

ANN ARBOR
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

SAFE CHURCH
POLICY

MAY 2016

I. Introduction

The Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church (AACRC) through our Council, staff, and ministry leaders affirm that our principles and purposes for ministry require that we respect and protect all ages as they participate in the various ministries of this church. The devastating emotional, physical, and spiritual trauma to victims, the destructive consequences of abuse, and the effects on those falsely accused, and the name of Christ and the church, make it essential that the church take the appropriate steps to maximize safety for all within the church environment.

It is for these reasons this policy is implemented. All church staff and volunteers involved in ministry are required to comply with this policy.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to reduce the risk of abuse, be it physical, sexual, or emotional, in the church and in church sponsored activities by creating an awareness of it and providing insights and tools for the prevention of it for volunteers, staff and leaders. The necessary procedures for reporting abuse are also included.

II. Safe Church Team

The Safe Church Team will be made up of the Coordinator of Family and Youth Ministries, the church office administrator and Pastoral Staff. This team may also appoint other staff members and/or the Chair of the Administrative Board to assist in the tasks of implementing this policy. The Safe Church team will prepare an annual report for the Admin Board, reporting the number of background checks completed, and the number outstanding.

III. Safe Church Policy

Anyone with a history of child abuse, molestation and/or physical violence against a child or adult, felony or misdemeanor sexual conduct, other documented abuse, or who is deemed by the shepherding elders to be unfit to serve, shall not serve in ministry at AACRC. Anyone serving in ministry at AACRC shall follow the policy as described in this document.

In all cases AACRC staff and volunteers shall comply with the laws of the State of Michigan. Any person who is an "Individual Required to Report Child Abuse and

Neglect" under the laws of the state of Michigan (MCLA 722.621 et seq.) shall continue to have that obligation at all times. The Pastors will follow the Michigan law requiring immediate reporting of any suspected or alleged abuse to the authorities. Others who are not mandated by law to report to the authorities may, in order to maintain confidentiality, choose to report any suspected or alleged abuse directly to the appropriate state or law enforcement authority. If the suspected or alleged abuse is reported to the Pastors, they must disclose who brought the issue to their attention.

This policy cannot anticipate all possible situations, and therefore does not dictate the behavior of church workers in all situations. Church workers are expected to use their best judgment in balancing a given situation with the paramount concern of safety.

IV. Volunteer and Staff Screening Procedure

The church will rely on the Safe Church Policy Volunteer Form, shepherding elder approval, background checks, and other information to which it has access in the screening process for volunteers who work with youth, and Friendship Ministry volunteers (applicants). Such procedures assist the church in attempting to maintain the safety and well-being of the individuals entrusted to its care.

Safe Church Policy Volunteer Form

All applicants must complete and submit the Safe Church Policy Volunteer Form (form) (Appendix B). The forms will be kept in a confidential file accessed only by the Safe Church team. Every five years, applicants must complete and submit the form again. If any information provided on the form materially changes, an applicant shall, within seven days of that change, inform the Safe Church team of the facts and circumstances of the change.

Shepherding Elder Approval

Shepherding elders must approve all applicants. The shepherding elders will base their approval on their knowledge of each candidate. If the shepherding elders are not adequately familiar with a candidate, they may ask other members, staff, or other approved volunteers to help in making this decision. In some cases, the shepherding elders may ask the Safe Church team members to conduct an interview to better evaluate a candidate.

An applicant must be in regular AACRC attendance for a minimum of six months. The shepherding elders shall not approve an applicant candidate until that time has

elapsed. An applicant can be an assistant or helper to an approved church worker before this time, observing the guideline to have two adults present when working with youth and Friends (as applicable).

Background Check

The Church's office administrator will conduct a background check on each applicant. By filling out the form, the applicant gives permission to conduct this search. The purpose of the background check is to make our best efforts to protect the people in our care.

The Safe Church team (hereafter referred to as the team) will safeguard the information received. The team shall take all reasonable precautions such that the information will only be used for the purpose of screening volunteers and employees, and will not be disseminated to any other person or agency.

