

Refuge – An Evangelical Free Church CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION PLAN

Introduction

Our intention at Refuge Church is to provide a safe place for all of our children physically and emotionally, and to protect each one of our serving staff and volunteers at Refuge. This requires a prevention plan. It also means that if physical or emotional abuse happens or is even suspected, we will act quickly but with compassion and care for all persons involved. The plan involves five areas that will help to create a safe place for our children:

- I. Definition of Abuse
- II. Guidelines for worker/volunteer selection
- III. Guidelines for worker/volunteer supervision
- IV. Reporting Obligations
- IV. Reporting Procedures

I. Definition of Abuse

Child abuse is any activity that exploits a child/student's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for their behaviors. These behaviors can be sexual, emotional or physical in nature. These would include:

Sexual abuse within the child protection system is based on **Minnesota Statutes 626.556** and is defined as criminal sexual conduct with a child by a person responsible for the child's care, or by a person who has a significant relationship to the child. This may include: sexual comments; pornographic materials; touching, fondling, kissing; oral, genital & anal penetration; and allowing child/youth to witness sexual activity.

Emotional abuse or maltreatment is consistently or deliberately inflicting mental harm on a child by a person responsible for the child's care. The treatment has an observable, sustained, adverse effect on the child's physical, mental or emotional development. This may include: verbal or emotional assault, belittlement, confinement, racial prejudice, or manipulation.

Physical abuse is when a parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care hurts a child, causing any physical injury, other than by accident. This includes any physical injury to a child that cannot reasonably be explained by the person responsible for the child's care, based on a history of injuries. The following are conditions of physical abuse that should be reported: child has suffered an injury that appears to be non-accidental in nature; child has suffered an injury and the parent or guardian seems unconcerned, denies anything is wrong, or gives unlikely or contradictory explanations; or there is a strong possibility that the child is in immediate danger of physical injury based on the likelihood that excessive force was used (i.e. choking, punching, shaking, biting, tying, caging).

Child neglect is harm to a child that results from what a parent or caretaker do NOT do. It differs from child abuse though both abuse and neglect may cause harm. Child neglect is continued failure by parents or caretakers to provide a child with needed care and protection. Examples of what may constitute a report of child neglect are: inadequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care; abandonment; exposure to threatening or endangering conditions; educational neglect; prenatal exposure to substance abuse; inadequate supervision; child has suffered a physical injury as a result of hazardous conditions; child suffers injury or risk of injury due to domestic violence; or exposure to, or involvement in, criminal activities.

II. Guidelines for staff/volunteer screening

A. All staff and volunteers in the areas of children and student ministries should complete the "Abuse Prevention Screening/Release Form." This screening/release form will ask the applicant for:

- . Name, maiden and/or other names used
- . Address
- . A full explanation of any prior convictions for sexual abuse, molestation or related crimes
- . Area of ministry interest
- . Previous churches attended for the past five years
- . Previous children or student volunteer work (churches or other organizations) for the previous five years
- . The names and addresses of two references
- . Consent to national background checks

B. We will attempt to perform national background checks on all staff and volunteers who participate in the areas of children and student ministries.

C. All screening/release forms will be kept on file.

III. Guidelines for staff and volunteer supervision

A. All staff and volunteers should read and understand the child abuse prevention guidelines. The scope of understanding should include the following areas:

1. Guidelines for a safe environment

a. We will seek to maintain a two adult rule for Refuge ministry activities. Specifically, that for any child or student ministry event, we will seek to have on location a minimum of one screened adult as well as an adult parent/guardian of the minor present, and/or two screened adults.

b. Every classroom with children/student activities must have windows in the door.

c. Usage of a claim-check system for the nursery and preschool through the age determined by the specific ministry area, releasing children to the properly identified and pre-authorized parent/guardian with the check at the designated area.

d. Documentation of each staff/volunteer being familiar with the Child Abuse Prevention Plan is the responsibility of the staff person that oversees the given area of ministry.

