

# **SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

## **Peoria Christian Reformed Church**

### **I. Introduction**

Peoria Christian Reformed Church seeks to provide a nurturing and safe environment for all persons participating in our church sponsored programs and activities. This policy seeks to especially protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults among us.

### **II. Scope of Policy**

This policy applies to any event or gathering sponsored or organized by Peoria CRC.

### **III. In this Policy**

- A. "Child" or "Children" refers to people from birth through Grade 8.
- B. "Youth" refers to high school students.
- C. "Vulnerable Adults" refers to the frail elderly and developmentally disabled people over 18 years of age.
- D. "Leaders" refers to paid staff and volunteers (18 years or older) who assist, coordinate, or teach any of the above groups.
- E. "Group" or "Groups" refers to "Children", "Youth", and "Vulnerable Adults".
- F. "Abuse", as described in *Preventing Child Abuse*, Beth Swagman, CRC Publications, refers to:
  - 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.
  - 5. Note by Peoria CRC: Types of Abuse described above refer specifically to forms of Child abuse but can generally be applied to Youth and Vulnerable Adults as well.

### **IV. Leader Approval or Selection**

- A. All Leaders selected to lead groups of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults will be approved by the Elders.
- B. All Leaders selected to lead groups of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults will sign the Peoria CRC Leadership Covenant (Appendix A).
- C. The 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.

## **V. Safe Church Policies and Procedures for Leaders**

- A. Leaders will model Christian behavior. Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse will not be tolerated.
- B. A Leader's priority in teaching, supervising, and leading a group is to seek their welfare spiritually, physically, socially, and educationally.
- C. Leaders will encourage and correct in a way that shows Christian love and will refrain from using corporal punishment, hurtful language, or public humiliation as tools for discipline.
- D. In situations where counseling or correction are needed, Leaders will use sound judgment with respect to location and timing.
- E. When transporting Group members, Leaders will obey all traffic laws, passenger safety regulations, maintain an orderly environment, and have another Leader present, if possible. Parents/Guardians may give permission in advance if a second Leader is not available.
- F. Leaders must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance, available before transporting Group members, and abide by all traffic laws and safety regulations.
- G. When possible, two or more adult members of Peoria CRC will be present at church activities to provide adequate supervision for Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults.
- H. Leaders will provide Group program schedules to parents, including beginning and ending times for activities.
- I. For very young Children, diapering or toileting assistance should be done in the restroom with the door ajar.
- J. 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. A Leader's ministry of a gentle touch is appropriate in the presence of other people and with respect to the personal boundaries of the Group member.
- K. Leaders will pray for all Group members regularly, lifting each of them up to our Father in heaven.
- L. All Leaders are required to report any allegations or suspicions of 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.
- M. All parents or guardians of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults are asked to immediately report any allegations of abuse or any suspected abuse to a member of the Abuse Response Team.
- N. All Peoria CRC activities for Groups have an open-door policy. Parents and guardians are free to visit at any time without notice but must assure that their presence does not disrupt an activity.

## **VI. Safe Church Team and Duties**

- 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:
  - 1. One member of the Church Council
  - 2. One member with a leadership role in a youth ministry of the church
  - 3. One member with a leadership role in the children's ministry of the church
  - 4. Two at-large members
- B. Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team
  - 1. Administration of the Safe Church Policy. Annually review the Safe Church Policy, and adjust as necessary. The date of the last review will be noted at the end of the policy.
  - 2. At the beginning of the church's Fall activity season, distribute the Safe Church Policy and Leadership Covenant to all (new) members who lead Groups, including Leaders who are not members.
  - 3. Collect and store signed covenants from Leaders.
  - 4. Collect and store signed Group driver Peoria CRC Transportation Agreements.
  - 5. Make the Safe Church Policy available to all parents or guardians of minor children who participate in church related functions.
  - 6. Educate the congregation on Safe Church issues as necessary and appropriate.
  - 7. Serve as members of the Abuse Response Team.

## **VII. Abuse Response Team and Duties**

- A. The Abuse Response Team will consist of:
  - 1. All members of the Safe Church Team. (If one of the team members is involved in the allegation, he or she will not participate on the team.)
  - 2. The Chairperson and Secretary of the Safe Church Team also serve as Chairperson and Secretary of the Abuse Response Team.
  - 3. Peoria CRC Pastor
  - 4. Peoria Council President
- B. Responsibilities of the Abuse Response Team
  - 1. Respond to or investigate allegations of abuse.
  - 2. Determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred.
  - 3. If it is determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult has been abused, the Abuse Response Team will follow procedures outlined in the next section

## **VIII. Procedures following Alleged or Suspected Abuse**

- A. The Chairperson of the Abuse Response Team does the following:
  1. Immediately informs the parents or guardians of the abuse allegation.
  2. 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.
- B. If the Abuse Response Team concludes there is reasonable cause, the following steps will be taken:
  1. Report to the appropriate outside agency:
    - a. 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.
    - b. 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.).
    - c. 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.
    - d. Peoria Church will cooperate fully with Children's Protective Services and/or the appropriate law enforcement officials.
  2. Report to the church consistory (elders and pastor): The Pastor or President of the Council may, at his discretion, convene a special meeting to address the issue. If the Council determines there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, the Council will:
    - a. Suspend the alleged abuser from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties.
      - i. If the alleged abuser is the Pastor, he will be suspended according to synodical rules with full pay and without prejudice pending a hearing.
      - ii. If the alleged abuser is another Leader, he/she will be suspended from the church position (with full pay, if applicable) without prejudice pending a hearing.
    - b. Notify the parents or guardians of the results of the investigation.
    - c. Notify the congregation of the allegation and the reason for suspension, along with any other information it deems appropriate.
    - d. If the event attracts media attention, appoint one official spokesperson to communicate with the media.
    - e. 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.
    - f. If allegations are found to be unsubstantiated and/or charges are dropped, decide if the church leader may be reinstated into his/her previous position or duty.
    - g. Deal appropriately with individuals found to have made false accusations.
  3. All individuals and their families involved in the case will be supported with Christian compassion by the Abuse Response Team and the church Council as appropriate throughout the hearing, investigation, and/or legal processes.

## **IX. Recognition of Abuse**

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

## **X. Availability of Safe Church Policy**

- A. Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be made available to all members of Peoria Christian Reformed Church.
- B. Parents, guardians, or any member of the congregation are welcome to submit suggestions for improving the Safe Church Policy to the Safe Church Team.

(Approved by the Council of the Peoria Christian Reformed Church, September 2018)  
(Revised by the Council of the Peoria Christian Reformed Church, December 2019)

**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

**Appendix B**  
**Peoria Christian Reformed Church**  
**Transportation Agreement**  
**for Group Drivers**

My vehicle is in good operating condition.

I possess a valid driver's license and insurance.

I will obey all traffic laws, including the speed limit.

I will verify that all passengers have their seat belts on AND know how to unbuckle them.

I will not use a cell phone while transporting youth.

I will not smoke, vape, or drink alcohol during any Group activity.

I will conduct myself in a responsible, supervisory, and orderly manner.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name