The team will review the results of each background check and decide if it discloses any information which would make the applicant inappropriate for the position. Upon review, a team member should sign and date the background check form to document that it has been reviewed. Those who have already been approved by the shepherding elders, and who have a clear background check may begin serving as leaders in their programs.

If the background check is not clear, the circumstances of the information may be discussed with the applicant. If the team decides that the applicant is not appropriate, the applicant will be informed and the applicant will not be allowed to serve or assist in any programs.

A copy of each background check will be kept on file and stored in a locked file with limited access. The team will review the list of youth ministry and Friendship volunteers on a yearly basis to see who is within a year of their five-year check anniversary. They will then be contacted in the fourth year, to give plenty of time for receiving the new forms and providing a new background check.

Special Volunteer Requirements

1. All those who volunteer with youth and Friends shall participate in yearly training/information sessions. Volunteers must do a mandatory yearly review of the *Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Guidelines for Conduct* (See Appendix C)

2. A person must have attended the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church for a period of six months before they can begin volunteering in a leadership role. Prior to that time, the volunteer may be an assistant or helper to an approved youth worker before this time, observing the guideline to have two adults present when working with youth and Friends.
3. All volunteers and paid staff who work with youth and Friends must have an application on file, have been approved by the shepherding elders and have passed a background security check.
4. If a person is a state or federally registered sex offender, or has a history of a child abuse, molestation of a child, physical violence against a child or adult, felony or misdemeanor sexual conduct, or other documented abuse, then never will he/she be able to volunteer with any of the youth or Friendship programs in the church.
5. If a person is suspected of abuse, then he/she must take a leave of absence from their role until an investigation has been completed. If, after an investigation has been concluded, it is determined that the person has been involved in abuse of another person, this person will be immediately dismissed from his/her current role.
6. A volunteer or church leader removed or dismissed from their position or office should not be considered for re-entry or reinstatement without the advice of legal counsel.
7. Sexual, physical or emotional abuse of a parishioner by a volunteer or church leader will not be tolerated.

V. Prevention

Youth Discipline Policy

1. Corporal punishment is not permitted. Corporal punishment includes, but is not limited to, slapping, hitting, pushing and touching in an aggressive manner.
2. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes, but is not limited to, yelling, hurling insults, verbally embarrassing a child and threatening a child expressly or by implication.
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
4. Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children's/youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting.
8. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
 - Timeouts for young children should not last longer in minutes than the age of the child. (A three year old should not have to sit longer than three minutes in time-out).
 - Whenever possible, try to avoid having to discipline a child by choosing one or more of the following options:
 - Distract the child with another activity
 - Help the child focus on another, more acceptable behavior
 - Isolate the child from others if another volunteer is available to assist.
 - When nothing seems to be working, volunteers should get help.

Youth Affection Policy

- Working with small children requires some bodily contact. Gentle, casual touching on a child's head, arms, and hands will be permitted.
- Kissing is inappropriate.
- Lap sitting is inappropriate for children over nursery age. Instead encourage children to sit next to you. To console a child crying uncontrollably and in sight of other adults, you may hold a child on your lap until the crying stops.
- Avoid body-to-body hugs. One arm hugs, side hugs or hand to arm hugs are permissible.
- Avoid giving or receiving back rubs.

Youth Supervision Policy

An adult should avoid being alone with one child, preferably having two approved adults present when youth ministries are taking place. When one student is left alone with an adult due to another student needing to temporarily leave the room, the adult will bring the student to another class, or a public place such as the fellowship hall. When this is not possible, the door left open and/or a window in the door must allow observation from outside the room. Youth workers may assist when appropriate.

Classes that are generally held with more than two individuals present, such as Sunday school classes, will be dismissed or combined with another class if there is only one teacher and one student present, unless prior arrangements are made with the families involved.

Transportation to and from meetings and events should be provided by the family. A Youth worker may provide transportation if at least three people are in the vehicle. Other arrangements may be made with prior parental consent. Once youth have arrived at any AACRC youth ministries event, they may not drive other youth or children during the event.

