



FRIENDSHIP

Christian Reformed Church

Safe Church Policy and Guidelines

“Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”

Ephesians 5:1-3

FCRC SAFE CHURCH POLICY AND GUIDELINES

FCRC Safe Church Policy and Guidelines		
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INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this document is to provide a vehicle enabling Friendship Christian Reformed Church (hereafter known as FCRC) to establish policies and guidelines to accomplish the following goals:

1. To make the church and its programs a safe place for children and adults. All other goals are subordinate to this.
2. To protect church workers from false allegations of abuse.
3. To reduce the church's legal risk by meeting the test of reasonable care.

Abuse, whether it involves a church member or members, or happens within the church programs and facilities, has devastating ramifications and consequences – to alleged victims, perpetrators and family members, as well as to the church family. This policy statement affirms FCRC's commitment to treat all members, leaders, and participants as image bearers of the Creator. The intent of the policy is to address all situations in a clear and consistent manner.

This policy focuses on abuse or suspected abuse, while on church property or while participating in a church ministry, of participants and/or leaders in our programs. These guidelines are intended to serve as a general framework to help create that safe and secure environment for FCRC ministries by setting policy and providing guidelines for the **screening** of staff and volunteers, for **preventing** harmful behavior, and for properly **reporting and responding** to such incidents. We pray that functioning within these guidelines will reasonably safeguard our fellowship from abuse and liability, and will allow us to remain a pure and wholesome witness to God's loving nurture.

Screening – FCRC has adopted a procedure for screening volunteers and paid staff. This procedure is described in this document.

Prevention – All volunteers and staff will agree to comply with the personal protection guidelines presented in this document.

Reporting and Responding – Individuals who become aware of possible child abuse will report it according to the guidelines contained within this document. We will show care and support for the individuals and families who are party to the allegations.

Any exceptions to this policy or to these guidelines, unless otherwise noted within this document, will be approved, in writing, by the FCRC Administrative Council.

Definitions:

See Appendix A. Additionally, see the "Acts of Synod 1992" and "Acts of Synod 1995" which provide more complete definitions for physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

SCREENING:

The following screening guidelines will be used for staff, ministry leaders, and volunteers involved in any FCRC ministry which involve children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These guidelines are in place for several reasons, to include:

- They communicate to church members and visitors that FCRC is serious about protecting our children from abuse by requesting information that may enable church leaders to screen an individual out of a program or position in which the individual may pose a risk to children.
- They may reduce incidents of abuse by deterring an individual that poses a threat to children and does not want to risk exposure from volunteering for a position.

The screening procedure will consist of the following steps:

1. **Staff/Volunteer Profile and Release Form:** All members, nonmembers, and staff, age eighteen (18) and over, who volunteer or work in a children's or youth ministry, will complete the FCRC Staff/Volunteer Profile and Release Form. A copy of this form is found in Appendix H of this policy. Completion of this form acknowledges that the individual has read the FCRC Safe Church Policy and Guidelines
2. **Records Check:** All staff/volunteers will be checked through the State of Michigan Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) system.

Additionally, some positions (either staff or volunteer) may require additional screening. Additional screening requirements may be required by the Personnel Team, the Education Team, specific ministry leaders, or by the Administrative Council. Decisions regarding these additional requirements will be made based on the following considerations: a new member/volunteer unknown to others, non-members desiring to participate as a volunteer, if questions arise regarding a response on the volunteer profile form or through information in the ICHAT system, or for staff/volunteers for specific positions. The additional screening requirements may include:

1. **Interview:** The appropriate ministry leader, staff person, or church team may conduct a personal interview with potential staff or volunteer applicants.
2. **Reference Checks:** Some individuals desiring to serve in ministry at FCRC may be requested to provide reference checks if further information would be helpful. All references will remain confidential.
3. **Additional Records Checks:** Some individuals may be required to consent to additional (criminal, driving, etc.) records check.

All volunteer and paid staff serving in ministry to children, youth, or vulnerable adults will submit to the guidelines for screening and will not serve in these ministries until approved. Any applicant for a volunteer position may withdraw without prejudice from the screening process. Anyone with a known conviction of child abuse will be denied a staff or volunteer position working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Anyone registered as a sex offender will not be allowed to serve in any ministry that involves contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth, or vulnerable adults will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Further, FCRC reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason.

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All screening information will be kept confidential with access limited to those individuals who make decisions about placing applicants in available positions.

PREVENTION:

Prevention of any abuse or suspected abuse of participants and/or leaders in our programs will include awareness, training, and compliance with guidelines.

