



Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church

Safe Church Policy:
Abuse Prevention Plan
Est. 2017

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Definitions.....	2
General Policies.....	3
Nursery Policy.....	4
Preschool Policy.....	5
Children’s Policy.....	5
Middle/High School Policy.....	6
Off-Site Policy.....	6
Adult Ministry Policy.....	7
Discipline Policy.....	8
Transportation.....	9
Screening Policy.....	10
Record Keeping.....	10
Reporting and Responding to Abuse.....	11

Appendix

Incident/Accident Report Form- Appendix #1	
Bullying Policy - Appendix #2	
Parental Consent Form- Appendix #3	
Staff References Check Form- Appendix #4	
Interview Protocol	
Volunteer Profile- Appendix #5	
Responding to Reports of Child Abuse	
Code of Ethics	
Contact Information for Reporting Abuse- Appendix #6	
Safe Church Contact Information and Resources- Appendix #7	
Safe Person Attributes and Job Description- Appendix #8	
Signs of Abuse- Appendix #9	
Commitments From Vogel Center CRC Leadership	

I. Introduction

Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church (VCCRC) desires to provide a caring and loving environment for people to worship God, engage in ministry activities, and grow spiritually. The church is urged by Scripture to promote the peace and maintain the purity of Christ's body, and it has been charged with a public and sacred trust. When this trust is broken, the gospel is hindered and can have devastating results to children, adults and the entire church's reputation.

This document defines our policies and guidelines, which are formulated from recommendations of the Christian Reformed Church of North America and the Safe Church Team of our classis. It is the responsibility of the VCCRC Council and the Education and Outreach Director, in cooperation with ministry leaders, to ensure that this plan is implemented and followed. The following procedures have been adopted to provide as safe and secure an environment as possible for our ministry participants, and to minimize our staff and volunteers' vulnerability to unwarranted accusation.

II. Definitions

- **Adults:** individuals 18 years or older
- **Children or minors:** individuals under 18 years of age
- **Volunteers:** Adults who serve without compensation in a church program and provide care or supervision of minors or adults.
- **Staff:** Adults who are compensated to serve in a church program and provide care and supervision of minors or adults.
- **Helpers:** Minors, ages 10 to 17, who serve a child or youth program without compensation.
- **Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church Council:** Elders and Deacons who provide oversight of the church by its articles of election, incorporation, and bylaws. Council usually serves a term of office and may be reappointed.
- **Abuse:** Harm or threatened harm to a child's or adult's health and well-being. Abuse includes [non-accidental] physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.
- **Physical Abuse:** Any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to an adult or child, which results in physical pain or injury whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, a mark or a bruise. Physical abuse behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms of abuse such as choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Attempts to control a child's or adult's life through words, threats, and fear, or to destroy a person's self-worth through humiliation, degradation, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a person's mental and physical ability to resist the offender, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes gradual loss of self-esteem of the victim – all of which reinforces a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

- **Sexual Abuse:** The exploitation of a child or adult or any sexual intimacy forced for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person who is responsible for their care or supervision. Sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not able to understand sexual acts or to resist coercion such as threats or the offer of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-contact sexual abuse include displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic purposes, making obscene telephone calls, and requesting someone to engage in sexual activity where no physical contact occurs. Examples of contact sexual abuse include prolonged hugging and kissing a child; fondling of breasts, genitals, buttocks; sexual intercourse; oral and anal sex.
- **Neglect:** Failure to meet the physical needs of a child for whom a person is responsible. Typically, physical needs include adequate food, shelter, clothing or medical care. Neglect includes placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

III. General Policies

A. Policy and guidelines for all programs and all ages.

1. When children's programs are in session, the meeting room doors should allow for unobstructed view. There will be a window in the door to the nursery and all classrooms.
2. The discipline section of our church safety policy applies to all programs, on-or off-site.
3. All volunteers, staff, and helpers should have completed the appropriate screening application, received training information regarding their areas of ministry, received a copy of Safe Church: An abuse prevention plan of Vogel Center CRC, and been advised of the information therein.
4. Displays of affection toward children should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a hand clasp, a high-five, or a light touch on the forearm. Volunteers, staff, helpers and children should respect the other person's right to refuse a display of affection. One child should not be singled out for affection.
5. Affection should not occur in private settings or isolated contexts. Displays of affection should not be encouraged in a group context that may intimidate, manipulate, or frighten a child.
6. Safe church posters will be posted in bathrooms and nursery.
7. A release shall be obtained for the publishing of any photo or video of a minor child by Vogel Center CRC staff or volunteers. *The release shall be signed by the minor's parent or legal guardian.* The release will contain two levels of permission: 1) To give

permission to publish an image of the minor, 2) to allow the minor in the photo to be identified. [See Appendix 3]

8. Staff or Volunteers must fill out an incident report when a child has had, or causes any significant accident to person or property, including but not limited to bullying. [See Appendix #1]
9. The doors to each classroom shall be kept locked when not in use to discourage inappropriate activity.
10. Use of the facilities of Vogel Center CRC by private parties should also conform to the guidelines.
11. To protect yourself, try to always be aware of what situation you are in that could be dangerous.
12. A third, unrelated volunteer or helper should be present when married couples serve together in a room.
13. When staff or volunteers need to meet alone with a child or adult, the meeting must be in a public place or a location where others are present.
14. All adults are encouraged to corporately care for the children. The leader(s) in charge of an event or meeting that does not have assigned nursery attendants are encouraged to assign monitors.
15. Refer to the following sections for program/age specific policies and guidelines.

