

# **Safety Policy for Children and Youth**

## **Introduction**

This Safety Policy has been adopted by Faith Church to help the church create safe environments for children and youth and for those who minister to them. All people who work with children and youth on behalf of Faith Church must read this policy and agree to provisions within it. Future revisions to this policy may be made by the Administrative Board.

## **Volunteer Screening Process**

Volunteers should attend Faith Church for at least six months before working with children or youth on a regular basis. Exceptions must be approved by the Administrative Board. All people who regularly work with or around children or youth shall be screened and selected utilizing the following process:

- The Pastor, Director, or program leader of the ministry will interview potential volunteers.
- Volunteers will complete an application which will be reviewed by the Pastor or Director of the ministry who will contact references.
- Adult volunteers need to authorize the release of information necessary to conduct background checks which will be updated every five years. No one who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children will be allowed to volunteer with children or youth.
- Those transporting children or youth will need to submit a copy of their driver's license and authorize checks of their driving record.

## **Education and Training Requirements**

- Before serving, all those who work with children and youth will be required to read the Safety Policy for Children and Youth, acknowledge in writing that they understand the church's policies pertaining to the protection of children, and agree to abide by them.
- Training will be provided on the ministry's policies and procedures.
- Faith Church encourages all volunteers to receive training in First Aid, CPR, and AED use.

## **Procedures**

It is the responsibility of everyone having contact with children and youth participating in church programs to promote the emotional and physical safety of the participants regarding all factors and circumstances known to them. If, in their opinion, an unsafe condition exists, such persons shall immediately take appropriate precautions under the circumstances to protect all children and youth. Nothing contained in any other church policy, procedure, or instruction shall be construed to relieve persons having contact with children and youth from this responsibility.

## **Release Form**

Prior to any activity away from the church, a release form will be signed by the child's parent or legal guardian. Without the form signed and in the possession of the church, the child will not be allowed to participate in the away activity.

### **Ratio of Adults to Children**

- The minimum requirement is two unrelated adults in the building at all times when children are being supervised during a church activity regardless of the number of participants, location, or activity.
- Ideally, there should be at least two adults in every classroom. Those two adults may be related as long as at least one other unrelated adult is in the building. If two adults are not available, volunteers should notify the program leader and follow visibility and ratio rules as directed by the program leader. Minors may take the place of adults if they have been approved by the Pastor, Director, or program leader and work under adult direction.
- Every program for children should maintain an appropriate ratio of adults to children. Suggested ratios are one adult for every three children under age three and one adult for every ten children age four and older. Maximum ratios are one adult to four infants, one adult to seven toddlers, one adult to ten preschoolers, and one adult to fifteen school-age children.

### **Visibility**

- Church activities for children should be scheduled in areas visible from adjoining areas whenever possible. Such visibility may be maintained by leaving doors open and windows uncovered.
- Adults and minor volunteers should not meet alone with a child in any room where the door is closed or in an area where they cannot be seen. Windows should not be covered in the doors of any rooms typically occupied by children or in the doors of offices in the church.
- One-on-one counseling with children or youth must be done in either an open area, a room with an open door, or a room with a door with a window where both the child and the counselor are visible.

### **Accidents**

#### **Serious Injuries**

- Call 911.
- Do not move a child if there is any injury to the back or head.
- Administer First Aid as appropriate. First Aid kits are available in every classroom.
- Remain calm and continually reassure the child.
- Clear bystanders and refocus the other children's attention elsewhere.
- Notify the Pastor, Director, or program leader.
- Notify the parents or legal guardians.
- Fill out an Injury Report Form.

#### **Minor Injuries**

- Listen to and reassure the child.
- Administer First Aid as appropriate. First Aid kits are available in every classroom.
- Notify the Pastor, Director, or program leader.
- Notify the parents or legal guardians.
- Fill out an Injury Report Form.

### **Health Concerns**

- Be aware of health needs such as allergies, asthma, diabetes, or other issues.
- Make sure that any food provided to children is appropriate.

