

Safe Sanctuaries

Reducing the risk of abuse in the Church

Faith Alive Church
678 Pine Street, Palmerton, PA 18071

Working Document
For the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

God has called us to make our ministries safe, protecting our children from abuse and exploitation. God has also called us to create communities of faith where children can be safe and grow strong.

Jesus taught “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37) and “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones . . . it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6 NRSV)

It is an unfortunate reality that every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Often, abuse occurs in places where children feel safe – home, schools, camps, and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. In light of this, Faith Alive Church has seen fit to establish and update this policy that can help to 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our church; 2) make our churches places where children can feel safer in disclosing abuse; 3) protect the loyal volunteers and employees that minister to our children.

Presented herein is a working plan that will include all the areas of the issue: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan. It is the responsibility of Faith Alive Church to ensure that it is in compliance with all aspects of the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (63 PA. C.S.A. 6301). In the event that the law conflicts with this policy, the law shall control.

Faith Alive Church will endeavor to monitor updates and recommendations by the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law and may modify the plan accordingly.

This policy was approved by the Faith Alive Church Administrative Council on this 12th day of October, 2015.

Definitions

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child Abuse” as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (23 P.S. 6301 et, seq.) in section 6303 shall mean any of the following:

- ☐ Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- ☐ Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom of disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- ☐ Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failure to act.
- ☐ Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- ☐ Causing a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- ☐ Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- ☐ Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:

- ☐ Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing, or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- ☐ Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location, or duration of the restraint or confinement.
- ☐ Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
- ☐ Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
- ☐ Interfering with the breathing of a child.
- ☐ Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
- ☐ Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.

“Child” means any person under the age of 18.

“Vulnerable Adult” for the purposes of this policy will be adults whose mental or physical condition make them susceptible to abuse.

“Children's Activities” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

“Ministry Team Leader” means any person who supervises a children's activity. This person has regular and direct contact with children, must be 18 years or older and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Volunteer” means any adult, who assists in conducting children's activities under the supervision of a staff person and/or Ministry Team Leader, has regular and direct contact with children and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Helper” means anyone who aids in ministry and is not counted in the 2-adult rule including youth ages 11-17.

“Mandated Reporter” means persons, who, in the course of their employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers, and nurses, social service workers, day-care center workers, mental health professionals, peace and law enforcement officers.

“We” means local church.

Screening and Selection of staff and volunteers

Careful screening is an effective way to help protect children. It can be time consuming, but is an essential step in selecting the most reliable, committed, and experienced staff and volunteers for every program that involves children.

Screening Standards:

All applicants for **employment** in which the person shall have contact with children shall complete the following prior to the start of service:

- 1) Written Application (provided by the church office)
- 2) Volunteer Agreement Form
- 3) Background Investigation Consent Form
- 4) Request for Criminal Record Check (must be completed every 5 years)
- 5) Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance (must be completed every 5 years)
- 6) FBI Clearance (must be completed every 5 years)
- 7) Disclosure Statement Application for Provisional Employment

Original documents must be provided to the Church office for copying and to be placed and kept in a secure filing cabinet under lock and key in the Pastors office. All documents will be kept confidential and access to these records will be restricted to those who need to know. All files shall be maintained for three years after service ends.

Any person whose Criminal Record Check, Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance , and/or FBI Report indicates the applicant has been convicted of one or more of the offenses as found in the PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.A. 6344(C), employment will be terminated.

All **Volunteers** who have direct contact with children are required to produce the same documents as listed above and meet all other requirements as employees with the exception of the following:

- 1) The volunteer applicant is not required to produce an FBI record if all of the following apply:
 - a. The position is unpaid;
 - b. The prospective volunteer has been a resident of Pennsylvania during the entirety of the previous ten years;
 - c. The prospective volunteer swears or affirms in writing that they have not been convicted of an offense in another state or territory, or foreign nation similar to those Pennsylvania offenses that cause disqualification.

All employees and volunteers are required to provide written notice to the Safe Sanctuaries Chair

Person or the Pastor within 72 hours of the following:

- a) Being arrested for or convicted of an offense that would be grounds for denial of employment or volunteer service; or
- b) Being named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated report.

If the Staff Parish committee or the Safe Sanctuaries Committee has reason to believe that either a or b above is true, and has not received written notification from the employee or volunteer, they shall immediately require that individual to provide new clearances.

All prospective volunteer workers with children shall have an active relationship with Faith Alive Church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children.

Persons who have a break in fellowship of one or more years shall resubmit to screening procedures. Faith Alive Church reserves the right to repeat background checks of persons at our discretion.

Outside groups using the facility shall maintain their own personnel files. Faith Alive Church reserves the right to obtain an explanation of the non-local church's record-keeping process, and upon written request of the Pastor, to be given copies of documents applicable to programs conducted at Faith Alive Church.

