

PREVENTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH ABUSE POLICY

Harderwyk Christian Reformed Church

Date Approved/Revised:

Legal Counsel Name: P. Haans Mulder

Legal Counsel Date Approved:

Approved By: Harderwyk Council

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Statement of Policy:

Members of Harderwyk Ministries come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds and needs. Many are young married and single adults who have children in our preschool, children and youth areas. Church leadership is committed to providing an environment which is as safe as possible for children and youth who attend the Church or any sponsored programs or activities, and to take the necessary precautions to protect Church leaders from accusations or suspicions.

Church leadership recognizes the need to have formal, written policies and procedures to help prevent the opportunity for, or the appearance of, abuse to a minor. This policy is not based on a lack of trust in a particular worker but instead are needed to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and the entire Church body.

Objective

Our Christian faith is grounded in the unfailing love of Jesus Christ which compels us to love one another and carry one another's burdens.

- Believing that children also are recipients of Christ's love and therefore recipients of our love for one another.
- Recognizing that children are often powerless to protect themselves from those who would cause harm.
- Acknowledging our responsibility to protect the children in our care.

This policy outlines the means by which Harderwyk Ministries will ensure a safe, secure environment for the children to whom we minister and the leaders who minister to them. The policy also outlines procedures for addressing allegations of abuse toward children in the care of Harderwyk Ministries.

General Information

- “Harderwyk” refers to the sum of Harderwyk Ministries including all of its worshipping communities, as well as other ministries initiated under the auspices of The Harderwyk Christian Reformed Church d.b.a. Harderwyk Ministries.
- “Adult” is defined as an individual who is at least 18 years of age.
- “Child” is defined as an individual who is under 18 years of age.
- “Leader” refers to an individual who has been certified for ministry with children by completing the Application and Screening Process outlined in the policy, and who is at least 21 years of age.
- “Student Leader” refers to an individual entering 6th grade through 12th grade who has been certified for ministry with children by completing the requirements outlined in the policy.
- “Staff” refers to paid employees of Harderwyk Ministries

Ensuring a Safe Environment

Staffing and Leadership

All Leaders in ministry with children must be certified by completing the Application and Screening Process outlined in this policy.

Individuals who are not yet adults may volunteer for ministry as student leaders. Student Leaders must meet the following conditions in addition to completing the Application and Screening process outlined in this policy:

- be at least 12 years old *and* at least 3 years older than the oldest children participating in the ministry or class
- work under the direct supervision of an adult

At no time shall any Leader be allowed to be alone with a child in a setting that is not visible or accessible to others.

Two people, at least one of whom must be a Leader, are expected to supervise any group of children in most situations.

One Leader: Situations where only one leader is present are exceptions only with all of the following criteria being met:

- The person is a Leader certified for Children’s Ministry
- The room door is completely open, or a half door is in use.
- A roving hallway monitor is available to step in where needed, or to accompany a child to the rest room.

Student Leaders: On occasion, it may be acceptable for two Student Leaders to supervise a group of children without the direct supervision of a Leader.

The following criteria must be met:

- *both* Student Leaders must be at least 16 years of age;
- each Student Leader is certified as specified in #1 above.
- each Student Leader must first have served in a similar ministry position at Harderwyk, under the direct supervision of an adult for a period of at least 9 months;
- a member of the Harderwyk ministry staff must pre-approve each situation.

Individuals living in the same household may not serve in the same room unless an unrelated adult is also present.

Any Harderwyk-sponsored group which arranges for use of the nursery during its ministry (whether arranged through the children's ministry or arranged independently) must abide by the above policies.

Application and Screening Process

Individuals who wish to be certified for ministry with children must complete the application and screening process outlined below.

Be a professing member of Harderwyk Ministries.

Membership Exception: Harderwyk recognizes that valid reasons may exist for non-members to volunteer for ministry with minors. In these cases, non-members must meet the following additional requirements:

- be a professing member of another Christian fellowship,

OR

- be active in the life and ministry of Harderwyk for at least six months prior to beginning ministry with children, have the recommendation of a Harderwyk staff member, and demonstrate intent to become a professing member of Harderwyk students

Complete all required paperwork: ministry application form and authorization for a criminal history screening.

Interview with a member of the Harderwyk staff connected to the ministry in which the individual wishes to volunteer.

Pass a criminal history screening.

Leaders must pass a criminal history screening every three years.

- Substantiated incidents of physical or sexual abuse, child neglect, child exploitation or other forms of sexual misconduct will disqualify an individual from ministry roles related to children
- Other incidents appearing on an individual's criminal record will be evaluated against the responsibilities of the ministry role in which the individual wishes to serve. An additional interview with the individual may be appropriate before final approval for ministry.

Complete orientation and training as required by the ministry for which the individual wishes to volunteer.

Supervisory Expectations

Identification: All leaders and staff will wear identification which is appropriate for the particular ministry in which they serve.

Visibility: The interior of all meeting spaces must be visible from the hallway by the use of in-door viewing windows. The use of half doors for younger children is also permitted and preferred.

