

Safe Church Policy

Rochester Christian Reformed Church

INTRODUCTION

As a church we believe that the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of our children is vital. Therefore, it is our intent to ensure that all church activities involving children are consistent with the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the Christian tradition of nurturing all children involved in our ministries.

The following policy is designed to make certain that we as a church have wise and carefully thought out policies in place to guide all those in youth ministries and childcare.

The leaders of Rochester Christian Reformed Church request the cooperation of the members of our church who must abide by the rules of this policy.

STRUCTURE

The Council takes very seriously the nurturing and protection of the children and young people in our church. It is the intended goal of the Council to review, revise, and approve the Safe Church Policy every three years.

All volunteers above age 18 for child and youth ministries need to fill out the Background Check Form. In addition, these volunteers need to fill out the Declaration of Agreement and Understanding Form annually. Volunteers are responsible to familiarize themselves with the Safe Church Policy and contact a member of the Council should they have questions.

The Consent to Participate Form needs to be filled out annually by all participants in Youth Programs (GEMS, Cadets, Junior and Sr. High Youth Groups). The Program Leader is responsible to have these forms filled out by the parents of participating youth. Forms and information may be kept in the Church Office.

The Safe Church policy will be emailed to all Program Leaders and copies made available in the church office. All forms will also be available in the church office. Forms includes: Background Check Form, Declaration of Agreement and Understanding Form, Consent to Participate Authorization Form, Incident Documentation Form.

MINISTRIES COVERED IN THIS POLICY

Nursery

Children's Worship

Sunday School

Youth Ministries - Cadets, GEMS, Junior and Senior High School Youth Group

Vacation Bible School, Outreach Activities, Summer's Best Two Weeks and any other activities involving children or youth.

DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT TERMS

Adult: A person at least 18 years of age.

Appropriate Conduct: Conduct that one could reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by the child's parents or guardians and the Staff and Council of this congregation. Any action that is questionable should be evaluated by any of these entities.

Child: A person under 18 years of age.

Child Abuse: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare which occurs through non-accidental physical, sexual or mental injury. Any behavior of a questionable nature shall, for the purpose of this policy, be deemed abusive until determined otherwise.

Church Staff / Program Director / Leader / Worker / Volunteer: Any person over age 18 serving in an official paid capacity and/or a volunteer role in leadership or assistance. All persons are subject to a background check done by the Elders before assuming their role as volunteer or paid staff. All persons must also sign a Declaration of Agreement and Understanding prior to being a worker.

Hall Monitor: Adult person who checks on the activity in the various classrooms.

Helpers: Non-adults who assist adult leaders or volunteers in any program and/or activity. Minimum age for helpers is ten (10) years old.

Sexual Abuse: Engaging in any sexual contact or non-contact maltreatment with a child which may be violent or non-violent.

RULES OF CONDUCT FOR ALL WORKERS

All program leaders should pray regularly for the children in our church, thanking God for the privilege of ministering to them and asking Him to protect them from any kind of harm; workers should also pray that God would give them wisdom and discernment so that they will be sensitive to ways to help and protect the children.

Perception of Misconduct: Workers must avoid even the appearance of misconduct, abusive conduct or corporal discipline. This is needed in order to maintain parental confidence and to avoid mistaken allegations.

Discipline: No form of physical punishment is ever appropriate by a program leader. If misbehavior is happening in the classroom, a parent should be notified to become involved.

Counseling: Counseling should be done in a public place where private conversation is possible but occurs in full view of others.

Hall Monitor: Periodically checks classrooms where there is only one teacher present and the bathrooms until the program ends and all the youth have left.

One-on-One: At no time should a youth worker take a child to another part of the church alone. If the need arises to talk with a child one-on-one, it should be done in an environment in which others are present to view adult and child. (See appendix)

Open Door Rule: All youth events will be open door. All volunteer workers, parents, and church members have a right to observe any youth activity.

Overnight Activities: At least two (2) adults should supervise overnight activities. Separate sleeping quarters will be maintained for males and females. Sleeping quarters are off limit to the opposite sex, with two (2) adults present per group. All church policies are in effect at off-site locations as well.

Touching: Hugging and other forms of appropriate physical affection are important to a child's development and are generally suitable in our church setting. Physical affection must be appropriate to the age of the child. Touching must be a response to the child's need for comfort, encouragement or affection, not the adult's emotional need. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Transportation: A minimum of three people are allowed to ride in a vehicle together, one adult with two children or two adults with one child. Volunteer drivers must obey all traffic laws and related appropriate conduct when transporting children and youth.

