

Waterloo Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Policy and Appendices

Prepared by the Waterloo CRC Safe Church Committee

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Waterloo Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Policy

1. Purpose Statement

This policy expresses the church's mission to be Christ's ambassadors in a broken world, fostering repentance and comfort, and upholding the promise of reconciliation to God (2 Corinthians. 5:20; 7:10). The focus on prevention is intended as a visible sign of hope in a spiritual community free from every form of abuse.

2. Mandates

The following mandates apply to everyone in the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church (WCRC) and pertain to all on- and off-site activities as well as to programs working under the auspices of the WCRC. The Council of the WCRC, through its Safe Church Committee, ensures that the ministry providers adhere to this policy and its mandates. A **ministry provider** is a person who serves in any capacity, paid or unpaid, within the WCRC or any program operating under the auspices of or affiliated with the WCRC.

2. 1. Mandate for Ministry Providers

Ministry providers:

- are screened according to an established protocol for the position. *[Appendix 1]*
- participate in orientation and ongoing training that focuses on abuse awareness and prevention.
- refrain from harassment or sexual harassment of volunteers, employees or any other individuals with whom they may work or serve in their role as ministry providers of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church *[for definition of harassment see Appendix 12]*.
- support the policy of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church that seeks to create and maintain an environment free from harassment and sexual harassment of or by its ministry providers and employees.
- sign the Memorandum of Agreement which states that they understand and agree to abide by the policy. Failure to honour that agreement will result in suspension or termination of the person's position. *[Appendix 5]*
- must report any suspicion or knowledge of abuse of a minor or other vulnerable individual (a child under the age of 18). *[Appendix 6]*
- complete a criminal record check or vulnerable sector check every five years if they are 18 years of age or older.



2. 2. Mandate for Ministry Providers Regarding Discipline and Conduct

- Physical discipline is unacceptable in all circumstances. Physical restraint is acceptable only when necessary to prevent harm to the person restrained or to others. *[See Appendix 8 for Guidelines for Appropriate Discipline]*
- Physical behavior that is abusive or potentially abusive is not acceptable. Such behavior includes but is not limited to pushing, scuffling, unwanted or suspect touching, and unwanted expressions of affection.
- Verbal behavior or discipline that is or may be perceived as abusive is unacceptable. Such behavior includes but is not limited to shouting, threatening, insulting, and making degrading or humiliating comments.
- When ministry providers believe that discipline beyond that described in *Appendix 8* is necessary, they refer that concern to the minor's parent(s) or guardian(s).
- Ministry providers record all incidents of restraint or discipline in an incident report. *[Appendix 7]*
- Ministry providers supervise or transport a single minor only with parental permission and with two adults, unrelated to one another present.
- Two adults, unrelated to each other, must be present in any situation of contact with a single minor or vulnerable adult for all program activities.
- Ministry providers immediately refer health concerns and injuries to a minor's parent(s) or guardian(s) for care. Exceptions may apply in an emergency situation when immediate response is required.
- Ministry providers report, with rationale, to the program leader, when they give special attention or favours such as gifts, letters, phone calls and visits to individual minors. This is to prevent there being any appearance of "grooming" *[See definition in Appendix 11, under Sexual Abuse]*.
- Ministry providers report and respond to abuse following the directives of Ontario legislation; in situations not covered by Ontario law, ministry providers follow the policy of WCRC. *[Appendix 6]*

2. 3. Mandate for the WCRC Safe Church Committee

WCRC Safe Church Committee provides:

- ongoing education to keep the congregation informed of the importance, content, and meaning of the policy and its mandates.
- ongoing training on abuse awareness and prevention.
- clear communication on reporting abuse through signage, brochures, announcements, etc.
- guidance to the church leadership in order that it may provide appropriate support to offenders and the offended.
- WCRC Safe Church Committee maintains records of criminal record checks, vulnerable sector checks and orientation and training records.
- WCRC Safe Church Committee reviews its procedures and policies every two to three years (with subsequent approval by the Council of the WCRC as needed).



2. 4. Mandate Regarding Facilities / Physical Environment

- 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 when the nursery is in use.
- Programs for the youngest children occupy rooms closest to washrooms.
- Stewardship Ministry conducts regular reviews to ensure safety and cleanliness of facilities.

3. Program specific regulations

The Team Leader or Program Leader ensures that Release Forms are completed to authorize legitimate use of images and voice recordings of participants [*Appendix 9*] and that Consent Forms for all off-site activities [*Appendix 10*] are completed and kept on file.

3. 1. Nursery

The Team Leader ensures that:

- Names of children and caregivers present are recorded each week.
- Children are signed in and signed out by a parent or guardian.
- Children are picked up by a parent or guardian only, unless prior arrangements are made.
- Children are picked up within 10 minutes of the end of the service/activity.
- Children remain in designated areas; exceptions may apply in emergency situations.
- Diaper changing facilities remain in clear view of other attendants and ministry providers.
- At least two adults, not related to each other, remain in the nursery at all times.
- A sanitary and healthy environment is maintained in the nursery area.

