

Child Protection Policy

River Shores Evangelical Free Church

Outline:

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- III. Child Care Policy
- IV. Reporting of Child Abuse/ Suspicious Behavior Policy
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I. Purpose/Scope

The purpose of this child protection policy is to create and maintain a safe environment within our church for our children. Child abuse can affect children from every social background, race, and age. Often it occurs in settings where children or youth trust adults – homes, schools, camps, athletic programs, and most sadly, the church. It also protects workers by guiding their behavior with children and providing supervision of their actions. Further, it protects the church from liability by screening workers and giving specific guidelines for workers to follow.

All volunteer and paid leaders, teachers, and child care workers of the River Shores Evangelical Free Church shall report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect of which they have knowledge or observe within the scope of their duties to the Pastor or one of the Elders. A report can also be made to one of the deaconesses.

The church will exercise due diligence to uphold this policy, but understands that perfection is not always possible. It is our goal to fulfill to the best of our abilities to follow the guidelines contained herein.

II. Definitions of Child Abuse

Sexual Abuse: In the eyes of the law, the definition of child sexual abuse varies by state. In general, it is any sexual exploitation of children/youth under 18 years of age, even if the child/youth seems to consent. Child sexual abuse may be violent or nonviolent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the consequences. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially and developmentally ready. It includes behaviors that involve touching and activities that do not involve actual physical contact. Types of abuse that involve touching include: fondling, oral, genital or anal stimulation/penetration, non-violent intercourse, incest and forcible rape. Types of abuse that do not involve touching include: verbal comments, exposure to pornographic videos or photographs, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, "peeping," and causing or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Physical Abuse: Non-accidental physical injuries or acts that create a substantial risk of serious injury that are inflicted or allowed to be inflicted.

Emotional Abuse: A pattern of blaming, belittling, verbally attacking or rejecting a child, or demanding that a child assume responsibilities that he/she is incapable of handling.

Neglect: Failure, refusal or inability of a parent, guardian, legal custodian, or another person exercising temporary or permanent control over a child, for reasons other than poverty, to provide necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care, or shelter so as to seriously endanger the physical health of the child.

See Appendix A for some of the signs of child abuse.

III. Protection Plan

It is best to avoid situations where abuse is most likely to occur, and situations that could easily lead to allegations (whether accurate or false). A well developed set of operational and supervisory guidelines will help protect our children and workers.

1. A leader, chaperone, Elder or teacher shall be made available at all times for whom any student, camper or other child can go to at any time without special permission, to discuss any problems he/she may be having.
2. *Educational Materials regarding Abuse and Awareness shall be available for volunteers and paid personnel.
*See Appendix B for materials available in the administrative assistant's office.
3. Use proper judgment when having physical contact with the child. Appropriate touch is non-demanding and gentle and confined to shoulders, hands, feet, arms, and head.

It is understood that nursery workers will need to have physical contact while changing diapers. It shall be the parent's responsibility to notify the workers if they (the parents) DO NOT wish for their child's diapers to be changed. If this is the case, then the nursery worker will need to call for the parents from the church service, or activity to come and attend to their child.

Whenever practical an adult should not take a child to the bathroom alone.

4. All activities should be done in an open area, not in a private office, when possible. Classroom doors shall have windows, if this is not possible, the door shall be left completely open, or as a last option, the door shall be removed.
5. During group activities and field trips, 1 male & female chaperone shall be made available for coed activities. For single gender activities, a chaperone of the same gender shall be available.