For overnight activities, separate gender sleeping quarters must be maintained, and there must be at least one leader and two youths in each sleeping area. Activities and common spaces must be supervised by at least two leaders

Bathroom Assistance Policy

If restroom assistance is necessary, an adult (not youth helper) may assist but must leave the restroom and stall doors open/unlatched. They must not be in the restroom any longer than necessary. The attendant should remain outside if possible. It is expected that children Kindergarten age and older will not need assistance. Children through first grade age will be escorted to the bathroom, even if a child does not need assistance. The adult will wait outside the open bathroom door. Children in second grade thru fifth grade may use the bathrooms without being accompanied by an adult.

If an adult requires assistance to the bathroom, the door should be left ajar/unlatched as appropriate and the minimal assistance required for safety should be provided.

VI. Reporting

Signs and symptoms of abuse and reports of abuse need to be taken seriously. A volunteer/staff person should not conduct an investigation of the matter, but should report to one of the Pastors. If any member or non-member can provide information verifying that a volunteer or staff member have had formal charges filed against them for abuse, one of the Pastors should be informed immediately.

Responding to a Report of Abuse from a Child

Take the child seriously when he/she tells the story. Write down as much of the account as you are able to do as soon as you are able. Reassure the child. Remind the child that you care about him/her. Remain emotionally calm and even-keeled in the presence of the child. Make no promises to the child that you will not tell what has been shared. Do not offer a reward for telling story. Do not tell the child he/she has been abused. Do not talk about police. Do not investigate the story. Repeat the story only to a Pastor or the President of Council, if a Pastor is accused. Remind the child that it was good to tell someone and that it was not his/her fault. Observe whatever is accessible without removing clothing. Do not ask the child for permission to check beneath his/her clothing.

Policy for Reporting Suspected or Alleged Abuse

All volunteers are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to one of the Pastors (ASAP) within 24 hours. In the pastor's absence (or if he/she is the accused), the report is to be made to the Council President, or a member of the Safe

Church team. The Pastors will report to the authorities, as required by law. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate or investigate the alleged or suspected abuse.

The parent(s) / guardian of the alleged victim (as applicable) must be informed immediately in a face-to-face meeting by the Pastor or his/her designee of the information that has come to light about their child(ren).

The team should handle matters such as informing the liability carrier, establishing a care plan for those involved, and preparing for disclosure to the church, if deemed necessary.

The Pastor shall maintain the records of reported incidents and will keep such records confidential, accurately and completely documenting all efforts at handling the incident.

The church will provide appropriate and necessary assistance to the victim, the offender, the local child protective services (CPS) as appropriate and local law enforcement agencies. So far as it is consistent with our legal duties, as well as our spiritual concern for all involved, we will work to maintain confidentiality.

Policy Regarding Alleged Offenders

- If the child's parent/guardian is the suspected abuser, the CPS or police will be notified by one of the pastors and will in turn notify the parent/guardian of their investigation.
- If staff or volunteer is the suspected abuser, the alleged offender must be informed by a pastor, Chair of Council, or a member of the Safe Church team of the allegations and must be suspended from participating in all service roles in the church until an investigation is done by the proper authorities.
- If the allegations are found to be false, the censure on service will be lifted.
- If the allegations are found to be true, the offender must continue under the censure on service and be dealt with by the pastors and Council.
- If a paid employee is the alleged offender, salary and other benefits will be continued during the period of suspension and investigation. If the allegations are found to be true, salary and all other benefits will be discontinued and the employee will be let go.

Policy Regarding Response to Media

If an incident of abuse becomes a public matter such as at the time of arrest, the media has the right to report such incidents. This policy intends to assist Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church's leadership to thoughtfully prepare for and respond to the media's awareness of an abusive event, while protecting the victims of such attacks and facilitating the legal process.

The identity of the victims or survivors of such circumstances must be held confidential. Only an adult victim or adult survivor can give consent to release his/her name for publication. Any report of child abuse made to the police directly or to the police via Child Protection Services becomes a felony investigation. Information in the form of a media release, news conference, or prepared statement on a felony investigation must be prepared and released by the Police Department. Legal advisors, police department's media officer and other experts should be consulted before any statements are read or made. The Pastors or the Council President, if one of the Pastors is the alleged offender, will be the official spokespersons for AACRC for any media responses. Statements to reporters or to the media may not be made by the church's staff or volunteers regarding any ongoing investigation of child abuse or neglect.

