

Abuse Awareness, Prevention, and Response Policy

Mosaic Church of Bellingham

Bellingham, WA

May 2018

I. Introduction

Mosaic Church is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and secure environment in which adults and children may worship and grow. Unfortunately, even in a church setting, some individuals may be at risk of being physically or sexually mistreated or abused.

To assure that Mosaic remains a safe place for all persons, the Leadership Community has adopted the following Safe Church Policy with Abuse Awareness, Prevention, and Response Policies and Procedures (“Policy”). The Policy shall govern all church-sponsored programs or activities. For purposes of the Policy, the terms “misconduct” and “child abuse” are defined as follows:

Child Abuse: The State of Washington defines abuse and neglect as injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by any person under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare, and safety is harmed. Abuse and neglect does NOT include the physical discipline of a child as defined in RCW 9A.16.100.

Misconduct is behavior that is offensive to the person upon whom it is inflicted or actionable in a church setting and may not reach the legal standard for the definition of abuse.

Physical misconduct means:

- threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a **minor or legally protected adult**
- or offensive or harmful contact to **any adult** where “offensive” means behavior that is clearly socially unacceptable in the broader church community. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult.

Sexual misconduct includes:

- exploiting or grooming (preparing) a person whether **minor or an adult**—regardless of consent or circumstances—for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the **minor or adult**;
- unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy **between co-workers, co-volunteers** where “unwelcome” means behavior that is clearly unwanted or unacceptable in the broader church community;
- or sexual suggestion, sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy **between a supervisor and a subordinate** who serve together in a church program or church ministry.

II. Prevention Starts With Awareness & Behaviors

Staff and volunteers should avoid, whenever possible being alone with a child that is not their own. Ideally, even in group settings, especially with younger kids, there should be at least **2 adults at all times**.

One adult and one child should **not be alone behind a closed door** together. If, for some unforeseen reason, a one to one scenario cannot be avoided (this should be extremely rare) other

adults (ideally also someone in charge) should be made aware of when it begins and ends and for what purpose.

Doors should be left open in one on one scenarios so that anyone can walk by and easily observe what is happening. **A closed door with an adult and child behind it, should be checked on by anyone that observes it.**

Knock on the door

Inquire if everything is ok

Request the door be left open

Abuse happens in secrecy; therefore, we seek to foster an environment of openness and communication. All staff, volunteers and constituents should freely communicate if they see a breach of our policies or a situation that concerns them. This communication can be directed to anyone on the Abuse Prevention Team.

III. Abuse Prevention Team

The Pastoral staff and members of the Leadership Community shall form the Abuse Prevention Team. All members of the Team shall be trained in abuse awareness and response.

Responsibilities of the Team are:

- A. Recommend policies and procedures for reducing the risk of child abuse in the church building, in church-sponsored programs, and by church volunteers or church staff.
- B. Assist in providing information and training of the congregation on the Policy, recognizing signs of child abuse, and appropriate response and behavior when working in church ministry.
- C. Provide oversight of all reports of child abuse related to church volunteers or staff.
- D. Provide oversight of the response to alleged offenders who are church volunteers or church staff.
- E. Communicate with the Classical Safe Church Team and with civil authorities as appropriate.
- F. Clarify whether the Committee or the first-hand reporter maintains a liaison with law enforcement officials.
- G. Notify legal counsel whenever a reasonable suspicion of child abuse has occurred related to church volunteer or staff.
- H. *Notify the church insurance agent as appropriate when directed by legal counsel.*
- I. Ensure that pastoral care is provided for the individuals and families who are party to the allegations.
- J. Provide disclosure and confidentiality as appropriate to:
 1. protect victims from further misconduct or abuse
 2. protect alleged offenders from unfair prejudice
 3. prevent additional persons from being victimized and
 4. promote healing.
- K. Maintain records on history of child abuse allegations reported at Mosaic.
- L. One member of the Team shall be designated as the Secretary and shall be responsible for maintaining the records of those who have been trained.

