

Child/Adult Protection Policy



First Reformed Church's Mission Statement

"God's Grace compels us to lovingly
Glorify God in all we do.
Grow with Him daily, and
Go with Him to share His Love to others."

This mission statement will be consulted in coordination with the child protection policy and will help to shape the policies and procedures that are discussed, providing a common ground for everyone.

Why do we need a child/adult protection policy?

Our purpose in creating this document is to provide a safe and secure environment for our children and leaders, in order to provide them with the best possible atmosphere for their spiritual growth and maturity. This policy is in place to protect not only the children, but also the adults and the church in general.

Definitions and Indicators of Abuse

In order for everyone to be operating under the same guidelines, the following definitions and indicators of abuse will be the standards under which this policy is enforced.

Physical abuse: Any intentional, deliberate behavior that inflicts physical pain or injury on another person. This can be a single event or a pattern of events. Indicators of physical abuse may include:

- Bruises or welts
- Burns
- Lacerations
- Wearing extra layers of clothing and/or a refusal to remove extra layers
- Extreme shyness; avoiding contact with adults
- Exhibiting extreme behaviors, like withdrawal or aggression

Physical neglect: Any intentional, deliberate behavior that does not meet the physical needs of someone under the care of someone else. Indicators of physical neglect may include:

- Dirty diapers or clothing
- Hunger
- Body odor
- Unkempt or messy appearance
- Stealing of food or supplies

Emotional abuse: Any attempts to control an individual's life through words, threats, or fear. These attempts convey a message that the individual is worthless and undeserving of love and care. Indicators of emotional abuse may include:

- Very low self-esteem/ high need for adult approval
- Difficulty with peer relationships
- Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, and backaches
- Exhibiting extreme behaviors, like withdrawal or aggression
- Threatening or attempting suicide

Sexual abuse: The sexual exploitation or any sexual intimacy forced on a child/youth for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Indicators of sexual abuse may include:

- Frequent sore throat or urinary tract infections
- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches or backaches
- Sexual knowledge beyond the child's developmental level
- Wearing extra layers of clothing and/or a refusal to remove extra layers
- Withdrawal from activities and relationships; extreme shyness/depression
- Walking or sitting difficulties

Sexual harassment: Any unwelcomed sexual advances toward another person. When it comes to a child/youth, this includes any sexual advances. Indicators of sexual harassment may include:

- Inappropriate sexual humor or language
- Questions or comments about a person's sexual behavior or orientation
- Unwelcomed or undesired physical contact
- Inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance
- Repeated requests for social engagements\
- Display of sexual material in such a way as to embarrass or intimidate

Policies for adults working with children between birth-18

General Policies

1. All adult workers will fill out a *Volunteer Application*, a *Volunteer Guidelines* sheet, and have a background check run. If an individual has not been screened according to these policies, then he/she is not allowed to be a teacher/substitute for classes involving children.
2. All teachers are under the supervision and care of the Christian Education Ministry Team and the Consistory.
3. Ideally, there should be at least two teachers with each class. If this is not possible, the window on the door to the classroom must remain unobstructed.
4. Classes that consist of 2 or less students and one adult will be combined with another class of similar age with both teachers in attendance.

5. Workers should arrive at least 5 minutes before any scheduled activity (class, event, etc)
6. Workers must wait to leave until all the children/youth under their care have been picked up or have left.
7. Any adult who witnesses or believes a child is being abused or neglected, using the indicators in this document, is required to report the behavior to either the Youth Director, who will take the proper action. If the Youth Director is not available, then the Senior Pastor will act in his/her place.
8. If a teacher needs to talk to a student alone, it must take place in a public setting where other people are present.

Work Restrictions

1. No child over 5 years of age shall be assisted in the restroom unless a disability prevents them from doing so alone.
2. Children younger than 5 years of age should be assisted as needed by an adult who will stand outside the door to wait for them.
3. Never touch a person's private area except when necessary; for example, changing a diaper.

Discipline

1. All disciplinary problems should be reported to the Youth Director or the Senior Pastor in his absence, who will take the proper action.
2. Workers should never spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone! Physical restraint should only be used when it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from self-harm or harming others.
3. Appropriate forms of discipline include: verbal warning, helping child focus on more acceptable activities, asking the child's parent, guardian, or an assistant to attend the next meeting and participate in the activities, removing the child from the activity, and/or removing the child from an off-campus activity and having the child's parent/guardian pick them up from the event.
4. When children demonstrate good behavior, they should be praised and shown proper amounts of love.

Display of Affection

1. Appropriate touching as an expression of affirmation is allowed, which includes casual touching of a hand, arm, shoulder, and a young child's head, as long as it's not offensive to the child.
2. Adults should avoid the appearance of impropriety, which includes behavior such as older children sitting on their lap, kissing, demanding hugs, touching chest, waist, stomach or bottom/private areas; and piggy-back rides.
3. Hugging is appropriate and positive in showing love, but it should only be given in public and only if it's not offensive to the child.