3. 2. Youth Programs

The Program Leaders ensure that:

- Parents/Guardians are regularly and fully informed of program guidelines.
- Equipment and materials are used and stored in a safe manner.
- Parents/Guardians pick up children within 15 minutes of the end of the program/activity.
- Children are supervised while they are waiting to be picked up.
- 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 [*Appendix 10*].
- Should a child need to be transported in a car, he or she will be driven by a responsible adult accompanied by another unrelated adult.

3. 3. Church School

The Ministry Leader and Superintendent ensure that:

- Children under Grade 1 are signed in and out by parents/guardians.
- If classroom helpers under the age of 18 are present, they assist under the supervision of the adult teacher at all times.



3. 4. Refugee/Newcomer Sponsorship and Settlement Committee(s) (includes Community Refugee Sponsorship Group)

Volunteers and ministry providers who work with Refugees/Newcomers:

- Recognize and acknowledge that refugees of **all** ages are deemed “vulnerable persons” and that policies, procedures and protective measures are understood to apply to adults as well as minors.
- Follow and abide by all the rules and regulations of the Waterloo CRC Safe Church Policy and its Appendices.
- Complete and commit to following any and all required orientation(s) and training module(s) that the Waterloo CRC or its affiliates may deem pertinent (e.g., initial orientation session, various training modules from World Renew).

3. 5. Friendship Group

Volunteers and ministry providers who work with participants in the Friendship group:

- Recognize and acknowledge that adults with developmental delays or challenges are deemed “vulnerable persons” and that policies, procedures and protective measures are understood to apply whatever the age of the participants.
- Those attending with a participant, as a support person or family member, are not to be considered as “leaders” or “teachers” and are not required to complete the screening process or provide a Vulnerable Sector Check. Such individuals are generally expected to focus their interactions on the participant they are accompanying.



WCRC Safe Church Policy: Appendices Screening Policy

Purpose:

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

Assumptions:

- Abuse prevention screening is required for all ministry providers, 18 years of age and over, who work with children, youth, and the vulnerable. This includes the minister, paid staff, all elders, pastoral workers, deacons, teachers, youth group leaders and those working with refugees/newcomers.
- Screening packages include an application form (Appendix 2), a memorandum of agreement (Appendix 5) and information on how to obtain a Police Vulnerable Sector Check. A vulnerable sector check must be submitted with the completed application package and renewed every five years.
- If a person has been absent for a period of five or more years from any position for which screening is required, the screening must be repeated.
- Training, support, and other resources with respect to abuse prevention are available to all ministry providers.
- A confidential and secure filing system is maintained to archive materials from the screening process of ministry providers.

Procedure:

- At least three weeks before a program begins, the program coordinator provides the WCRC Safe Church Committee with a list of names of all ministry providers. The WCRC Safe Church Committee identifies which candidates must undergo screening.
- For candidates requiring screening, the following occurs:
- The WCRC Safe Church Committee provides the candidate with a screening package.
- Newcomers to WCRC complete the entire screening package along with a vulnerable sector check and submit them to the WCRC Safe Church Committee.
- Members who have never undergone screening or who have been absent for five or more years from a ministry position requiring screening, will completed the screening, attend an orientation session, sign the memorandum of agreement and submit it with the vulnerable sector check to the WCRC Safe Church Committee.
- The WCRC Safe Church Committee conducts reference checks, reviews and records the vulnerable sector check and advises the program coordinator or ministry leader in charge when the screening process is complete.
- The WCRC Safe Church Committee files all screening documentation in the ministry provider's file.



Application for Volunteer or Ministry Position in the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church

1. Applicant's Personal and Contact Information:

Name: _____
Surname Initial First name

Address: _____
Number Street Apt.#/ Unit# /P.O. Box

_____ *City/ Town Postal Code*

Phone Numbers: _____ *Home Cell*

Email: _____

2. I have been a member of the WCRC for at least 6 months
or
 I have been attending WCRC for at least 6 months.
or
 I have been known to _____ (WCRC Church Member) for at least 6 months who is willing to vouch for my suitability for volunteering or working in this position.
or
 If none of the above, please explain: _____
- _____
- _____

3. **Position(s) for which you wish to apply:** _____



4. Please describe why you are applying for the indicated position(s):

5. List the qualifications and skills that you bring to this position/these positions:

6. Previous relevant experience:

<i>Name of Organization</i>	<i>Position/Responsibility</i>	<i>Dates of Service</i>	
		<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>

7. Personal References

Please provide the contact information of three references who can speak to your personal character and skills. Ideally, all references should be non-family but if necessary, list no more than one family reference. Include a reference who is a member of the Waterloo CRC if possible:



Reference #1.

Name: _____
Surname Initial First name

Address: _____
Number Street Apt.#/ Unit# /P.O. Box

_____ *City/ Town Postal Code*

Phone Numbers: _____ *Home Cell*

Email: _____ Best time to call? AM PM Eve.

Relationship to you: _____ Length of relationship: _____

Reference #2.

Name: _____
Surname Initial First name

Address: _____
Number Street Apt.#/ Unit# /P.O. Box

_____ *City/ Town Postal Code*

Phone Numbers: _____ *Home Cell*

Email: _____ Best time to call? AM PM Eve.

Relationship to you: _____ Length of relationship: _____



Reference #3.

