

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

GEORGETOWN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Georgetown CRC hopes that our church community will be a place of God's presence in the world. Therefore, we strive to create in our church an environment that nurtures each person's dignity and safety so that everyone can grow and mature as the Creator intended.

We acknowledge, however, that we live in a broken world, and that one of the signs of that brokenness is the violation of boundaries for healthy relationships. When sin of this nature occurs, appropriate action is required. We must strive to achieve justice, protect victims, promote the healing of those who have been abused, and work toward the repentance and healing of the abuser.

GENERAL PREVENTION POLICIES

- In order that Georgetown CRC will be a loving community, to protect itself and prevent abuse from happening all volunteers working with babies/children/youth and friendship, all paid staff and council must provide a "security clearance "every 5 years.
- **NUMBER ONE RULE according to our insurer, Robertson Hall, is that there be a SIX-month waiting period for new members to be a volunteer working with children/youth/elderly. Newcomers can volunteer in that capacity if they provide a reference from their previous church indicating that they were a member in good standing.**
- Volunteers and staff will adhere to prevention policies and sign a statement annually to that effect.
- Volunteers, staff, council members will be expected to familiarize themselves and attend an educational session on the dynamics of abuse including the policies at Georgetown CRC as to how to recognize the signs of abuse and inappropriate behaviour.
- All doors must have window for an unobstructed view of the room or a swinging half door which is open.
- **Georgetown CRC has zero tolerance for abuse, neglect or bullying.**
- **Yelling at children is not acceptable. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.**
- Open Internet access should not be made available to children or youth who are unsupervised. When wireless routers are installed in any premises, the network should be available only by password and a password (including numbers and letters) should be changed on a regular basis.
[Wireless networks that are unsecured are vulnerable to hackers for illegal use and may give access to minors to potentially inappropriate websites]
- ***At the beginning of each program year, a review of the Safe Church policy should be done by all leaders and volunteers***
- All overnight activities must be pre-approved by the church leadership. Proper written consent and medical release forms are required for each child participating. All overnight activities should have a minimum ratio of 2 leaders for every 10 children. There should never be less than appropriate number of volunteers at all times. All supervising adults must be approved volunteers.

The Safe Church Team provides these documents as a resource guide only and assumes no responsibility for use or modifications.

- Being an effective leader involves building relationships with each group member. Should any individual or small group meeting be necessary to facilitate this, and only one adult is present, then the meeting must occur in a public place (e.g. McDonalds, Tim Horton's, etc.) and must be for a reasonable length of time.

Sunday School / Story Hour/ Sermon Discussion / Vacation Bible School

- All Groups should be conducted by at least one adult volunteer (over the age of 18] and one minor volunteer with another adult close by if needed [hall monitor).
- Children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before or after the class. For children needing assistance, the adult attendant should assist with the washroom door ajar.
- All adult leaders and assistants will be required to read the child protection policies and will be required to sign a covenant (annually) stating they understand the policies and guidelines and will abide by them. All adult volunteers over the age of 18 must provide a security check (police check) to the safe church team every 5 years.
- Incident reporting form must be used and filed if there is an incident (copies in binder in each classroom).
- Attendance must be taken and filed on an annual basis (attendance sheets in binder in each classroom).
- Classroom door will be kept open, unless the door has a window, with a clear view of all areas in the room for the hall monitor.
- **Social media policy should be reviewed regularly.**
- **All "General Safe Church Policies" of our church apply to all programs.**