VII. Best Practices for Adult Ministries

Everyone has different levels of feeling comfortable and safe. It is important to be aware of other people's boundaries, as well as to communicate our own, to create a Welcoming and Healing environment as we gather and work together. The following are a list of "common sense" reminders which assist in building healthy boundaries:

- Try to gather with more than 2 people present, or with other people in the church building at the same time
- Meet with another person of the same gender if you can
- Restrict home or office visits to about an hour at a time and no more than once a week
- For office visits, the door should be fitted with a window and you should be visible through the window
- If a door does not have a window, leave the door open and remain visible from the doorway

- Technology creates a new form of connection (email, texting, phone calls, etc.) and each one is a form of connection that can increase daily or weekly contact beyond what is healthy
- Be mindful of how personal touch can be interpreted (a hand on the shoulder, handshake, or brief hug have varying levels of appropriateness – when in doubt avoid physical touch)
- Be mindful of physical space and physical boundaries of others (for example, some people may be uncomfortable with sharing a couch)
- Open, honest, and direct communication is important. If you feel uncomfortable, say something. If you suspect someone feels uncomfortable, ask.

VIII. Compliance by Friendship Program

Workers and volunteers that participate in the church's Friendship Ministry shall ensure that the appropriate guidelines enumerated in the Safe Church Policy are complied with and implemented with respect to their ministry. This includes: reporting any evidence of trauma or abuse (be it emotional, physical, or sexual), to follow AACRC's volunteer screening process, joining others to avoid one student and one teacher being alone in a room, and abiding by the bathroom policy with the understanding that there is a wide range of functionality within Friendship Ministry.

IX. Compliance by Non-AACRC Programs Using the Facility

AACRC is not responsible for the safety of youth ministered to by other organizations using AACRC facilities. Organizations and individuals that utilize the facilities of the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church for the ministry, education, or care of youth are responsible for maintaining the safety of those youth. A copy of the policy will be made available to the organization using our facility, and must be signed on an annual basis. Ministries not directly supervised by the AACRC council will be expected to abide by the basic tenets of this policy, though not subject to completion of volunteer forms or approval by elders.

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS FOUND IN THIS POLICY

- A. 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.
- B. 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 person’s normal development.
- C. Sexual Abuse – sexual exploitation or forced sexual intimacy of a person regardless of age or circumstance, which may or may not include physical contact.
- D. Emotional Abuse – attempting to control a person’s life through words, threats, and fear, destroying a person’s self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation, which reinforce a sense of helplessness dependence on the abuser.
- E. Child / Minor / Youth – persons under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated through marriage or induction into military service
- F. Friend – a young person or adult who participates in Friendship Ministry, which is a non-denominational program designed to provide loving support and fellowship to people with intellectual disabilities
- G. Member – having gone through required membership process and welcomed as a communicant member.
- H. Non-member – have not gone through the required process of membership required by AACRC.
- I. Staff – individuals paid hourly or salary by the church and serve in any area, which brings them into contact with persons within the context of direct contact or care and supervision.
- J. Volunteer – individuals who are not paid for serving in a church program or who have direct contact with minors or adults in their care or supervision

APPENDIX B

ANN ARBOR CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

SAFE CHURCH POLICY VOLUNTEER FORM

This form is to be completed by all who have a desire to work with **youth or friendship ministry programs** of our church, with the intention of updating every 5 years. It will be used to assist the church in preventing abuse of people who participate in our church ministry programs, as well as a means of protecting volunteers in those programs. Please fill it out completely and honestly and be prepared to give appropriate detail if asked. Upon completion, return it to the person that gave it to you, or to a member of the Safe Church Team.

I attend this church regularly: No Yes For: less than 6 mos less than 2 yrs more than 2 yrs

I do not attend this church, but am a member of the following local church _____

I have been a ministry worker in this church for _____ years.

