

A. Rationale for this Policy

The Church is called to **bring glory to God** in all things (Matt. 5:15, Phil. 3:17, 1 Pet. 2:12). As a family of believers - all members, pastors, elders, and deacons - we share the responsibility to care for and protect one another. The Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27, Gen. 5:1, Gen. 9:6, James 3:9). Through our creation therefore, God bestowed upon us an inherent special concern for children and the vulnerable members of society¹ (Matt. 18:6, 10:14).

According to Scripture, abuse² - whether physical, sexual, verbal, or neglect - is sin. In public preaching, and private teaching in the home, it should be clearly condemned. When it occurs in the church, it requires the application of church discipline in addition to any action that may be lawfully brought by civil authorities³.

The **purpose** of this Abuse Prevention Policy is to bring glory to God by:

1. **Protecting** children, youth, and vulnerable adults of our church and those who participate in our church programs.
2. **Providing an environment** for all those involved in ministering to others that will allow them to do their work without the threat of false accusation or suspicion.
3. **Responding** diligently, wisely, and compassionately to all persons involved when an allegation of abuse has been made.
4. **Being a faithful witness** to the world around us, that we may not put any unnecessary stumbling block in the way of the gospel of Christ.
5. **Encouraging increased trust, grace, and humility** within the body of Christ by having **clear shared expectations** for how we can lovingly interact with each other to build up our children.

B. Defining Abuse:

As God's people, we define abuse biblically and carefully:

Physical Abuse: Any act that results in non-accidental physical injury to a child or vulnerable adult.

¹ Children are persons under the age of 19. A adult who is vulnerable is defined as "any person aged 19 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness, or by virtue of other recognized factors is unable to take care of him or herself or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation."

² See appendix A for definitions of and indicators of types of abuse

³ See Article 51 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America, 9th Edition, 2023: "*Since Christian discipline is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by civil authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censure, that god may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church and his neighbour, and that offence may be removed from the church of Christ.*"

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Sexual Abuse: The exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult, or any sexual intimacy forced on a child or vulnerable adult for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact.

Verbal Abuse. Chronic patterns of attempting to manipulate a child or vulnerable adult through words, threats and fear; destroying their self-worth through harassment, threats and deprivations.

Neglect: The ongoing failure to provide for the accepted standards of a child or vulnerable adult's physical, educational, emotional, social, or safety needs.

C. Appointing and Screening Procedures

All FRC church programs and committees are supervised by the FRC consistory; and all leaders, volunteers, and committee members are screened, approved, appointed, and supervised by the FRC consistory. All adults, 19 and older, involved in committees and programs are expected to be familiar with the relevant parts of this Policy and will also be responsible for applying it with respect to underage helpers. The **Council will do due diligence in their screening to ensure that appointees to positions involving the care of children will be persons of good character who will only seek the welfare of those in their care**, and do not harm them in any way.

1. All leaders and volunteers in our programs must be members of our church or under the oversight of our church and be members in good standing.
2. Council will appoint only leaders and volunteers whose background is known to 2 or more of them and for a minimum of 5 years.
 - a. If the leader or volunteer are not known to council for 5 years, they will contact their previous church to get two character references from the leadership there.
3. References for any individuals cannot be related to the person that they are giving a reference for.
4. A criminal record check (CRC) will be required in addition to the references in the case of VBS and any church outreach program that involves children or vulnerable individuals from outside FRC. This will be the last step of approval.

Criminal Record Check:

A criminal record check is encouraged, though not required, for all members 19 and older, who are working with children or the vulnerable within our congregation. Although a criminal record check is only effective for identifying repeat offenders, it is a powerful witness to the community around us for the sake of the gospel, as well as a deterrent and warning for would-be predators, that this is a church community that cares well for the vulnerable.

Confidential Documents:

Sensitive documents such as signed acknowledgements, background references, and volunteer applications are to be stored and kept indefinitely in a locked and secure location to ensure confidentiality. Criminal record checks will be kept for five years, and then destroyed.