Medical Release & Permission Forms:

- All *Medical Release & Permission* forms must be obtained prior to any event. The release forms for First Reformed Church are valid for one year. Release forms for a specific event not run through First Reformed Church will only be valid for that specific event.

Off-Campus/Overnight Church Events:

- An officially sponsored off-campus/overnight church event is one in which has been promoted through the church and meets the following guidelines:
 1. Has been approved by Consistory.
 2. At least two adult workers are present. If the group is mixed, then at least one male and one female need to be present. These minimum ratios are recommended by the church for these specific age groups (unless the sponsoring organization has stricter guidelines, in which case those must be followed):
 - Birth-1st grade: 2 adults/7 children
 - 4th grade-8th grade: 1 adult/7 children
 - 9th grade-12th grade: 1 adult/7 children
 - Each youth group must have adults present representing the gender of each student.
 - If you have less than 7 students, we REQUIRE 1 adult per gender.
 - Adult leaders must exemplify mature, Christ-like behavior.
 3. If possible, parents will be given details of event at least 1 month in advance. (agenda, address/phone number, time of departure/arrival, cost, etc)
 4. Leaders will properly supervise sleeping arrangements.
 5. Leaders will not sleep in the same bed as a youth.
 6. All transportation guidelines are properly followed.

Transportation Guidelines:

1. Youth are never allowed to drive for any out of town events. They may drive to events in town.
2. All drivers must be at least 25 years of age with a valid driver's license.
3. All children/youth must wear seatbelts when available, with at 1:1 ratio of seatbelts to children/youth being followed.
4. Youth may not transport other youth if it is a church related event.
5. In the event that vehicles, such as vans, are to be rented for church use, the drivers of said vehicles must read and sign the FRC Fleet Safety Policy prior to trip date.

Nursery Guidelines

1. There must be at least two people on duty in the nursery and one of them must be an adult female. If there is a situation in which there is only one child present, it is sufficient to have one adult female on duty.
2. All parents leaving a child in the nursery must label the child's personal items.
3. Children will be dismissed by nursery workers to appropriate parents, guardian, or designated party only. No exceptions!
4. If a child needs assistance in using the restroom, he or she will be accompanied by an adult female nursery worker who must leave the door ajar.
5. The door windows or any half-door must not be covered for any reason.
6. Parents or guardians of any child in the nursery must remain on the church grounds during the time their child is in the nursery.

Notice of Injury, Abuse, or Molestation

1. Any volunteer or paid ministry worker who becomes aware of any injury, abuse, or molestation occurring within any ministry activity must immediately inform the Youth Director, or the Senior Pastor, who will in turn complete an *Incident Report*.
2. A copy of the Incident Report will be given to the Senior Pastor and the parents of the child. A copy will also be retained by the church and placed in a secured file location in the church.
3. Our attorney will be consulted by the Youth Director or Senior Pastor within 24 hours after the incident occurs to solicit his/her opinion. If possible, a written opinion should be obtained within 48 hours after the Youth Director or Senior Pastor becomes aware of the situation. The attorney's advice will be acted upon immediately and before any investigation would occur.

4. The Youth Director or Senior Pastor will notify our insurance carrier and the Synod, if needed, upon notice of abuse or molestation.

Violation of Policy or Procedures

1. Ministry workers must notify the Youth Director or the Senior Pastor when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.
2. The Youth Director, under the guidance of the Pastor, Elders, and/or the Christian Education Ministry Team, is required to take all the necessary steps to ensure future compliance with this policy and its guidelines, including the possible removal of workers from their positions.

Internal Investigation

1. First Reformed Church considers any allegation of abuse or molestation a serious matter! Each situation will be fully investigated by the Youth Director, the Senior Pastor, and the Elders, with the assistance of legal counsel and civil authorities, if necessary.
2. Employees who are subject of an investigation will be removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Employees who admit to the abuse or molestation will be terminated consistent with the RCA Book of Church Order and/or Iowa law.
3. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
4. First Reformed Church will permanently remove any employees or volunteers from their duties within the church if they are found to have committed the abuse or molestation. Whenever termination of employment is a factor, legal counsel may be consulted.

Dealing with Law Enforcement, News Media

1. All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers of First Reformed Church will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.
2. One individual, (the Senior Pastor or the Vice President), will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. Our spokesperson will be the only one to convey information concerning the situation, doing so in a prudent manner to avoid compromising an ongoing investigation and to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved.

Annual Review

1. Each year, the Education Ministry team will conduct a review meeting. At that time, the procedures mandated by this policy will be reviewed with all volunteers and employees of First Reformed Church, who will sign the *Yearly Confirmation Form*.
2. If the Yearly Confirmation Form indicates any concern in working with children or youth, the worker will be removed from his/her position immediately and an interview with the worker will be conducted, after which a decision will be made about his/her future involvement.

Revision of Policy and Procedures

The Christian Education Ministry Team will review this policy and the procedures established within it at least every 2 years. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified in accordance with the by-laws of First Reformed Church. When changes are made, they will be communicated to all employees and volunteers affected by the policy changes.