B. Additional policy and guidelines for Nursery programs.

1. Nursery is intended for children 0 to 3 years of age.
2. Each nursery session should be staffed by at least two adults (18 or older).
3. One adult should be present for every three infants. One adult should be present for every four toddlers. A member of the nursery team will check ratios every Sunday and add attendants if needed. A list of attendants willing to be pulled out of services to fill in will be kept by the nursery team.
4. *Substitutes must come from the same age or higher.* Females must switch with females. A male may switch with male or female.
5. Adults or helpers may take children from the classroom only for a compelling reason, such as an emergency or illness.
6. If a child needs bathroom assistance during the program session, an adult volunteer may assist the child with the bathroom door ajar.
7. For children not needing assistance, the adult should remain outside the bathroom.
8. Only an adult attendant should diaper a child/infant when necessary.
9. The Safe Church Committee may make unannounced visits to the nursery at any given time.

10. Name identification is required for every child.
11. Parents must fill out the contact information sheet, which also states who is allowed to sign out their child(ren) from nursery.
12. Each child must be signed in and out.
13. The schedule of nursery volunteers will be posted in the bulletin. All leaders must sign in so there is a record of who served in the nursery on which dates and at what times.
14. The nursery shall not be used unless it is properly supervised.
15. The nursery staff will contact a parent/guardian if infant/child has been crying for over 15 minutes and is inconsolable.

C. Additional policy and guidelines for Preschool programs [Ages 3-5].

1. At least two volunteers/staff or one adult and one helper should be in the room.
2. The recommended ratio of volunteers to preschool children is two to ten.
3. If the child needs bathroom assistance during the program session, an adult may assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. For children not needing assistance, the adult should remain outside the bathroom.
4. Adults may take children from the classroom only for a compelling reason, such as to use the bathroom, or in case of illness or emergency. A helper [minor, 10-17] should never take a child from the classroom.

D. Additional policy and guidelines for Children's programs [Ages 6-12]

1. At least one volunteer or staff member should supervise the children in the room. A helper may be present; however, she or he should be at least four years older than the oldest child in the room.
2. The recommended ratio is one to ten; some activities may require additional volunteers or helpers.
3. Volunteers or staff members should not meet privately with children off-site. Nor should they meet frequently or have lengthy private meetings with children on the premises. When a private meeting on the premises is necessary, it should be held with the knowledge and consent of the child's parent(s) and with the knowledge of the staff member or volunteer's supervisor
4. Helpers [minors, 10-17] should not meet privately with a child[ren] in the facility or off-site.
5. Volunteers and staff should identify and address bullying behavior observed in their programs. [See Appendix #2]

E. Policy and Guidelines for Middle and High school programs.

1. At least two volunteer/staff should supervise activities. More volunteers/staff should supervise off-site activities. There should be sufficient supervision for all activities.
2. Volunteers and staff should identify and address bullying behavior observed in their programs and sponsor training about the topic. [*See Appendix #2*]
3. A single volunteer/staff should not meet alone with a teen in a residence. They may meet alone at the church facility under the following circumstances:
 - a. With the permission of the parent or guardian;
 - b. With the knowledge of the volunteer/staff person's supervisor;
 - c. When other staff or volunteers are present in the building at the time; and
 - d. No more than once per week.
4. It is never appropriate for a volunteer/staff person to date a participant in the program or a friend of a participant in the program.
5. Volunteers/staff and teens should not exchange gifts, phone calls, letters, e-mails, text messages, or any other form of communication that is perceived as intimate in nature. All communications with teens should be considered subject to parental and church oversight.
6. Volunteers/staff who consume alcohol or use illegal drugs in the presence of teens or offer any of the same to teens shall be subject to discipline and will be reported to the civil authorities.
7. Teens that consume, use, or have possession of alcohol, or illegal drugs during scheduled activities will be dismissed. They must be picked up by a parent or a legal guardian.
8. Teens that consume, use, or have possession of tobacco products, including E-cigarettes, will have them confiscated and parents will be notified. Continued problem will result in student being dismissed from activity.

F. Policy and guidelines for off-site Programs for Children and Teens

1. Activities off-site should adhere to the same safety guidelines as activities held on-site.
2. At least two volunteers/staff persons should supervise.
3. Parent(s) or guardians must be notified regarding participation at each off-site event. Written consent should be received yearly from parents for children to participate in off-site program. [*See Appendix #3*]
4. Parents must be notified by a volunteer/staff person if a child's or teen's behavior warrants removal from an off-site program. A adult/staff person must be present with the child/teen until the parent arrives to pick them up.
5. Children should not leave the program site unless accompanied by a parent, volunteer or staff member.

