



PLAN TO PROTECT AGAINST ABUSE

Approved: January, 2021

PREAMBLE

As a church, we seek to bring God glory and reflect Christ in all that we do.

Our vision statement aspires

“that we would be a healthy, growing and attractive community that is known within the city of Brantford for our Christlike love to one another and for our care to the communities that surround us, with the goal of showing everyone the transformational power of Jesus Christ.”

(Vision Statement, Redeeming Grace Reformed Church, 2020)

We are aware that we live in a world that is broken and torn apart by the sin of humankind. We have a responsibility to face this reality by putting in place policies and procedures to protect the vulnerable. While it is true that all sin affects our relationships with God and others, few sins cause as much misery, pain, and betrayal as the sin of abuse. Abuse devalues human beings created in God's image, devastates individuals and whole communities, and can have far-reaching impacts on all those it affects.

The church is responsible for providing a nurturing community that confronts sin, including the sin of abuse. Our commitment is to zero tolerance for all forms of abuse. While every activity involves some risk, this policy is designed to prioritize the safety of the most vulnerable among us, with the goal of making all programs and activities as safe as is reasonably possible. This Policy establishes the criteria for the provision of an environment free of abuse for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The policy applies to situations where vulnerable persons are placed into the care of those in a position of trust. This protection extends to our neighbours and visitors as they interact with our church community and participate in church events.

In the event of abuse we desire to bring healing and support to its victims. Too often victims of abuse are shamed or blamed as a community struggles to comprehend how the abuse could have occurred. We affirm that victims are innocent and are in no way responsible for the wrong that was done to them. We will work with civil authorities as justice is sought. At the same time, we seek to reach out to perpetrators of abuse, recognizing that they also are hurting, in need of healing, and require support from those who are willing and able to hold them to accountability.

DEFINITIONS

Child	A person under the age of 18 years; see also Youth.
Church Leadership	The office bearers of the church, consisting of the Minister(s) of the Word, Elders and Deacons. They are the highest functioning authority of Redeeming Grace.
Complainant	A person who makes a complaint of abuse or sexual exploitation under this Policy.
Hall Monitors	Service Personnel whose role is to walk hallways for surveillance and to randomly visit rooms where children are being supervised.
Ministry Leader	An individual who has met the requirements for Ministry Personnel and has been given the responsibility to give directions to programs for children, youth and vulnerable adults.
Ministry Personnel	An individual who is a member in good standing 16 years of age or older and has successfully completed the recruitment and screening process of this policy and is now deemed to be a person who can be put into a position of trust with children, youth and vulnerable adults. This includes both paid and unpaid positions (volunteers).
Parent	The natural or adoptive parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of a child
Person in Question	A person against whom a complaint of abuse or sexual exploitation is made pursuant to the terms of this policy.
Position of Trust	The role wherein parents and/or guardians have entrusted their children, youth or vulnerable adults to the care of the Ministry Personnel.
Service Assistant	An individual of 11 to 17 years of age who is a member in good standing and is able to serve under the supervision of the Ministry Leaders and Personnel as stipulated elsewhere in the policy.
Vulnerable Adult	A person 18 years of age or older who, because of his/her age, a disability or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk that the general population of being harmed by a person(s) in Positions of Trust or authority relative to him/her.
Youth	A child aged 11 to 17 years

PLAN TO PROTECT REQUIREMENTS

1. The Ministry Leaders and Personnel who serve in the following areas must complete the recruitment and screening process before being placed into a Position of Trust.
 - a. Church Leadership
 - b. Nursery
 - c. Children's Programs
 - d. Youth Group Programs
 - e. Hall Monitors

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MINISTRY PERSONNEL

1. For the protection of our youth, ministry personnel are to be committed to maintaining a consistent spiritual life including prayer, Bible reading, attendance at youth events, planning meetings and worship services.
2. Ministry personnel serving in children's and youth ministry are members in good standing who support the doctrines, direction and by-laws or constitution of the church.
3. Individuals that have been accused or are under suspicion of crimes against children and/or youth will not have any involvement in ministries or programs where children or youth participate until a full investigation by Police or Social Services has been conducted and the person has been cleared of wrong-doing. Individuals that have been convicted of crimes against children and/or youth, or who have been convicted of violent crimes or other relevant crimes will not have any involvement in ministries or programs where children or youth participate.