Awareness:

The Education Team will review and recommend updates to the policy on an annual basis.

Ministry leaders whose ministry includes children/youth/vulnerable adults will review this policy annually and document their review to the Education Team. Ministry leaders will provide a copy of this policy to all new volunteers working with children/youth/vulnerable adults and will review the policy and guidelines information with their returning ministry volunteers as appropriate.

All staff and volunteers will read this policy and these guidelines. Specifically, to help provide a safe church environment, all staff and volunteers must be aware of and comply with the prevention guidelines in Appendixes B, C, and D.

The Administrative Council will insure that all council members familiarize themselves with this policy and these guidelines annually.

Training:

The Education Team will provide periodic training using seminars or workshops for all volunteers and staff. Attendance will be taken and kept on file.

All volunteers and staff will be urged to attend the training programs.

Compliance with guidelines:

All volunteers and staff will comply with the guidelines provided in the appendixes of this policy.

The guidelines are organized as follows:

APPENDIX B: Safe Church Guidelines for ages 0-4;

APPENDIX C: Safe Church Guidelines for ages 5-18;

APPENDIX D: Additional Safe Church Guidelines for FCRC Pastors and Staff.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING:

The FCRC Administrative Council will establish a Safe Church Team to be available to address any allegations and/or complaints of violation of FCRC's Safe Church Policy and Guidelines involving FCRC volunteers. The Safe Church Team will consist of the President of Administrative Council and four (4) additional members appointed by Administrative Council. The names of the FCRC Safe Church Team will be published in the Church Directory.

Additionally, our denominational Classis has established a Classis Safe Church Team to be available to address any allegations and/or complaints of violation of FCRC's Safe Church Policy and Guidelines involving FCRC staff. The name of our Classis Safe Church Team representative will be published in the Church Directory.

An individual who becomes aware of any suspected violation or suspicious behavior with regard to this policy will notify a member of the appropriate Safe Church Team, or a ministry leader, as soon as possible. We will show care and support for the individuals and families who are party to the allegations.

Allegations must be taken seriously and held in strict confidence, following the procedures set forth below:

1. Any individual who receives a report of abuse or suspects abuse, shall not attempt any investigation, but shall report the incident/suspicion to the appropriate ministry leader or a member of the appropriate Safe Church Team.
2. If a report involving a FCRC staff member is brought to the FCRC Safe Church Team, the FCRC Safe Church Team will immediately forward that information to the Classis Safe Church Team for response.
3. The Safe Church Team will determine whether further action is warranted.
4. FCRC's Safe Church Team will inform our attorney, our insurance company, and the denominational officials.
5. The FCRC Safe Church Team will obtain a written opinion from our attorney within 24 hours of any allegation or suspicion of child abuse/neglect reported to ministry leaders.
6. If the legal opinion advises to report the allegation or suspicion to law enforcement or other civil authorities (i.e. child protective service), the Safe Church Team will do so immediately. See Appendix F.
7. The Safe Church Team will inform any parents of minors involved (assuming the parents are not suspected of involvement in the alleged abuse).
8. The accused and the accuser shall be treated with dignity; the privacy of all parties shall be respected and confidentiality maintained. If the accused is a church worker (staff or volunteer), that person shall be relieved of their role until the investigation is complete.
9. If allegations are found not to be true, the accused may be reinstated in their role. If allegations are proven true, the offender will be treated according to the church order of the Christian Reformed Church for restoration of the sinner. Additionally, if termination of an employee is recommended as a result of alleged or suspected child abuse/neglect, the Safe Church Team will obtain a written opinion from our attorney.

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10. If allegations involving the church become public, FCRC's spokesperson (as designated by the FCRC Administrative Council) shall use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and convey the news to the congregation, being careful to safeguard the confidentiality and dignity of all parties involved, and indicating that every effort is being made to treat the allegation fairly and ethically.

Any steps taken in response to an allegation of abuse will be documented and kept in a secure, confidential file.

There may also be times when ministry staff and/or volunteers become aware of abuse or suspected abuse outside of the church and not involving a church ministry. There is certainly a moral, and oftentimes a legal, requirement to respond to abuse or suspected abuse -- even when it does not directly involve FCRC ministries. Staff and/or volunteers are urged to contact a pastor and/or a member of the FCRC Safe Church Team, or a known professional within this field, for assistance in dealing with this type of situation.

For additional information see:

- Appendix E, Responding to a Child's Report of Abuse;
- Appendix F, Reporting Abuse.