6. Transportation to and from an off-site program by volunteer/staff should follow the transportation policy in this plan.
7. Children attending off-site programs should be able to use bathroom facilities without assistance. If a child needs assistance, the parent should develop an assistance plan with the adult/staff person.

G. Policy and Guidelines for Adult Ministries

1. Counseling by staff and ministry leaders shall be arranged to occur in a formal setting (*Church office or conference room*) which provides for both confidentiality and accountability. Particular care and caution should be observed when counseling occurs between members of opposite sex. Someone else must be present nearby and aware that counseling is happening.
2. Counseling that extends beyond six sessions shall be approved in advance by the VCCRC council.
3. Content of all counseling by staff and ministry leaders shall be confidential with the exception of information regarding the abuse of a minor, suicide, or homicide. Michigan law requires reporting information of this nature to authorities.
4. Volunteers who are asked by church leadership to make assigned home visits will receive training by Pastor and VCCRC council.
5. Displays of affection should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, a high-five, or a light touch to the forearm.
6. Staff and volunteers should not give or receive gifts, phone calls, letters, e-mails, text messages, or any other form of communication that is perceived as intimate in nature. All communication should be considered subject to church oversight.
7. All staff and volunteers should have completed the appropriate screening application, received training information regarding their areas of ministry, and been advised of the information in the Safe Church Policy. [*See Appendix #5, #11*]

IV. Discipline policy

1. There will be no corporal punishment (*Spanking, slapping, hitting, kicking punching, etc.*) used as a form of discipline.
2. There will be no hard words, insults, belittling comments, threatening words, or other verbal humiliations directed toward children and youth.
3. Staff should inform the parent(s) whenever a child or teen misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior becomes apparent.
4. Staff members and volunteers should report to the Education and Outreach Director all concerns about a child's or teen's unacceptable behavior, as well as the response taken to deal with the behavior.
5. An additional volunteer or parent should be involved with groups or present for activities in which misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations for the behavior of children and youth should reflect their age and level of comprehension. Discipline measures should be appropriate to the age comprehension abilities of the children and youth involved. When using "Safe spot" (*Alone time*) with younger children, the time period should not last longer (*in minutes*) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year old should not have to sit for any longer than three minutes.
7. Staff and volunteers should regularly remind children of the behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
8. New volunteers and staff members will be trained by the program director in the area of discipline and use of appropriate discipline measures. Existing staff/volunteers/helpers should receive yearly reminders as well. Vogel Center CRC's Safe Church Team will ensure the readiness of program directors to train their volunteers on an annual basis.
9. Volunteers and staff should avoid physical contact as a way of disciplining child or teen. Some ways to do this is:
 - a. Redirect the child or youth with another activity
 - b. Helping to child or youth focus on more acceptable behavior.
 - c. Removing the child or youth from others if another volunteer or staff is available to assist.
10. Staff or volunteers should immediately remove a child or teen who assaults, harasses, or bullies another person. The bullying child or teen may be reinstated in the group when the risk to others has been adequately reduced. An incident report should be filled out when physical harm happens to a person as a direct result of bullying.
11. Staff or volunteers may remove a child or teen from the program at any time for any reason; reinstatement is optional if the risk of re-offense has been adequately reduced.

V. Transportation

A. *When transporting children and youth:*

1. At least two youth must be present in the vehicle; or a youth being transported alone must sit in the backseat.
2. Volunteers and staff who transport children or youth, must be 21 years of age, have a valid driver's license, and proof of insurance. Those who transport children or youth will attest to their eligibility to do so, according to the requirements above, when they sign the Safe Church Application. The driver is responsible to inform the ministry leaders/supervisor in the event that they are no longer eligible to drive.
3. Volunteers and staff **must abide by state requirements** for car seat use, seat belt use, and airbag safety. Michigan state law requires that children under age 8 and under 4'9" (57") must be properly restrained in a car seat or booster seat. Children who are under age 8 but are taller than 4'9" (57") may use the vehicle seat belt.
4. Children under the age of ten may not sit in the front seat if there is a passenger-side airbag installed in the vehicle.
5. Permission forms must be completed for children by the parent or guardian for any transportation that is arranged by Vogel Center CRC for an event/program. The completed form (*or copy of it*) must be carried in the vehicle during transporting of the students. [*See Appendix #3*]
6. If the Two-Person rule is not possible, the volunteer or staff should notify the parents by phone or email, stating the date, expected return time, and location of the event along with names of the individuals involved.

B. Transportation to or from events or programs of Vogel Center CRC that is not arranged by Vogel Center CRC to be provided by its staff or volunteers, is **not** subject to this policy.

