

# Grace Christian Reformed Church

## Safe Church Policy



Version 1.2  
November 2017

# Grace Christian Reformed Church

## Safe Church Policy

### Overview

Grace Christian Reformed Church (CRC) is firmly committed to making the church and church related activities safe from sexual, physical and emotional abuse. We recognize the potential for abuse is a reality in our society, and Grace CRC has the responsibility to ensure that everyone involved in our fellowship is protected from abuse, especially children. We have a zero tolerance policy for child abuse and will terminate any employee who violates this policy and remove any volunteer who violates this policy.

To create the safest possible environment for everyone involved in Grace CRC activities, policies and procedures have been developed with the goal of preventing any instances of abuse. This includes:

- guidelines for behavior of adults responsible for caring for children
- careful screening to guard against involvement in our programs of volunteers or leaders with any record of prior abuses
- obtaining written assent from church activity leaders that they agree to our Safe Church Policy
- making sure that more than one individual in any leadership role is present to help assure that no abuse takes place
- promptly reporting to appropriate public authorities any instances of inappropriate behavior or alleged abuse.

The goal of this policy is to prevent any abuse in any of the programs and activities of Grace CRC.

The principles, statements, and guidelines in this Grace CRC Safe Church Policy are intended to assure a safe environment for children and adults. We recognize that abuse can have devastating consequences, both for the abused and the abuser, and harmful effects on organizations where it takes place. The protection of children and minors who participate in Grace CRC activities and programs is the first and foremost goal of this policy. In addition, Grace CRC also strives to protect its staff and volunteers from false allegations of abuse, and to reduce the church's legal risk by meeting the test of reasonable care.

The Grace CRC Safe Church Policy addresses many aspects of abuse to help volunteers and leaders identify and guard against abuse. The policy is intended to motivate everyone in leadership positions to place a high priority on abuse prevention. It is also intended to better equip the leadership to recognize, prevent, and deal responsibly with any abuses that may occur. This policy is organized to facilitate reference to the many aspects of abuse, all with the goal of providing an abuse-free environment in all of the church's programs.

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## Document History

Version	Date	Responsible Party	Action
0.1	May 2012	Safe Church Special Committee – Marv Kusters (chair), Donna Johnson, Anita van der Merwe	Review of current Abuse Prevention Policy and complete rewrite into Safe Church Policy
0.2	June 2012	Grace Council	Approve policy, conditional on legal review
1.0	September 2012	Safe Church Special Committee in concert with Safe Church Committee	Minor updates per legal review feedback
1.1	January 2013	Safe Church Committee	Approval from Council for implementation. No updates.

## I. Purpose and Biblical Basis

The main purpose of the Grace CRC Safe Church Policy is to provide a caring and secure environment for children (see Glossary -- APPENDIX A) in all phases of church life. This policy also protects those providing care and leadership in the ministries of the church from unjust allegations of inappropriate behavior, and to limit exposure of the church to liability and legal risks.

Grace CRC is committed to providing safe and secure arrangements for the children entrusted to its training, teaching, and care. The church has special responsibilities for nurturing and protecting children, and the Bible is the foundation for our understanding of policies and procedures appropriate for all of the ministries of the church. Jesus teaches us explicitly that children have an important place in these ministries.

*And they were bringing children to Him, that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them. (Mark 10: 12-16)*

We are reminded of these words of Jesus each time a child is baptized in Grace CRC -- when we are asked the question: "Do you the people of the Lord promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?". We respond, "We do, God helping us."

## **II. REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within our church, several measures are utilized. These measures include:

- A. Approval by Council of Youth Workers
- B. Acknowledgement of the Safe Church Agreement
- C. Orientation and Worksheet pertaining to Safe Church Policy
- D. Church Liability Insurance, and
- E. Establishing an oversight body.

The scope of the Safe Church Policy applies to all ministries at Grace CRC that involve youth (see Glossary -- APPENDIX A) under the age of 18 years. This includes all participants, leaders, helpers, etc. Examples of such groups, but not inclusive, are: Nursery, Children's Worship, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, GEMS, Cadets and youth groups.

### ***A. Approval by Council of Youth Workers***

Leaders, helpers and volunteers (see Glossary -- APPENDIX A) of all ministries in the scope of this policy are to be approved by Council prior to the start of their involvement in the ministry.

The Chair of the Committee that oversees the respective ministry has responsibility to submit requests to council in a timely manner.

### ***B. Acknowledgement of the Safe Church Agreement***

All individuals who have responsibility in caring for children in the ministries under the scope of this policy, must read and understand the Safe Church Policy and sign the Safe Church Agreement form (see attached signature page--APPENDIX F).

A copy of the current version of the Grace CRC Safe Church Policy will be provided to each Grace CRC staff member, leader and volunteer annually, normally in conjunction with the start up of fall church programs and other church activities. It is also distributed at any time for ad hoc events or when a new person joins a ministry. Each staff member, leader and volunteer in Grace CRC is required to review the policy and sign the agreement annually, attesting that they understand the policy and will abide by the policy. In the instance of volunteers under the age of 18, the responsible parent or guardian is required to co-sign the statement with the under-age volunteer. Copies of the signed Safe Church Agreement acknowledgements will be maintained as part of the church records.