- If a child is displaying any of the following symptoms, contact the parent/guardian to remove the children immediately from the program:
  - Fever, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (Children must be symptom free for 24 hours before participating in any program.)
  - Runny nose with any colored discharge
  - Unexplained rash or skin infection
  - Sore throat
  - Pink eye and/or other eye infections
  - Head lice

### **Bathroom Procedures**

#### **Pre-3 and Early Childhood**

Ask parents at the beginning of the event if they would prefer to be called to help their child use the restroom. If assisting a child, stand outside the stall door while the child is using the bathroom. If the child asks for help, leave the bathroom door open while assisting him/her. With the door open, wash your hands and the child's hands with soap and water after the child has used the toilet.

#### **Grade School**

Grade school children must be escorted to the bathroom. If no one else is in the bathroom, wait in the hallway. If someone else is also in the bathroom, go in and wait by the sink or wait in the hallway with the bathroom door open. If possible, men should supervise boys and women should supervise girls.

### **Hostile Person Guidelines**

If a hostile person(s) is actively causing deadly harm or the imminent threat of deadly harm or is barricaded within a building, the following procedures should be followed:

- Stay calm, assess the situation, count the children, secure your area, and pray.
- Do not sound the fire alarm. A fire alarm would signal the occupants in the rooms to evacuate the building and thus place them in potential harm as they attempt to exit.
- If communication is available, call 911 or other appropriate emergency numbers as soon as possible.
- Move all children to a safer place if one is available. When sheltering in place, lock the doors and windows and close the blinds or curtains. Move children to less visible areas and stay away from windows. Turn all lights and audio equipment off and silence cell phones. Wait for emergency personnel to release you.

### **Fire**

If the fire alarm goes off, all children and adults should leave through the nearest exit. Remain in the designated area outside until children are reunited with their parents/guardians.

### **Tornado**

During a tornado warning, move children and adults to an indoor location away from windows. The best locations in the main building are the restrooms or hallway behind the stage. The best location in the east building is in the basement.

### **Discipline**

Age-appropriate discipline in the classroom environment provides a positive learning environment. Physical punishment or abusive or demeaning language is never a proper discipline method. Young children should be redirected to a new activity. For older children, be sure to give a clear description of expectations. If the expectations are broken, use a light touch on shoulders and a calm and cheerful voice to state what behavior you want to see. If that does not work, use a light touch on shoulders and a calm and forceful voice to tell them to stop their current behavior. If necessary, pick up the child and move them to a new location. Appropriate punishments for older children are to remove them from an activity, take an object away, and/or contact the parents/guardians.

### **Proper and Improper Affection**

When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to understand appropriate and inappropriate types of affection. If you see someone engaging in improper forms of affection, report to a staff member immediately.

#### **Positive and Appropriate Forms of Affection**

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-fives” and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate.
- Placing hands on top of head or shoulder during prayer.

#### **Negative and Improper Forms of Affection**

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over five years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas, or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult

- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not other clothing covers it.
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth

### **Preventing and Handling Bullying**

- Demonstrate by example the high standards of personal and social behavior that are expected.
- Work to foster self-respect and respect for others.
- Deal with observed instances of bullying promptly and effectively.
- Report suspected cases of bullying to your program leader.
- Follow up on any complaint about bullying with the program leader and the parents/guardians.

### **Examples of Bullying**

- Physical violence such as hitting, pushing, or spitting
- Interfering with another person’s property by stealing, hiding, or damaging it
- Using offensive names when addressing another person
- Teasing or spreading rumors about another child or his/her family
- Belittling a child’s abilities and achievements
- Writing offensive notes or graffiti about another child
- Excluding another child from a group activity
- Ridiculing a child’s appearance, way of speaking, or personal mannerisms
- Misusing technology to hurt or humiliate another person

### **Further Policies**

- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from the use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.
- Church volunteers and employees will respond to children and youth with respect, consideration, and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, or socio-economic status.
- Church volunteers and employees will portray a positive role model for children and youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity. They will avoid even the appearance of favoritism.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth under their care.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from having sexual contact with a child or youth.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.

- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from discussing their own sexual activities, including dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos, or materials on or from the Internet, with children or youth.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from sleeping in the same beds or sleeping bag with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of all children or youth in the bed or sleeping bag.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from dressing, undressing, bathing, or showering in the presence of children or youth.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth, or others.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from using harsh language, degrading punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management.
- Church volunteers and employees are prohibited from participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities relating to children's or youth ministry or camp activities.

**Reporting:**

It is the policy of Faith Church to report any incident of child abuse or neglect toward any child in the church. By taking on the responsibility of serving in our children's or youth ministry, you agree to take on the responsibilities of mandated reporting when required by Minnesota state law. The Pastor or Director for the ministry will be able to assist in mandatory reporting. See the appendix for resources on identifying and reporting child abuse or neglect.

**Internal Reporting**

- The Pastor or Director will notify the parent or legal guardian of the child (unless the suspected abuse or neglect has occurred in the home).
- The Pastor or Director will notify the Administrative Board.
- The Administrative Board will notify the appropriate legal counsel.
- The Administrative Board will notify the church's insurance agent that an abuse report has been filed with the appropriate local or state agency.

**Suspension of Church Related Duties**

A person accused of child abuse or neglect will be suspended from all church related duties involving children. This would include all childcare, teaching, transportation, or sponsorship duties. The church staff is not authorized to conduct an investigation of the incident but is allowed to monitor any such investigation and receive confidential information concerning the incident as may be necessary to determine issues concerning continuation of employment and compensation. If the accused person is an employee of the church, his or her employment will be suspended with pay until the investigation is completed. This removal from duty should occur in such a way that an innocent person is not

immediately deemed guilty. If the allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, the employee can return to the prior position.

### **Confidentiality**

All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with any official investigation. Any breach of this confidentiality by an employee of the church shall be cause for immediate discipline, including possible dismissal from duties and/or termination from employment. The Pastor or Director, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation, may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other children from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified, but in no case shall the identity of the victim or the accused person be disclosed except as required by law.

### **Investigation of Alleged Abuse or Neglect**

No person shall attempt to conduct a detailed investigation either through examination or interrogation of the child, the accused person, or a witness. It is acceptable to obtain a reasonable amount of information to have cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected. Interviews shall be conducted only by authorized officials of the agency to whom the suspected crime has been reported or, when appropriate, by legal counsel or persons representing the church in an official capacity. All employees and volunteers of the church shall cooperate with the official investigation as requested.

### **Caring for the Afflicted**

The Elders Ministry Team shall encourage and assist the child and the parents in securing appropriate counseling, care, and support. In the event the abuse or neglect involves a member or employee of the church, the staff shall encourage and assist the individual in securing appropriate care and support, including third party counseling, being mindful of the potential for a conflict of interest. All persons shall act towards the child, the parents, and the accused in accordance with the principles of Christianity at all times.

**Code of Conduct for those who work with Children and Students at Faith Church**

**Please initial each statement and sign below.**

I have read the Safety Policy for Children and Youth.

I agree to do my best to protect children and youth involved in Faith Church activities and services.

I agree to not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.

I agree to comply with the policies for general conduct with children and youth as defined in this Safety Policy.

I understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.

I agree that if I observe any inappropriate behaviors or policy violations with children or youth, I will immediately report my observation to the Pastor or Director of the ministry.

I acknowledge my obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix

### **Indicators of Possible Child Abuse**

Emotional Abuse: threats, critical words, demeaning terms, or names, depriving a child of any sign of affection or other similar spoken or unspoken emotional cruelty. It conveys a message that the child is worthless and undeserving of love and care.

- Severe depression-often crying without reason.
- Withdrawal from activities
- Lack of self-esteem
- Threatened or attempted suicide
- Speech or eating disorders
- High need for adult approval
- Extreme passive/aggressive behavior

Sexual Abuse: sexual contact between a child and an adult (or older, more powerful youth). A sexually abused child also may be physically and psychologically dependent upon the abuser.