Consistory shall designate 2 members of consistory, who will be the only ones with access to the

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completed criminal record checks, and will be responsible for keeping the records secure. If the criminal record check reveals concerns, it will be brought to consistory to determine whether the person is eligible to serve on the committee. The consistory will inform the leaders of various activities of only the information they need to know in order to fulfill their responsibilities.

Implementation Timeline:

Once a year the consistory will approve the committee appointments and volunteers. If a volunteer is added mid-year, they must be approved by the consistory before beginning their role.

Once a year, following the installation of new consistory members, the two members in charge of the confidential documents will be updated.

D. Specific Prevention Guidelines

1. General Principles

All members of FRC are expected to interact with children in a healthy way, with a high level of godly accountability. Interacting with children and vulnerable adults in healthy, kind, and generous ways reflects God's love and value for them.

All members are asked to commit to the following guidelines:

I will **increase accountability/visibility** and **decrease isolation/vulnerability** for children/vulnerable adults in these ways:

- Interact with children and vulnerable adults where we can be seen and heard by others.
- Not be alone with a child or vulnerable adult other than my own when at all possible; notify the child's parents or guardians if it is unavoidable.
- Ensure that I can see and hear all children and vulnerable adults I am responsible for during care.
- See children and vulnerable adults as individuals who are precious in God's eyes by learning their name, speaking to them, and getting to know them.

I will interact with children in healthy ways that:

- Are open rather than secretive.
- Are in response to the needs of the children and vulnerable adults.
- Communicate respect for the child or the vulnerable adult.

2. Discipline Policy

Corporal punishment by any member of any child or vulnerable adult, other than their own, is not permitted. Parents' discipline of their own children is not considered harmful if it is measured, not done in anger, and causes no bodily injury to the child. Parents are to be informed and involved whenever a child misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.

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Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:

- Clear communication of the kind of behaviour that is expected of them.
- Distract the child/youth with another activity
- Help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behaviour
- Isolate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff member is available to assist. Time-outs for young children should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child.
- Restraint of a child or vulnerable adult should only be used for their own or others' immediate safety and for the shortest amount of time necessary.⁴

3. Nursery

- The following guidelines apply to the church nursery during church services, and other church events.
- General Principles and Discipline policy apply.
- Appointed leaders must ensure that all volunteers have a copy of this policy and comply with it. A copy of this policy will be posted on the nursery wall. Volunteers who are added to the list during the year must be approved by council.
- All adult nursery volunteers must be members of FRCT, have two character references, and agree to the Child Abuse Prevention policy guidelines for the nursery. A criminal record check is encouraged.
- Nursery volunteers from sister churches will be permitted for activities other than church services, with two character references and agreement to the Child Abuse Prevention policy guidelines for nursery. A criminal record check is required for nursery volunteers that are not members of FRCT.
- A minimum of two attendants, including at least one adult attendant, must be with children at all times. All volunteers who are under the age of 19 must work with someone of age 19 or older.
- There will be no male babysitters.
- Visitors will not be left alone to babysit the children.
- All nursery doors must have a window. There will be an open-door policy enabling parents/guardians to come in at any time.
- If possible, the nursery bathroom will be used. If a child is able to use the bathroom independently, the attendant will wait outside the bathroom. If a child needs help, the attendant will leave the bathroom door open while helping them. If the nursery bathroom is unavailable, an adult attendant must accompany the child to the main bathroom.
- Diapering procedures must take place in view of the main nursery area where at least two attendants are present. Only adult attendants will change diapers.
- A parent, guardian, or family member designated by the parent/ guardian must pick up the child after church services.

⁴ Physical force cannot be used on individuals unless the force used is “reasonable” and used for “corrective and protective purposes”, as defined in the Criminal Code, section 43.

