

Church of Saint Mark – Lutheran
130 Mineola Rd. E., Mississauga, Ontario L5G 2E5

Abuse Prevention Policy Summary for Volunteers

...answering God's call to faithfully serve all those that are vulnerable...

We have a fundamental obligation to look after the welfare of those in our church and all those we serve, especially those who are vulnerable. The vulnerable include not only children, youth, some of the elderly, hospital patients, the mentally and physically challenged – but also those otherwise healthy adults who become vulnerable because of personal circumstances such as bereavement. This is a sacred trust that we must manage responsibly and safely.

The Church of Saint Mark will not tolerate abuse of the vulnerable we are called to serve. We focus on preventing abuse as well as detecting and stopping abuse. Our goals are:

- Create and maintain a safe environment by preventing harm to those in our care.
- Maintain a policy of zero tolerance for abuse and neglect.
- Prevent abuse of children and youth under 18 years
- Prevent abuse of other vulnerable persons
- Protect employees and volunteers from any false allegations
- Promote justice for accuser and accused should an allegation of abuse be made
- Ensure that our ministry is enhanced – and not limited- by our policies.

Our Abuse Prevention Policy covers every employee and volunteer, and every activity and group sponsored by our church.

Who is responsible?

You are. Everyone in our church is individually responsible for helping to prevent abuse, and stopping it if it occurs. Our church Council is responsible for implementing and maintaining the plan to help us all prevent abuse. This summary includes the most important points of our policy that everyone should know, and it must be reviewed annually at the beginning of each ministry year (e.g. June for appointed positions, July for VBS). For more information, you should talk to the member of Council that is responsible for the ministry area you are serving in. You may also wish to refer to the full policy and related materials.

What is abuse?

There is a specific behaviour which is not only sinful, but is sufficiently damaging to the victim that it is legally defined under Ontario law as “abuse”. Every person in Ontario has a legal obligation to report legal abuse where it involves someone under 18 years.

Physical Abuse ranges from slapping, kicking and biting to choking, beating, burning, stabbing and shooting. Physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person.

Sexual Abuse is taking advantage of a child or vulnerable person who is not capable of understanding sexual acts, or resisting coercion, such as threats or offers of gifts. It may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, and requests to engage in sexual activity (even where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact include inappropriate touching, fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs, as well as intercourse and other sexual acts.

Emotional Abuse is defined as but not limited to a chronic attack on an individual's self-esteem. It can take the form of name calling, threatening, ridiculing, berating, intimidating, isolating, hazing, habitual targeting, and /or blaming.

Neglect is defined as but not limited to any behaviour that leads to a failure to provide services which are necessary such as withdrawing basic necessities as forms of punishment, failing to assess and respond to changes in health status and/or refusing or withdrawing physical or emotional support.

Harassment is defined as but not limited to any unwanted physical or verbal conduct that offends or humiliates, including gender-based harassment. It can be a single incident or several incidents over time. It includes threats, intimidation, display of racism, sexism, unnecessary physical contact, suggestive remarks or gestures, and/or offensive pictures or jokes. Harassment will be considered to have taken place if a reasonable person ought to have known that the behavior was unwelcome.

Our policy deals primarily with legal abuse. However, other if you are aware of someone 'hurting' or 'suffering' you should discuss it with your Lead Contact or Council Contact or the Pastor. They are committed to taking your concerns seriously.

How can I recognize abuse?

There are several commonly recognized danger signs. The isolated presence of only one or two signs does not necessarily indicate abuse, but where a number of signs are present you must consider the possibility of abuse.

If you are uncertain, there are many sources of help available. Your first action should be a discussion with your Lead Contact or your Council Contact (who can access the full policy and members of the Abuse Prevention Policy Committee) or the Pastor. Also, information can be obtained through the Children's Aid Society and the Police. In your initial discussions you have the option of asking for the discussion to be confidential with respect to the victim's name or with whom the information may be shared. Remember, it may be possible that the person you approach is party to other incidents the victim may have encountered so it may very well be helpful to share the specific victim name.

Possible indicators of Physical Abuse: unexplained bruises, burns, cuts or scrapes; unbelievable explanations of injuries or claiming no knowledge of the source of the injury; disordered sucking, biting or eating habits; fear of adults or of going home; shrinking away from touch; overly aggressive or withdrawn; lags in emotional development.

Possible indicators of Emotional Abuse/Neglect: speech problems; slow mental or emotional growth; anti-social or destructive behavior; dramatic emotional swings; habit of sucking, biting, or rocking; long-term depression; loss of appetite.

Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse: difficulty in walking or sitting; unusual knowledge of or interest in private parts; bed-wetting; depression or withdrawn behavior; poor relationships with other children; acting out adult sexual behaviours; indirect hints that allude to problems; pain or itching around private parts; reluctance to go to the bathroom.

A more comprehensive description of indicators of all different forms of abuse/neglect are available in our policy and training materials, as well as the Children's Aid Society and government agencies.

What should I do if I think there may have been abuse?

The most important thing is not to ignore your conscience. The protection of a child or other vulnerable person rests may depend on you alone.

It is not up to you to investigate the case or confirm your suspicions.

If the person has told you something, **do take their allegation seriously**, assure them that you will do your best to get help, that they did the right thing by telling you, and that you will not abandon them. **DO NOT promise that you will not tell anyone else** (in the case of someone under 18 years).