6. When a worker is driving children/youth to or from an activity, he/she should avoid being alone with them. Whenever there is a possibility that a worker will be transporting a child without a second adult present, the adult shall attempt to contact the parents. Additionally, the driver must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance.
7. Periodically, classrooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together shall be inspected. Also, bathrooms, closets and other areas shall be checked. Checks are not limited to, church services, Sunday school, youth activities and social gatherings.
8. Where child care is needed by a group during group gatherings, an exception to the two adult or adult plus helper rule will be allowed if the attached waiver has been signed by the parent/guardian of the children for which care is being provided.
9. In addition to the other applicable requirements of the Child Care Policy and Procedures, all events of River Shores Evangelical Free Church involving children held off-site or overnight must satisfy the following three requirements:
 1. It will require the presence of at least two approved workers.
 2. Written parental permission and a medical release must be obtained for each participant for overnight events.
 3. Parents will be given the agenda of the event, the address and phone number of the place to which the group is going, and (if possible) the anticipated departure and return time.

IV. Reporting of Child Abuse/Suspicious Behavior Policy

1. All church workers, full-time or part-time, compensated or volunteer, including clergy, involved with the custody or supervision of minors shall, as soon as reasonably possibly, report any suspicion of child abuse of which they have knowledge or observe within the scope of their duties, directly to the Pastor or Elders. A report can also be made to one of the deaconesses.
2. The report may be made on the basis of a suspicion or knowledge of abuse either at the church or in connection with a church activity, or a case of abuse that has occurred outside of church activities but is suspected by a church worker.
3. If a worker suspects or observes another worker or individual in the church of abuse, he should, as soon as reasonably possible, report this to the Pastor or one of the Elders and fill out an *Incident Report. A report can also be made to one of the deaconesses.

*see Appendix C

V. Leadership Response to an Accusation

A fair, discreet and confidential investigation will be done of all alleged incidents of abuse by a committee appointed by the Pastor and Elders.

1. Carefully document all actions taken in response to any abuse allegations using the *Investigation Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse.. This written record will be kept by the Pastor or his representative.

*See appendix D

2. Treat the youth making the accusation with dignity and pastoral concern and treat the allegation itself with the utmost concern, without judging the accused as “guilty until proven innocent.” Whether or not the accusation is true, the church will respond in such a way as to make the safety and well being of the child its first consideration.
3. Seek to respond in a calm and helpful manner. River Shores will seek to be a source of stability, strength and calm confidence for the child, his or her family and all others involved in the situation.
4. Temporarily relieve the church volunteer or employee of his/her duties until the investigation is finished, while being careful to explain to all persons aware of this action that this action is being taken as a necessary precaution and does not imply that the church believes the accused is guilty of the charge. If the person is a paid employee, a decision will be made by the Elders to either maintain or suspend his or her salary until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
5. While information gathering may be necessary, in-depth questioning or interrogation of the parties involved should be left to the professionals involved.
6. Report the abuse allegation according to the statues of the State of Wisconsin starting with the county sheriff department. Others to be informed include: the church’s attorney, the church’s insurance company, the parents or guardians of youth involved, the accused, church fellowship officials (i.e., the Superintendent of the Forest Lakes District of the Evangelical Free Church of America).
7. Have an attorney present while answering any investigative questions from law enforcement or social service agencies.

8. Use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey the news to the congregation. River Shores Evangelical Free Church will be careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. Only the church's designated spokesperson (appointed by the Elders) will speak to the news media. Youth workers and church members in general will be asked to allow the designated spokesperson to answer questions from the media. The church's designated spokesperson will offer copies of this policy to the press and carefully express the concern which motivated its adoption.
9. Do not engage in denial, minimization, or blame in the face of an allegation, but treat the situation as meriting the utmost concern.

Appendix A: Some Signs of Sexual, Physical, and Neglect

Following are the major signs of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. *One of these, or even several in combination, may not indicate that abuse has occurred.* They may indicate accidents or that other medical conditions, emotional illness, or problems exist. If a number of these signs occur together or if they reoccur frequently, child abuse and neglect may be suspected. (WI Dept. of Health and Social Services, PSC-101.)