4. Sunday School/ Story Hour

- General Principles and Discipline policy apply.
- Appointed leaders must ensure that all volunteers have a copy of this policy and comply with it. Volunteers who are added to the list during the year must be approved by council.
- All adult volunteers must be members of FRCT, have two character references, and agree to the Child Abuse Prevention policy guidelines for Sunday School/ Story Hour. A criminal record check is encouraged.
- Volunteers from sister churches will be permitted for Story Hour, with two character references and agreement to the Child Abuse Prevention policy guidelines for Story Hour. A criminal record check is required for volunteers that are not members of FRCT.
- There must be a minimum of one adult present with children at all times. All volunteers who are under the age of 19 must work with someone of age 19 or older.
- All classrooms must have a window. There will be an open-door policy enabling parents/ guardians to come in at any time.
- Young children will have an adult supervising outside the door if they need to go the bathroom, or a parent will be called to take their child.

5. VBS/ Girls' and Boys' Club/ other Youth Groups that involve children from outside our church

- General Principles and Discipline policy apply.
- Appointed leaders must ensure that all volunteers have a copy of this policy and comply with it.
- All adult volunteers must be approved by Council. They are to be members of FRCT or a sister church; have 2 character references; complete a Criminal Record Check; and be familiar with and agree to abide by the Child Abuse Prevention policy.
- A minimum of two attendants, including at least one adult attendant, must be with children at all times. All volunteers who are under the age of 19 must work with someone of age 19 or older.
- All classrooms must have a window. There will be an open-door policy enabling parents/ guardians and other volunteers to come in at any time.
- Exterior bathroom doors will be left propped open during these events.
- Leaders should be aware of where children are at all times, including during bathroom breaks.
- There will be no individual (one-on-one) meetings with minors.
- For any overnight events, the parental consent form (Appendix B) must be used.

6. Catechism class or meetings

- General Principles and Discipline policy apply.
- There will be no individual (one-on-one) meetings or catechism classes with minors.
- All classrooms must have a window. There will be an open-door policy enabling parents/ guardians and other volunteers to come in at any time.
- All volunteers must be members of FRCT, have two character references, and agree to the Child Abuse Prevention policy guidelines. A criminal record check is encouraged.

7. Committees

All committee mandates will include the Abuse Prevention Policy as it applies to their committee; when members join a committee, they are expected to be familiar with and agree to the policy. All committees must follow the Appointing and Screening Procedures when adding new committee members.

8. Council members/ counselling situations

All council members, ministers, and employees of the church will follow the guidelines of the Abuse Prevention Policy. Ministers, elders, and deacons, will avoid one on one counselling situations with people of the opposite sex, and show discernment in fulfilling their duties. If possible, visits should be done with two counsel members. Council must follow the Appointing and Screening Procedures when adding new council members.

9. Facility requirements:

- All rooms without windows will be kept locked while not actively in use.
- The doors of all classrooms and the nursery must have a window. All classrooms and the nursery have an open-door policy, enabling parents/ guardians to come in at any time.
- All reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that children have adult supervision during FRCT events. Parents are to be aware of where their children are while at the church, and to ensure that they are treating the building and others appropriately.

E. Reporting and Responding Procedures

- Anyone who has reason to believe that a child under the age of 19 years has been or is likely to be abused or neglected (sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, or neglect as per the definitions in Appendix A) has a legal duty under the child, family, and community service act to properly report the matter to the Ministry of Children and Family Services. If a member is unsure how to proceed, they can go through the reporting procedure with a consistory member. This requirement cannot be delegated to anyone else. It is the person who becomes aware of abuse or neglect or who suspects that there is a risk for abuse or neglect who must inform the ministry or the police.
- An excellent resource for this is *The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* available at [The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers (gov.bc.ca))
The handbook states "if you have reason to believe that a child or youth needs protection under section 13 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act you must promptly report the matter to a child welfare worker. (See page 41 for section 13.) Phone 1 800 663-9122 at any time of the day or night. If the child or youth is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local police."
- If a child discloses neglect or abuse the following preliminary steps should be followed:
 - Respond seriously to what the child says.