Name: _____
Surname Initial First name

Address: _____
Number Street Apt.#/ Unit# /P.O. Box

_____ *City/ Town Postal Code*

Phone Numbers: _____ *Home Cell*

Email: _____ Best time to call? AM PM Eve.

Relationship to you: _____ Length of relationship: _____

8. Authorization and Declaration

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I hereby authorize the people named as personal references above to respond to questions concerning my character and to provide any information relevant to my suitability for the indicated volunteer/ministry position.

I also understand that a Police Vulnerable Sector Check is required and agree to obtain this check.

Signature of Applicant

Date



Form for Conducting a Reference Check

Record each reference phone call on a separate copy of this form. Use the back of the form or an additional page as required to record the following information.

Sample script: Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling on behalf of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church. [Name of applicant] is applying for a volunteer position in our church and your name was provided as a reference. Do you have a few minutes to answer some questions now? Please be assured that everything you share will be held in confidence. I will describe the position that [Name of applicant] wishes to volunteer for. [Give a brief ministry description. Then proceed to questions.]

Name of applicant

Date and time of interview

Name of referee

Phone number of referee

Name of person conducting interview

Interview conducted in person by phone

Questions:

1. How long have you known [*the applicant*], and in what context?

2. This volunteer position requires someone who can demonstrate [*list some skills, requirements, expectations this role entails*]. Do you believe [*the applicant*] has these abilities and have you seen [*the applicant*] in a work or volunteer situation demonstrating these kinds of abilities? Please elaborate.



3. (To be completed only if position involves working with children or vulnerable adults.)
Have you ever experienced the applicant working with or interacting specifically with
[*children/vulnerable adults*]? If so, please describe.

4. Do you have any reservations about [*the applicant*] or reason to believe [*the applicant*]
would not be suited to serve in the requested position?
If so, please explain.

[Thank the referee]: “Your input is an important part of our screening process and I appreciate
your time.”

Additional notes as needed:



Vulnerable Sector Check Acknowledgement Form

Appendix 4

Name of Volunteer/Ministry Provider: _____

To be completed by the WCRC Safe Church Committee

I, _____, acknowledge that I have received and am fully aware of the contents of the Police Vulnerable Sector Check or Criminal Record Check for _____ and will ensure that the Police Vulnerable Sector Check or Criminal Record Check be retained in a secure location according to the WCRC Safe Church Policy.

Safe Church Comm. Member: _____ **Date:** _____
(signature)

Ministry Provider: _____ **Date:** _____
(signature)

To be completed by the Volunteer/Ministry Provider:

By signing this form, I, _____, affirm that I understand that my Police Vulnerable Sector Check or Criminal Record Check will be retained by the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church to fulfill the requirements of the WCRC Safe Church Policy.

Ministry Provider: _____ **Date:** _____
(signature)

Safe Church Comm. Member: _____ **Date:** _____
(signature)



**Memorandum of Agreement
between the
Waterloo Christian Reformed Church
and the Ministry Provider**

Appendix 5

I, _____, have read and I understand
(print name)
the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church’s Safe Church policy, as approved by
council and in effect at the date of signing.

I agree to its regulations and mandates, and will adhere to them. I realize that an
allegation of abuse brought against me will result in immediate suspension and
possible termination of my ministry position. Additionally, I understand that all
allegations of abuse will be reported to agencies and law enforcement bodies in
accordance with the laws of Ontario, or, when not covered by Ontario law, will
be dealt with according to the policies and regulations of the Waterloo Christian
Reformed Church. I further acknowledge my responsibility to report any person
whom I suspect, on reasonable grounds, has abused or is abusing a child or
vulnerable adult.

Signature of Ministry Provider/Volunteer

Date of signature

Signature of witness

Print name of witness



Reporting Abuse

Introduction

The Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017) states:

Every person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child (i.e., a minor under the age of 18) is, or may be, in need of protection must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a [children's aid] society (CYFSA s.125(1)).

“Abuse” means: physical, sexual or emotional harm, or risk of physical, sexual or emotional harm, as well as failure to care properly for a child (neglect).

Assumptions

- Correct procedure in handling of abuse or suspected situations is of utmost importance to ensure an unhampered justice process and a minimum of harm to innocent persons.
- Because correct procedure is at times a complicated matter it is best to involve a minimum of persons, and to have one knowledgeable and competent person coordinate the procedure.

Procedure

The following procedures are followed in the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church:

1. Anyone having suspicion, on reasonable grounds, of abuse of a child reports that suspicion immediately Family & Children's Services (F&CS) phone: 519-576-0540 and to the WCRC Safe Church Committee Chairperson. The WCRC Safe Church Committee offers the reporting person support and facilitation in prompt reporting of the suspected abuse to F&CS.
2. Anyone who is unsure whether their observations qualify as “suspicion on reasonable grounds” consults with the WCRC Safe Church Committee, who will advise concerning further action.
3. Anyone reporting abuse does NOT approach either the alleged perpetrator or the alleged victim at any time to discuss concerns around the potential abuse situation. Investigation is the responsibility of F&CS and police; if an internal investigation is conducted it is coordinated by the WCRC Safe Church Committee.
4. The WCRC Safe Church Committee immediately advises the reporting person how to respond appropriately in the event the alleged perpetrator or alleged victim approach him/her to talk about the situation.
5. If the reporting person is uncomfortable approaching the designated WCRC Safe Church Committee member, or perceives the WCRC Safe Church Committee member to be in a position of conflict of interest with respect to the information to be reported, the person discusses these concerns with another WCRC Safe Church Committee member or the staff of the F&CS.