Youth Group / Gems / Cadets / Church School

- All adult leaders and assistants will be required to read the child protection policies and will be required to sign a covenant (annually) stating they understand the policies and guidelines and will abide by them. All adult volunteers over the age of 18 must provide a security check (police check) to the Safe Church Team every 5 years.
- Adult leaders should be at least 4 years older than the oldest club member
- Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and youth group member to date.
- Leaders may meet privately with a youth once or twice and thereafter only with the permission of a parent. Any such meeting should occur in public.
- All off site trips must be adequately supervised, and the transportation policies must remain in effect.
- All incidents must be reported and an incident reporting form filled out and filed (copies in binder in each classroom).
- Attendance must be taken and filed on an annual basis (attendance sheets in binder in each classroom).
- Classroom door will be kept open, unless the door has a window, with a clear view of all areas in the room.
- **Social media policy should be reviewed regularly**
- While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Therefore, displays of affection between the leader and a child ought to be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder in a public area.
- **All "General Safe Church Policies" of our church apply to all programs.**

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Friendship Group

- *At the beginning of each program year, a review of the Safe Church policy should be done by all leaders and volunteers.*
- We recognize the need to build a trusting relationship with these friends. Taking him/her alone for a quiet chat could set a friend up for abuse. Therefore, to protect the leader and the friend, one-on-one situations are discouraged when done in isolation. If a chat is necessary, let another leader know where you are, with whom and for how long.
- For friends that require assistance in the bathroom, the leader must remain outside the bathroom and/or have the caregiver attend to the needs of the person.
- While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Therefore, displays of affection between the leader and a child ought to be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder in a public area. A leader and a friend's right to refuse such a display will be respected.
- All volunteers over the age of 18 must provide a "security clearance" every 5 years.
- All incidents must be reported and an incident reporting form filled out and filed (copies in binder in each classroom).

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

- **Physical Abuse** - a non-accidental human act by a person responsible to care for or supervise a child or youth, which results in physical pain or injury to that child or youth 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 of abuse like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting.
- **Physical Neglect** - failure to meet the physical needs of a child or youth for whom a person is responsible. Typically, physical needs include adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Long-term neglect can interfere with or prevent a child's normal development; neglect can also occur when children or youth are denied medical or dental care or prevented from attending school.
- **Sexual Abuse** - any sexual intimacy forced on a child or youth or the exploitation of children and youth for sexual stimulation or gratification by a person responsible for their care or supervision. Sexual abuse refers to taking advantage of a person who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or of resisting coercion by a person who threatens or offers gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include displaying pornographic material, photographing of a child for pornographic purposes, making obscene telephone calls, and requesting someone to engage in sexual activity where no physical contact occurs. Examples of physical sexual abuse include prolonged hugging and kissing a child; fondling of breasts, genitals, buttocks; sexual intercourse; oral and anal sex.

Emotional abuse - attempts on the part of the abuser to control a child or youth through words, threats, and fear, or to destroy a person's self-worth through humiliation, degradation, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child's mental and physical ability to resist the offender, cuts off his or her contact with others, making it difficult to seek help, and diminishes the self-esteem of the victim - all of which reinforces a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

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NURSERY

Nursery of GCRC is peanut free to the best of our abilities. Parent/guardians are not to provide their children with any snacks.

- All volunteers over the age of 18 must provide a “security clearance” every 5 years
- Children between the ages of 12 and 16 may volunteer for nursery service, provided that an adult is present. They may not care for children without adult supervision.
- At least two attendants must serve in the nursery area. The hall monitor must check just prior to the start of the worship service that both nursery attendants are present. The hall monitor can then involve the nursery monitor-of-the-month or the nursery coordinator if additional help is needed.
- It is recommended that the adult female attendant should diaper an infant or take a child to the washroom. Diapers should be changed in the infant nursery only. For children who do not require assistance, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom or stall. For children who require assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the washroom door ajar. Children with a disability may require additional assistance and the child’s parent(s) must be called.
- Only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at a given time. A couple (husband/wife) should not serve in the nursery at the same time. Whenever possible try to avoid the parent/teenager of the same family combination as well.
- If a designated volunteer cannot serve as scheduled, he/she may find a substitute from the approved list and must notify the supervisor/monthly monitor of changes.
- The caregivers or parents who brought the child to the nursery must pick them up. A parent or caregiver must sign the child in along with all pertinent information. Parents and/or caregivers must provide the bracelet to the attendant indicating they are the one designated to pick up child before the child is released.
- The designated attendants must remain with the child until these caregivers or parents pick them up. Parents and/or caregivers must provide the bracelet to the attendant indicating they are the one designated to pick up child before releasing the child.
- The “General Safe Church Policies” of our church apply to Nursery Programs.
- All volunteers will be expected to be familiar with the safe church policies and review them annually.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy discourages communicating directly with minors by means of social networking such as, texts, Facebook, tweets, emails, etc. This policy is in effect to avoid communication via social networking being misconstrued or misinterpreted.