Anyone refusing to sign the agreement will not be permitted to work with children. References supplied for a staff (see Glossary -- APPENDIX A) person will be contacted as needed to determine if any known reason exists for denying this person the opportunity to serve as a child or youth worker.

### ***C. Orientation and Worksheet pertaining to Safe Church Policy***

All paid and volunteer child or youth workers are to participate in an annual orientation that explains the Safe Church Policy, rationale, indicators of child abuse and responding to and reporting procedures. This "Safe Church" orientation may be conducted as part of a regularly scheduled meeting at the start of the program year

or ad hoc session for new individuals or ministries. At the conclusion of the orientation, all attendees are required to complete the Safe Church Worksheet (see APPENDIX G) indicating their level of understanding and turning the completed worksheet in with the signed agreement. The orientation and worksheet will be approved and implemented by the Safe Church Committee.

#### ***D. Church Liability Insurance***

Grace CRC carries liability insurance coverage that applies to all of the different activities of the church, at and away from church premises.

#### ***E. Safe Church Committee***

The Safe Church Committee is responsible for the administration and interpretation of this policy. A periodic review should include any changes to the law in order to insure the integrity of the policy and procedures. The Safe Church Committee consists of the Pastor and two elders. Ordinarily the elders are the council liaisons for the Education Committee and the Worship Committee. The Safe Church Committee determines the level of background check that is made for individual volunteers or youth workers.

# III. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES and RULES

## A. Roles & Responsibilities

### 1. Safe Church Agreement, Worksheet and Orientation

Everyone involved as a Grace CRC staff member, leader, helper or volunteer that meets the scope requirements for this policy is required to read the policy, attend the Safe Church Orientation, complete the Safe Church Worksheet and sign the Safe Church Agreement annually, attesting that they understand the policy and will abide by the instructions therein. The Grace CRC Safe Church Agreement is APPENDIX F and the Worksheet is APPENDIX G.

In the instance of volunteers under the age of 18, the responsible parent or guardian is required to co-sign the statement with the under-age volunteer. Copies of the signed Agreements will be maintained as part of the church records.

### 2. Distribution

The committee chair of the committees that oversee children and youth ministries must make sure that everyone involved in their respective ministries receive a copy of the current Safe Church Policy, attend the Safe Church Orientation, complete the Safe Church Worksheet, sign the Safe Church Agreement and turn the signed worksheet and agreement in to the administrator. The chairs of the committees may delegate this to members on their committees--but they are ultimately accountable.

These committees include, but are not limited to, the following: Education Committee for Sunday School, GEMS, Cadets, Youth Group; Worship Committee for Nursery and Children's Worship; Outreach Committee for VBS.

### 3. Administration

The safe church administrator role is currently assigned to the church secretary. The administrator is responsible for retaining all signed Safe Church Agreements and maintaining a master list of those who have been approved to serve, completed the APPEDIX F&G and the respective dates. Prior to updating the master list, all staff and volunteers must be verified against the national sex offender registry. Details are outlined in the Administrator Procedure. A digital copy of the Safe Church Policy will also be kept by the church secretary.

### 4. Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Abuse

In the event that abuse is suspected or alleged, the Safe Church Committee will function in the role officially representing Grace CRC to the external authorities, the family, the alleged abuser, the congregation, the media etc. (See section IV Responding/Reporting for detailed steps).

### 5. Policy Oversight

Council shall establish a Safe Church Committee and approve the membership annually. The Safe Church Committee is responsible for the administration and interpretation of this policy.

## **6. Policy Review**

The Safe Church Committee, reporting to Council, should ensure a detailed review of the policy is performed at a minimum of every three years. This review includes:

- contact the insurance carrier on a periodic basis to ensure Grace CRC carries adequate liability insurance coverage that applies to all of the different activities of the church, at and away from church premises
- work with a knowledgeable insurance agent who knows and understands the needs of the church
- consult the denomination for any significant changes
- interact with the Classis Safe Church Team if such a team is in place
- review any changes to the law in order to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures
- update the policy accordingly and present to Council for approval

The policy review can be delegated to a special committee formed solely for this purpose.

## **B. Rules and Guidelines**

### **1. Six Month Rule**

Volunteers working with children or youth at Grace CRC must be an active participant or a member of the church for at least six consecutive months.

### **2. Two Leader Rule**

All children and youth activities will have at least two approved leaders. These two leaders will be adults age 18 or older, and at least 5 years older than the children and youth in their ministry. Volunteers under 18 years of age must be paired with an adult. This applies to onsite, offsite and overnight activities. If two leaders are not available for each group, every effort should be made to achieve a satisfactory alternative arrangement; otherwise the activity will be canceled for that occasion. A one-on-one meeting is allowable if 1) the meeting is in a public area, and 2) the parents/guardians are informed in advance and have given their consent.

### **3. Open Classroom Rule**

Meeting spaces, classrooms and nursery may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers.