6. If abuse by a ministry provider/volunteer of the WCRC is determined to have occurred, the WCRC Safe Church Committee will report the incident to a lawyer designated by WCRC Church Council and to the insurance provider of the WCRC.
7. The WCRC Safe Church Committee reports minimal information to other persons or governing bodies within the congregation, strictly on a “need-to-know” basis. Need to know is determined by:
 - potential of litigation or other public liability for the congregation;
 - danger to members of the congregation;
 - need for the informed persons or governing bodies to take action with respect to the incident.



Waterloo Christian Reformed Church Significant Occurrence Report

Appendix 7

This form should be used to report and file a record of all occurrences of injuries, accidents, first aid treatment/advice, complaints or concerns about behaviour, altercations, or any situation in which a person feels physically, emotionally, or sexually threatened or injured while participating in any program or activity under the auspices of Waterloo CRC.

Name of person who is the subject of the reported incident: _____

Name of person reporting: _____

Date of incident: _____ **Date of Report:** _____

Description of incident: _____

(Use reverse if more space needed)

Witness(es): _____

Program or Activity: _____

Action taken:

- Appropriate parent or guardian informed**
- Program leader informed**
- Others consulted or informed:** _____

Describe other actions taken: _____

Name of person completing this form: _____

Note: if the incident involves actions with minors which may be interpreted as a form of abuse, F&CS (519-576-0540) and the WCRC Safe Church Committee chair must be informed immediately. See policies.



Guidelines for Appropriate Discipline

Appendix 8

1. Behavioural expectations are age appropriate as is discipline for inappropriate behaviour.
2. Children are to be reminded often of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting. When possible, youth are included in the development of rules and consequences for negative behaviour.
3. When discipline is needed, leaders might try the following:
 - Distract the child/youth with another activity;
 - Help the child/youth focus on more appropriate behavior;
 - Use a “time-out” strategy (Time-outs should not last longer in minutes than the age of the child.).
4. Concerns about the behaviour of a child/youth/participant are reported to the program leader and to the parents/guardian at the discretion of the program leader.



Waterloo Christian Reformed Church Standard Release for Images and Voice

I hereby give permission

(please check your intention)

I do not give permission

to the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church and its agents to use the name(s), photograph(s), whether still or motion, and/or recording(s) of the voice(s) of the person(s) listed below, within the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church for only non-commercial, legal purposes such as: poster, wall display, recorded song, church newsletter, church web site or related social media sites (e.g., Facebook, X, Instagram).

Name(s):

Parent / Legal Guardian please sign below.

Signature

Name

Date



Waterloo Christian Reformed Church Off-Site Activity Permission Form

Appendix 10

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of our ministry to the young people of our church, our group will be making a number of off-premises, church group-sponsored outings over the course of the year. The purpose of this form is to obtain the consent of parents/guardians for these outings and minimize the number of consent form requests by asking for one “blanket consent” for low-risk outings that we are planning. Specific permission forms will be sent home for special events, such as out-of-town trips, overnight camping and higher-risk outings.

Thank you for your cooperation.
WCRC Program Leaders

Group/Program:

Leader in Charge: _____ Leader’s phone #: _____

_____ has my permission to participate in off-site activities as part of the church-
(child’s name)
sponsored program.

If volunteer drivers are used, I give permission for my son/daughter to travel with a responsible adult driver. I understand the WCRC Safe Church Policy stipulates that a single minor will only be transported by an adult accompanied by another unrelated adult.
(please check)

(Parent/Guardian name)

(Parent/Guardian signature)

(Date)

Parents/Guardians, please keep a signed copy of this form for your records.



Definitions of Abuse:

PHYSICAL ABUSE/ASSAULT

the use of force or threat of force in an attempt to
control, intimidate or punish

Examples:

- punching
- shoving
- twisting
- choking
- kicking
- biting
- burning
- shaking
- using any weapon
- threatening to do any of these things

SEXUAL ABUSE

when an adult or a person in a position of authority or trust **uses a young person to meet their sexual needs.**

This could involve **physical contact** such as **touching, fondling, oral sex, vaginal or anal intercourse.** Sometimes, there is **no contact**: For example, **flashing, taking pictures or videos, making obscene phone calls.** It may also take the form of **grooming**, or preparing a minor or vulnerable adult for the purposes of sexual gratification or power and control over the individual.



SEXUAL ASSAULT

when someone forces any form of sexual activity on someone else
without that person's consent.

Force can be physical, or through the use of threats, coercion, manipulation, alcohol/drugs or harassment.