- In order for a leader to use social media as a way of communicating with a minor the leader should either have written consent from a parent/guardian **or** the parent /guardian should be cc'd on all communication. Content should be limited to announcements and/or to promote upcoming events. Questions in the message should be kept simple requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer e.g. about attending an event or required transportation.
- Pastoral care or counselling in any form should never be done using a social media form.
- No images of individuals or guests should be posted on any form of social media without written permission from a parent or guardian.
- Open Internet access should not be made available to children or youth who are unsupervised. When wireless routers are installed in any premises, the network should be available only by password and a password (including numbers and letters) should be changed on a regular basis. Wireless networks that are unsecured are vulnerable to hackers for illegal use and may give access to minors to potentially inappropriate website.

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Staff and volunteers need to be aware of and sensitive to differences in sexual development, culture, family backgrounds, personalities and special needs. Any touch of a sexual nature is totally inappropriate and will not be tolerated. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate. Appropriate touching should be done only in the presence of other adults in an open classroom.

Examples of love and care expressed in appropriate ways are:

- Bending down to the child's eye level and speaking kindly, listening to him or her carefully
- Taking a child's hand and leading him or her to an activity
- Putting an arm around the shoulder or a child who needs comforting or quieting
- Taking both of the child's hands as you say, "You did a good job"
- Patting a child on the hand, shoulder or back to affirm to him or her
- Holding a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his or her attention while you re-direct the child's behavior
- Holding a pre-school child who is crying

Examples of inappropriate touching which must be avoided:

- Kissing a child, coaxing a child to kiss you, extended hugging or tickling
- Massaging any part of a child/youth – including shoulders
- Touching a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit
- Prolonged physical contact such as holding, stroking, hugging
- Rubbing your hand up and down a child/youth arm and/or leg for any length of time
- Inappropriate touching can include anything beyond what is listed as "appropriate"

Other Guidelines:

- *All over night activities must be pre-approved by the church leadership.* Proper written consent and medical release forms are required for each child participating. All overnight activities should have a minimum ratio of 2 leaders for every 10 children. There should never be less than the appropriate number of volunteers at all times. All supervising adults must be approved volunteers.
- Being an effective leader involves building relationships with each group member. Should any individual or small group meeting be necessary to facilitate this, and only one adult is present, then the meeting must occur in a public place (such as McDonalds/ Tim Horton's) and must be for a reasonable length of time.

SIGNS AND/OR SYMPTOMS OF CHILD ABUSE

A. Pre-School Children

- Regression of behavior to an earlier stage of development e.g. baby talk, thumb sucking, wetting the bed.
- Change of sleeping or eating habits, generally dramatic, and continuing for a period of time.
- Change in social behavior to becoming aggressive, or becoming withdrawn, excessive crying, or clinging.
- Physical manifestations such as loss of bowel control, bedwetting, frequent urination, headaches, stomach aches, breathing difficulties, complaints of sore throats accompanied by gagging, stains in the child's under clothes.
- Exhibit signs of fear around a family member or a familiar person, or fear of a familiar place or object.
- Fear of being touched or shying away from physical contact. Resistance to being diapered or assisting in the bathroom.
- Use of explicit language or sexual behavior that is beyond the comprehension of life experience. Attempting sexual behavior with other children or adults.
- Unexplained injuries and/or bruises. Bruises repeated injuries blamed on the child's carelessness, multiple bruises sustained in one event. Or bruises to child's midsection, back, head, or back of things. Also, signs of scalding, burning, or distinctive bruising e.g. in the shape of a buckle
- Name calling toward other children, bullying behavior, and sulking/brooding.