2. Guidelines for Appropriate Behavior

a. Each staff/volunteer should use reasonable and prudent conduct toward every child/student. When natural instinct questions a particular behavior, it is best to avoid that conduct. Avoid setting yourself up for getting into any undesirable situation where the child/student may misread your behavior.

b. It is the staff/volunteer's responsibility to ensure that the group is a safe place for all group members. This includes helping group members respect the integrity and privacy of each person both physically and emotionally.

c. The staff/volunteer's job is to lead the group, not to take care of the group members. The ministry staff/volunteer is not a counselor or therapist in this setting, even if the person is a trained therapist.

d. If you do not know how to handle a situation, seek out the ministry team leader or elder.

e. The person who is offended defines what is offensive. Handle seriously anything said or done to children or students that they find abusive, offensive, frightening, demeaning or disrespectful.

f. It is not appropriate to physically discipline a child or even to touch or hold a child who does not want to be touched (except to gently restrain a child for safety reasons).

g. It is never appropriate to touch a member of a group sexually in any way.

3. Sections I, II, IV & V of this policy

IV. Reporting Obligations

A. If Refuge knows of or has reason to believe any activity listed in this plan under *the Sexual definition of Abuse* has occurred, it will report such information to the proper authorities as mandated by MN Stat. Sec. 626.556, sub 3.

B. **Every volunteer is responsible to report immediately to the person that oversees the given area of ministry** or the Elder chairman (in case the alleged abuser is their staff person) any known and or suspected cases of abuse, be they sexual, emotional or physical.

V. Reporting Procedures

A. We will take seriously every allegation made concerning sexual abuse.

First of all, be calm. Let the child tell you in his or her own words. Leave questioning about details to authorities. Tell the child he/she is not in trouble and that it was the right thing to tell you about what happened. Let the child know you are going to get help.

B. Ministry staff will report any known and/or reasonably suspected cases.

C. Protection for good faith reporting will be provided by the ministry staff and held in the strictest confidence.

D. The Ministry Leadership will be sensitive to the victim and perpetrator on what they are going through, encouraging professional counseling where necessary.

E. We will immediately seek legal counsel concerning every allegation.

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Abuse Prevention Screening/Release Form

All applicants under 18 should complete this form with a parent or guardian

Name: _____ Maiden name/ previously used name _____

SSN: ____/____/____ Sex: M F Birth date: _____ Phone: _____

Home Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____ Email _____

Employment: _____ Phone: _____

Is it OK to phone you at work? Y N

Please list the churches you have regularly attended or volunteered at during the past five years.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please list any child or youth work you have performed in the past five years (list organizations).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What ministry area(s) with children/students are you volunteering for (please check all applicable boxes)?

Nursery Children's Church Sunday School AWANA VBS Jr. High (6-8th grade) High School

REFERENCES: List two. This may include a former employer, Pastor, or other character reference. Do not list relatives. Please try to list two institutional type references (i.e. church or organization).

Name	Address	Phone	Position	Length of Relationship
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Are you a member/regular attendee at Refuge Church? Y N

If yes, which ministries have you been involved in at Refuge Church?

When did you begin attending Refuge Church (Month/Day/Year)? ____ / ____ / ____

Are you willing to abide by the policies of the church leadership that effect your area of ministry? Y N

Were you ever a victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse? Y N If yes, have you received counseling? Y N

Do you have any life issues for which you would need counseling? Y N

Have you ever abused someone? Y N

Have you ever been convicted of anything other than a traffic violation? Y N

If yes, please explain: _____

I have read and understand the Child Abuse Prevention Plan and will uphold the guidelines? Y N

For Students: To participate in children's ministry I commit to regular attendance at youth group. Y N

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references listed in this application, churches, organizations or civil authorities to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children or student work. This authorization does not expire, will include rescreening on a regular basis and will be considered revoked only upon my written authorization or request to Refuge Church. I am obligated to immediately report any criminal changes that may occur following the signing of this document.

Signature

____ / ____ / ____
Date

If under 18: _____
Parent/ Guardian Signature

____ / ____ / ____
Date

*Please return this form to your ministry team leader's communication box in the provided sealed envelope.