

**ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE
POLICIES and PROCEDURES
of the
STRATFORD
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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MISSION AND MANDATES

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Mission of The Christian Reformed Church

As people called by God,

We gather to praise God, listen to Him and respond.

We nurture each other in faith, and obedience to Christ.

We love and care for one another as God's people.

We commit ourselves to serve and to tell others about Jesus

We pursue God's justice and peace in every area of life.

Purpose of Abuse Prevention / Abuse Response Policy

As a family of believers 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 society. (Matt. 18:6, 10:14).

The purpose of this Abuse Prevention / Abuse Response Policy is:

1. to maintain an environment where there is zero tolerance for abuse or neglect.
2. to prevent harm to children of our church and children in our church programs.
3. to prevent harm to vulnerable adults of our church and church programs.
4. to provide an environment for teachers, nursery attendants, leaders, pastors and all those involved in ministering to others that will allow them to do their work without the threat of false accusation or suspicion.
5. to respond diligently, caringly and in a supportive manner to all persons involved when an allegation of abuse has been made.

Mandates of Abuse Prevention and Response Policy

The following mandates apply to everyone in the Stratford Christian Reformed Church (Stratford CRC) and pertain to all on- and off-site activities. Stratford CRC Council, through the Stratford CRC Safe Church Committee (Stratford SCC), ensures that the **Ministry Providers** adhere to this policy and its mandates. A **ministry provider** is a person who serves in any program of the Stratford CRC.

1. Mandate of Stratford CRC Safe Church Committee (Stratford SCC)

Stratford CRC Safe Church Committee provides:

- 1.1 Recommendations to Stratford CRC Council respecting content/updates for this Abuse Prevention and Response Policy.
- 1.2 Ongoing education to keep the congregation informed of the importance, content, and meaning of the policy and its mandates.
- 1.3 Ongoing training on abuse awareness and prevention.
- 1.4 Clear communication on the requirement of reporting abuse through signage, brochures, announcements, etc.
- 1.5 Security for all confidential documents relating to this policy.
- 1.6 Every two years, Council will appoint an independent internal auditor (individual or committee) to review and survey all the ministries of Stratford CRC and to report back to Council to verify that operations are in compliance with Stratford CRC Safe Church policies and procedures.

2. Mandate for Ministry Providers

Ministry Providers:

- 2.1 are screened according to an established protocol for the position.
- 2.2 participate in orientation and ongoing training that focuses on abuse awareness and prevention.
- 2.3 sign a statement that they understand and agree to abide by the policy. Failure to honour that agreement will result in termination of the person's position.
- 2.4 complete a police check every five years.
- 2.5 who are age 16 or younger may assist only under qualified adult supervision.

3. Mandate for Screening Staff, Leaders and Ministry Providers

3.1 Purpose:

- 3.1.1 To ensure that ministry providers in the Stratford CRC possess the personal qualities to provide safe and effective service.

3.2 Assumptions:

- 3.2.1 Abuse prevention screening is required for all ministry providers {16 years and over} who work with children, youth, and the vulnerable, as well as for ministers, paid staff, elders, deacons and deaconesses.
- 3.2.2 Screening packages include an application form, a memorandum of agreement and information on how to obtain a police check. A police check must be submitted with the completed application package.
- 3.2.3 If a person is absent for a period of two or more years from any position for which screening is required, the screening must be repeated.
- 3.2.4 A police check must be completed for every ministry provider every five years.
- 3.2.5 Training, support, and other resources with respect to abuse prevention are available to all ministry providers.
- 3.2.6 A confidential and secure filing system is maintained, to archive materials from the screening process of ministry providers.

3.3 Procedure:

Prior to the start of a program, the program coordinator provides Stratford SCC with a list of names of all ministry providers. Stratford SCC identifies which candidates must undergo screening. For candidates requiring screening, the following occurs:

- 3.3.1 Stratford SCC provides a screening package to the candidate.
- 3.3.2 Typically, a candidate will have been a member of Stratford CRC for at least 6 months. All church ministry volunteers who are not members of Stratford CRC must be interviewed by the pastor, an elder or the leader of the church ministry. The volunteer must provide the following documents:
 - 3.3.2.1 Current police record check which must be the original copy and viewed within 60 days of issuance;
 - 3.3.2.2 Form 1: Application for Ministry Position;