B. School Age Children

- Physical manifestations such as loss of bowel control, headaches, stomach aches, breathing difficulties, complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the bottom.
- Patterns of multiple injuries about the neck and face, no complaint about obvious physical discomfort, avoids explaining what happened.
- Change in sleeping and eating patterns, dramatic, not of short duration.
- Unusual fears, such as of familiar persons, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of a new experience.
- Poor concentration in the classroom setting.

- Exhibit adult pleasing behaviors, strives for perfection, acts out if fails.
- Engage in self-injury; engage in excessive masturbation or masturbation in public settings.
- Acts enraged and out of control, expresses anger through destruction.
- Shy about physical touch
- Exhibits sexual behaviour beyond comprehension or maturity. Attempting sexual behavior with other children or adults.
- Exhibits signs of needing to be in control of others or situations, and bullies others.
- Acting out including hoarding of food and toys, lying, stealing and assaulting.
- Frequent absences from school or other scheduled events.
- Low self esteem, and particularly sensitive to criticism.

C. Adolescents

- Eating disorders, use of laxatives, and unexplained and dramatic changes in weight.
- Change in sleep patterns, including excessive sleeping, sleeping during the day and/or insomnia.
- Performance in school plunges.
- Perfectionist and especially harsh on oneself, attempts to please adults, stunned by any form of criticism or complaint.
- Sexually provocative – or behave in a sexual manner, denying body change and sexual development.
- Experiments with drugs and alcohol.
- Self abusive behaviour including cutting oneself, preoccupation with danger and weapons, suicide attempts.
- Truancy from school.
- Cruelty to animals, bullying to younger children.
- Numb to feelings, unable to be emotionally supportive to others.
- Few friends and changes friends often.
- Depression and other signs of withdrawal and avoidance.
- Pregnancy
- Refusing to attend to basic hygiene
- Rectal and vaginal infections.

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RESPONDING TO ACCUSATION OF ABUSE – See Blue Binder in GCRC Office.

**SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES - See Green Binder in GCRC Office
OR Policies and Guidelines section of the GCRC Council Manual (on church
website).**

WHOM TO REPORT ABUSE TO

If the victim is a child or a minor up to the age of 16 years old:
notify the Children's Aid Society immediately at 905-333-4441.
For any other concerns and/or suspicion of abuse for those older than 16,
call Halton Regional Police at 905-878-5511.

No proof is necessary – suspicion is enough.

If a reasonable suspicion is reported, and the report is not substantiated or no charges are brought up, those who reported the alleged abuse to officials are usually protected from liability against a charge of false accusation and/or slander.

A child's life isn't always fun and games.

Children suffer abuse at home, at church, and in the community.

Child abuse is harm or threatened harm to a minor by someone with authority over that minor. Abuse includes hitting or kicking a minor; repeated verbal threats or humiliation of a minor; sexual contact or exploitation of a minor for the gratification of the person in authority. Child abuse thrives in secrecy so do not be surprised if you are unaware it is happening to someone you know.

A few of the common signs of child abuse are:

- Exhibiting fear around a family member, familiar person, or familiar place
- Unexplained injuries and bruises; distinctive bruising in the shape of a buckle, hand print, or cord
- Exhibiting sexual behaviour beyond comprehension or maturity level; sexual acting out
- Hostility and distrust of adults
- Dramatic change in social behaviour
- Sudden change in eating habits, sleep pattern or school performance
- Hoarding; stealing; lying; destroying property.

If you would like more information about child abuse or need to report abuse, contact:

Children's Aid Society 905-333-4441



Safe Church Ministry 877-279-9994
www.crcna.org/SafeChurch/abuse-prevention

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