APPENDIX A

Definitions:

- A. Child/Youth – persons under the age of eighteen (18) years, unless legally emancipated through marriage or induction into military service.
- B. 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, which reinforce a sense of helplessness dependence on the abuser.
- C. FCRC Member – a person having gone through the required membership process at FCRC, to include a public profession of faith, and whose membership papers are maintained at FCRC.
- D. Ministry leader – a volunteer worker who is designated to head a ministry at FCRC.
- E. Physical Abuse – any intentional means of inflicting injury on another person whether a one-time event or a chronic pattern. Physical abuse may occur regardless of whether there is a cut, wound, mark, or bruise.
- F. Physical Neglect – not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care, which interferes with or prevents a child’s normal development.
- G. Public place – a place within sight and sound of others.
- H. Sexual Abuse – sexual exploitation or forced sexual intimacy of a person regardless of age or circumstances, which may or may not include physical contact.
- I. Staff – any worker who is compensated for ministry activities at FCRC.
- J. Volunteer – a worker who is not compensated for ministry activities at FCRC.
- K. Vulnerable Adult – an individual age eighteen (18) or over who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical disability requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently.

APPENDIX B
Safe Church Guidelines for Ages 0-4

General Guidelines

1. A minimum of two (2) volunteers will serve in these ministries whenever they are scheduled.
2. Follow the “rule of 3”: At least three (3) individuals (at least one being an adult) must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children or youth.
3. One on one meeting with children/youth away from the presence of other adults or group members is not allowed.
4. Classroom doors for this age group must have windows. Exceptions can be made, with ministry leader approval; however, for classrooms without windows in the doors, the door must be propped open.
5. Youth, age ten (10) and above, may serve as a volunteer in some ministries under direct adult supervision. Ministry leaders will determine minimum ages for their specific ministries; however, the minimum age will not be below age ten (10).
6. Ordinarily, only scheduled volunteers or substitutes will serve.
7. No volunteer will be allowed to take a child from the scheduled room to another part of the church except to a restroom as provided below.
8. Nursery and Wee Worship workers are requested to arrive a minimum of twenty (20) minutes prior to the start of the schedule service/activity. Parents are requested to remain with their children until volunteer supervision arrives.
9. Limit the display of physical affection to a brief hug or a pat on the back or forearm.
10. If a child needs medical attention, the parent (guardian) should be notified as soon as possible.

Restroom Assistance Guidelines

1. Only female staff/volunteers will assist small children in the restroom or change diapers.
2. A volunteer will change diapers or clothes only in the sight of another volunteer.
3. Volunteers will not change diapers or assist with toilet needs if a parent has requested to be contacted and wishes to assist with their own child.
4. When using the restroom, children will be accompanied by a volunteer to and from the restroom. Before any child enters the restroom, the volunteer will enter the restroom to make sure that it is safe.
5. Children should use the closest restroom to their ministry area. If occupied, a volunteer may escort the child to a different restroom.
6. For children who do not require assistance in the restroom, the volunteer must remain outside the restroom or stall door.
7. For children who require assistance, the volunteer must assist the child with the restroom stall door ajar or restroom door ajar (as appropriate).
8. When restrooms are directly accessible to children from the room where children’s activities are taking place and not accessible to the general public, children can be allowed to utilize the restroom alone.

Arrival and Dismissal Guidelines

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1. For nursery, the parent (guardian) must sign in their child with each visit. Special care instruction should be written in the designated area of the sign-in register. A nametag is to be placed on each child. Carry bags should be labeled with the name of the child.
2. For other child programs (i.e. Children's Worship), ministry volunteers will escort children to their respective classrooms.
3. Parent (guardian) will be allowed in the ministry area only for calming or assimilating a child to his new environment.
4. At least two (2) volunteers will remain in these ministries until all children have been claimed by a parent (guardian).
5. Parent (guardian) of children ages 0-4 will remain on church grounds during scheduled ministry time/ and/or attending a FCRC ministry for which this ministry is being provided. An exception for this guideline will apply for 4-year olds at Vacation Bible School.

Policy for Obtaining Parent (Guardian)

1. The parent (guardian) should be notified as soon as possible when a child has been crying for ten (10) minutes, is ill, or injured.
2. The number notification system will be used to obtain the parent (guardian) if available. If this system is not available, a volunteer will go to the parent (guardian) and return with them rather than bringing the child to them.

