

Safe Church Policy

[Bethel Church]

Bethel CRC Safe Church Policy

These policies and procedures aim at reducing Bethel CRC's risk of child sexual abuse within its ministries.

Adults who minister with children and youth are responsible for fostering a nurturing environment wherein children and youth are rooted in Christ, grow in faith and bear fruit for Christ daily. Foundational to this environmental nurture is the established trust between adult and children or youth. In various nurturing environments children and youth learn to trust adults, following them faithfully and sometimes unquestionably. Because of this trust level, adults who minister with children and youth must always act with integrity and trustworthiness.

A growing national concern both in society and in the church is the betrayal of children and youth's trust in adults through abuse. Adults must always guard against and caution themselves against abusing children and youth verbally, physically, and sexually. While our church understands some of the factors that lead to abuse, we believe abuse is never excusable.¹

KNOWLEDGE and PREVENTION. These are two key words regarding sexual abuse in the church.

Knowledge of sexual abuse often begins with acknowledgment. The Christian community should recognize that in over 80% of sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is a close friend or family member. Nation wide attention is being focused on sexual abuse of children and youth by church volunteers and staff. The church can no longer deny that sexual abuse exists within its midst.

The second critical word is prevention. Acknowledging that church workers too may be perpetrators of sexual abuse, the church must take steps to prevent such abuse. Thinking that abuse will never happen in our church breeds the type of environment where abuse could be even more likely to happen. Something can be done to reduce the risk of abuse in our church.

Knowledge and prevention are not only foundational for a safe environment for children and youth; they are beneficial for those susceptible to practicing abuse.

¹Abuse does not disqualify adults from involvement in other ministries within the church. We all stand in need of forgiveness and restoration.

What is sexual abuse?

A simple, working definition of sexual abuse is:

Any sexual activity with a child (Reducing the Sexual Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church, p. 13).

Sexual abuse occurs when the perpetrator takes advantage of a child's age, vulnerability, and powerlessness. The perpetrator is fully responsible for these actions.

Sexual abuse occurs in two categories: 1) touching: fondling, penetration, intercourse, rape; 2) non touching: comments, pornography, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism.

The consequences in the life of the abused are often deep and long lasting. Even a thoughtless momentary act of sexual abuse can result in children and youth experiencing abnormal fears, depression, low self-esteem, suicidal tendencies, substance abuse, sexual dysfunctions.

What are the indicators of sexual abuse?

Parents, church volunteers and staff should be alert to the signs of sexual abuse. Awareness can intercept sexual advances at an early stage as well as lead to the eventual apprehension of the perpetrator.

The following may be indicators of sexual abuse. One indicator alone could be a sign but does not necessarily indicate sexual abuse. These indicators taken together give reasonable cause that sexual abuse may be taking place.

lacerations and bruises
nightmares
irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
difficulty with urination
discomfort when sitting
torn or bloody underclothing
venereal disease

Behavioral signs may include:
anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
sexual self-consciousness
"acting out" of sexual behavior
withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:
I don't like (a particular church worker).
(A church worker) does things to me when we're alone.
I don't like to be alone with a (church worker).
(A church worker) fooled around with me.

Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church, p. 16

The following may be indicators of physical abuse:

Unexplained lacerations, bruises and welts (especially if in several locations, different stages of healing, or if common after absences or vacations).
Unexplained burns (such as cigarette, or patterned burns as left by electric burners or irons, particularly in locations atypical to accidental exposures to objects).
Unexplained fractures (including nose and skull and multiple or spiral fractures, or repeated breaks).
Fear of parents or going home from school at the end of the day.
Wariness of adult contacts or inquires.

The following may be indicators of mental abuse:

Lags in physical development
Speech disorders
Failure to thrive
Habit disorders (such as sucking, biting, or rocking)
Neurotic reactions (such as hysteria, obsession, phobias)
Extreme behaviors (passive or aggressive in nature)
Attempted suicides

The following may be indicators of neglect:

Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, constant fatigue or inappropriate clothing
Consistent lack of supervision (especially in dangerous activities or for long periods of time)
Unattended or untreated physical problems or medical needs
Alcohol or drug abuse
Abandonment

When attempting to evaluate whether reasonable cause exists to suspect abuse or neglect, educators should take into account the presence of one or more of these indicators, the number of them present, their severity and the repetitiveness with which they appear. Remember, however, even an isolated occurrence of some of these indicators may trigger the obligation to file a report.

Bethel CRC Abuse Prevention Policy

The staff, officers, leaders, teachers, or anyone in a position representing Bethel Christian Reformed Church (hereafter referred to as Bethel) are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the Pastor or his designee. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse, but only to report it to the Pastor. When the alleged victim is a minor child the reporting person will be encouraged to report this to the local Children's Protective Service agency and/or the local law enforcement department. Michigan state law requires the Pastor to report all alleged abuse cases involving minor children to Children's Protective Services and Law Enforcement Agencies. Maintaining records of reported incidents will be left to the discretion of the Executive Committee but if they are kept they must be secure and confidential.

All staff, leaders and teachers of Bethel who work with children and youth will be required to attend an educational seminar on the dynamics of abuse; this will include the church's policies and how to recognize signs of abuse and inappropriate behavior.