### **4. Overnight and Offsite Activities**

When traveling offsite in separate vehicles, the two leader rule may be followed if the vehicles travel in caravan. Vehicles must keep in sight of each other and make stops at the same times and places.

The Youth Groups Permission form (see APPENDIX B.1) should be completed for all Grace CRC sponsored events that meet either of the following criteria:

- overnight stay
- exceeds 30 miles from Grace CRC

## **5. Discipline of Children**

Grace CRC staff and volunteers must attend to the physical and emotional well-being of children in their care. The following guidelines will always be followed:

- Corporal punishment is not permitted. (No slapping, hitting, pinching, pushing, any action that leaves a mark, bruise or wound, or the use of a device or object to administer discipline.)
- Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted, e.g. hurling insults, persistent yelling, or threatening.
- Use positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior from a child.
- Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children may benefit from having these expectations in written form, such as:
  - Children must refrain from hitting, kicking, or injuring anyone in the classroom.
  - Children are to use an inside voice and must take turns talking by raising hands.
  - Children must be obedient and follow the teacher's instruction.
- Expectations of children's behavior must reflect their age level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect the age and level of comprehension of the children involved. For example, a three-year old should not have to sit for a time-out longer than three minutes.
- Leaders and teachers, to avoid having to discipline a child, should try, when possible, to distract the child.
- When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers should get help before losing their composure.
- Parents are to be informed and involved whenever a child misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
- When misbehavior in a class or other activity becomes an ongoing problem, additional parents or aides should be brought in to help supervise the class or activity.
- Concerns about a child's behavior or questions about the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor or Committee Chair that has oversight for the ministry.

## **6. Children's Affection**

Working with small children may sometimes require some bodily contact. Guidelines that should be observed are outlined here. Gentle, casual touching on a child's head, arms, and hands is generally permissible. More demonstrative actions should be avoided.

- For example, kissing is inappropriate.
- Lap sitting is inappropriate for children over the age of two. Instead encourage children to sit next to you. To console a child crying uncontrollably, in sight of other adults, you may hold a child on your lap until the crying stops.
- Avoid body-to-body hugs. One arm hugs, side hugs or hand-to-arm-hugs are permissible.
- Avoid giving or receiving back rubs.

## **7. Restroom Assistance**

Children and youth are encouraged to take care of their personal needs to the best of their ability. When bathroom assistance is needed, children's privacy must be respected along with openness to other adults. Guidelines that should be observed follow:

- For the protection of all, children should generally go to the restroom in a group whenever possible.
- A female worker should accompany a female child and a male worker should accompany a male child, if possible. In a mixed group, a female worker should accompany the children.
- If a child does not need assistance, the adult should stand by the doorway while the child uses the bathroom.
- If a child requires assistance, the adult should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as he/she assists the child.
- In the nursery, diapers or clothes will be changed within sight of another worker. If a parent has requested to be contacted and wishes to assist their own child, nursery workers will not be allowed to change diapers or assist with toilet needs.

## **8. Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured during a church activity, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide basic First Aid (Band-Aids, etc) as appropriate and the leader must notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- In the event that an injury occurs while on an outing, the volunteer will use the information provided by the parent/guardian on the permission form.

First aid supplies are kept out of the reach of young children in the following locations:

Church – secretary's office  
Fellowship house – kitchen

## **9. Other Use of Church Facilities**

The established facility use procedure should be followed when any church facilities are used by groups or individuals other than Grace CRC sponsored events. Depending on the nature of and frequency of the use the following should be considered per insurance carrier recommendation:

- Hold Harmless Agreement
- Certificate of Insurance

For activities specifically involving children and youth, we request a copy of the abuse prevention policy from the external party.

For activities specifically targeted for youth and children, it is expected that the third party have an abuse prevention policy in place. The Grace CRC Safe Church Policy can be made available for guidance upon request.

## **10. Social Media**

Any electronic communication and social media requires the express permission of the parents as well as a including copy to the co-leader of the group.

The Grace Church Social Media Permission form (see APPENDIX B.2) should be completed by all parents of junior and/or senior high youth participating in Grace ministries.

## IV. RESPONDING/REPORTING

There are several steps included in responding to an allegation of suspected child abuse. Each component of the response requires sensitivity and deliberate purpose, and includes:

- A. Responding to the Child
- B. When you Suspect Child Abuse
- C. Church Leadership Initial Steps
- D. Contacting the Parents
- E. Reporting to Parties External to the Church
- F. Responding to the Alleged Offender
- G. Responding to the Media

### ***A. Responding to the Child***

When an incident of possible abuse comes to the attention of a responsible adult leader, one of the leader's first responsibilities is to be a good listener. Listening to a child's story is important to gather information about what may have occurred. Some of this information may be useful assessing whether there is reason to suspect that abuse may have occurred. Carefully listening can also be helpful to the child who may be looking for an adult response. Some guidelines for responding to the child follow:

- Take the child seriously when he/she tells the story.
- Avoid judgmental statements such as, "I think you just had a bad dream."
- Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story. This may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with the child.
- Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way the child reported it.
- Do not make promises to the child that you will not tell anyone what has been shared with you.
- Remind the child that whatever happened was not their fault.
- Assure the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened to him/her.
- Tell the child that you want to find help so it doesn't happen again.
- Do not offer a reward to the child for telling the story or promise a gift if the child tells another adult.
- Reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or about medical examinations. Share that other people need to know about what happened and they will talk to the child later.
- Do not ask the child to show any bruises that are beneath underwear or clothing; only observe those bruises that are accessible.
- Do not tell the child that he/she has been abused.
- Offer to support the child and remind the child that you care about him/her.