Parental Contact: Program leaders must have emergency contact information readily available in case of an emergency.

The Church Directory of members should be available. For guests and visitors, information should be gathered by the responsible party if parent(s) of child will be leaving the building. For off-site youth activities, leaders are responsible to bring along emergency contact information with them.

SPECIFIC RULES FOR SPECIFIC MINISTRIES

NURSERY:

All persons desiring to serve in Nursery need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

A minimum of one (1) adult and one (1) helper need to be in attendance whenever nursery is provided. Members of the same family should not be scheduled together unless there is a third unrelated volunteer scheduled. Helpers must be ten (10) years of age or above, male or female.

Bathroom Policy - Bathroom use by pre-schoolers will be monitored by a Nursery volunteer. While the child uses the bathroom, the volunteer should remain outside the bathroom with the door propped open. If the child needs assistance, the volunteer should enter the bathroom to assist the child and leave the door open until both the child and volunteer exit. Diaper changes shall be done by an adult volunteer in the nursery.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parents(s) should be notified immediately.

An adult volunteer will remain until the last child has been picked up.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the Nursery Coordinator and/or Council.

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP :

All persons desiring to serve in Children's Worship need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

A minimum of one (1) adult and one (1) helper need to be in attendance whenever Children's Worship is provided.

Bathroom Policy - Bathroom use by pre-schoolers will be monitored by a Children's Worship volunteer. While the child uses the bathroom, the volunteer should remain outside the bathroom with the door propped open. If the child needs assistance, the volunteer should enter the bathroom to assist the child and leave the door open until both the child and volunteer exit.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parents(s) should be notified immediately.

An adult volunteer will remain until the last child has been picked up.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the Nursery Coordinator or Council.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

All persons desiring to serve in Sunday School need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

Prior to the first meeting of the Sunday School season a review of this policy should be read with all teachers and helpers.

One (1) adult must be present in every classroom.

Hall monitor must do a walk around to check each classroom as well as the restrooms.

Children and youth should not leave class except for illness or to use the restroom. Children and youth may use the restroom without direct supervision.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parents(s) should be notified immediately.

A teacher will remain until the last student has left the room.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the Sunday School Superintendent and/or Council.

MID-WEEK YOUTH PROGRAMS:

All persons desiring to serve in the Cadets or GEMS or Youth Group need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

Prior to the first meeting of the Cadets/GEMS/Jr. High Youth Group season a review of this policy should be read with all counselors and helpers.

A minimum of two (2) adult volunteers need to be present at all activities.

For mid-week programs, a Hall monitor must do a walk around to check each classroom as well as the restrooms.

Children and youth should not leave class except for illness or to use the restroom. Children and youth may use the restroom without direct supervision.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parent(s) should be notified immediately.

A minimum of two (2) adult leaders will remain until the last student has left.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the Program Director and/or Council.

YOUTH MINISTRIES:

All persons desiring to serve in Junior High or High School Youth Group need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

Prior to the first meeting of the Youth Group each season, a review of this policy should be read with all leaders and helpers.

A minimum of two (2) adult volunteers need to be present at all activities.

Children and youth should not leave class except for illness or to use the restroom. Children and youth may use the restroom without direct supervision.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parent(s) should be notified immediately.

A minimum of two (2) adult leaders will remain until the last student has left.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the Program Director and/or Council.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL:

All persons desiring to serve in Vacation Bible School need to meet the rules of conduct for all workers.

Prior to VBS a review of the policy should be read with all leaders and helpers.

One (1) adult leader and a hall monitor must be present at all activities and/or meetings.

Children should not leave class except for illness or to use the restroom. Children and youth may use the restroom without supervision.

If a child needs significant medical attention the parent(s) should be notified immediately.

Leaders should not physically restrain a child in their care. If the child's behavior requires discipline, seek help from another leader and notify the child's parents.

A minimum of two (2) adult leaders will remain until the last student has left.

If transportation is provided, at least two (2) adults must be present.

Anyone not following these rules must be reported to the VBS Director and/or Council.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.

Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted.

Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.

Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.

An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.

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.

Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.

Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.

Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options: (1) Distract the child/youth with another activity (2) Help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behavior (3) Isolate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist.

For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three- year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.

When nothing seems to be working, leaders should seek assistance from another adult helper or parent before "losing their cool."

PROCEDURES

BACKGROUND CHECK FORM PROCEDURES

Prior to the church year beginning, Background Check Forms must be completed by all program volunteers.