VI. Screening Policy

1. All paid staff that are involved in the supervision, care, or instruction of minors must complete an application form including references [*See Appendix #5*]. The church uses this information to help ensure a safe and secure environment for children and adults who participate in its programs and use its facilities.
2. All volunteers, who are involved in supervision, care, or instruction of minors, must complete an application form and give consent to undergo an MSP Sexual Offenders Registry check. The applicant will give the form with this confidential information directly to the Education and Outreach Director.
3. VCCRC will conduct the MSP Sexual Offenders Registry check at least once every five years.
4. Interviews are required for paid positions. They are also required for any applicant whose position will include time alone with children or youth such as a youth counselor, coach, or mentor. A personal interview utilizing the prescribed protocol will be conducted by at least two persons designated by council.
5. Anyone accepted for a volunteer position will be a member, or attending for a period of at least six months. Certain positions require Professing Membership. Membership requirements will be evident in the job description of each position.
6. At least three references will be checked, including a contact with a previous church, for paid staff who are providing care, instruction, or supervision of minors (or adults). This will be done by the Council and/or the hiring committee.
7. Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason including prior criminal convictions.
8. Once an applicant is approved for child/youth ministry, he/she will receive training and be required to sign a code of ethics. [*See Appendix #5*]

VII. Record Keeping

1. All applications, including the CSE records, shall be kept in a locked file in the church office. These records shall be available only to those who make employment or volunteer approval decisions, two people appointed by VCCRC council who update the files with new information, and those who access the file information for the purpose of investigation.
2. A record of this policy and any amendments adopted by council, as well as the records regarding implementation shall be kept.
3. Careful record keeping is essential in order to respond to an allegation of abuse.
4. Documentation of all steps taken in response to an allegation must be kept on file.
5. Records cannot be destroyed or altered. Even after a staff member or volunteer leaves, records must remain in the file for five years.

VIII. REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE

ALL EFFORTS AT HANDLING THE INCIDENT MUST BE DOCUMENTED.

A. *Minors*

1. If you have a reason to believe that a child has been abused, be sure to take the situation seriously. Don't deny or ignore the problem. If a child is disclosing this information to you, stay calm and listen to the child. Give emotional support by reminding the child that he/she is not a fault for what an older person has done and that the child was right in telling you about the problem. Do not promise the child that you will not tell anyone. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation. [*See Appendix #5*]
2. In the U.S. anyone who has a reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused or sexually exploited may report the matter to a child protection social worker. In addition, some individuals are mandated reporters and must file a report of suspected child abuse with Children's Protective Services or the police. (**See Appendix #6 for Contact info for reporting abuse.**)
3. The volunteer/staff who has received first-hand information leading to a reasonable suspicion of child abuse is responsible to **report within 24 hours.**

Reporting Flowchart:

CPS & Education and Outreach Director--->Safe People--->Safe Church Team

4. In most circumstances the identity of the person making a report will not be revealed without consent unless required for the purposes of a court hearing.
5. It is the responsibility of the civil investigation team, police or CPS, to notify the alleged offender of the allegations against him/her. Neither the first hand reporter nor the Safe Church Team should engage the alleged offender in an investigative process until he/she has been interviewed by police officials or CPS.
6. After a report [*Appendix #1*] is made to police officials or CPS, the volunteer/staff shall notify the Education and Outreach Director, who will in turn notify a member of the Safe Church Team.
[*See Appendix #5*] The Safe Church Team will notify the pastor of any reports that they receive.
7. In the event a volunteer/staff is uncertain as to whether a reasonable suspicion of child abuse has occurred, the volunteer is encouraged to contact the Education and Outreach Director. **Remember, authorities should be notified within 24 hours.** [*See Appendix #5 and #6*]
8. After speaking with the Safe Church Team, the volunteer/staff with first-hand information is the one responsible to report a reasonable suspicion of child abuse. The volunteer/staff cannot be prohibited from reporting what he/she may believe is a reasonable suspicion of child abuse even if the Safe Church Team does not concur.

9. If the alleged incident occurred during a church function or involved church staff, **the Safe Church Team is responsible to report** the incident immediately to the denomination officials, church's attorney, and the insurance company. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance.

B. Adults

1. If the victim is an adult, he/she should be encouraged to self-report the incident to the pastor and an elder, or two elders. The adult victim's wishes for confidentiality must be respected at all times. Support must be given to reassure the victim that they deserve to be treated with dignity and that the offender must be held accountable for his/her abusive actions. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation.
2. The pastor/elder(s) will be responsible to see that the following steps are taken:
 - a. If the alleged incident occurred during a church function or involved church staff, report the incident immediately to your denominational officials, attorney, and insurance company. Do not try to handle this without professional outside assistance.
3. Contact the Classis Northern Michigan Safe Church Team for assistance in handling the incident.

C. Care, Support, and Accountability

1. Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt.
2. Do not confront the accused. Leave that to the proper authorities.
3. Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person should be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is finished.
4. A volunteer or church leader who confesses or is found guilty of sexual or physical abuse against a minor or adult parishioner will be removed or dismissed from their position or office.
5. A volunteer or church leader removed or dismissed from position or office should not be considered for re-entry or reinstatement without the advice of legal counsel.
6. If allegations involving the church become public, the council is responsible to use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation, being careful to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved and displaying that every effort is being made to treat the allegations fairly and ethically.
7. **Only after** the church council knows that the parents of any minor involved have been contacted by the civil authorities is it appropriate for a church council representative to call them. (Provided the parents are not suspected of any involvement in the abuse.)

Incident/Accident Report Form- Appendix #1

Name of person making the report:

Date of Report: _____ Time: _____ Phone number: _____

Volunteer/Staff position:

Description of the circumstances (when incident occurred/was reported, location, time of day, persons present at the time, etc.)