Listening to the child should not take the form of a full-fledged investigation, and the listener should refrain from expressing any judgments. After taking appropriate time to listen, however, careful notes should be made about the conversation with the child to facilitate accurate recall of what was said.

### ***B. When you Suspect Child Abuse***

Should there be an allegation of child abuse, the following steps will be followed:

- Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
- Pray for all persons affected by the allegation.
- Immediately begin documenting all procedures which occur in handling the allegation.
- Reach out to someone in church leadership and work together to determine whether external reporting

should be made.

- If it is determined that a report should be made, contact authorities external to the church within 24 hours. You may make a report anonymously. The Safe Church Committee will also contact county officials in order to establish their responsibility in handling the situation. You are not representing the church when you make your report to the county. (See Section IV-E below.)

State statute requires that any person, volunteer or staff, in the position of care-provider for children is considered a “mandated reporter.” A mandated reporter must report child abuse or neglect if it is suspected. Failure by a mandated reporter to report abuse or neglect within 24 hours of his first suspicion of child abuse or neglect shall be fined not more than \$500 for the first failure and for any subsequent failures not less than \$1,000. If the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) becomes aware of an incident involving a mandated reporter who failed to report pursuant to the Code of Virginia Sections 63.2-1509 A and B, the LDSS must report the incident to the local Commonwealth’s Attorney.

### **C. Church Leadership Initial Steps**

When an incident of abuse is suspected or alleged, Grace CRC staff and volunteers are required to report the circumstances to the Safe Church Committee within 24 hours. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged or suspected abuse. The initial responsibility of the Safe Church Committee is instead to determine whether there is reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred.

- To make a determination whether or not there is reason to suspect child abuse, the Safe Church Committee shall convene as soon as possible to consider, based on available information, whether a "reason to suspect" exists.
- In making this determination, the committee should avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, consulting with a representative of the church's insurance company, and contacting the denomination.
- If the Safe Church Committee concludes that there is reason to suspect child abuse, the incident must be reported to the Virginia Child Protective Services Agency, as provided by the Virginia Child Protection Law.
- The Safe Church Committee shall maintain a complete and accurate record of the reported incident, and it shall keep such records confidential.
- The church will provide appropriate assistance to the victim, the offender, and others involved. The Pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation.
- In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the Pastor or church leader should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of an allegation. No steps should be taken to assign blame or to confirm or refute an allegation.
- Confidentiality should be observed for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Safe Church Committee.
- The Safe Church Committee will determine the appropriate time to contact the parents or guardian of the alleged victim. Guidelines for contacting parents are listed in Section D below.

### **D. Contacting the Parents**

An incident of suspected abuse should be reported to parents or guardians with a great deal of sensitivity. Parents may perhaps show disappointment, shock, or disbelief. It is important to be calm and nonjudgmental, and to offer parents spiritual, emotional, and prayer support at a time like this. Some guidelines for contact with parents follow:

- The Safe Church Committee will determine the appropriate time to contact parents.
- Anyone who makes a report to Child Protective Services is usually granted anonymity; do not identify the reporter unless you are given permission to do so.

- Do not share any statements made by the child with a parent or relative who is implicated by the child as an abuser. Do not share the child's statement with anyone other than the authorities until the identity of the abuser can be determined and authorities have determined whether or not the child can be protected from contact with that person.
- Do not attempt to convince a parent that the alleged abuse happened or did not happen. Do not attempt to discredit the child or cast suspicion on the alleged abuser.
- Do not investigate with a parent what may be happening in the home. Do not share information with a parent which has not been shared with the authorities.
- Do not make promises to a parent about the outcome of the investigation.
- Listen to any information a parent may offer about the incident and record it immediately after the conversation.
- Do not minimize the type of abuse or embellish the abuse, its impact on the child, or its harm to the child.

Listening to the child should not take the form of a full-fledged investigation, and the listener should refrain from expressing any judgments. After taking appropriate time to listen, however, careful notes should be made about the conversation with the child to facilitate accurate recall of what was said.

## ***E. Reporting to Parties External to the Church***

If the Safe Church Committee has reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred, then the following steps will be taken by

### **The Mandated Reporter:**

- Notify Child Protective Services of the allegations within 24 hours  
Child Abuse Hotline -- 703-324-7400

### **The Safe Church Committee:**

- Notify Child Protective Services of the allegations within 24 hours  
Child Abuse Hotline -- 703-324-7400
- Notify the church's insurance company -- GuideOne -- 800-552-7945
- Notify the denomination (Classis Safe Church Team (if it exists), the Clerk of Classis and the Church Visitors).