I have worked in ministries in other churches: No Yes

If Yes, please describe _____

I have had education or training that has prepared me to work with children: No Yes

If so, describe:

Have you ever been convicted of a sex-related crime? No Yes

If yes, did the crime involve minors? No Yes

Have you ever been convicted of a crime involving the welfare, health, safety or victimization of a minor? No Yes

Have you been arrested for a crime for which the accusation has not been resolved? No Yes

I have not have engaged in behavior or have certain attitudes or feelings that may affect the way I relate to youth, or may affect the way others perceive me if they were to become aware of that behavior, attitude or feeling. If you checked "have," please describe:

This area used by Staff and Safe Church Team

Agreement with this Safe Church Policy

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the attached Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Guidelines, and that I, to the best of my ability and with the Lord's help, will comply with it, and will seek to assist the church in its efforts to maintain a safe environment for all the people involved in the programs of our church and those that utilize our facilities.

I also give the Church permission to conduct a background search. I hereby release the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church from any liability resulting from the use of this information. I understand that AACRC will keep this information confidential, and accessed only by the Safe Church team.

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Middle Name: _____

Former / Maiden Name(s): _____ Male/Female _____

Date of Birth: _____

Street Address: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Other States that you have resided _____

Signature of Candidate: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church Safe Church

Guidelines for Conduct for Youth Ministries

Youth, under this policy, are those under age 18.

An adult should avoid being alone with one child, preferably having two approved adults present when youth ministries are taking place. When this is not possible, the door should be left open and/or a window in the door must allow observation from outside the room. Youth helpers may assist when appropriate.

Classes that are generally held with more than two individuals present, such as Sunday School classes, will be dismissed or combined with another class if there is only one teacher and one student present, unless prior arrangements are made with the families involved. When one student is left alone with an adult due to another student needing to temporarily leave the room, the adult will bring the student to another class, or a public place such as the fellowship hall.

Nursery attendants, teachers of toddlers (ages 2 and 3), and their youth helpers shall wear attendant/teacher/helper nametags. They shall also register with the time that they are serving.

Children must be signed into and out of the nursery or toddler classroom by their parents. Children will be released only to their parents or, by prior parental consent, to other known adults.

An adult nursery attendant shall perform any necessary diaper changing in clear view of another nursery attendant or helper.

If restroom assistance is necessary, an adult (not youth helper) may assist but must leave the restroom and stall doors open. They must not be in the restroom any longer than necessary. The attendant should remain outside if possible. It is expected that children Kindergarten age and older will not need assistance.

Any unreasonable or inappropriate touching is forbidden. A warm handshake, an arm around a child's shoulder, or a brief hug may be appropriate but only when done in the presence of other people.

A one on one meeting with a youth is permissible in a public place such as a restaurant.

Transportation to and from meetings and events should be provided by the family. A youth leader/teacher may provide transportation if at least three people are in the vehicle. Other arrangements may be made with prior parental consent. Once youth have arrived at any AACRC youth ministries event, they may not drive other youth or children during the event.

For overnight activities, separate gender sleeping quarters must be maintained, and there must be at least one leader and two youths in each sleeping area. Activities and common spaces must be supervised by at least two leaders.

When discipline of a youth displaying inappropriate behavior is necessary:

- Do not use physical force in discipline. An exception: if the child's behavior is harmful to others, and the child disobeys correction, the teacher/leader may take the child firmly by the shoulder, and escort the child out of the situation. If this exception occurs, the parent(s) of the child must be advised immediately.
- Do not shout or otherwise verbally abuse a child.
- Involve the parents regarding any difficulties with a child as soon as possible.
- If behavior is a recurring problem, report it to the ministry staff as soon as possible.

Youth ministry staff and volunteers should immediately report any allegation or suspicion of abuse to an AACRC pastor, the Council President, or a member of the Safe Church team. The Pastors will report these to the authorities. To maintain confidentiality, a person making a report may do so directly to the authorities as the Pastors must disclose who brought the issue to their attention.