Each program in Bethel that involves children is required to have and maintain operating procedures that will prevent and protect children from being abused. These procedures must be reviewed annually by program leaders. Any recommendations for change will be submitted to council for approval.

In order to assure protection for children and prevent abuse from happening, all adult positions at Bethel (both paid and volunteer) will be screened for previous abuse offenses. This will include completing of a volunteer profile form, references, a criminal record clearance and an interview by one of the church staff. (See Appendix A for a copy of a volunteer profile.)

Any children leaving the church service should be accompanied by his or her parent.

Removal or suspension of alleged offenders serving in some capacity within the church will follow the listed guidelines.

When the allegation is made of abuse, the alleged offender must be informed of these allegations and must be suspended from participating in all service roles in the church until an investigation is done by the proper authorities. (Children's Protective Services and/or local law enforcement agencies.)

If the allegations are found to be false the censure on service will be lifted. The elders will continue to work with the party who made the allegations.

If the allegations are true the offender must continue under censure and be dealt with by the pastoral elders per Church Order articles 78 through 84.

That in addition to the following be done if the pastor is the alleged offender (accused): The church visitors and the Pastor-Church Relations or Regional pastor shall be notified immediately.

Suspension of an office bearer means, in the case of the pastor, that his salary and housing continue while he is under suspension.

The church visitors shall report in executive session to the next meeting of classis.

The alleged offending party and the council shall seek to keep the incident confidential.

If/when suspension is lifted; the lifting of suspension shall be made known to the church visitors, to the director of Pastor-Church Relations or Regional Pastor, and to an executive session of classis.

The council shall encourage both parties to seek professional counseling.

Reinstatement of a healed offender:

The ex-offender must request reinstatement into the church and admit sorrow for his sin per Church Order articles 81 and 84.

The healed offender must submit psychologist or therapists' statement of visitation and progress in treatment on a regular basis to the Pastor or his designee.

A healed offender will not be placed in a volunteer position, which places him at risk.

To protect staff (paid and volunteer) and assure accountability of program leaders, any concerns of the staff must be reported to the Pastor or Executive Committee.

Church School Procedures

All teachers and regular helpers must fill out the volunteer profile.

All teachers and regular helpers are required to attend the abuse education class.

Prior to the first week of Church School there will be a period of training for teachers explaining all rules (geared to all age groups).

Any one-on-one outings (student with teacher) will require approval by the parents.

An adult will monitor the hallways and bathrooms to see that they are safe during Church School.

Anyone not following the rules stated must be reported to the superintendent.

Bathroom procedure for Church School: an adult and assistant should accompany children to the bathroom.

Nursery Procedures (during worship & WNAB)

Sign-in sheet with name, address, phone number, any special needs or nickname. This enables people to be called if there has been exposure to chicken pox, etc. (All sign-in sheets must be retained.)

All nursery staff are required to attend the abuse education class.

Only a parent or their designate will be allowed to pick up a child.

Three people (2 adults) in nursery every time.

Allow only assigned workers or approved subs to be in nursery. Subs would be anyone already on the list. Volunteer profile done on all adult nursery attendants.

Diapers are changed only in the presence of two attendants (Including the one changing the diaper).

All three attendants will not be members of the same family. Husband and wife will not staff the nursery at the same time.

Children will stay in the nursery until picked up by parents or those designated.

Bathroom Procedures: Any child going into the bathroom should be monitored by 2 individuals (1 adult) for diaper changing or use of the toilet or sink.

Parents will be allowed to bring their children into the nursery and are required to sign each child in on the sign-in sheet.

Anyone not following the rules stated must be reported to the nursery coordinator.

GEMS and Cadets Procedures

All counselors and helpers must fill out a volunteer profile form and be interviewed by the education committee.

All counselors and helpers must attend an abuse education class.

A minimum of two staff/counselors need be present at all activities.

It is recommended that hall monitors be set up for Cadet and GEMS meeting nights but in place of this head counselors and assistant head counselors are to be hall and bathroom monitors during meetings along with increased awareness by counselors regarding the location of their Cadets and GEMS at all times.

Prior to the first meeting a review of the policy should be done with counselors.

Any one-on-one (Cadet/GEMS with counselor) will require written approval of the parent. (Any meeting night counselor/cadet/GEMS outings must be reported to the head counselor prior to leaving.)

Written parental approval must be obtained if a staff/counselor is to transport a youth to or from a church activity.

Anyone not following the rules stated must be reported to the head counselor.

TGIC, Youth Group & Children's Worship Procedures

All leaders and helpers must fill out a volunteer profile form and be interviewed by the education committee.

All leaders and helpers must attend an abuse education class.

A minimum of two staff/leaders need be present at all activities.

Prior to the first meeting a review of the policy should be done with leaders and helpers.

Any one-on-one (leader with youth) activities will require written approval of the parent.

One written permission slip may be obtained for recurring one-on-one activities. (Any meeting night youth/leader outings must be reported to the head leader prior to leaving.)

Written parental approval must be obtained if a staff/leader is to transport a youth to or from a church activity.

Anyone not following the rules stated must be reported to the leaders.

Outings = with a group

One-on-One = individual at time it's not a programmed activity