- 3.3.2.3 Form 2: Memorandum of Agreement;
- 3.3.2.4 Two references;
- 3.3.3 Members who have never undergone screening or have been absent for two or more years from a ministry position requiring screening, sign memorandum of agreement and submit it with police check to Stratford SCC prior to eligibility.
- 3.3.4 Members who were born before February 28, 1986 and who also have never undergone screening must complete a Vulnerable Sector Verification (V.S.V.) police check. For all others, a C.P.I.C, E.P.I.C. or E.C.R.C are sufficient.¹
- 3.3.5 Stratford SCC conducts reference checks, reviews, records and returns police check, and advises program coordinator when screening process is complete.
- 3.3.6 Stratford SCC maintains all screening documentation in ministry provider's file located in the secure filing system.

4. Mandate for Training / Educating Ministry Providers

- 4.1 **TRAINING IS REQUIRED** for all ministry providers who regularly work with children, youth and vulnerable adults to assist in the prevention of abuse through the following means:
 - 4.1.1 Circulation of a staff handbook containing this policy (**ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES of the STRATFORD CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**)
 - 4.1.2 Formal abuse prevention training through the presentation of resource materials, videos, “in-house” seminars, etc.
 - 4.1.3 Educating ministry workers about their legal obligation to report suspected abuse and to recognize and identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and molestation.
 - 4.1.4 An initial period of intensive training for all children's workers at the time of implementation of “new” policies and procedures respecting prevention and reporting of abuse.
 - 4.1.5 Follow-up with periodic refreshers and reassessment of policies and procedures on an annual basis (usually each August or September prior to the

¹V.S.V. means Vulnerable Sector Verification (available through local Police Services).
 C.P.I.C. means named-based Police Check through Canadian Police Information Centre.
 E.P.I.C. means Enhanced Police Information Check (available through Third Party Providers).
 E.R.C.R. means Enhanced Criminal Record Check (available through Third Party Providers).

startup of children's and youth and other ministry programming).

4.1.6 Reviewing the ongoing suitability of existing workers.

5. Mandate Respecting Discipline of Children and Youth by Ministry Providers

- 5.1 No physical discipline of any nature shall be used for the correction of children and youth within the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church of Stratford.
- 5.2 Potentially abusive behaviours such as wrestling, body-checking, prolonged tickling, excessive teasing and other activities which are physically or verbally aggressive are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.
- 5.3 No abusive verbal discipline is permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes:
 - 5.3.1 shouting, yelling, threatening, using insults, using obscenities.
 - 5.3.2 discipline that is intended to humiliate a child or youth.
 - 5.3.3 discipline by refusing to speak to a child or youth.
 - 5.3.4 discipline that involves bribery, coercion or threats.
 - 5.3.5 discipline followed by a request or threat not to report the discipline.
- 5.4 Acceptable discipline techniques include:
 - 5.4.1 verbal correction that is not abusive.
 - 5.4.2 age-appropriate “time-out” interval.
 - 5.4.3 suspension from the present activity.
 - 5.4.4 suspension from the present day's session.
- 5.5 Misbehaviour that requires significant discipline (eg. suspension from the present day's session) or repeated discipline shall result in resolution efforts by the leader which include:
 - 5.5.1 prayer.
 - 5.5.2 reconciling the child/youth to the group by public apology.
 - 5.5.3 advising the supervisor.
 - 5.5.4 advising the child's /youth's parent of the misbehaviour and the discipline.
- 5.6 Ministry Providers immediately refer health concerns and injuries to a minor's parent(s)/guardian(s) for care. Exceptions may apply in an emergency situation when immediate response is required.
- 5.7 Ministry Providers record all incidents of restraint or discipline in an incident report.

6. Mandate Respecting One-To-One Meetings / Transportation

- 6.1 No one-to-one meetings or excursions, including transportation to or from church meetings or church events, shall occur between a leader/volunteer and a child/youth within any ministry of the Christian Reformed Church of Stratford except in one of the following circumstances:
- 6.1.1 A ministry provider may transport a related child/youth ideally with prior specific approval given by the parent of the child/youth.
 - 6.1.2 Prior specific approval has been given by the parent of the child/youth and prior specific approval has been given by the ministry provider's supervisor or superior.
 - 6.1.3 A ministry provider in Catechism ministry or Youth Group ministry may meet one-to-one with a youth in a public place (e.g. restaurant) on only one or two occasions. Subsequent one-to-one meetings must have the approval of Council and must occur in a public place.