IV. The Policy

Mosaic Church of Bellingham is committed to the following:

- A. Allegations of misconduct or abuse will be taken seriously.
- B. Sexual and physical misconduct or abuse against a child or adult in a church building, in a church-sponsored program, or by church volunteers and church leaders will not be tolerated.
- C. Any applicant for a church volunteer or staff position with a previous history of sexual misconduct or physical assault, or misdemeanor or felony conviction of child abuse, or pleading of no contest to any misdemeanor or felony charge will not be allowed to serve in any positions that put others at risk.
- D. Various means to prevent misconduct or abuse will be utilized to reduce the risk of sexual and physical misconduct or abuse in a church building, in a church-sponsored program, or by church volunteers and church leaders.
- E. Allegations by a minor of sexual or physical misconduct by a church volunteer or church leader, in a church facility, or in a church-sponsored program will be reported to child protection authorities will be notified within 24 hours if there is reasonable cause to suspect that child abuse has occurred. Mosaic will cooperate with the civil authorities responsible for handling reported incidents of abuse.
- F. An accused person has the right to due process, both civilly and in the church.
- G. A victim is not to be held responsible for misconduct or abuse that occurs.
- H. A volunteer or church leader who is accused of misconduct will be removed from serving until the allegations are resolved.
- I. A volunteer or church leader who confesses or is found guilty of sexual or physical misconduct against a minor or adult parishioner will be removed or dismissed from position or office.
- J. A volunteer or church leader removed or dismissed from position or office will not be considered for re-entry or reinstatement to any position that puts others at risk. No decisions regarding reinstatement will be made without the advice of legal counsel.
- K. All persons directly or indirectly involved with incidents of misconduct or abuse are to act with honesty, charity, and confidence in God's power to forgive and heal.

V. Abuse Awareness and Prevention

- A. Screening of Employees:** All prospective employees shall agree to:
 - 1. Authorize Mosaic Church to obtain background information and opinions from former employers, personal references, educational institutions and governmental agencies.
 - 2. Allow Mosaic to verify background information and credentials.
 - 3. Allow Mosaic to obtain criminal and credit history, motor vehicle records, and to check the sex offender registry.
 - 4. Different levels of background checks are conducted depending on the responsibilities of the relevant employee position.
- B. Screening of Volunteers:** All potential volunteers who will be working with vulnerable people in "at-risk situations"¹ shall agree to:

¹ **Definition:** "At-risk situations" means situations anticipated to include private one-on-one contact in non-public settings with children, youth under age 18, or developmentally disabled adults. At-risk situations do not include, for example, Sunday School classes, group activities, or volunteers in the nursery during worship.

1. Complete a volunteer information form.
 2. Authorize Mosaic Church to do a criminal record search, a statewide sexual offender search, and for any volunteers who are likely to be driving a church vehicle in their volunteer capacity, to obtain driving or motor vehicle records.
- C. Screening Responsibilities and Confidentiality:** Staff members are responsible for having the volunteers and employees in their area of supervision complete a volunteer information form or employment application and a background check release form. All information received will be confidential; background check information will be available only to the Lead Pastor, the Director of Service Ministries, and to those who are directly responsible for making the selection of an employee or volunteer.
- D. Ministry Guidelines:** Each ministry area will provide this policy and/or maintain written guidelines designed to protect program participants from abuse. These guidelines must be reviewed periodically by the Lead Pastor and the Abuse Prevention Team. These guidelines will be used to train church volunteers and church leaders to prevent misconduct and to create positive role models in the church. Guidelines will be available for review by members of Mosaic Church or anyone with children or other vulnerable individuals participating in church programs and activities.
- E. Training:** Once per calendar year, staff, leaders, teachers and volunteers working with minors or developmentally disabled adults, who are new or who have not been previously trained, shall be trained in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. This training will include a review of the church's Abuse Prevention, Safety, and Discipline Guidelines, reporting procedures, and how to recognize inappropriate behavior and signs of mistreatment or abuse. Staff and volunteers must repeat the training every three years.
- F. Facility Guidelines:** Mosaic Church will endeavor to incorporate features in its buildings and to maintain its facilities in a manner that helps prevent misconduct and abuse, that enables persons with disabilities to participate, and that reduces safety risks to all who come to the church.