RECRUITMENT AND SCREENING PROCESS

1. Church leadership and/or the ministry lead determine if an individual is a suitable or potential candidate for children's or youth ministry.
2. Prospective ministry personnel are to submit to the recruitment and screening process managed by the ministry lead. Individuals will submit and complete the following:
 - A. Ministry Application Form (Appendix 1)
 - B. Adhere to six month waiting period
 - C. Sign statement of faith (Appendix 2)
 - D. Face to face interview (Appendix 3)
 - E. Reference checks (Appendix 4)
 - F. Police records check
 - G. Training
 - H. Final approval from church leadership
3. Ministry personnel must complete the recruitment and screening process prior to being placed in a position of trust. Service assistants under the age of 16 do not require screening but must be with a ministry personnel at all times. Service assistants between 16 and 18 are to be screened, excluding the Police records check. When a service assistant turns 18, a police check must be obtained.
4. Ministry personnel who serve children and youth must have a personnel file kept with church records. These files are to be kept permanently.

A. Ministry Application Form

1. Prospective ministry personnel are to complete a Ministry Application Form. (Appendix 1)
 - A verifiable witnessed signature is required for the protection of all parties.
 - Individuals who transfer from another congregation unknown to the church leadership must include contact information or a reference from a pastoral staff member of their previous church.
2. Ministry Application Forms are to be kept confidential and only available to the ministry lead, church leadership or the Plan to Protect® team. They are to be kept permanently in a secure location.

B. Adhere to Six Month Waiting Period

1. All prospective ministry personnel will have been members of Redeeming Grace for a minimum of six months before being placed into a Position of Trust.

C. Sign Statement of Faith

1. All prospective ministry personnel are to sign the Statement of Faith. (Appendix 2)

D. Face-to-Face Interview

1. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted by the ministry lead or an individual approved by church leadership. (Appendix 3)

E. Reference Checks

1. Designated screening personnel will conduct reference checks on all prospective ministry personnel. Minimum 2 required. (Appendix 4)
 - Prospective ministry personnel must sign a liability release before reference checks are conducted.
 - Be sure that the references provided fit within the acceptable categories for adults and for youth who work with children.
 - Reference checks are conducted by telephone to confirm the suitability and appointment of prospective ministry personnel.

F. Police Records Checks

1. Police records checks must be conducted on all ministry personnel serving children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.
 - Police records checks are to be renewed every five (5) years.
 - Police records checks are to be conducted on all ministry personnel 16 years of age and older and are to be kept on file permanently.

G. Plan to Protect® Training

1. Abuse prevention education and training is required for all ministry personnel serving with children and youth and must be completed prior to ministry placement.
2. Attendance should be taken at training courses and noted in the personnel file for each individual.

H. Final Approval from Church Leadership

1. Final approval of all ministry personnel is to be by church leadership. This is to be done only after completion of recruitment and screening process.

CHILD & YOUTH PROTECTION PROCEDURES

A. Classroom Staffing

1. To comply with insurance requirements and to provide adequate supervision for children, one ministry personnel is present with windows having clear lines of visibility in place.

B. Occasional Observers

1. Occasional observers who join a class will have their attendance recorded and kept on file with the classroom attendance for that day. Visitors will be clearly identified and if they have not been screened and approved, they will not be placed into a position of trust with children who are not their own.

C. Receiving and Releasing Children

For Nursery:

1. Receiving and releasing children under the age of 6 is closely monitored. A mandatory sign-in and sign-out form is to be used in all children's programming.
2. Children are not to be dropped off in the nursery without ministry personnel present.
3. Babies and preschool children will only be released into the care of the child's parent or designate utilizing a signature, security number or identification card.

For Children's Programs:

1. Parents are to sign-in their children before Children's Programs begins.
2. Younger elementary students (under Grade 1) are to remain in the classroom until the parent or designate comes to pick them up and the student is signed out.
3. Consideration must be given to security, church facilities and location when determining the age release of older elementary children. Ministry personnel are to ask on an informal basis whether the child knows where to find his or her parents. If the child demonstrates uncertainty, the ministry personnel will keep the child with them in the classroom until the parent or designate picks up the child.

D. Attendance

1. Attendance of children under grade 1 is taken each time a classroom or program is in session. These attendance records are kept on file permanently.
2. A record will be kept of ministry personnel on duty in each classroom or program. This record will be maintained with the record of attendance and kept on file permanently.

E. Washroom Guidelines

Washroom guidelines are applicable while children are signed into the nursery or children's program.