Use the Reporting Abuse Form (see APPENDIX E) to capture all information before you call the Child Abuse Hotline. Reports can be made anonymously. If you choose to provide your name, it will not be released to the victim's family, except by Court order. Persons reporting in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability pursuant to Section 63.2-1512 of the Code of Virginia.

After a report is made, a Child Protective Services (CPS) social worker will interview the child and siblings, the parents or caretakers, and the alleged abuser. The CPS social worker may also contact other persons having information about suspected abuse or neglect of the child.

After contacting all individuals involved, if a CPS social worker is assigned to the case, they will conduct a Family Assessment or Investigation.

## ***F. Responding to the Alleged Offender***

- When an allegation of abuse is made, the alleged offender must be informed of the allegations and must be relieved of all their duties (censure of service) pending an investigation by the proper authorities (Child Protective Services and/or local law enforcement agencies).

- If the allegation of abuse is made against a Pastor, church leader, or volunteer sanctioned by the church leadership to act for Grace CRC, the alleged abuse incident will be reported to the Classis Hackensack Abuse Advisory Panel (if such a panel exists at the time) for advice and assistance in accordance with CRCNA guidance.
- If the allegation of abuse is made against a Pastor or a paid staff person, the following additional procedures will be followed as well:
  1. The Church Visitors and the Pastor-Church Relations director shall be notified immediately.
  2. The Council and church visitors shall provide Pastoral assistance to the alleged victim.
  3. The Pastor's salary and housing stipend shall continue during the period of suspension and investigation.
  4. The Consistory, with the possible assistance of the church visitors, professional counselors, and legal authorities, shall ensure that a full and accurate account of the allegations is obtained.
  5. The Church Visitors shall report in an executive session to the next meeting of Classis.
  6. The confidentiality of all parties is protected.
  7. If the allegations are true, the procedures for deposition of office under Article 83 of the Church Order shall be followed. If the suspension is lifted, this shall be made known to the church visitors, to the Director of Pastor-Church Relations and to an executive session of Classis.
- If the allegations are found to be false, the censure on service will be lifted.
- If the allegations are found to be true, the offender must continue under censure on service and be dealt with by the Safe Church Committee in accordance with provisions of Church Order Supplement, Articles 78-84.
- To be reinstated into the church, an ex-offender must admit sorrow for the sin and request reinstatement in accordance with provisions of Church Order Supplement, Article 81 and 84. The offender must submit a statement of visitation and progress from a psychologist or therapist to the Safe Church Committee. An ex-offender will never be placed in a volunteer position that places him/her at risk.

## ***G. Responding to the Media***

- If an incident of abuse becomes a public matter such as at the time of disclosure of an arrest, the media has the right to report such incidents. This media policy aims to assist Grace CRC leaders to thoughtfully prepare for and respond to the media's awareness of an abusive event, while protecting the victims of such attacks and facilitating the legal process.
- The Safe Church Committee shall designate a single spokesperson for the Church. Only this person will share such events with the media when it is deemed necessary. The designated person ought to be knowledgeable about abuse issues, not related to either victim or perpetrator, but someone who is actively involved in congregational care or the life of the church. Statements to reporters or to the media may not be made by the church's staff or volunteers regarding any ongoing investigation of child abuse or neglect.
- The identity of the victims shall be held confidential. Only an adult victim can give consent to release his/her name for publication.
- The facts ought to be presented, only if they are known. Refrain from speculation and conjecture.
- A prepared statement will assist the person reporting the events on behalf of the Council to the media. The Safe Church Committee and Council, in consultation with legal advisors and other experts, should review any such statement.

## **APPENDIX A - GLOSSARY**

- Child/Youth - Persons under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated through marriage or induction into military service.
- Staff - Individual paid hourly or salary by the church and serving in any area, which brings them into contact with children within the context of direct contact or care and supervision.
- Volunteer - Individuals who are not paid for serving in a child or youth program or who have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.

# APPENDIX B.1 - YOUTH GROUPS PERMISSION FORM

## Grace Church – Christian Reformed

9800 Burke Lake Road  
Burke, VA 22015

Tel (703) 250-8033  
Fax (703) 250-7820  
www.gracecrc.org

### Personal Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of birth \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

### Medical Information

Date of last Tetanus shot \_\_\_\_\_  
Please list any: Health problems \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_  
Medication \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(name of medication, what it is taken it for, dosage, side affects we should be aware of)

### Emergency Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Alt phone \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

### Insurance Information

Insurance Co \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Policy # \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ Group # \_\_\_\_\_  
Requires pre-authorization? \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby give permission for (*child's name*) to attend the (*outing/event*) on (*date*) at (*place*).

I further grant my permission to the youth leaders/counselors to seek emergency medical care in the event it is required until such time as the parent can be reached.