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- Promptly report the disclosure to the Ministry of children and families (or the police, if the child's safety is a concern). Time is of the essence in ensuring the safety and well-being of the children.
- Do not contact the alleged perpetrator. This is the responsibility of the police or child protection agency.
- If the alleged abuse occurred in a program or function under the jurisdiction of the church the following will also apply: while the matter is under investigation, it would be wise to obtain formal legal counsel prior to admitting liability or issuing any public statement (whether to the media or from the pulpit). This will be up to the discretion of the consistory.
- During an investigation, members are legally obligated to disclose everything they know about the alleged abuse. There is no confidentiality protection regarding confessions made to the church leaders regarding alleged crimes. Church leaders are required to cooperate with the civil authorities if approached during an investigation. Sexual abuse, child neglect, or physical assault of a child will be considered criminal abuse and will be reported to the authorities as described above and as required in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.
- All responses will be dealt with confidentially to protect both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator. The process must be carried out with care and concern for the people involved.
- No public statements will be made about the incident without first seeking legal counsel.

F. Training

- Consistory will give every member of the congregation a copy of the Abuse Prevention Policy.
- The entire policy will be posted on the church website.
- Consistory will ensure that all program leaders and committee members fully understand and comply with the abuse policy. As consistory visits committees and programs annually, this will give opportunity to ask whether the policy is being followed, and whether there are questions or clarifications needed.
- Consistory will go through the list of committee members and volunteers annually to approve new volunteers. Volunteers should be submitted to council well in advance of programs.
- Consistory will strive to ensure that parents are made aware of the precautions being taken to protect their children. Incoming members should be updated by consistory when they join the church as well, if there is anything they need to know.
- For the sake of accountability and transparency, consistory will inform the congregation when there are details that they need to be aware of regarding members or visitors, particularly relating to abuse.

Appendix A: Definitions of Abuse

The appendix is not part of the policy, but is given to provide clarity and definitions to the policy. **Due to the explicit nature of language surrounding abuse, we recommend that parents use discretion before allowing their children to read the appendix**

There are four major types of child and vulnerable adult maltreatment:

1. **Physical abuse.** Physical abuse is any act that results in a non-accidental physical injury. Such acts may include, but are not limited to punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, burning, holding underwater, or pulling hair.
 - *Possible signs of physical abuse*
 - *Unexplained bruises or welts in places where it would be unusual to have injuries (cheeks, lower back, inside of arms, etc.)*
 - *Burn marks that appear to be inflicted*
 - *Unexplained fractures*
 - *Fear of physical contact*
 - *Apparent fear of going home*
2. **Sexual abuse.** Sexual abuse is the involvement of a child or vulnerable adult in sexual activity with an adult or another child (as defined below) which includes but is not limited to:
 - Verbal: Remarks, which include sexual threats, solicitation, obscene or sexually explicit language (whether in person, on the telephone, or via text messaging or the internet); or any verbal expression with inappropriate sexual content.
 - Visual: Indecent exposure; masturbation or sexual activity in the presence of a child or vulnerable adult; showing or taking of suggestive pictures, pornographic material of genitals, or the showing of unclothed persons; any sexual activity or simulated sexual activity such as masturbation or intercourse; or inappropriate viewing or staring.
 - Physical Touching: Physical contact or penetration by penis, fingers, or any other body part or object, except for normal caretaking or medical care, with a person's clothed or unclothed genitals, pubic area, buttocks, or in the case of a female, breast, or causing a child or vulnerable adult to perform any of these acts: masturbation, rubbing, holding, or kissing for the purpose of sexual gratification.
 - Sexual Exploitation: Actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult.
 - Grooming: Befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child or vulnerable adult, and sometimes the adults around the child, to gain access to and time alone with the child or vulnerable adult to lower inhibitions for sexual abuse. In the context of sexual abuse or exploitation, grooming can often be identified by six steps or characteristics:
 1. Targeting a child or vulnerable adult.
 2. Offering specialized attention.
 3. Manipulating the relationship to meet a child or vulnerable adult's needs.
 4. Isolating the child or vulnerable adult.