7. Mandate Regarding Facilities / Physical Environment

- 7.1 All classrooms have doors with windows and mirrors where necessary to ensure a clear view of the entire room. Infant and toddler nurseries have divided doors; the upper door remains open.
- 7.2 Programs for youngest children occupy rooms closest to washrooms.
- 7.3 Classrooms and closets remain locked when not in use during ministry programs.
- 7.4 Building Committee conducts regular audits to ensure safety and cleanliness of facilities.

8. Mandate for Ministry Providers in Nursery

The Nursery Supervisor ensures that:

- 8.1 Names of children and caregivers present are recorded each week.
- 8.2 Children are signed in and signed out by a parent/guardian.
- 8.3 Children are picked up by a parent/guardian only, unless **prior** arrangements are made.
- 8.4 Children are picked up within 10 minutes of the end of the service/activity.
- 8.5 Children remain in designated appropriate areas; exceptions may apply in emergency situations.
- 8.6 Change tables remain in clear view of other attendants and ministry providers.

- 8.7 At least two adults, not related to each other, remain in the nursery at all times.
- 8.8 A sanitary and healthy environment is maintained in the nursery area.

9. Mandate for Ministry Providers in Church School, Cadet, Gems, Youth Programs

The Program Leaders ensure that:

- 9.1 A designated hall monitor circulates periodically throughout the church premises to ensure the safety of all ministry program participants and ministry providers.
- 9.2 Parents/Guardians are regularly and fully informed of program guidelines.
- 9.3 Children who are pre-grade 1 are signed in and out by a parent/guardian.
- 9.4 Children who are pre-junior kindergarten should be taken to the washroom by their parents or guardians. If this is not possible, then the ministry provider should do so in the presence of another unrelated ministry provider such as the hall monitor. Children who may require assistance should be accompanied to the door of the washroom where the worker will wait outside in case they are called for help. Helpers under the age of 16 are not authorized to take children to the washroom on their own.
- 9.5 Parents/Guardians pick up children within 15 minutes of the end of the program/activity.
- 9.6 Children wait inside the church building or alternate facility to be picked up.
- 9.7 Prior to any off-site or overnight activities, the ministry provider organizing the activity submits a written plan of supervision and care of participants to a Program Leader for approval. The ministry provider organizing the activity or the Program Leader obtains written parental/guardian permission for the participants, using the appropriate consent form. The Program Leader keeps the written plans and consent forms on file.

10. Mandate Respecting Internet Use, Media, and Communication

- 10.1 Ministry providers do not share inappropriate or unsupervised internet access with ministry participants.
- 10.2 Ministry providers do not text or message with youth under 16 without parental permission.
- 10.3 No individual pictures of children or youth are taken without prior parent/guardian permission.
- 10.4 Photos of minors must not be posted on any social media platform without consent from

a parent/guardian.

- 10.5 Ministries creating social media accounts, including youth groups, must exercise caution when posting content and ensure that all photos have obtained the necessary consent.

11. Mandate Respecting Reporting Abuse and Responding to Abuse

- 11.1 Ministry Providers report and respond to abuse following the directives of Ontario legislation; in situations not covered by Ontario law, the requirements follow the policy of Stratford CRC.
- 11.2 Any reasonable suspicion that abuse has been committed against a child or youth under the age of 16 years, committed by a person having charge of the child, together with the information upon which the suspicion is based, shall be reported to the Children's Aid Society of the County of Perth. This information shall also be reported to the supervisor of the particular church ministry and to the Council of the Christian Reformed Church of Stratford.
- 11.3 The Council of Stratford CRC responds to the needs of all persons affected by an allegation of abuse as required by law and as set out in the Appendices of this Policy.
- 11.4 The alleged perpetrator will be immediately suspended pending the outcome of the investigation.