Description of the incident (reported or witnessed)

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Names of any witnesses:

If a reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists, when was Children's Protective Services and/or the police notified?

Date: _____ Time: _____

Caller's name: _____

Caller's signature: _____

Other action taken, if any

Date the Education and Outreach Director received the report:

Education and Outreach Director's Signature:

Bullying Policy- Appendix #2

Definition of bullying:

“Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power and strength. Typically, it is repeated over time.” (“What we know about bullying” – a publication of US Department of Health and Human Resources.)

Not all behavior can be construed as bullying. Bullying has three markers:

- It is intentional.
- It is repeated.
- It involves an imbalance of power.

Why should we be concerned about bullying?

- Bullying is serious. Many studies have revealed major social, educational, health, and other implications for children who bully, who are bullied, or who witness bullying.
- Bullying from a Christian perspective is a spiritual issue. It’s about treating people as things, rather than image bearers of God. Bullying is about violence against and contempt for others. It creates a climate of fear, insecurity, and suspicion – negative emotions that inhibit the formation of healthy self-concepts, loving relationships, and a strong community.

Recognizing Bullying Behavior:

Verbal Bullying: can be seen in taunting, name-calling, belittling, defamation, racial slurs, sexually abusive or suggestive remarks, malicious nicknames, extortion, abusive phone calls, gossip, or making a child the butt of jokes.

Physical bullying: is evidenced by hitting, punching, kicking, shoving, tripping, slapping, choking, biting, scratching, twisting limbs into painful positions, spitting, and damaging clothes or property.

Relational bullying: is seen in shunning, ignoring, isolating, excluding, and spreading rumors, lies, gossip to diminish the social standing of the bullied child. The actions are often accompanied by subtle gestures such as eye-rolling, sighs, frowns, sneers, snickers, and hostile body language.

Cyber bullying: uses the latest technological tools to hurt others: e-mail, blogs, text messages, cell phones, chat rooms etc. It can be extremely damaging and have devastating results on the target. A simple rumor can be multiplied a thousand times in minutes; a picture on a cell phone can reach around the world via the internet; anonymous threats can arrive via email, leaving the victim terrorized by an unknown aggressor.

Signs and Symptoms:

A child may indicate by signs or behavior that he or she is being bullied. Adults should be aware of these possible signs and that they should investigate if a child:

- Is unwilling to go to youth group or youth event
- Becomes withdrawn, anxious, or lack in confidence
- Starts stammering
- Attempts or threatens suicide, or runs away
- Cries themselves to sleep at night or has nightmares
- Feels ill in the morning
- Has possessions which are damaged or “go missing”
- Has unexplained bruises or cuts
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive, or unreasonable
- Is bullying other children or younger siblings
- Is frightened to say what is wrong
- Gives improbable excuses for any of the above
- Is afraid to use the internet or mobile phone
- Is nervous or jumpy when a cyber message is received

These signs and behaviors could indicate other problems, but bullying should be considered a possibility and should be investigated.

How can the church address bullying?

Prevent bullying from happening in church –

- Ensure that leaders in children and youth programs are caring models of Jesus’ love.
- Nurture empathy – the root cause of bullying is that bullies lack empathy. The quality of empathy allows a person to enter into and identify with another person’s feelings. It is the ability to imagine what it’s like to be in the predicament of the other person and, as a result, the ability to communicate that awareness so the other person feels understood. Bullies lack that quality.
- Practice warm Christian love
- Spotlight feelings
- Use service projects with people who are different
- Practice empathic reactions
- Praise positive behavior
- Provide opportunities for fellowship and friendship
- Education committees, staff, teachers, and children program leaders need to be informed about the issue of bullying and how to deal with it. Training is essential (see *Preventing Child Abuse – Creating A Safe Place* - appendix A - C)
- Teach practical coping strategies to children who may be victims or bystanders.
- Bullying often happens outside the supervision of adults. Simple steps such as adequately supervise hallways, after church coffee hour, and other events, can make it more difficult for bullies to act.

Policy to address bullying incidents:

Responsibilities of all those who observe bullying

- Ensure that all staff and volunteers are trained and aware of the anti-bullying policy and procedures
- Ensure that any incident of bullying during a church activity is dealt with regardless of whether a complaint of bullying has been received
- Provide leadership and role-modeling in appropriate behavior
- Respond promptly, sensitively, and confidentially to all situations where bullying behavior is observed or alleged to have occurred.
- If peers, church members, volunteers, and/or staff are a witness to bullying, report incidents to the (youth) program director.
- Any child or member of VCCRC who feels that he or she has been victimized by bullying is encouraged to report the matter to the (youth) program director or an elder.
- Where appropriate, an investigation will be undertaken and disciplinary measures will be taken as necessary.

Respond to a bullying incident:

1. **Victim First** – going to the victim first shows a focus on healing, not aggression. If we go to the bully first, we reinforce the aggression by giving it (negative) attention.

First Aid for the Victim:

- State what you see: example – “Alice, you are sitting on the floor with your legs crossed, your face is red and you have tears coming down your cheeks. You look upset”.
- Inquire, “Something happened?”
- Reflect back what you hear and comfort child.
- Tell him/her that you will help the child.

