

A Safe Church

We'd all like to think that our church is a safe place, not only for children, but for every person. Our ancient tradition of hospitality requires that everyone who comes under our roof, even our enemies, be treated with respect and generosity.

Unfortunately, we cannot simply assume this is so. We must take self-conscious and direct actions to ensure the church is safe. This is especially true in relation to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse thrives in an atmosphere where some people have power and some do not and where secrets are kept. Our task is to create an environment where the weak are protected and where there are no opportunities for secret behavior.

What is Safety?

Safety means one's person – spiritual, emotional and physical – is protected from injury. For example:

Spiritual safety

- Are differences respected and are the needs of vulnerable persons (children, the aged, and minorities) understood and respected?

- Are efforts made to represent and include differences in the life of the church? In preaching? In prayer? In programs?
- Are efforts made to invite and welcome different persons into the community?

Emotional safety

- **No putdowns.** Do people refrain from personal attacks and gossip?
- Are kindness and civility community norms?
- Is confidentiality respected and protected?

Physical safety

- Are the facilities clean and well lighted?
- Are exits clearly marked and clear of debris?
- Has the church been checked for fire hazards – electrical, chemical, and refuse collection?
- Are fire extinguishers clearly visible and in working order?
- Are chemicals and poisons properly labeled and stored?
- Are food preparation areas clean?
- Are NYS Health Department guidelines for the preparation of food properly observed?

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

Preventing child sexual abuse means reducing the opportunities for sexual abuse.

Training

- All church employees and all adults working with children must be trained in child sexual abuse prevention and reporting. (Vestry members, Sunday School teachers, and youth advisors are expected to participate.)

The Two Adult Rule

- A single adult should never be alone with a child and invisible to other adults and children. Meetings and classes should be planned so there are always two adults immediately available (within earshot).
- Trips with children in cars or buses should be planned so that there are two adults in each vehicle or readily available.

Meeting Spaces

- Meetings with children should be held in public spaces with the lights on.

- Drapes and doors should be open. Doors should be unlocked and have windows.
- Parents should always be welcome.
- If there is a need for a private conversation, the door should be open and the participants visible to others.

Overnight Meetings

- Overnight meetings should be planned so that there are two adults for each sex. Adults should not sleep or dress in the same spaces as children, but should be immediately available.
- Privacy should be provided for washing and dressing.

Language and Behavior

- Adults should take care to avoid sexual references, adult jokes and innuendo.
- Children and teenagers should be encouraged to refrain from sexual talk.
- Older teens should understand that a difference of three years in age is enough to consider sexual relating as sexual abuse.
- Shouting at or striking a child is never permitted as a means of discipline.

- **No secrets.** Nothing should occur that we would not willingly share with parents and church leaders.

Parental Involvement

- All meetings away from the church require permission in writing from parents.
- Trips and overnight meetings require parental permission in writing and insurance information for emergency medical treatment.
- Children should not be released to anyone other than a parent without signed permission.

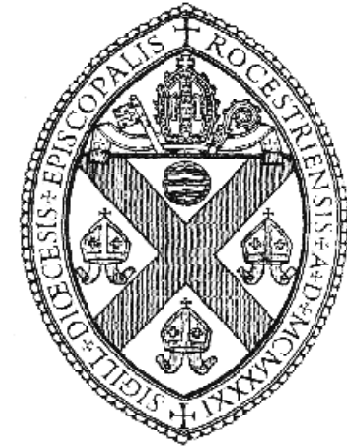
Reporting Sexual Abuse

- Policy and boundary violations should be reported to the program director or rector.
- Sexual abuse should be reported immediately to the rector. Sexual abuse is a crime and will be reported to the proper authorities.
- Children should not be promised that secrets will be kept or abusers protected.
- Children should be assured they will be protected.

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Common Sense Guidelines for a Safe Church

Making Child Sexual Abuse Less Likely



What to Do to Prevent Problems