APPENDICES

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Appendix A: Definitions

1. **Physical abuse** means any intentional application of force or threat to apply force upon a person without that person's consent. "Physically abusive behaviour ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing and shooting. In other words, any means of inflicting force, pain or injury to another person" (Agenda for Synod 1992, p. 318)
2. **Sexual abuse** generally includes any sexual intimacy forced on one person by another. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact between persons. Examples of non-physical contact sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, obscene phone calls, or requests to engage in physical sexual contact with another, even though that physical contact does not occur. Non-physical contact sexual abuse of a child can include improper and suggestive speech, exposing a child to pornographic material, or masturbating in a child's presence. Sexual abuse involving physical contact includes fondling body parts, intercourse and oral and anal sex. Adult sexual abuse occurs when sexual relations are forced against a person's or partner's wishes, when sexual practices are uncomfortable or degrading, or when a person or partner is injured. Sexual abuse of a child takes place when, through non-physical contact or physical contact, the child participates in sexual activity that she/he cannot comprehend, cannot legally give consent to or cannot resist. Threats or gifts often accompany the sexual abuse of children." (Wake Up: A Guidebook (Bethany Prod.) 1993)
3. **Emotional/Psychological Abuse** is "harm or threatened harm to a person's welfare or well-being by a chronic or intentional pattern of deprivation, manipulative threats, words or actions, harassment, or unnecessary and excessive attempts to control a person's behaviour or thoughts. The term 'spiritual abuse' may be understood as emotional/psychological abuse committed by a recognized spiritual leader who causes harm or threats of harm to a person's spiritual welfare or well-being by chronic or intentional patterns of behaviour ordinarily contrary to role expectations of the spiritual leader's office" CRC Abuse Guidelines, p. 5).
4. **Child Neglect** occurs when a child has been treated in such a manner that the child is in need of protection. The Ontario Child and Family Services Act section 72(1) defines "in need of protection" to include, among other circumstances, the following:
 - a. The person having charge of the child has caused physical harm to the child.
 - b. The person having charge of the child is likely to cause physical harm to the child.
 - c. The person having charge of the child has caused sexual harm to the child.
 - d. The person having charge of the child is likely to cause sexual harm to the child.
 - e. The person having charge of the child does not provide necessary medical treatment for

the child.

- f. The person having charge of the child has caused directly or by neglect, emotional harm to the child demonstrated by serious: anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour, or delayed development.
- g. The person having charge of the child is likely to cause, directly or by neglect, emotional harm to the child.
- h. The person having the charge of the child does not provide necessary treatment for a child who has suffered emotional harm.

- 5. **Inappropriate touching:** Inappropriate touching refers to any physical contact that is unwelcome, makes a person feel uncomfortable, or creates a sense of violation, confusion, or distress. This includes, but is not limited to, any touch that is sexual, intrusive, or disregards personal boundaries. A good guideline for adults is to ask themselves: “Would this action be appropriate if done in public or observed by others?” If the answer is no or uncertain, the action should be avoided. When in doubt, err on the side of respecting personal space and seeking clear consent.
- 6. **Child or Youth** means a person under the age of 18 years.
- 7. **Offender** includes in its meaning a person who is alleged to have committed abuse.
- 8. **Victim** includes in its meaning a person who alleges that an abuse has been committed against him/her.
- 9. **Council** means the Council of the Christian Reformed Church of Stratford.

Appendix B: Procedure to be Followed by Ministry Provider

1. Signs and/or symptoms of abuse or reports of abuse arising from a minor (age 16 or under) need to be taken seriously. An investigation of said signs and/or symptoms and reports must be conducted only by people trained to investigate abuse complaints. A ministry provider should not conduct a solo or independent investigation of the matter. In the case of a minor, the trained investigators are the local police departments and the Children's Aid Society (CAS).
2. The ministry providers who work in youth programs should be trained to look for the signs and/or symptoms of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. They should also be trained to respond to a child who reports abuse. If the ministry provider has reasonable grounds to suspect child abuse, he/she has a duty to report. There is no liability for reporting suspected abuse. If in doubt about reporting, call the Children's Aid Society Intake Worker as a consult.
3. When a ministry provider observes what may be signs and/or symptoms of abuse, it is appropriate to ask a minor how the signs and/or symptoms appeared. The ministry provider should not interview the minor in great detail about the signs and/or symptoms. The ministry provider must not ask a minor if he/she is/was abused.
4. Ministry providers must report any suspicion of child abuse, whether physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, to their immediate leader unless that person is the suspected abuser. In that case, a report must be made to the Pastor or to a member of the Stratford CRC Safe Church Committee. In addition, the ministry provider reporting will immediately complete an incident reporting form located next to the first aid kit on the lower floor.
5. Those receiving the report must contact the police and Children's Aid Society (CAS) directly and immediately. Note: Disclosure to the congregation is subject to the approval of the authorities (the Police and/or Children's Aid Society).
6. Council representatives shall immediately consult a lawyer and notify the Stratford CRC's insurance company to advise of the allegation and to seek advice respecting procedures required by the insurance company.
7. If anyone contacts a volunteer, leader or staff requesting information about an incident, then the volunteer, leader and/or staff should advise them to contact the pastor and/or a member of the Safe Church Committee.
8. Without admitting legal liability or making public statements prior to obtaining legal counsel, a compassionate response to the alleged victim and their family must be assured.
9. Subject to reporting requirements of the law and of this policy, a volunteer or staff shall maintain essential confidentiality for the alleged victim and perpetrator.