2. Address the aggressor (Bully)

- Practice positive discipline with a bully – the word “discipline” has as its root the word for “to learn”. Discipline is not primarily about punishment but more about teaching new and better ways of behaving. The process of discipline helps bullies identify what they have done wrong, gives them ownership of the problem, helps them develop a process for solving their problem, and leaves their dignity intact.

Emphasize the three R’s with bullies:

1. **Restitution** – fixing what they did, such as paying for a broken toy, giving back the extorted money, apologizing for the malicious words.
2. **Resolution** – figuring out a way to keep it from happening again, such as counting to ten when they’re angry or recognizing the stimulus that causes bullying behavior, and deciding on a better coping mechanism.
3. **Relationship** – finding a way to heal the broken relationship.

Keep the bully away from the victim while you talk with the bully – tell them assertively:

- a) “You wanted----“(to hurt him, to have his attention, to have his toy)
- b) “So you -----“(hit him, call him a name,)
- c) “You may not-----, ----- hurts”.
- d) “What else could you do? When you want-----, say (or do) -----“
- e) Say or do it now for practice

Listen actively – questions such as, “How did that make you feel?” or “What could you do to make your friend happier or better?” can stimulate a child to identify with others’ feelings and thoughts. Bullies often do not have feelings for their victims.

In serious cases of bullying parents should be informed and will be asked to come to a meeting to discuss the problem.

The bullying behavior or threats of bullying must be investigated by the program director and the bullying stopped quickly.

If the bullying still continues, the bully will be asked not to attend any church functions until he/she stops the bullying behavior.

Incidents of bullying will be recorded by the program director.

Parental Consent Form- Appendix #3

I _____ (parent/guardian) give permission for _____
(child(ren)/ward), to attend events with Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church.

Transportation Consent

I also give consent for the above named to be transported by a designated driver approved by Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church. VCCRC confirms that the driver will have insurance coverage on his or her vehicle, and has a valid driver's license. I waive the driver and the Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church from liability due to accidental injury suffered in a motor vehicle accident while a passenger in the vehicle.

Video/Photograph Consent (circle yes or no)

Yes No I agree to the publication of photographs and/or video by Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church in online (i.e. website, social media, etc.) or print (bulletins, newsletters, fliers, etc.) media not including names.

Yes No I also agree to the use of first names in the aforementioned publications

Medical Information and Consent

I give permission to the volunteers to secure needed emergency medical treatment for the child named above. In case of accident or injury during the event, I release the supervisors from all liability not covered by insurance.

Telephone/cell numbers _____

Family's insurance company _____

Policy number _____

Allergies _____

Current medications _____

Other pertinent medical information _____

This parental transportation and medical consent form is valid for the () ministry year.

Signed: _____

Print: _____

Staff Reference Check Form- Appendix #4

Regarding Applicant: _____
Name of applicant

Reference Information:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone: Home _____ Cell: _____

How long have you known this person? _____

In what capacity have you known this person? _____

Describe this person's skills/gifts for working with children. _____

Do you have any concerns about this person's prior work with children or his/her relationship with children? _____

Describe how this person interacts with children. _____

Describe how this person disciplines children. _____

Do you have any knowledge about this person's behavior, attitude, or emotions toward children that might cause a parent to worry about this person caring for his/her children? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, please specify. _____

Would you have any hesitation to fully endorse this person for providing children/youth ministry work? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, please specify. _____

Interview Protocol- Appendix #4 continued

Regarding Applicant: _____
Name of applicant

Interview Questions (Please mark which questions were asked. Note can be written on the back.)

1. Discuss your interest in working with children or youth.
2. Discuss how you set limits with children/youth.
3. Give examples of situations when you disciplined or corrected a child's or youth's behavior.
4. What gifts do you have for working with children or youth?
5. Describe a situation when you became angry or frustrated with a child or youth and how you handled it.
6. Describe a time when you interacted with a child or youth and felt guilty about the interaction.
7. Children and youth need affection and attention. Describe what you would and wouldn't do to meet those needs.
8. What would be your reaction to a child's or youth's complaint of inappropriate behavior by a parent or other caregiver?
9. What do you think should be the church's response to adults who are accused by a child or youth of misconduct?
10. Is there any part of the church's policy you disagree with and could not follow?
11. Describe the risks of meeting one to one with a child or youth.
12. Describe your social support network.
13. Describe how sexual contact between an adult and a child or youth could be harmful.
14. What are some examples of emotional abuse and why is it harmful?
15. Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ and also to this church.