- Advanced sexual knowledge or behavior
- Depression - often crying without reason
- Promiscuous behaviors
- Withdrawal from activities, running away
- Walking or sitting difficulties
- Bruising or bleeding in the genital area
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches
- Extreme fatigue
- Sexually transmitted diseases

Physical Abuse: intentional, deliberate behavior that causes bodily harm to a child. It can take several forms, including assault, shaking, kicking, choking, bone fractures, or other non-accidental injuries.

- Hostile, aggressive behavior toward others
- Fear of parents and other adults
- Destructive behavior (self, others, property)
- Unexplainable bruises or fractures
- Burns or facial injuries (often reoccurring)

## **Reporting**

Information is available from The Minnesota Department of Human Services Resource Guide for Mandated Reporters of Child Maltreatment Concerns. <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-2917-ENG>

- Do not treat any suspicion as frivolous. Notify the Pastor or Director immediately. The staff member will assist you in calling the proper authorities as indicated. You are not required to take this information beyond the Pastor or Director, but you are free to call Law Enforcement (911) and/or the Mower County Department of Health and Human Services (507-437-9701) yourself.
- **Immediate danger** – If you know or suspect that a child is in immediate danger (such as a recent sexual assault or a serious physical assault) or a child is abandoned, contact 911 for the local law enforcement agency. Law enforcement officers can remove a child from a threatening environment to protect them.
- If a child is **not** in immediate danger, but you have reason to believe a child has been maltreated, you should contact the local child welfare agency:
  - Mower County Child Protection, 507-437-9701 or [childprotection@co.mower.mn.us](mailto:childprotection@co.mower.mn.us), if an alleged perpetrator is a parent, guardian, family childcare provider, family foster care provider, an unlicensed personal care provider organization, or juvenile correctional facility staff person.
  - The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Division of Licensing, 651-431-6500, if the alleged maltreatment was committed by a staff person at a child care center, residential treatment center (children's mental health), group home for children, minor parent program, shelter for children, chemical dependency treatment program for adolescents, waived services program for children, crisis respite service program for children, or residential service program for children with developmental disabilities. There are specific state and federal laws that govern child protection involvement with an Indian child.
  - The Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Health Facility Complaints, 651-201-4200 or 800-369-7994, if the alleged maltreatment occurred in a home health care setting, hospital, regional treatment center, nursing home, intermediate care facility for the developmentally disabled or licensed and unlicensed care attendants.
  - The Minnesota Department of Education, 651-582-8546, or by fax, 651-797-1601, if the alleged perpetrator is employed by a public preschool, elementary school, middle school, secondary school, or charter school when the child is a student in the school. Reports received regarding staff working in private or parochial schools are sent directly to law enforcement.
- Your local law enforcement agency if the alleged perpetrator is staff working in a private or parochial school, someone outside the family and not a staff person at a regulated facility. Examples of non-family, non-facility caretakers include athletic club staff and babysitter.

### **Criteria Needed for a Child Abuse or Neglect Investigation**

- The alleged victim is a child under the age of 18.
- The alleged perpetrator is a parent, guardian, foster parent, relative caregiver, paramour, any individual residing in the same home, any person responsible for the child's welfare at the time of the alleged abuse or neglect, or any person who came to know the child through an official capacity or position of trust (for example: health care professionals, educational personnel, recreational supervisors, members of the clergy, volunteers or support personnel) in settings where children may be subject to abuse and neglect.
- There is a specific incident of abuse or neglect or a specific set of circumstances involving suspected abuse or neglect.
- There is demonstrated harm to the child or a substantial risk of physical or sexual injury to the child.

Information the reporter should have ready to give:

- Name, address, and age of victim(s)
- Name and address of parent(s)/caretaker(s) and siblings
- Relationship of caretaker(s) to victim(s)
- Details of the abuse, including specifics of the incident(s), location and severity of injuries, any pattern of neglect or abuse, and any physical evidence
- Any explanation provided by the child
- Any other relevant information that would expedite the investigation, such as directions to the victim's house (especially in rural areas) or information about potential risks to the investigator