For Nursery:

1. Diaper changing procedures are clearly posted in the nursery diaper changing area.
2. If at all possible, it is strongly encouraged that diaper changing be done by the child's parent or guardian.
3. Should the parent or guardian not be available, diaper changing is to be done only by Nursery Ministry Personnel and must be conducted within view of other Ministry Personnel.

For Preschool Children:

1. Preschool children are not to go to the washroom alone .
2. When a child needs to visit the washroom, the hall monitor will inform the parent or guardian.
3. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, one of the following will be adhered to when accompanying preschool children to the washroom:
 - Two ministry personnel will escort a group of children to the washroom, or,
 - One ministry personnel will escort a group of children to the washroom with one hall monitor appointed to assist with washroom and security duties.
4. No ministry personnel will ever be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom and they are never to go into the cubicle with a child and shut the door.
5. When a preschool child needs assistance in the washroom, ministry personnel may enter the washroom cubicle to assist utilizing the following guidelines:
 - Female ministry personnel will assist both girls and boys in the washroom,
 - The outside washroom door must be propped open and the adult must stand in an open cubicle doorway,
 - Ministry personnel will take into consideration the privacy of the child.

For Elementary Children:

1. Elementary boys and girls are not to be sent to the washroom alone but should be accompanied by a buddy and ministry personnel.
2. Ministry personnel will escort the children to the washroom and prop the door open to make sure that everything is in order. Ministry personnel should then remain outside the washroom door and wait for the children before escorting them back to the classroom.
3. Ministry personnel are not to be alone with children in an unsupervised washroom and are never to enter into the cubicle with a child and shut the door.
4. Male ministry personnel are not to accompany female children to the washroom.

F. Proper Display of Affection

Appropriate Touch:

1. Recognizing that children need appropriate displays of affection that reflect pure, genuine and positive displays of God's love, appropriate touch with children will be age and developmentally appropriate. We encourage ministry leaders to:
 - Hold a preschool child who is crying,
 - Speak to a child at eye level and listen with your eyes as well as your ears,
 - Hold a child's hands when speaking, listening or walking him or her to an activity,
 - Gently hold the child's shoulder or hand to keep his or her attention while you redirect the child's behaviour,
 - Put your arm around the shoulder of a child when comforting or quieting is needed,
 - Pat a child on the head, hand, shoulder or back to affirm him or her.
2. All touch must be done in view of others.

Inappropriate Touch:

1. Recognizing that the innocence of children must be protected, ministry leaders will be made aware that the following actions are deemed inappropriate and will not be permitted:
 - Do not kiss a child or coax a child to kiss you,
 - Do not engage in extended hugging and tickling,
 - Do not hold a child's face when talking to or disciplining the child,
 - Do not touch a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit (strictly prohibited except in cases of diapering and assisting preschoolers as outlined in washroom policies),
 - Do not carry older children and do not allow them to sit on your lap,
 - Avoid prolonged physical contact with any child or youth.
2. Ministry personnel are not to be left alone with a child or youth.

G. Discipline & Classroom Management

1. All discipline and classroom management will be conducted in a loving and caring environment. All attempts will be made to prevent discipline problems from arising and to avoid the need for remedial discipline. All attempts are to be taken to adhere to the following:

Preventative Discipline:

- Create a loving, caring atmosphere,
- To gain respect, you must grant respect,
- Model self-discipline and structure in your own life,
- Prepare exciting and interesting classes with short transitions between activities,
- Arrange your environment for children and for learning,
- Establish and communicate realistic expectations for the children,
- Be sure the activities that you provide are meaningful and age-appropriate,
- Be fair and consistent with all children,
- Be sure your focus is on positive actions and reward positive behaviour,

- Be aware of children with special needs and bring their needs to the attention of the ministry lead.

Remedial Discipline:

- Every effort will be made to deal with problems individually,
- Every effort will be made to explain to the child why the behaviour is unacceptable and instruct them in how to do it correctly,
- Every effort will be made to redirect the child to positive action,
- Every effort will be made to explain the consequences of unacceptable behaviour by defining the correct way to behave as well as the result of the wrong behaviour,
- Every effort will be made to offer choices that are acceptable to both you and the child.