Sexual Abuse

Physical signs MAY include:

- (1) Pain, swelling or itching in genital and/or anal areas
- (2) Bruises, bleeding, discharge in genital and/or anal areas
- (3) Difficulty walking or sitting, frequent urination, pain
- (4) Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- (5) Sexually-transmitted diseases
- (6) Pregnancy

Behavioral signs MAY include:

- (1) Anxiety when approaching place of abuse (home, church, school, etc.)
- (2) (Sudden) nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- (3) (Sudden) sexual self-consciousness
- (4) "Acting out" of sexual behavior
- (5) Withdrawal from church activities and friends
- (6) Verbal indicators of not wanting to be with someone or reports of being abused
- (7) Unusual interest in sex for age
- (8) Regressive or childlike behavior inappropriate for age
- (9) Excessive masturbation
- (10) Recurring nightmares
- (11) Runaway or delinquent
- (12) Alcohol/drug abuse

Physical Abuse

A. Physical signs MAY include:

- (1) Bruises, welts on face, neck, chest, back, etc.
- (2) Injuries in the shape of object (belt, chord)
- (3) Unexplained burns on palms, soles, back
- (4) Fractures that do not fit story of injury

B. Behavioral signs MAY include:

- (1) Delay in seeking medical help
- (2) Extremes in behavior: very aggressive or withdrawn and shy
- (3) Afraid to go home
- (4) Frightened of parents
- (5) Fearful of other adults

Neglect

A. Physical signs MAY include:

- (1) Poor hygiene, odor
- (2) Inappropriately dressed for weather
- (3) Needs medical or dental care, glasses or hearing aid
- (4) Consistent hunger looks under-nourished
- (5) Left alone, unsupervised for long periods

B. Behavioral signs MAY include:

- (1) Extreme willingness to please
- (2) Constantly falling asleep in class
- (3) Craves attention from adults
- (4) Aggressive behavior

Appendix B: Educational Materials Available

Church Mutual

- * Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse (pamphlet and CD)
- * Sexual Abuse Prevention

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

- * Child Protection
- * Just in Case – Guidelines in Case Your Child Might Someday be the Victim of Sexual Exploitation
- * Know the Rules – General Tips for Parents and Guardians to Help Keep their Children Safer

Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin

- * Prevalence of Child Abuse
- * What is Child Abuse?
- * How to Recognize Child Abuse
- * Responding to Child Abuse or Neglect

Appendix C: Incident Report

This form is to be used for reporting incidents of observation, allegations, or reasonable suspicions of abuse or injury to a child, youth, or special needs adult while under the care or supervision of River Shores Evangelical Free Church staff or its volunteers. The completed Incident Report should be submitted to an elder, deaconess, or a pastor.

Type of report: Observation Allegation Suspicion

Type of incident (*circle as many as apply*): Physical Injury Sexual Abuse Physical Abuse Other

Name of Minor/Special Needs Adult: _____ Birth date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

DETAILS OF INCIDENT

Date of incident: _____

Place of incident: _____

Description of incident (*use additional sheet if necessary*):

If known, name of suspected abuser: _____

Were other adults or minors involved? Yes No If yes, who?

Persons notified or aware of incident: (*please specify all names, date and time*)

Church Staff: _____ When? _____

Other: _____ When? _____

Was there medical treatment? Yes No If yes, please specify the following:

Doctor's name: _____

Injuries claimed: _____

Where was injured taken? (*Name of facility*) _____

Date of Report ____/____/____ *Reported by*

Address

City State Zip Phone

Appendix D: Investigation Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse

1. Name of worker observing or receiving the disclosure of child abuse: _____
Address: _____ Phone: _____

2. Victim's Name: _____
Victim's age/date of birth: _____

3. Date/Place of initial conversation with/report from victim: _____

4. Victim's statement (give your detailed summary here): _____

5. Name of person accused of abuse: _____
Relationship of accused to victim (paid staff, volunteer, family member, other): _____

6. Reported to pastor: _____
Date/time: _____
Summary: _____

7. Call to victim's parent/guardian: _____
Date/time: _____
Spoke with: _____
Summary: _____

8. Call to local children and family service agency: _____
Date/time: _____
Spoke with: _____