*Leader – Name – contact number*

*Leader – Name – contact number*

*Leader – Name – contact number*

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Guideline – This form should be completed for all Grace youth program sponsored events that meet either of the following criteria:  
- overnight stay  
- exceeds 30 miles from Grace CRC

# APPENDIX B.2 - SOCIAL MEDIA PERMISSION FORM

Grace Church – Christian Reformed

9800 Burke Lake Road  
Burke, VA 22015

Tel (703) 250-8033  
Fax (703) 250-7820  
www.gracecrc.org

## Grace Christian Reformed Church Social Media Permission Form

In this day of electronic communication and social media, it is important that we ensure the safety and security of our children. To that end, we request all parents sign the form below which permits their junior and/or senior high school student to receive electronic communication from their youth leader (i.e. Sunday School teacher, youth group leader, etc.). All communication from a youth leader to your teen will also be sent to the co-leader of the group.

I give my permission that my junior or senior high school daughter and/or son may receive social media, e-mail, twitter, or other communication from their teacher or youth leader.

---

Name of Child(ren)

---

Parent's Name

---

Date

Guideline – This form should be completed by parents of all junior and senior high school students participating in Grace Youth programs.

## APPENDIX C - VIRGINIA'S CHILD ABUSE LAW

Under Section 63.2-100 of the *Code of Virginia*, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age,

1. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions, including but not limited to, a child who is with his parent or other person responsible for his care either (i) during the manufacture or attempted manufacture of a Schedule I or II controlled substance, or (ii) during the unlawful sale of such substance by that child's parents or other person responsible for his care, where such manufacture, or attempted manufacture or unlawful sale would constitute a felony violation of subsection 18.2-248;
2. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care neglects or refuses to provide care necessary for his health. However, no child who in good faith is under treatment solely by spiritual means through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination shall for that reason alone be considered to be an abused or neglected child;
3. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care abandons such child;
4. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care commits or allows to be committed any act of sexual exploitation or any sexual act upon a child in violation of the law;
5. Who is without parental care or guardianship caused by the unreasonable absence or the mental or physical incapacity of the child's parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person standing in loco parentis; or
6. Whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates a substantial risk of physical or mental injury by knowingly leaving the child alone in the same dwelling, including an apartment as defined in subsection 55-79.2, with a person to whom the child is not related by blood or marriage and who the parent or other person responsible for his care knows has been convicted of an offense against a minor for which registration is required as a violent sexual offender pursuant to subsection 9.1-902.

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care.

# APPENDIX D - ABUSE --DEFINITION, TYPES and SYMPTOMS

## 1. DEFINITION

Child abuse refers to any act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he or she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services and other sources.

## 2. TYPES OF ABUSE

### A. Physical abuse

Any non-accidental human contact that results in physical pain or injury to a child--whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.

Includes physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples include but are not limited to: asphyxiation (suffocating); bone fracture; brain damage; skull fracture, subdural hematoma (severe bruising); burns and scald injury; cuts; bruises; welts; abrasions; internal injuries; poisoning; sprains; dislocations; gunshot and stabbing wounds.

### B. Physical Neglect

Not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a child's normal development. Includes the failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to the child's health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include, but are not limited to: abandonment; inadequate supervision; inadequate clothing; inadequate shelter; inadequate personal hygiene; inadequate food and malnutrition.

### C. Sexual Abuse

The exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Examples of such abuse include, but are not limited to: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse, sodomy, and other sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, "peeping Toms" and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact include fondling body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.

## **D. Emotional Abuse**

Attempting to control a child's life through words, threats, and fear; destroying a child's self worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child's mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his or her contact with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem--all of which reinforces a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

## **E. Medical Neglect**

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays is medical neglect.

## **F. Failure to Thrive**

Failure to thrive is a syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

## **G. Mental Abuse/Neglect**

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development defines mental abuse/neglect.

## **H. Educational Neglect**

Any action in which the child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study is considered educational neglect.

## **I. Bizarre Discipline**

Any action in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior is bizarre discipline.

### **3. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD ABUSE**

Children rarely exhibit just one sign that they are the victims of abuse. Some symptoms may represent typical developmental changes or the aftereffect of traumas in their lives other than abuse. Conversely, it is possible for abuse to be taking place without the appearance of noticeable symptoms because of the child's ability to mask or deny what would otherwise be very confusing and painful to acknowledge. Generally, several signs observed over a period of time suggest that a child may be suffering from abuse. This highlights the need for orientation (or awareness) among volunteers, staff and program leaders. Signs and symptoms are described in the following sections.

#### **A. Infants and Preschool Children**

- Regression to an earlier stage of behavioral development, e.g. baby talk, thumb sucking, or bedwetting.
- Change in social behavior that is not associated with normal development, e.g. excessive crying,

clinging, becoming aggressive, withdrawn.