Any **unwanted sexual activity** – including kissing, touching, groping, flashing, oral sex, intercourse, bondage and group sex. **Consent must be freely and actively given by someone over age 14.**

**NO MEANS NO!
NO ANSWER MEANS STOP!**

EMOTIONAL ABUSE/ASSAULT

a chronic attack on someone's self-esteem –
psychologically destructive behaviour

DEGRADING

making someone feel worthless; insulting, mocking, humiliating, excessively criticizing

ISOLATING

keeping away from normal experiences
or from friends/family

TERRORIZING

to cause fear or extreme dread (includes screaming, punching walls, breaking things, etc.)



IGNORING

withholding affection, approval emotional support

CORRUPTING

encouraging destructive, illegal,
anti-social or dangerous behaviour

EXPLOITING

making use of someone to meet inappropriate
needs, or for economic or social gain

CONTROLLING

trying to dominate and control behaviour;
often motivated by jealousy

REJECTING

ignoring or belittling
someone's needs

NEGLECT

when someone's **basic needs are not being met.**

Those needs may be **physical**

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- medical care
- exercise
- rest

or **mental/emotional**

- education
- security
- support and guidance
- affection

Neglect may be passive and subtle, but the consequences on a young person can be severe.



Harassment and Sexual Harassment

Waterloo Christian Reformed Church encourages and expects its employees and those who volunteer within its ministries to work toward creating and maintaining an environment free from sexual harassment and any other form of harassment. The Waterloo Christian Reformed Church defines harassment and sexual harassment as:

- 1) engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a volunteer, employee or any other individuals with whom they may work or serve in their role as ministry provider that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome; or
- 2) engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a volunteer, employee or any other individuals with whom they may work or serve in their role as ministry provider because of an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, where the course of comment or conduct is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome; or
- 3) making a sexual solicitation or advance where the person making the solicitation or advance is in a position to confer, grant or deny a benefit or advancement to the other individual and the person knows or ought reasonably to know that the solicitation or advance is unwelcome.

This policy applies to members and employees of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church, those who volunteer within its ministries and those to whom ministry providers offer their services.

The Safe Church Committee of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church encourages any ministry provider, employee or individual receiving services of an employee or ministry provider of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church to report any incidents of harassment or sexual harassment to the chair of the Safe Church Committee. The reporting individual should know that he or she will not be penalized for reporting or participating in an investigation of harassment or sexual harassment.

The Safe Church Committee of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church will investigate and deal with all complaints or incidents of harassment in a fair and timely manner. In order to protect the individuals involved, information about a complaint or incident will not be disclosed except to the extent necessary to investigate the complaint or incident, to take corrective action or as otherwise required by law.

Individuals seeking help or resources regarding harassment or sexual harassment should contact the Safe Church Committee of the Waterloo Christian Reformed Church or the pastor of the church who will contact the Safe Church Committee for consultation and appropriate action.



Responding Pastorally To Instances of Abuse

The intention of this document is to help the people, volunteers and leaders of Waterloo Christian Reformed Church, feel more confident in providing loving and supportive care for people who are experiencing abuse. The goal is to be able to say “I know what I should do when I suspect abuse, why I should do it, and how to do it in a way that provides dignity and safety for the victim”. Abuse is, unfortunately, an all-too-common reality in churches and society as-a-whole. However, by being aware of the warning signs and dynamics of abuse, as well as what is involved in our legal obligation to report the suspected abuse of children, we can be better equipped to respond well when situations of abuse do arise. We can also do so in a way that is rooted in the gospel and avoids the re-traumatization of the abused.

1. What does it mean to say that our response to abuse should be rooted in the gospel?

Abuse is a horrible distortion of the inherent dignity of all people created in the image of God. The word gospel literally means “good news”, and in Luke 4:16-21 Jesus declares that he has come to free the captives and those who are oppressed; to bring light to the hopeless and forsaken. While he certainly meant this on a spiritual level, the physical and relational oppression people experience also matter to him. We see this many times in Jesus’ interactions with people throughout the gospels. Jesus came to bring the good news of hope, redemption, and freedom for all people and to demonstrate God’s characteristics of justice, mercy, and love.

At various points in our lives and throughout our faith journey, we can all identify with being both sufferers and sinners. The good news of the gospel is that the sufferer is invited to find refuge from the realities of a harsh and broken world in him, and the sinner is invited to find forgiveness and hope through repentance and transformation. As followers of Christ, we can offer this message of hope to those involved in situations of abuse.

2. If I’ve seen evidence that suggests a child might be experiencing abuse or neglect, but I’m not sure if they actually are, should I say something?

In Ontario, anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect child abuse or neglect is **legally obligated** to promptly report it to Family & Children’s Services of Waterloo Region (FACS).

Some examples of signs of abuse or neglect include, but are not limited to:

- the child has experienced physical harm or is at risk of physical harm by the person caring for them; this includes patterns of neglect in providing for the child;
- the child has been or is at risk of being sexually abused or exploited;
- the child requires medical treatment, but is not given access; or
- the child shows signs of severe withdrawal, anxiety, depression, or aggression and it’s reasonable to suspect emotional abuse at the hands of their caregiver.