Interviewer: _____

Print Name Signature

Date: _____

VOLUNTEER PROFILE- Appendix #5

Confidential

This application is to be completed by all applicants who regularly engage in supervision at Vogel Center CRC or serve as supervisors of volunteers. It is being used to help the church provide a safe and secure environment for those who participate in our programs and to protect the volunteers who work in those programs.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name _____ Birthdate _____

Address _____

Phone # _____

Are you a member of Vogel Center CRC? _____

If not a member, are you a regular attendee of this church? _____

List (name and city) other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

List all previous work involving children in the last five years (type of work, organization or place):

Have you ever been arrested for or convicted of child abuse, actual or attempted sexual molestation or any other crime? _____

If yes, please explain: _____

Responding to a Child's Report of Abuse- Appendix #5 cont'

When a child reports something to you that raises suspicion the child may have witnessed or been a victim of abuse, these guidelines for responding may be helpful to you:

- Take the child's story seriously.
- Don't respond with judgmental statements such as, "I think you just had a bad dream."
- Don't react with fear or disgust at the child's story; that may cause the child to stop talking or to think you are upset with him or her.
- Don't try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way the child is reporting it.
- Don't promise the child that you will not tell anyone what he or she shared with you.
- Remind the child that whatever happened was not his or her fault.
- Remind the child that it was a good decision to tell you what happened to him/her.
- Tell the child that you want to find help to prevent another incident from happening.
- Don't offer the child a reward for telling the story or promise the child a gift if he or she tells another adult.
- Reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
- Don't frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint; instead, share with the child that other people need to know about what happened, and they will talk to the child later.
- Don't ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath his/her clothing or underwear; simply note those bruises that are not concealed. In some communities, removing a child's clothing even to confirm a report of abuse is a violation of the law.
- Don't investigate the child's story; rather, listen to the story and take notes immediately afterwards while the story is still fresh in your mind.
- Don't tell the child that he/she was abused.
- Offer support to the child and remind the child that you care about him/her.
- Follow up in the next weeks and months by speaking to the child and offering support.

Reporting Flowchart:

CPS & Education and Outreach Director--->Safe People---> Safe Church Team

Code of Ethics for Volunteers and Staff Child and Youth Programs
Appendix #5 cont'

Believing that God is calling me to serve children or youth in this congregation,

- My first priority in supervising or volunteering with children or youth will be to seek their spiritual, psychological, and social welfare.
- I will respect each child or youth's cultural or ethnic background.
- I will give the parent[s] of each child or youth full information about the program I am supervising or volunteering in.
- I will not intentionally harm or betray a child or youth's trust. I will use reasonable means to protect each child or youth from abuse while he or she is in my care.
- I will report a reasonable suspicion of abuse of a child or youth to a responsible person for a proper investigation.
- If I wish to talk to a child or youth alone, it will be within the sight and sound of one or more adults.
- I will answer a child or youth's questions openly and honestly.
- I will work with the children or youth to set guidelines for acceptable behavior within the group. I will expect children or youth to act based on those guidelines. If a child or youth consistently breaks behavioral guidelines, I will seek help from parents and others to assist me in responding.
- If a child or youth is distressed, I will try to offer comfort and help, and I will encourage the child or youth to find appropriate help.
- I will pray for each child or youth regularly and assure them that I care about them.
- I will follow the policies and procedures in the congregation's Abuse Prevention Plan.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches (if requested) listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for ministry. I understand that this application will be kept strictly confidential. Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by Vogel Center CRC's policies and to serve scripturally and with integrity in the performance of my services on behalf of the church. Additionally, I understand and agree that all allegations or observations of physical and sexual abuse concerning me will be reported by an elder and/or pastor to me in a timely manner. When necessary, the appropriate authorities will be notified.

I also understand that Vogel Center CRC will check the MSP Sexual Offenders Registry.

Applicant's signature & Date: _____

Contact Information for Reporting Abuse- Appendix #6

To report actual or suspected child abuse or neglect in any Michigan county:

Call Centralized Intake (855) 444-3911

Missaukee County Sheriff's Department (231) 839-4338

State Police – Houghton Lake (989) 422-5101

State Police – Cadillac (231) 770-6040

SAFE CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION AND RESOURCES- Appendix #7

Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Team

Danielle Hoekstra	231-942-9808 (Education and Outreach Director)
<i>Terry Lutke*</i>	<i>231-825-2211</i>
<i>Tabby Martz*</i>	<i>231-878-3958</i>
Marvin Bode	231-328-4573
Randy Jenema	231-878-0632

Classis Northern Michigan Safe Church Team

David Embertson – Co-Chairperson	231-920-0335
Jerry Schepers- Co-Chairperson	231-826-0038
Ria Cunningham- Claimant Advocate	231-429- 8554
Jennifer VanHouten-Secretary	231-429- 8554
Danielle Hoekstra	231-942-9808

Safe Church Ministry – Christian Reformed Church in North America

Bonnie Nichols, Director 616-224-0735 bnicholas@crcna.org
safechurchministry@crcna.org

Resources Available in the VC CRC office:

Child Protection Law – DHS Pub 3 (Rev. 5-09)

Mandated Reporter’s Resource Guide – DHS Pub 112 (Rev. 10-08)

Preventing Child Abuse – Beth A. Swagman – Faith Alive

Child Sexual Abuse Response Plan - 2007 Christianity Today

Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in Your Church – Church Law and Tax

Report - Who Are the Safe Church Team Advocates? – CRCNA

Healing Wounds of Cadillac

***Denotes safe person trained for members of the congregation/volunteers to report incidences.**

SAFE PERSON ATTRIBUTES- Appendix #8

1. Is a committed Christian who knows the power of prayer and communicates with God.
2. Has a servant heart and, like Jesus, lays down his/her life for another.
3. Knows that there is no power stronger than God's love, which is the channel to hurting people.
4. Can bring hope and encouragement to those who have no hope.
5. Is a good listener.
6. Is accepting, not judgemental.
7. Is genuine.
8. Speaks truthfully in kindness and has deep respect for others.
9. Recognizes that trust is built over time.
10. Able to relate to children.
11. Is aware of issues relating to abuse and familiar with our church's policy.