- Physical manifestations, e.g. loss of bowel control, bedwetting, frequent urination, headaches, stomachaches, breathing difficulties, sore throats accompanied by gagging, stains on the child's undergarments.
- Exhibiting signs of fear around a family member or a familiar person or fear of a familiar place or object.
- Fear of being touched, shying away from physical contact. Resistance to being diapered or assisted in bathroom.
- Use of explicit language or sexual behavior that is beyond the child's comprehension or life experience.
- Attempting sexual behavior with other children or attending adults.
- Unexplained injuries or bruises, repeated injuries blamed on carelessness, multiple bruises sustained in one event, bruises to child's midsection, back, head, or back of thighs; signs of scalding, burning, or distinctive bruising, such as in shape of a belt buckle; multiple bruises in various stages of healing.
- Name calling toward other children, bullying behavior, sulking or brooding.
- Fascination with fires, playing with matches, lighter.

## **B. School-age Children**

- Same as physical manifestations above coupled with complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the child's bottom, smearing feces on walls or objects.
- Pattern of injuries, multiple injuries, injuries about the face or neck, failure to complain about or explain an obvious physical discomfort.
- Unusual fears, e.g. a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences.
- Poor concentration in classroom.
- Exhibiting adult-pleasing behaviors, striving for perfection, acting miserable if failing.
- Engaging in self-injury, engaging in excessive masturbation, masturbation in public setting.
- Acting enraged and out of control, expressing anger through destruction.
- Shyness about physical touch.
- Exhibiting sexual behavior beyond comprehension or maturity level, behaving in sexual manner with other children or adults.
- Exhibiting signs of needing to be in control of others or situations, bullying others.
- Hostility and distrust of adults, mood swings and irritability, violent disruptions.
- Acting out, including hoarding food and toys, lying, stealing, assaulting.
- Frequent absences from school or other scheduled events either because of being punished or to hide bruises.
- Low self-esteem, particular sensitivity to criticism.
- Hyper-vigilance, i.e. excessive and suspicious watching of other people, easily startled.
- Preoccupation with fire and setting fires.

## **C. Adolescents**

- Eating disorders, use of laxatives, unexplained and dramatic changes in weight.
- Changes in sleep patterns, including excessive sleeping, sleeping during the day, or insomnia.
- Performance in school plunges.
- Perfectionist behavior, excessive self-criticism, attempting to please adults, overreacting to any form of criticism or complaint.
- Sexually provocative or asexual behavior, denial of body changes and sexual development; for females, seeking affection from older males.
- Experimentation with drugs and alcohol.
- Self-abusive behavior including cutting self, preoccupation with danger and weapons, suicide attempts.
- Truancy from school.
- Cruelty to animals, bullying younger children.
- Emotional numbness, inability to emotionally be supportive of others.

- Having few friends, changing friends often.
- Depression and other signs of withdrawal and avoidance.
- Pregnancy.
- Refusing to attend to basic hygiene.
- Rectal and vaginal infections.
- Hyper-vigilance-excessive watching and suspicion of other people; easily startled.

#### **D. Neglect**

- Appearing to be underfed, constantly hungry, underweight for size and age.
- Begging for food, stealing food, hoarding food.
- Lack of supervision, underage child supervising another child/children.
- Chronic absenteeism from school, unattended educational needs.
- Unattended medical and dental needs.
- Consistent or frequent lack of hygiene, poor hygiene, or lack of cleanliness resulting in odors.

#### **E. Parental Behaviors and Home Life**

- Not attending meetings about the child, not showing an interest in the child, critical of child, uncomplimentary.
- Constantly putting child down, using harsh words to describe child, using threats and unflattering language.
- Describing child as underachiever, complaining that he/she lets people down, is unmotivated, achieve less than brothers and sisters.
- Speaking of child in way that sounds too romantic, too grown-up, too sugary, too perfect.
- Hostile, closed-minded, overprotective, isolating, doesn't let others in house, won't participate in activities with other parents, makes excuses about failing to do task, talks about things not being good at home.
- Reports of past/other suspicious behavior, reports that an older brother or sister may have been mistreated.
- Chemical dependency by one or both parents.
- Sudden and dramatic changes in family's financial security.

# APPENDIX E - REPORTING ABUSE FORM

## Demographic Data:

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Race/Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_  
Language spoken in the home \_\_\_\_\_  
Caretakers name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Any siblings \_\_\_\_\_  
School/grade \_\_\_\_\_  
Where is the child now? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where will the child go after school? \_\_\_\_\_

## Type of abuse reporting:

Physical \_\_\_\_\_  
Emotional \_\_\_\_\_  
Neglect \_\_\_\_\_  
Sexual \_\_\_\_\_  
If Physical abuse--description of the injury (size, shape, color, location and number) \_\_\_\_\_

## Circumstances of the abuse:

Who--Name of alleged abuser \_\_\_\_\_  
What--What is the abuse? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where--Where did the incident occur? \_\_\_\_\_  
When--Date and Time \_\_\_\_\_  
Why--Circumstances surrounding the incident \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did the child approach you to report the incident? \_\_\_\_\_  
Any known similar incidents in the past? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## History with Family:

What is your experience with the family? \_\_\_\_\_  
What does the school know about the family? \_\_\_\_\_  
What are the strengths of the family? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are other services involved with the family? \_\_\_\_\_

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# APPENDIX F - SAFE CHURCH AGREEMENT

## Grace Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Agreement

In order to ensure the safety and security of our children, we must screen volunteers. If any of the following situations apply to you, please check below so we may discuss how this may impact your serving in children's ministries. (All information provided will be kept confidential. Disclosure shall only be related to ministry service.)