Appendix C: Reporting Child Abuse And Neglect: A Summary Of The Law

1. The Child and Family Services Act (1984) is the legislation that, among other goals, seeks to protect children from abuse and neglect. Specific clauses within it require the reporting of child abuse and neglect by the general public and, in a more rigorous way, by the “professional” public. This mandate to report child abuse relates to the church in 2 ways.
2. Firstly, any member of a church community falls under the general “duty to report”: which states: “Every person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report the belief and the information upon which it is based to a children's aid society.” (C.F.S.A. Section 72.2)
3. Secondly, there are special responsibilities imposed on professionals and officials by Section 72.3 which states: “A professional who in the course of his/her duties with respect to a child has reasonable grounds to suspect that child is or may be suffering or may have suffered abuse shall report forthwith the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a children's aid society.”
4. Professionals, in the church context would include clergy and others employed to work with children/youth. Section 85.1 of the C.F.S.A. goes on to say that a professional who fails to act and report abuse is guilty of an offence and on conviction, is liable to a fine up to \$1,000.00
5. “Abuse” is defined to be either physical, sexual, or emotional harm, risk of physical, sexual or emotional harm, as well as a failure to care properly for a child.

The Church Workers Role

6. First of all, as a church worker you are protected from liability if you report child abuse. The professional's duty to report overrides the provisions of any other provincial statute; specifically, those provisions of which would otherwise prohibit disclosure by the professional or official. The only privilege not subject to the reporting law is between a solicitor and his client.
7. Secondly, let's examine the wording of the provisions more closely. The Act says that if you have “reasonable grounds to suspect abuse” you must report. Reasonable grounds are not defined in the Child and Family Services Act and require your professional judgment. What is clearly required in the report is a **suspicion of child abuse, not proof**. You do not need to conduct an internal investigation. Remember: you do not need to find proof or even be sure about child abuse before calling the Children's Aid Society. The child protection agency, or CAS, is mandated to investigate all allegations of child abuse. The worker will assess situations carefully, and make a determination as to whether the initial allegation can be verified. The responsibility for this investigative process is onerous and requires specialized training and skill. It could be inappropriate and unfair to burden a church worker with this responsibility. Reporting child abuse is a very serious matter and it is understandable that professionals would seek the greatest

possible clarity prior to making a report. However, the law clearly mandates you to report a suspicion. It is up to the child welfare investigator to determine whether the child abuse actually occurred, is occurring, or may occur.

8. The phrase, “shall forthwith report the suspicion”, means that the report must be made immediately. The church must have a responsive internal communication system so that the reports are never delayed. The reasons are:
 - a. The ability of the CAS to protect the child, if necessary, is greatly enhanced.
 - b. The CAS can more effectively prioritize several urgent situations on any given day.
 - c. A quick investigative response to reports of suspicion ensures less contamination of evidence, and increases the ability of the CAS to come to a determination around the verification of the allegation.
 - d. In situations that do not necessarily require immediate investigative response, church workers have access to specialized consultation immediately and initial response to the child and the family is planned together. Positive working relationships are thus strengthened.
9. Legislation requires that the report be made to a Children's Aid Society. Church workers must know how to access the Children's Aid Society in their local areas. Once the Children's Aid Society has been notified, their staff will begin an investigation and will contact the persons as they see it. Under the regulations, only the Children's Aid Society and/or police may question the alleged victim or offender so that the investigation may proceed unhindered. Pastoral support is appropriate. Cooperation with the CAS worker is an ideal to be sought.
10. Church workers play an important role in the identification and reporting of child abuse. Without your concerned intervention, children and families in our church communities will not get the help that they need.