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5. Creating secrecy around the relationship.
6. Initiating sexual abuse or exploitation.

Possible signs of sexual abuse:

- *Difficulty in walking or sitting*
- *Reports of pain, itching, bleeding and bruises in the genital or anal area*
- *Fear of physical contact*
- *Apparent fear of going home*
- *Unusual (not age appropriate) knowledge of sexual behaviour*

3. **Verbal Abuse.** Chronic patterns of attempting to manipulate a child or vulnerable adult through words, threats and fear; destroying a child's self-worth through harassment, threats and deprivations. Verbal abuse weakens a child or vulnerable adult's mental and physical ability to resist abuse, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem – all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

○ *Possible signs of verbal abuse*

- *Demands for constant attention*
- *Extreme lack of confidence, withdrawal, depression*
- *Extreme aggressiveness or passivity when playing with children*

4. **Neglect.** The ongoing failure to provide for the accepted standards of a child or vulnerable adult's physical, educational, emotional, social, or safety needs (eg. food, rest, clothing, shelter, health, hygiene, safety, or failing to provide adequate medical attention).

○ *Possible signs of neglect:*

- *Persistent hunger, malnutrition, or dehydration*
- *Poor hygiene, dirtiness, and skin disorders associated with bad hygiene*
- *Persistent fatigue and listlessness*
- *Demands for constant attention*
- *Lack of parental participation or interest*
- *Indications that no one is ever home to look after the child*

Other unacceptable behaviors:

Peer-to-Peer Harmful or Abusive Behaviour: Should children or vulnerable adults engage in harmful or abusive behaviour that is beyond normal developmental behaviour, concerns should be assessed based on age and differences in responsibility, trust, or power between the person/s causing harm and those who may have been harmed. Peer-to-Peer harmful behaviours may include all types of abuse as well as the harmful behaviours defined above inclusive of bullying.

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Inappropriate Behaviours: The following interactions with children are considered inappropriate, as they cause harm that can be considered abusive and can have long-term negative consequences:

- Doing things of a personal nature that the child or vulnerable adult can do for themselves, including dressing, bathing, toileting etc.
- Excessive use of physical force or restraint except in safety situations to protect from specific harm.
- Showing inappropriate affection when alone with a child or vulnerable adult.
- Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or vulnerable adult.
- Shaming, belittling, humiliating, or name-calling, making derogatory remarks about them.
- Using harsh language that may frighten, threaten, or humiliate them.
- Cursing in any language is considered inappropriate.
- Telling secrets or having inappropriate discussions with children or vulnerable adults.
- Favouring or showing preferential treatment to children or vulnerable adults to the exclusion of others, except as is appropriate in family relationships

Parental Consent – Appendix B

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are planning a special activity for your child that will require an overnight stay. Please read the information contained in this form and then sign and return the permission slip at the bottom of this form by _____, 20____.

Activity Name: _____

Activity Leader: _____ Phone Number: _____

Date of Activity: _____, 20 _____

Location: _____ - _____

Purpose: _____

Cost: _____

Cash or check payable to: _____

Means of Transportation: _____

Leave Church: _____ Arrive back at Church: _____ --- _____

Special Instructions:

() I give permission for my child's picture to be used the promotion of this program

Save this lower part of the form for future reference.

Sign this part of the form and return it to the Activity Leader. Include payment if required.

_____ has permission to attend the following activity:

_____ BC Health Care Number: _____

In an emergency, please contact:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Print Parent / Guardian Name

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____, 20_____