APPENDIX C

Safe Church Guidelines for Ages 5-18

General Guidelines

1. When youth groups are using the church facilities there shall be adult hall monitors to supervise activities in hallways and bathrooms.
2. Follow the “rule of 3”: At least three (3) individuals (at least one being an adult) must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children or youth.
3. Classroom doors must have windows or the door should be propped open.
4. Youth, age ten (10) and above, may serve as a volunteer in some ministries under direct adult supervision. Ministry leaders will determine minimum ages for their specific ministries; however, the minimum age will not be below age ten (10). Additionally, volunteers for the junior high and high school ministries will be at least three (3) years older than participants.
5. Limit the display of physical affection to a brief hug or a pat on the back or forearm.
6. Avoid misinterpretation of affection by choosing not to give individual gifts.

Restroom Assistance Guidelines

1. Children and youth are encouraged to take care of their personal needs to the best of their ability.
2. Children and youth with special needs will be assisted as pre-arranged with the parent (guardian).
3. When assistance is required, comply with the Restroom Assistance Guidelines provided for ages 0-4 in Appendix B.
4. Children and youth should use the closest restroom to their ministry area.

One-to-One Guidelines

1. One-on-one meetings with a child or youth away from the presence of other adults or group members are not allowed. An exception for this can be made for one-on-one spiritual counseling if the following conditions are complied with:
 - a. There is prior written approval of the minor’s parent or guardian.
 - b. There is advanced notification and consent of the ministry leader. In the case of the ministry leader requesting an exception, there must be advanced notification and consent from the appropriate supervising church team (i.e. Education Team).
 - c. The one-on-one counseling is limited in duration to thirty (30) minutes and in frequency to a maximum of four (4) sessions.
 - d. The volunteer or staff person will keep a record of each meeting.
2. For high school ministries, volunteers, staff, and ministry leaders will avoid cross-gender one-on-one meetings; even when the exception above is applied.

Arrival and Dismissal Guidelines

1. Volunteers, staff, and ministry leaders must strive to arrive ten (10) minutes prior to the ministry start time. Youth should not arrive any earlier than ten (10) minutes prior to starting time. Leaders are not responsible for children or youth who arrive for ministries earlier than ten (10) minutes prior to starting time.

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2. Youth may only be picked up/dropped off at the church facility entrances for that particular ministry. There is to be no waiting in the parking lot.
3. Specific permission from the parent (guardian) is needed for a volunteer/staff to take a child/youth home.
4. At least two (2) volunteers will remain in these ministries until all youth have been picked up by their parent (guardian).

Overnight Outing Guidelines

1. Parent (guardian) consent forms, medical release forms will be required for each young person. Leaders will have these forms.
2. Sleeping areas will be off limits to members of the opposite sex.
3. Male/female contact will not be allowed after the designated bedtime.
4. Use of alcohol and tobacco products is forbidden for leaders and youth when participating in these outings.

APPENDIX D

Additional Safe Church Guidelines for FCRC Pastors and Staff

General Guidelines

1. Establish clearly defined boundaries and maintain them in your interpersonal relationships. Acknowledge the risk of meeting alone in a congregant or counselee's home or in church offices. Keep accurate records of any pastoral care sessions and maintain them in utmost confidentiality. Records to be maintained for an indefinite period of time and must be made available if deemed necessary.
2. Be accountable to a colleague, spouse, or pastoral relations committee to ensure that you are maintaining proper boundaries in your interpersonal relationships. Openly discuss the threats to those boundaries.
3. Give adequate 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 the feedback and counsel of others who supervise you or to whom you report when they express concern about your behavior or attitudes.
4. Be sensitive and honest about your sexuality and needs and about appropriate avenues for proper fulfillment and mastery of those needs so you conduct yourself in a responsible, moral way.
5. Use your office to promote the spiritual and interpersonal growth and healing of individuals of the congregation within which you work and the denomination you serve. (i.e. sermons, planning activities, new programs, etc.)
6. If you are a member of the Safe Church Team, be familiar with the laws governing reporting of abuse situations within the church and within the community. Refrain from investigating allegations; notify police, child protection, or legal counsel when faced with allegations against a church member or leader.

APPENDIX E

Responding to a Child's Report of Abuse

- Take the child seriously when he/she tells the story.
- Avoid judgmental statements such as, "I think you just had a bad dream."
- Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story, since this may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with the child.
- Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way the child reports it did.
- Do not make promises to the child that you will not tell anyone what has been shared with you.
- Remind the child that whatever happened was not his/her fault.
- Remind the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened to him/her.
- Tell the child that you want to find help so the incident can be prevented from happening again.
- Do not offer a child a reward for telling the story nor promise a gift if the child tells another adult.
- Reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- 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.
- Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child's underwear or clothing; only observe those bruises that are accessible. In some communities, removing a child's clothing even to confirm a report of abuse is a violation of the law.
- Do not investigate the child's story; rather, listen to the story and take notes immediately afterwards while it is still fresh in your memory.
- Do not tell the child he/she has been abused.
- Offer to support the child and remind the child that you care about him/her.
- Follow through in consecutive weeks and months by speaking to the child and offering support.