If you're not sure if what you've seen or heard qualifies as "reasonable grounds" to suspect abuse, always err on the side of reporting. It's important to understand that a report is not an accusation, but rather a request to gather more information. Also keep in mind that child protection services follow strict confidentiality policies, prioritize the vulnerability of victims in their approach to interviewing, and have an ethical and legal obligation to consider the parents' wishes for their children.

(For a more thorough list of signs and symptoms of child abuse, see Appendix 11 of WCRC's Safe Church Policy.)

3. What can I expect when I call FACS to report a suspicion of child abuse or neglect?

Before you call, confirm basic details about the child such as the child's name, age, and address, if you can; but don't let not knowing these things prevent you from calling. A child protection worker will listen carefully to your concerns and ask you about what you've heard and seen. The format will likely follow a structured interview form -- it's okay if you don't know a lot of the answers. What you say will help the child protection worker in assessing the best way to help the child and how quickly to respond. If FACS chooses not to follow up with your concerns, it does not mean you made a mistake in reporting; they may not even let you know if they acted on it. Also, if new concerns come up since the initial call, it's important to call again with the new information.

4. If a child comes to me with a disclosure of abuse, what should I keep in mind to best help them?

One of the best ways you can show love and support to a child who is telling you about their experience of abuse is to be a source of safety and security for them, both in your words and your actions. Listen to what the child voluntarily shares, but do not ask them questions about details as this can interfere with a legal investigation. Overreacting could cause the child to experience shame and shut down. Remain neutral and empathic in order to create an environment of safety. Also consider where the child is at developmentally in terms of what they can understand and communicate. How a 2-year-old experiences, interprets, and communicates what happened to them will be drastically different than a teenager.

Since you are obligated to report the abuse, let the child know clearly, yet sensitively, that you'll be doing so. For example, you could say to a child, "Thank you for telling me what happened. I'm going to call some people who can help because I want to make sure you're safe." Communicate the steps you'll take, but do not make promises you can't keep. Also, be mindful not to leave the child with the offending adult or someone who has an interest in protecting the offender.

4. What are some important considerations to keep in mind when an adult makes a disclosure of sexual abuse?

Anyone who discloses sexual abuse is demonstrating an immense amount of courage in coming forward. Sexual abuse is usually followed by demands or threats to keep the abuse a



secret. Sexual abuse victims can also face an incredible amount of shame, often wondering if they deserved or encouraged the abuse in some way. In addition to this, victims greatly fear not being believed, (especially if the perpetrator is well-known in the community), but they also fear what they will need to endure if they are believed. It is of the utmost importance that victims feel safe and believed. They are coming to you because they are hoping you can do this.

When listening to their story, don't ask too many questions about the details as they could be interpreted by the victim as disbelief or result in greater feelings of shame. Instead, ask broader questions like "How can I help you?" or "How are you doing now?" Their story may come out fragmented and disjointed; put aside your own questions and fear. It's okay to express grief at what they've endured and affirm they are not responsible. One of the most significant things victims of abuse have lost is the ability to make choices for themselves. Don't try to control the situation, but rather, as much as possible, allow them to choose how things will proceed. Help them assess their options for moving forward and connect them with legal or professional support, as appropriate.

If an adult discloses that they were abused as a minor by a person-whom you know has access to children and vulnerable adults in the present, it is still your responsibility to notify Family and Children's Services, as this would constitute "reasonable suspicion" of child abuse.

6. What are some important considerations to keep in mind when an adult discloses physical or domestic/intimate partner abuse?

Physical abuse does not need to occur regularly or over a long period of time to have a significant impact on the victim. Even a single incident can bring about the complex and disorienting effects of trauma and be enough to establish compliance and control of the victim.

It's important to understand that abuse is usually rooted in the offender's desire to have power over or to control the victim. In close relationships (e.g., between spouses or parent/child) an incident of physical abuse is rarely an isolated incident. It is quite likely that it has escalated from other abusive forms of control and may continue to escalate to even more dangerous and potentially lethal forms of abuse.

As with sexual abuse, perpetrators of physical abuse will often self-protect by using threats to control the victim into keeping silent (e.g. "No one will believe you"). They may also go to great lengths or use tears to convince a victim of their remorse for what happened and of their love for the victim. This sadness should not be confused with repentance because genuine repentance is always accompanied by a change in behaviour.

Confidentiality is a must. Sharing of details and information regarding a disclosure should be on a need-to-know basis only. Anyone who is unsure whether their observations qualify as "suspicion on reasonable grounds" consults with the WCRC Safe Church Committee, who will advise concerning further action. (See WCRC Safe Church Policy, Appendix 6, s.7)

7. What should I do if I suspect an adult is in an abusive relationship, but I'm not sure?

If you have reason to suspect that someone you know is in an abusive relationship, it would certainly be appropriate to mention what you've observed and ask if everything is okay



with them. Even if they are not truthful at first, she or he will know that you are willing to hear their story. Focus on helping the victim to feel safe and believed and provide information about CAP counselling and relevant community support services. (e.g., <https://shalemnetwork.org/cap-counselling-assistance-program/>)

8. How can I best provide on-going support and care for someone who has experienced abuse?

In the months and years following an initial disclosure of abuse, victims will require the support and loving care of trustworthy individuals and the wider community, in order to experience healing, health, and wholeness.