Check-in/Check-out: Staff members for each ministry area will set check-in/check-out procedures which are appropriate for the events/activities of that ministry. As a general rule, check out of students 5th grade or under must be by a parent or other authorized person. Staff members are responsible for communicating these procedures to leaders.

Liability Release: Any certified leader taking a group of minors off-campus for a planned activity must have a current, completed, signed Health & Liability Release Form for each child participating in the event/activity.

Restroom Use: Staff members for each ministry area will set restroom procedures which are appropriate for the children participating in the event/activity. Children under 5th grade must be escorted to the restrooms and supervised in a manner befitting of their age. Staff members are responsible for communicating these procedures to Leaders.

**Transportation:* Leaders who transport children from the Harderwyk campus to a Harderwyk-sponsored event/activity held off campus will abide by the following:

Individuals who drive a church owned vehicle must abide by the overall Harderwyk Transportation Policy

Individuals who transport children in personal vehicles must:

- have the appropriate, valid driver's license for that vehicle and valid personal auto insurance
- must be at least 21 years of age
- provide a seat belt for each individual in the vehicle and ensure that seat belts are properly worn by everyone in the vehicle **car seat applications**
- follow proper rules of the road, law, and speed limits

Drivers may not transport a student alone in a vehicle unless life is in danger.

*Please refer to the Harderwyk Transportation Policy for full transport requirements.

Overnight Events: If an overnight event or off campus outing is planned, the *Harderwyk Student Ministries Health – Liability – Transportation Release Form* must be signed and on file for each student.

- All adult chaperones and supervisors at an overnight activity shall be members of the Student Ministries Team or shall have been individually approved in advance by the Event Leader.
- At least one male and one female leader must be present at overnight events that include both genders.
- Separate sleeping areas will be provided at all overnight events for males and females, and at least one adult of the same gender will be present in the sleeping area for the entire overnight event.
- Each retreat or overnight event will require a clear set of leader and student guidelines for boundaries and expectations and will be shared with everyone attending.

Education

All leaders will participate in Child Protection Training. Harderwyk staff members in specific ministry areas (children's, student, Neighbors Plus, etc) will develop and present appropriate training for leaders in their area. Training should include:

- review of Harderwyk's child protection policy
- explanation of ministry-specific procedures
- awareness education on issues related to child abuse

Each ministry area and its leaders will encourage children in the ministry to practice behaviors which protect themselves and report any incident or situation which makes them uncomfortable or frightens them.

Harderwyk Ministries will make the content of this policy available to parents of children participating in the ministry upon request.

Addressing Allegations

Reporting Procedures

If an adult (leader, church officer or staff member) receives a report of abuse or observes signs or symptoms of abuse, the adult must seek immediate consultation with his or her staff supervisor/liaison and the Executive Pastor (or Pastoral staff member in the absence of the Executive Pastor).

The reporting adult, staff supervisor and the Executive Pastor will not attempt to investigate or substantiate the report. Instead, if they believe a reasonable suspicion of abuse exists, the Senior Pastor will notify Child Protective Services (CPS) and make the required reports. (An oral report is expected to be made immediately, a written report within 72 hours)

The reporting adult, staff supervisor, Executive Pastor and any other representatives of Harderwyk will cooperate with authorities during any ensuing legal investigation and procedures related to the incident.

NOTE 1: Members of the clergy are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect in the state of Michigan (Child Protection Law, Act 238, 722.623, Section 3,1,a). Members of the clergy are required to report incidents of known or reasonably suspected abuse to Child Protective Services (CPS), a division of the Department of Human Services. “*Member of the clergy* means a priest, minister, rabbi, Christian science practitioner, or other religious practitioner, or similar functionary of a church, temple, or recognized religious body, denomination, or organization.” (722.622, Section 2, 1)

NOTE 2: If the alleged offender is the Executive Pastor, another minister on staff will replace the Executive Pastor in these procedures.

Church Response

If the alleged offender is a member of Harderwyk, or a regular, active participant in Harderwyk community life, Harderwyk will respond in the following manner.

The Executive Pastor will notify the Council, the Church Administrator, the church legal counsel and the church liability carrier that allegations have been made and reported to CPS.

Council (or its designees) will inform the alleged offender that allegations have been made and a report filed with CPS.

Council will suspend the alleged offender from ministry roles which would bring the individual into direct contact with children until legal proceedings are complete. Council will determine whether it is also appropriate to suspend the alleged offender from additional ministry roles until legal proceedings are complete.

If the alleged offender is a Minister of the Word or any office bearer in the church, the following responses also apply:

- Council will immediately notify the Pastor-Church Relations director and proceed according to Church Order Articles 82-84 (and related supplements) and other guidelines from Synod.
- in the event of suspension, salary and housing compensation will continue

At the close of legal proceedings if formal charges are not filed, if charges are filed but then dropped, or if the alleged offender is acquitted, Council will review the matter and determine whether it is appropriate to lift the suspension and reinstate the individual.

If legal proceedings result in conviction of the alleged offender, the offender will continue under suspension and be subject to Church Order, Articles 78 through 84 and related supplements.