Appears in Preventing Child Abuse: A Guide for Churches, by Beth A. Swagman, Faith Alive Publisher

APPENDIX F
Reporting Abuse

Reporting Abuse in the United States/Michigan

If the victim is a child under the age of eighteen (18), notify the Children's Protective Services if:

- The child is related to abuser and/or is living in the same residence.
- The child is being abused by parents, siblings, or non-relative either living in the same home or during custodial arrangements.
- The child's safety is at risk, and parents are not protecting the child.

When the victim is a child under the age of eighteen (18), notify the local police department if:

- The victim does not know the abuser.
- The victim is not related to the abuser and does not live with the abuser.
- The victim may have contact with abuser with protection.
- The victim is under the authority of the abuser, who may be a babysitter, a school teacher, choir director, and the like.

APPENDIX G

Administrative Responsibilities and Record-Keeping

Record-keeping for ordained staff:

The FCRC council clerk (or elder of communication) will maintain all documents for the ordained staff with regard to the FCRC safe church policy and guidelines. This will include: the “Volunteer Profile and Release Form”, reference checks, criminal records checks, etc.

Record-keeping for non-ordained staff:

The FCRC Personnel Team will maintain all documents for the non-ordained staff with regard to the FCRC safe church policy and guidelines. This will include: the “Volunteer Profile and Release Form”, reference checks, criminal records checks, etc.

Record-keeping for volunteers:

The FCRC Bulletin Secretary (who is also the Membership Records Clerk) will maintain all documents for the volunteers with regard to the FCRC safe church policy and guidelines. This will include: the “Volunteer Profile and Release Form”, reference checks, criminal records checks, etc.

A summary of leadership/administrative responsibilities:

- Ministry Leaders –
 - Ensure all volunteers have completed the “Volunteer Profile and Release Form”.
 - Make decisions on additional screening, as required.
 - Review this policy and these guidelines annually.
- Education Team –
 - Annually review this policy and these guidelines.
 - Ensure all ministry leaders have reviewed the policy annually.
 - Conduct training with regard to this policy, as required.
- Administrative Council
 - Review this policy annually with all council members.
 - Establish the FCRC Safe Church Team. Provide for training for the Safe Church Team, as required.

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**APPENDIX H
FCRC Staff/Volunteer Profile and Release Form**

Print Name: _____
(First) (Middle) (Last)

Former Name(s) and Dates Used: _____

Current Address Since: _____
(Mo/Yr) (Street) (City) (Zip/State)

If you have been at this address for less than 7 years, please use the reverse side to provide previous addresses during that time.

Telephone Number(s): _____ Date of birth (include year): _____

I acknowledge that I have been given a copy of Friendship Christian Reformed Church's Safe Church Policy and Guidelines and that I have read the policy and agree to abide by it.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

In order to help provide a safe and secure environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities, we will screen all volunteers. FCRC utilizes the State of Michigan Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) system for initial screening. Additionally, please answer the following questions to assist us in determining whether additional screening is necessary prior to your serving in any FCRC children's and youth ministry:

1. Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty or no contest to any criminal offense of any kind? YES NO
2. Are you aware of any health problems (i.e. communicable diseases, emotional disorder, etc.) or any traits or tendencies (i.e. struggles with pornography, anger management problems, etc.) you possess that could pose any threat to children, youth, or adults with disabilities? YES NO
3. Have you ever participated in, or been accused, convicted or pleaded guilty or no contest to abuse or any sexual misconduct? YES NO

Your signature below is a waiver for police departments to release information pertaining to you, and authorization for FCRC and its designated agents and representatives to conduct a comprehensive review of your background causing a consumer report and/or an investigative consumer report to be generated for employment and/or volunteer purposes and you release them from any liability from such disclosure. If FCRC requests, you will submit a "Request for Central Registry Clearance" (DHS-194 Form), with the results being sent to FCRC.

The information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that my name will be submitted for the purpose of affirming my character and fitness for children's and youth ministry. I agree to serve spiritually, with integrity, and I will participate in training and discipleship to enhance my ministry to children and youth.

Signature _____ Date _____