A community can provide support in practical ways such as arranging help with childcare, meals, housing, transportation and finances. Furthermore, members within the community can help connect victims with local services or trauma-informed therapists, offer to accompany the victim to legal proceedings, and ensure victims have someone they can call if there is a crisis or immediate help is needed. Encouragement and prayer are also key to helping a victim feel loved and supported and can be provided by anyone in the community.

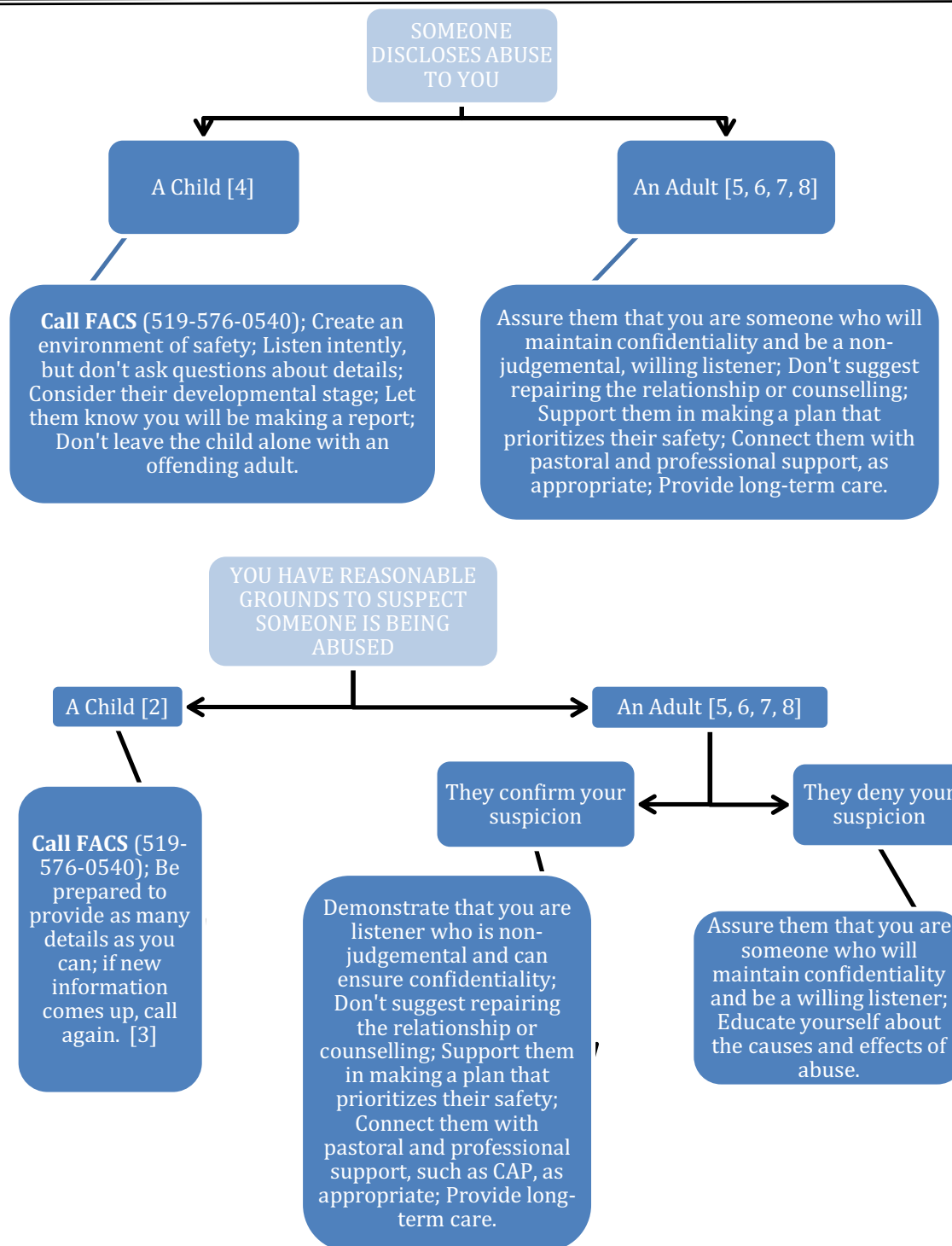
Education around the effects of abuse and trauma can help in better understanding the feelings and behaviours of someone who has been abused. Be sure to check in with them regularly, as abuse can be incredibly isolating; grieve with them and continue to speak the truth about their circumstances. Help victims of abuse to live a well-rounded life by encouraging them in their gifts and hobbies -- they are more than what they've suffered. Remember that healing takes time, and as much as you may want to make everything better for them, you can't, but you can help them know they are seen and cared for.

*This document has been adapted from the [River City Church](#), Cambridge, Policy Appendix G. The WCRC Safe Church Committee acknowledges input and ideas from many sources, among them the Classis Huron Safe Church Committee.

**Much of the information in this appendix has been adapted from *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused* edited by Brad Hambrick, and *Reporting Child Neglect and Abuse: It's Your Duty (Ontario)* from <https://www.facswaterloo.org/assets/images/news/Reporting-Child-Abuse-and-Neglect-EN-4.pdf>.