This process of collecting and reviewing this information will be done with the highest degree of confidentiality.

Church Staff will be responsible to:

1. Obtain/review/update Background Check Form prior to new church year.
2. Develop a list of volunteers for Youth Programs and forward to Elders.
3. Put Background Check Forms in volunteer boxes or other distribution methods.
4. Confidentially collect forms and forward to Elders.

Elders will be responsible to:

1. Confidentially collect and review all completed forms.
2. Inform Church Staff of any volunteers that have not completed forms.
3. Based on completed forms and other knowledge regarding volunteers, follow up directly with volunteers where there are concerns regarding their ability to volunteer.
4. Perform a full background check on volunteers as necessary with assistance from Council.
5. Inform volunteers who may not serve and inform Church Staff as well.

Church Staff will then be responsible to:

1. Follow-up on any volunteers who have not completed forms as informed by Elders.
2. Search New York Sex Offender registry for all volunteers (This is a public website and is free of charge.)
3. Notify Elders to dismiss any volunteers who refuse to fill out Background Check Form.

PROCEDURES AND ACTIONS THAT MAY BE REQUIRED OF COUNCIL

Council should take care in monitoring adults as leaders for child and youth ministries of our church. This is the first line in our attempt to protect our children and lessen the opportunity for abuse to take place.

Council will inform youth and parents of the Safe Church Policy via an annual bulletin announcement and making the complete policy available in the church office. Council will also inform youth and parents how to protect themselves and who they can consult for help. It is NOT the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse, but only to report it to Council, Child Protective Services, and law enforcement agencies.

The following steps will be taken if an Incident Documentation Form is presented to Administrative Council:

1. Immediately report the suspected child abuse to the Program Director.
2. The Program Director will report the suspected abuse to the Pastor and to no other person. (In the case of no pastor, the Vice-President of Elders will be reported to.
3. The Pastor will report the suspected abuse to Child Protective Services and/or local law enforcement agencies after confirming with the teacher/leader who made the report of suspected abuse.
4. The Pastor will report to Council only if the alleged abuse has happened on or in church property or at church functions such as outings, retreats, field trips, etc.
5. If the Pastor is the alleged offender, the following steps will be observed:
 - a. The suspected abuse will be reported to the Vice-President of Elders who will notify the local civil authorities including police.
 - b. The Church Visitors and the Pastor-Church Relations Pastor will be notified immediately.
 - c. The Church Visitors will report in executive session to the next meeting of Classis.
6. Administrative Council may seek the advice of the Denomination Director of Abuse Prevention.

PROCEDURES FOR THE REMOVAL, SUSPENSION, AND REINSTATEMENT OF ALLEGED CHILD ABUSE OFFENDERS

The suspected offender will be informed of the allegation against him/her by the police or appropriate civil authority.

An investigation will be conducted to determine whether or not sufficient cause exists to suspend the suspected offender. This will take place after civil authorities have been notified.

If the preliminary investigation results in a determination of sufficient cause the suspected offender will be suspended from participating in all service in the church until an investigation is completed by Child Protective Services and/or the local law enforcement agency, at which time further appropriate action will be taken.

If the allegations are found to be false, the person may resume service in the church.

If the allegations are found to be true, the offender will be dealt with according to applicable Church Order Articles.

Before assuming any kind of service in the church, the healed offender will request reinstatement into the Church and will admit sorrow for this sin per applicable Church Order and policy.

The healed offender will submit a psychologist or therapist's written report to the Pastor. An additional study of the history of the offender as to patterns may be done.

The healed and reinstated offender will not be placed in a volunteer position which places him/her at risk.

If the pastor is the alleged offender:

1. The Elders (with the help of professional counselors, if needed) will make an evaluation on the accusations after the civil authorities have been notified.
2. The Church Visitor will work as arbitrators or go-betweens with the Elders and the Pastor.
3. If/When the suspension is lifted, the Church Visitors, the Pastor of the Church Relations, the Pastor and the Executive Session of Classis will be notified.
4. The Elders will encourage both the alleged offender and the alleged victim to seek professional counseling.
5. If the allegations are found to be true, the offender will be dealt with according to applicable Church Order articles.

APPENDIX

Council passed a motion at their April 11, 2013 meeting to make an exemption which allows Julie VandeBrake, current Youth leader, to give one-on-one rides to Senior High girls when she has their parent's permission.

[Background Check
Form](#)

[Consent to Participate
Form](#)

[Volunteer Agreement](#)

[Incident Documentation
Form](#)