Classroom rules will be established to clearly communicate the expectations required of children. Some suggested rules are:

- One voice talking at a time,
- Quiet hands get answered,
- Use inside voices,
- Obey directions the first time,
- Use good manners,
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself,
- Respect each other,
- Be friendly,
- Visit the washroom before class begins,
- Remember – life isn't fair, but God is good.

The following forms of punishment will not be permitted:

- Corporal punishment by a ministry personel
- Deliberate harsh or degrading measures that would humiliate or undermine a child's self-respect
- Depriving a child of basic needs
- Lock or confine a child in a room separate from others

H. Bullying among Peers

1. Our children and youth have a right to a caring, respectful and safe church environment where they will encounter the love of God in action. An anti-bullying policy will therefore be in effect at all times and will be clearly communicated and enforced among the children and youth. All ministry personnel will take action to prevent bullying, teach against it, and assist and support children and youth who are being bullied. Bullying in any form will not be tolerated.
2. Bullying is defined as unwanted, aggressive behaviour, verbal or physical, that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated.

Procedures for dealing with bullying:

- Any incidents, reports or suspicions of bullying will be acknowledged, reviewed and dealt with appropriately and immediately by the Church Leadership.
- Appropriate action will take place based on the situation.
- All attempts will be made to work towards reconciliation and change of behavior with the bully or bullies.

I. Severe Allergies

1. Parents and caregivers are responsible for notifying the church of any known allergies which their children have.

J. Contacting Opportunities

1. Ministry personnel are encouraged to meet with youth in small group settings and in teams.
2. One-on-one mentoring must be done in public settings and only under the following conditions:
 - The ministry lead is informed of the time and place of the meeting prior to the meeting, and,
 - Parental permission is granted, and,
 - When separate transportation is arranged.

K. Open Door Policy

1. Ministry personnel working with youth will not have a one-on-one or a small group meeting behind closed doors. It is required that the door remain open or that the meeting take place in a room with an unobstructed window in the door.

L. Physical Contact

1. Ministry personnel are aware of what constitutes appropriate touch, such as:
 - one-arm hugs
 - shoulder-to-shoulder hugs
 - touch on the back or shoulder
2. Ministry personnel must refrain from inappropriate touch at all times, such as:
 - extended hugging
 - over exuberant affection
 - lap-sitting
 - kissing
 - touching of thighs, knees or inappropriate spots of the body
3. Ministry personnel must be cognizant of conduct that could be misinterpreted, such as:
 - horseplay
 - tickling
 - extended backrubs

M. Dating

1. Ministry personnel working with youth may not pursue a dating relationship with a student.

YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAMMING

Off-Site Event Planning

1. All off-site trips must be pre-approved by the ministry lead.
2. Parents of youth group children will be informed at the beginning of the season what type of activities the youth group will be involved in. By acknowledging and signing the Youth Group Activity Authorization Form and Consent (Appendix 5), they authorize and consent for their children to be involved in the youth group events throughout that season. Parental authorization and consent must be obtained at the beginning of every youth group season for each participant.
3. The Youth Group Activity Authorization Forms must be maintained and filed in the church office. Forms will be kept on file permanently.
4. Sufficient supervision by two adult ministry personnel is required to ensure protection and safety for all involved.

Retreats and Overnight Events

1. All retreats and overnight events must be pre-approved by the church leadership.
2. Written communication regarding retreats and overnight events should be available to families no less than one week prior to the event. Include the exact location of the event, emergency phone numbers and a list of adult ministry personnel attending the event. If there is travel involved or any element of risk in the activity, parents must be asked for further signed authorization.
3. Youth Group Activity Authorization Form and Consent are required for each student participating in overnight events. The originals are to be kept on file permanently.
4. Policies for ministry personnel staffing will be followed. Female ministry personnel will be assigned responsibility for female youth and male ministry personnel will be assigned responsibility for male youth.
5. Youth attending retreats and overnight events will not be allowed to leave the event.
6. Female and male youth are not allowed in each other's rooms or tents for any reason during retreats and overnight events and they are not permitted to sleep in mixed company.

PROCEDURES TO REPORT ABUSE

A. Hearing of an Allegation or Suspicion of Abuse

The following policies outline the recommended procedures and sequence for reporting suspected abuse cases.