Abuse Response Flowchart





So you're a Group or Ministry Leader?

Here's what you need to know ...



Appendix 14

Photo credit: <http://bit.ly/1L8SpsG>

About enlisting and screening volunteers:

- ▶ Volunteers who are new to the Waterloo CRC must complete a Vulnerable Sector Check (police record check) and an application form with references (*Safe Church Policy* Appendices 1, 2) and submit them to the Safe Church Committee who will conduct the reference checks. Volunteers who have previously served in our church don't need to complete the application and screening package and only need to ensure their Vulnerable Sector Check is up-to-date. The names of all volunteers should be submitted to the Safe Church Committee **prior** to the beginning of the program year or **before** the volunteer begins in the volunteer role. The Safe Church Committee will review the submitted volunteer list to ensure all volunteers are compliant with the Safe Church Policy.
- ▶ Some volunteer positions require professing membership in our church (e.g., Ministry Leader, Head Counsellor). Other positions are open to other members and regular attendees. *WCRC Requirements for Program Leaders and Volunteers* outlines these requirements. Once you have submitted your list of volunteers to the Safe Church Committee, their names will be checked to ensure all volunteers are compliant with the *Requirements for Program Leaders and Volunteers* document.

About Vulnerable Sector Checks:

- ▶ All church elders, deacons, ministry leaders, teachers, youth group leaders and volunteers age 18 and over working with minors or vulnerable adults (refugees and individuals with developmental challenges of all ages are deemed vulnerable) must complete a Vulnerable Sector Check every five years. Paid staff must complete a Criminal Record Check. The only volunteers exempted from this are Stewardship ministry members (not counting the ministry leader) and other volunteers whose role does not include working with children or vulnerable adults, e.g., certain kitchen workers.
- ▶ The Safe Church Committee keeps a database of members and the dates of their most recent vulnerable check and looks after reminders for renewal.
- ▶ Volunteers must provide the Safe Church Committee with the **original vulnerable sector check form** within 30 days of it being issued. A sign-off form must be completed by the Safe Church Committee and by the member. Please give completed vulnerable sector checks to the Chair of the Safe Church Committee in person, or, if in electronic format, via email, to be recorded.

About Safe Church Orientation sessions:

- ▶ All church elders, deacons, ministry leaders, paid staff, visiting elders and volunteers age 18 and over working with minors or vulnerable adults must complete a Safe Church orientation session **before** they begin their volunteer work (*Safe Church Policy* 2.1).
- ▶ These sessions are offered several times per year and on an as-needed basis.
- ▶ Orientation sessions provide volunteers with important information on detecting, preventing and responding to abuse situations.

About Safe Church documentation:

- ▶ *WCRC Safe Church Policy*, its appendices and other pertinent documents can be found online at <http://www.waterloocrc.org/AboutUs.html> under Safe Church Policies.
- ▶ Contact Safe Church Committee members for more details.



So you're a Group or Ministry Leader?



Appendix 14B

Here are some *Safe Church* tasks and timelines:

Photo credit: <http://bit.ly/1L8SpsG>

Recruiting and enlisting volunteers:

- ▶ Prior to the start of the program year:
 - Check with previous year's volunteers and develop your slate of returning volunteers.
 - Determine if additional personnel will be required.
 - Solicit and recruit new people as needed. Build in time to allow for completing and reviewing the application packages for new volunteers.
 - Provide the full list of volunteers for the current year to the Safe Church Committee. The committee will review the list to determine if any volunteers require a renewal of their Vulnerable Sector Check, an orientation or a complete application package,
 - If any of the volunteers are new to our church or are not yet members, provide some background information to the Safe Church Committee so they can better determine what steps will need to be taken with these new volunteers.

- ▶ After the program year is begun:
 - If the prospective new volunteer is a member of the WCRC, they may already be compliant with our policies. Provide the name to the Safe Church Committee for review. If they have been absent for five or more years from a ministry position requiring screening, they will complete the screening, attend an orientation session, sign the memorandum of agreement and submit it with the vulnerable sector check to the WCRC Safe Church Committee. If the prospective volunteer is a member of a different church, or not a member of any church, Safe Church Committee will conduct a case-by-case review of the application. Provide the prospective volunteer with the needed documents as soon as possible (Appendices 1 and 2 of the WCRC Safe Church Policy on the website of our church: <http://www.waterloocr.org/AboutUs.html>)

Maintaining a safe environment for participants and volunteers:

- During the program year, be aware of signs of possible abuse as you engage with participants and volunteers in your group. Be attentive to comments or behaviours that seem "off" or cause feelings of unease in you. Do consider that seemingly off-hand comments may point to or indicate something deeper that could merit follow-up. Remember, you or other teachers or counsellors in your group, have a duty to report to Family and Children's Services any suspected instances of abuse. Refer to Appendices 8 and 13 for signs and symptoms of abuse and for details on responding to actual or suspicions of abuse.
- Be sure all volunteers working in your group have been screened and have attended the required initial orientation. Make maintaining a safe church part of any additional training or preparatory sessions you have with your volunteers.
- For further resources or learning material, speak with the Chair of the Safe Church Committee. Contact Safe Church Committee members for more details or for help answering your questions.