If I have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect, I will inform a Safe Church Team member within 24 hours of the discovery.
4. In summary, I will lead in love, pray for those I lead, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers.

I have received a copy of the Safe Church Policy for Peoria Church. I have read it, I understand it, and I will adhere to it, God helping me.

Signature

Date

Print Name