1. For the protection of our children and youth, all allegations and/or suspicions of abuse against children and youth will be taken seriously.
2. Upon hearing of potential abuse or allegations of abuse to a child or youth, the ministry personnel must complete a Suspected Abuse Report Form documenting all pertinent information. (Appendix 8) The victim should not be asked leading questions nor should the accused or any other parties be contacted at the point of completing the Suspected Abuse Report Form. All forms must be kept permanently unless otherwise directed by legal counsel.
3. Any allegations of abuse to a child or youth must be reported to the proper authorities. The reporting should be done in conjunction with the leadership of the church.

B. Reporting an Allegation or Suspicion of Abuse

1. Any person including, but not limited to, ministry personnel, who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protection, is legally required to immediately report the matter to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services or the police. Reporting must be done orally by telephone or in person.
2. A person who knowingly fails to report in these circumstances is in violation of the law and may be found to have committed an offence.
3. The church leadership must notify the church's insurance provider and seek legal counsel upon hearing of a suspected child abuse case.
4. If the suspected abuse happened in the context of church ministries or was committed by a church member or attendee, the parents of the victim must be notified by church leadership.

C. Assessing and Investigating an Allegation or Suspicion of Abuse

1. No persons, including church leadership, are to assume the function of assessing, substantiating or investigating the need for intervention or interpretation of suspected child abuse.
2. The church and its individuals must avoid any undue interference when a report of child abuse has been filed with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services or the police. The church should ask the Department of Social Services how it could assist in helping and supporting the investigation and the hurting child or youth and their family. The church should maintain frequent communication and supportive relationships with those suspected or guilty of child abuse as long as these persons exhibit a willingness to listen, change and look to Christ for help. This does not exclude the need for hurting individuals to receive professional counselling.

D. Protecting Confidentiality and Dignity of the Victim and the Accused

1. During the process of reporting and response, all ministry personnel will be committed to prayer and strive to remain calm and hopeful.
2. Discretion must be observed and details of the suspected abuse must not be shared among the church community. Information should be shared on a need-to-know basis, expanding only as individuals are drawn into the response and investigation. Confidentiality for the suspected victim and the accused must be protected.

RESPONDING TO ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

A. Spiritual Response and Counsel for the Victim

1. For the protection of our children and youth, all allegations and/or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and handled with the utmost care. The suspected victims will be treated with dignity and respect.
2. During the process of reporting and response, all ministry personnel will be committed to prayer and strive to remain calm and hopeful.
3. Situations of abuse must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality. Discretion must be observed and details of the suspected abuse must not be shared among the church community. Information should be shared on a need-to-know basis, expanding only as individuals are drawn into the response and investigation. Confidentiality for the victim must be protected.
4. Church leadership will seek opportunity to provide individual care and counsel both for the abuse victim and their family. Church leadership will determine the need for professional assistance and evaluate and designate resources as needed and able.

B. Biblical Response and Discipline for the Accused or Convicted

1. The accused is to be treated with dignity and respect. If the accused is a paid ministry personnel, that person will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed with arrangements made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
2. It is the responsibility and right of church leadership to exercise and practice church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18 and as stipulated in denominational guidelines.
3. Church leadership will seek opportunity to provide individual care and counsel both for the accused and their family. Church leadership will determine the need for professional assistance and evaluate and designate resources as needed and able.
4. Anyone accused of abuse to children or youth will be prohibited from having access to children or youth until they are cleared of any and all charges. Clear written guidelines will be provided to the individual with restricted activities and areas of the church that they are not permitted to use.
5. Anyone convicted of child abuse will be prohibited from having access to children or youth. Church leadership may designate an individual to be responsible to be informed whenever the convicted person attends church activities and to accompany the convicted person while on church property. Clear written guidelines will be provided to the individual listing restricted areas and access points on the church property.

C. Media Relations

1. It is the responsibility of the church leadership to designate a spokesperson to speak on behalf of the church to media and to the public in relation to a suspected child abuse case. All inquiries should be directed to this person and comments should not be made by other individuals unless given permission to do so.
2. Public statements must be well prepared and presented under the guidance of legal counsel.

D. Ongoing Investigation

1. Full cooperation must be given by all parties to civil authorities under the guidelines of legal counsel.
2. At no time should church leadership or its individuals either engage in denial, minimization or blame, or admit responsibility which could prejudice the case or cause increased liability to the church.
3. A confidential follow-up report with conclusions and action taken must be documented by the senior pastor, children's pastor or youth pastor following a report of abuse. This report should be placed in a confidential ministry personnel file and kept permanently.
4. Children and youth ministry departments will inform others of any ongoing investigation strictly on a need-to-know basis.