Where you have a reasonable belief that a person under 18 years may have suffered abuse, you are legally obliged in Ontario to report it immediately to either the local Children's Aid Society, or to the Police. You do not have a choice of not reporting it, depending on someone else to report it indirectly on your behalf, or reporting it only within the church. The Children's Aid Society or the Police will assist you in making your report. Your Lead Contact or Council Contact may be happy to sit in on your call if you wish the support. At this point in time, an Abuse Reporting Form will be completed for the Church file.

PEEL CAS (Children's Aid Society) – 905-363-6131 (24/7) – see also http://www.peel.cas.org/protecting_children.asp?page-78

PEEL REGIONAL POLICE – Non emergency # 905-453-3311

Where your concern does not involve a child, you should report your concern to the Lead Contact, Council Contact or Pastor. If the victim considers it appropriate, you or the victim may also choose to contact police.

Should the situation arise where you believe it cannot be reported to the Pastor or anyone on Council, you need to report it directly to the Police.

What do I need to do after I have made a report?

Please complete an Abuse Reporting Form upon calling the Children's Aid or Police and forward to your Church Contact for filing, if this was not done already.

You do not have any further responsibilities except to maintain absolute confidentiality with respect to the alleged victim and alleged abuser; to co-operate with the Children's Aid, Police or Church Investigations; and to pray for all those involved. It is crucial to avoid further damage to an actual victim or alternatively to avoid destruction of reputations in the event of a false allegation that you respect your obligation to maintain confidentiality.

How can I help avoid abuse, and false allegations of abuse?

Our church has established guidelines to limit the possibility of abuse, and to protect employees and volunteers from the possibility of false allegations. More information on each of these guidelines is available from your Council Contact, and in our full abuse prevention policy.

Two-adult guideline – To the maximum extent possible, there should always be more than one approved adult in rooms where children's or youth ministries are taking place.

Keep it public- Ministry should occur only in rooms where there are others present, or windows in the doors, or the door is left open. As part of ongoing renovations, all doors to rooms used for ministry (including meetings) will be equipped with windows, and until then you should specifically avoid being in any room with a vulnerable person where you cannot be readily observed by others.

Nursery procedures- Those working with infants and toddlers ages 3 and under must wear name tags that indicate they are nursery attendants, toddler teachers, or helpers. Infants and toddlers must be signed in and out at the entrance to the nursery/classroom, and be released only into the custody of parents or other known adults by prior consent. Only adults appointed as nursery attendants may change diapers, and only in clear view of another attendant or adults and as authorized by the child's parents.

Restroom guidelines- A child is to use the restroom by himself or herself if possible. An adult may provide assistance if required, but should stand the restroom, propping the door open if assistance is required within the stall only for as long as absolutely necessary. Staying outside the restroom unless assistance is absolutely required provides the best protection.

Display of support & affection – Touching is valuable, sometimes even necessary, when ministering to children and the vulnerable. **DO** keep everything public, ensure touching is age appropriate and generally initiated by the child or vulnerable person, avoid any physical activity that could be construed as sexually stimulating; challenge your co-workers constructively if you feel touching may be either inappropriate to the child or vulnerable person, or dangerous to your

co-worker. **DO** feel free to express support and affection within our church family. Examples of behavior that are appropriate and acceptable in our church include a warm handshake, patting briefly on the head or shoulder, brief hugging between adults, and brief hugging of a child by an adult where the child is distressed and the contact is communicated as soon as possible to the child's parents. **DON'T** touch any area normally covered by a bathing suit except in an emergency (and where you report the emergency as soon as possible), don't engage in prolonged tickling, hugging or wrestling; make any contact that the recipient verbally or non-verbally indicated that is unwelcome or that they have already said 'no' to.

One-on-One meetings with youth – These are valuable but create risk, and should be in public places like a coffee shop or mall where possible. Where meeting elsewhere, another adult must be informed such as the Pastor or Council Contact, and a written note (even an e-mail to the Pastor) be maintained as a written record. Transportation for the youth should be by someone other than the leader where possible, or otherwise only with parental knowledge and consent. All meetings with youth under 16 years must be with the knowledge and approval of the youth's parents.

Discipline of children and youth – **DO NOT** use physical force other than to prevent immediate harm, and then only with a hand firmly on the shoulder to escort the child out of the situation, and when followed by advising the child's parents. **DO NOT** discipline in anger, if anger is present get another adult. **DO NOT** shout or verbally abuse a child. **DO** involve the child's parents with resolving any difficulty as soon as possible. **DO** report any recurring problem with behavior to your Lead Contact, Pastor or Council Lead – don't wait to involve others.

Off-site meetings and transportation – Special requirements apply in these situations, including parental approval. If your ministry involves such activity, you must be familiar with the requirements as outlined in the detailed policy and ensure that your Council representative is aware and approves of the arrangements. Off-site meetings or transportation to other locations is otherwise prohibited. If a person, out of the goodness of their heart chooses to transport someone to a church activity, if they are under the age of 16 years, parent permission must be granted. It is recommended that the individual should inform their Lead Contact or Council Contact so they are aware of the gesture and can advise accordingly if there is any concern.

Pastoral care guidelines – Special requirements apply to counselling and other pastoral care such as home visits by elders. If your ministry involves such activity, you must be aware of the requirements in the detailed policy and have received training. Pastoral care, counselling and home visits on behalf of the church are otherwise prohibited.

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