Have you ever been convicted of an offense, other than minor traffic offenses? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
If Yes, please elaborate \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Have you ever been convicted of a crime against a child (i.e., physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect molestation, or exploitation of minor children)? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

If Yes, please elaborate \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

I have attended the Safe Church orientation on this date \_\_\_\_\_

I authorize all corporations, current and former employers, credit agencies, educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, city, state and federal courts and military services to release information about my background including but not limited to, information about my employment, education, consumer credit history, driving record, criminal record, and public records history to the person/organization with which this form has been filed. This releases the aforesaid parties from any liability for collecting the above information.

I, the undersigned, have read the Grace CRC Safe Church Policy, understand, acknowledge and endorse it.

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

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

If the person named above is under 18 years of age, guardian or parental acknowledgement and consent by signature is requested.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent or guardian of above named person

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

# APPENDIX G - SAFE CHURCH WORKSHEET

## Safe Church Worksheet – Year A

Name/Date \_\_\_\_\_

True/False Choice –

- T F 1. All members of Grace Church must read, understand and sign the Safe Church Agreement form.
- T F 2. Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be distributed and signed one time only.
- T F 3. All paid and volunteer youth workers will participate in a safe church policy orientation once every three years.
- T F 4. Youth workers can choose one of the following before being allowed to work with youth: a) attend Safe Church orientation, b) complete Safe Church Worksheet, or c) sign the Safe Church agreement.
- T F 5. Volunteers have to be active participants of Grace Church or members of Grace Church for six consecutive months to be eligible to work with youth.
- T F 6. The Safe Church policy only applies to activities on Grace Church premises.
- T F 7. Youth leaders need to have signed permission slips from parents before interacting with youth on social media.
- T F 8. The Safe Church Committee consists of any three members of council, as long as the council appoints them.
- T F 9. When responding to a child's allegation of abuse, the adult leader should assure the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened.
- T F 10. When an incident of abuse is suspected or alleged, staff and/or volunteers are required to report to the Safe Church Committee within 24 hours.
- T F 11. Parents should be informed of an alleged abuse incident by anyone who heard of the allegation.
- T F 12. A mandated reporter must report suspected abuse within 24 hours to the local Child Protective Services. Failure to do so results in a fine of not more than \$500 for the first offense; not less than \$1,000 for subsequent failures.
- T F 13. If an allegation of abuse is made against a pastor or staff member of Grace Church, the alleged incident will be reported to the denominational Pastor-Church Relations director.

# Safe Church Worksheet – Year B

Name/Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Multiple Choice –

1. Who must read, understand and sign the Safe Church Agreement form?
  - a. All members of Grace Church.
  - b. All individuals, ages 18 and over, caring for children at Grace Church.
  - c. All individuals who have responsibility caring for children at Grace Church.
  - d. All adults who attend Grace Church.
2. Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be distributed and signed...
  - a. one time only.
  - b. annually.
  - c. whenever the policy changes.
  - d. every five years.
3. All paid and volunteer youth workers will participate in a safe church policy orientation...
  - a. once a year.
  - b. once every two years.
  - c. once every three years.
  - d. only one time – before beginning their first year of service.
4. The Safe Church Committee consists of...
  - a. the Pastor and any two adult church members.
  - b. any three members of council, as long as the council appoints them.
  - c. the Pastor, the Education Liaison elder, and the Worship Liaison elder.
  - d. the Pastor, the Sunday School superintendent, and the Worship chair.
5. When responding to a child's allegation of abuse, the adult leader should...
  - a. tell the child, "You just had a bad dream."
  - b. try to convince the child that the story isn't true.
  - c. assure the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened.
  - d. offer a reward to the child so that the child will tell someone else.
6. When an incident of abuse is suspected or alleged, staff and/or volunteers are required to report to the Safe Church Committee...
  - a. within 24 hours.
  - b. within 60 minutes.
  - c. within two days.
  - d. at the next council meeting.
7. Parents should be informed of an alleged abuse incident
  - a. by the person who initially heard the allegation.
  - b. by anyone who heard of the allegation.
  - c. by the Safe Church Committee.
  - d. all of the above.
8. A mandated reporter must report suspected abuse within 24 hours to the local Child Protective Services. Failure to do so results in...
  - a. permanently closing the church.
  - b. a fine of not more than \$500 for the first offense; not less than \$1,000 for subsequent failures.
  - c. 500 hours of volunteer work for the county Child Protective Services.
  - d. a stern lecture from a local judge.
9. If an allegation of abuse is made against a pastor or staff member of Grace Church, the alleged incident will be ...
  - a. reported to the Classical Church Visitors.
  - b. reported to the denominational Pastor-Church Relations director.
  - c. reported to the next meeting of Classis Hackensack.
  - d. all of the above.