VI. Reporting

- A. All Allegations:** Staff, volunteers, or anyone in a position representing Mosaic Church are required to report any allegations of misconduct or any suspected abuse to the Lead Pastor or to the ministry director who will report the allegation to the Lead Pastor. Individuals should report to the Leadership Community if the Senior Pastor is involved in the allegation(s). It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged misconduct or suspected abuse, but only to report the suspected abuse or the incident.
- B. Additional Reporting for Suspected Child Abuse:** If the alleged victim is a child, the first-hand reporter may report the suspected abuse or the incident directly to Children's Protective Services. The reporting person should also document the allegation and reporting process with as much detail as possible. This information is confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential so far as possible. Upon receiving the report, the Lead Pastor and/or the Leadership Community shall make an initial determination of whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred. If the Lead Pastor and/or a member of the Leadership Community (LC) conclude that there is reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred, the Lead Pastor or a member of the LC shall report the suspected abuse to Children's Protective Services.

VII. Responding to Allegations

- A. A small Response Team of church leaders will oversee the response to allegations. This team is comprised of at least two of the following: The Lead Pastor, Associate Staff member, two members of the Leadership Community.
- B. The Response Team should first promptly determine:
 - 1. Whether the alleged victim is a child or an adult
 - 2. Whether the alleged offender is a church leader (paid staff, LC Member or appointed volunteer)
 - 3. Whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that misconduct or abuse has occurred. "Reasonable cause" is defined as a suspicion founded on circumstances sufficiently strong to justify a reasonable person in the belief that the allegations are true.
- C. **Allegations Involving a Child:** If there is reasonable cause to suspect that a person at Mosaic is involved in an incident of misconduct, the Response Team should determine in consultation with the Abuse Prevention Team the appropriate course of action based on the known information and the circumstances of the incident or situation. The Response Team should respond using the principles and guidelines outlined in this policy.
- D. **Allegations By An Adult Against A Church Leader**
 - 1. If the allegations are made by an adult against a church leader (paid staff, leadership community member, or appointed volunteer) of Mosaic, the Response Team shall consult with the Abuse Prevention Team and determine the appropriate response and course of action using the principles and guidelines outlined in this policy. The Response Team and the Abuse Prevention Team are encouraged to contact the Classis Pacific Northwest Safe Church Team if one of Mosaic ministry staff members is accused.
 - 2. If the allegations are made by an adult against a church leader (paid staff, leadership community member, or appointed volunteer) of another Christian Reformed Church, the Response Team shall consult with the Abuse Prevention Team and notify the appropriate Classical Safe Church Team.
 - 3. After receiving the Classical Safe Church Team's Report, the Response Team in consultation with the Abuse Prevention Team shall convene to discuss the allegations and the Classical Report and determine the appropriate course of action.

VIII. **Compassionate Response for Families:** The Leadership Community will appoint a small group of wise and experienced pastoral persons to minister with compassion to all the individuals and families involved.

IX. **Criminal Proceedings:** For either church leaders or non-church leaders, if criminal proceedings are involved, the Response Team and the Abuse Prevention Team shall promptly revisit the matter at the conclusion of the criminal proceedings and take other such action as the circumstances may dictate.

X. **Records, Confidentiality, and Disclosure.**

- A. **Records:** All information received and efforts to respond will be documented.
- B. **Confidentiality:** Any information received, and any record maintained by Mosaic Church regarding allegations of misconduct or abuse shall be kept confidential. This means that only those who need to know will have access to these records and only to the records for the case in question. Those with a need to know may include for example the attorney representing the church, the Response Team, and the Abuse Prevention Team.
- C. **Disclosure:** Mosaic Church should disclose allegations of misconduct against a church leader only when appropriate as decided by the Leadership Community under advisement from the Abuse Prevention Team.
 - 1. If someone in the church is convicted of criminal child abuse, the congregation will be notified in a manner the Abuse Prevention Team deems appropriate for the situation.
 - 2. Mosaic Church should disclose information related to allegations of misconduct or abuse by a church leader as needed to protect and minister to the needs of children and families.