TRAINING

All persons who have direct contact with children shall participate in orientation training and then an annual review.

The orientation shall include an explanation of the Safe Sanctuaries program including:

- 1) The need for Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures;
- 2) Supervision requirements;
- 3) Appropriate discipline practices;
- 4) Recognizing signs of abuse;
- 5) The role and responsibilities of the mandated reporter;
- 6) Reporting procedures

The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children. The annual review shall include review of the Safe Sanctuaries policy, procedures for supervision, and current information on how to identify and report child abuse. The annual review may be a self-conducted reading of materials followed by a written statement of review.

SUPERVISION

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

Supervision Standards:

Programs and ministries in the church shall use the following standards for the supervision of children:

- 1) The two adult rule – regardless of the size group, there will always be at least two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “monitor” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities.
- 2) No child shall be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry event/activity. Two youth shall be paired for mutual safety when using the restroom or leaving the area for other reason.

- 3) All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities/events occur must be open to public view. For example: enclosed spaces such as classrooms shall have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration or an open door.
- 4) No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 5 years older than the children being supervised and has also had the necessary clearances completed.
- 5) Ministry events involving transportation shall require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child.

REPORTING

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred (PA Child Protective Services Law”, Title 23 Pa. C.S.A. Chapter 6311(B)). Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur under any of the following circumstance:

- 1) The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through regularly scheduled program, activity, or service.
- 2) The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization, or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or training of the child.
- 3) A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.
- 4) An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

A. **The Mandated Reporter** who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim, and his or her address and family information and is required to report the incident immediately (within 48 hours) to Childline either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313. (Persons calling will also be required to submit a written report either online or by mail). If the child or youth appears to be in immediate danger, call either Carbon County Children and Youth Services (570-325-3644) or the Lehigh State Police (610-377-4270) depending on the severity. This line of reporting shall be followed in such incidents. (Copies of the incident report will be available in a designated area in the church office to help you obtain any and all pertinent information.)

It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to observe the child abuse in order for the mandated reporter to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

It is not necessary for a mandated reporter to identify the alleged perpetrator to have reasonable cause to make a report of suspected child abuse.

B. **The Pastor and/or Safe Sanctuaries Contact Person** must be informed immediately after the making of a report. At which time, the Pastor or Safe Sanctuaries Contact Person shall contact the Church Attorney.

C. **The Pastor must notify the child or youth's parents/guardians**, unless they are the alleged perpetrator. If the allegation is against a church staff person, ministry team leader, volunteer or helper,

or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity, the person in charge of the children's activity and the Staff Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately.

D. Additionally, if the alleged incident occurred in the church, at a church sponsored event, or the alleged perpetrator is a volunteer, staff member, or supervisor, **the Church Attorney** should then be notified and briefed on the situation. If a criminal offense has occurred the police will be notified immediately. In all cases, the Church Attorney shall be the media spokesperson. That person alone should speak with the media, and all inquiries should be directed to the media spokesperson.

E. Any **person who is the subject** of the report will be required to refrain from all children's activities until the incident report is resolved.

F. In any **removal of a person** from any children's activities, this matter shall only be discussed with whom it is absolutely necessary, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted and confidentiality for the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator involved is of the utmost importance.

If a mandated reporter fails to follow the law, and willfully fails to report child abuse, penalties range from a misdemeanor of second degree to a felony of the second degree.

The mandated reporter shall have the benefit of civil and criminal immunity from the Church when making a report in good faith. The mandated reporter is also entitled to an action against the employer if the reporter is terminated for making the report.

Anyone who is concerned about the safety of a child, even though they are not a mandated reporter are encouraged to make a report. Although they are not required by law to make a report of suspected child abuse, they can make a report to Childline by calling 1-800-932-0313. The identity of the person making the report will be kept confidential with the exception of being released to law enforcement officials or the district attorney's office.

RESPONSE

Pastoral Responses for Reports of Allegations of Abuse:

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

Response to victims of abuse:

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, there shall be a reaching out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended. The care and safety of the victim shall be considered the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family shall be done in a positive and supportive manner.

The parents of a victim shall be notified and steps shall be taken to address the safety and well being of the child until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities shall be followed concerning notification of others.

Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:

The alleged perpetrator shall immediately, yet with dignity and respect, be removed from further involvement with children and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse shall not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator at the time of removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities or both.

When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or a volunteer has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities.

Response to the Media:

The Attorney of the local church, or his/her designee, is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All request for statements should be directed to the Attorney. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is often helpful.

REFERENCES

www.dhs.state.pa.gov and www.KeepKidsSafe.gov