JOB DESCRIPTION – SAFE PERSON

1. Receive, review and file volunteer profiles.
2. When requested by the Council, state if individuals have completed abuse prevention training, and if there are any reasons they should not be considered for a position.
3. Hear and process details of suspected abuse and neglect.
4. Report cases of suspected abuse/neglect to the pastor(s) and elders.
5. File written reports of suspected abuse/neglect and volunteer profiles.
6. Meet with the ministry leaders to determine any special needs.

SIGNS OF ABUSE: WHAT TO LOOK FOR- Appendix #9

Signs of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse often leaves marks, and can be easier to identify than sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.

Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises and welts are the most frequent evidence found
 1. Often on the face, torso, buttocks, back, or thighs
 2. Can reflect shape of object used (electric cord, belt buckle)
 3. May be in various stages of healing
- Unexplained fractures/dislocations
 1. Often involve facial structure, skull, and bones around joints
 2. May include multiple or spiral fractures
- Unexplained burns
 1. Often on palms, soles, buttocks, and back
 2. Can reflect pattern indicative of cigarette, cigar, electrical appliance, immersion, rope burn
- Other unexplained injuries
 1. Lacerations, abrasions, human bite marks or pinch marks
 2. Loss of hair/bald patches
 3. Retinal hemorrhage
 4. Abdominal injuries

Behavioral Indicators

- Requests or feels deserving of punishment
- Afraid to go home and/or requests to stay in school, day care, etc.
- Overly shy, tends to avoid physical contact with adults, especially parents
- Displays behavioral extremes (withdrawal or aggression)
- Suggests that other children be punished in a harsh manner
- Cries excessively and/or sits and stares
- Reports injury by parent
- Gives unbelievable explanations for injuries

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Unfortunately, many children do not report their abuse. They rely on adults to be aware of specific behavioral and physical indicators. A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing sexual abuse.

Remember: The most reliable indicator of child sexual abuse is the child's verbal disclosure.

Physical Indicators

- Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of the genitals
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Pregnancy in young adolescents
- Frequent unexplained sore throats, yeast infections, or urinary infections

Behavioral Indicators

- Excessive masturbation in young children
- Sexual knowledge or behavior beyond that expected for the child's developmental level
- Depression, suicidal gestures
- Chronic runaway
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints, such as headaches, backaches, stomachaches
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes
- Sudden avoidance of certain familiar adults or places
- Decline in school performance

Signs of Emotional Abuse

The signs of emotional abuse may be less obvious than other forms of maltreatment. Emotional abuse is suspected when a child exhibits impaired development, destructive behavior, or chronic somatic complaints that cannot be explained medically or circumstantially. A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing emotional abuse.

Physical Indicators

- Eating disorders
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Wetting or soiling by school-age child
- Speech disorder, stuttering
- Failure to thrive
- Development lags
- Asthma, severe allergies, or ulcers

Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders, such as biting, rocking, head banging, thumb sucking in an older child
- Poor peer relationships
- Behavioral extremes (overly compliant or demanding, withdrawn, aggressive)
- Self-destructive behavior, oblivious to hazards and risks
- Chronic academic under-achievement
- Irrational and persistent fears, dreads, or hatreds

Signs of Neglect

A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing neglect. But keep in mind: Cultural standards which differ from those prevailing in a community are not necessarily neglect.

Physical Indicators

- Height and weight significantly below age level
- Inappropriate clothing for weather
- Poor hygiene, including lice, body odor, scaly skin
- Child abandoned or left with inadequate supervision
- Untreated illness or injury
- Lack of safe, warm, sanitary shelter
- Lack of necessary medical and dental care

Behavioral Indicators

- Begging or stealing food
- Falling asleep in school, lethargic
- Poor school attendance, frequent tardiness
- Chronic hunger
- Dull, apathetic appearance
- Running away from home
- Repeated acts of vandalism
- Reports no caretaker in the home
- Assumes adult responsibilities

Failure to Thrive: A possible case of child abuse

Failure to thrive (FTT) is a condition in which children show a marked retardation or cessation of growth. On a normal chart, FTT children usually fall below the third percentile. FTT can result from (1) a medical condition, (2) environmental factors, such as neglect or disturbed parenting, or (3) a combination of medical and environmental factors.

- FTT can be life-threatening.
- FTT is usually diagnosed in children age two and under.
- FTT must be confirmed by a medical diagnosis.

Commitments from Vogel Center CRC Leadership

With the Spirit's help we will:

1. Provide support and encouragement for the Vogel Center CRC Safe Church Team.
2. Regularly update the congregation.
3. Add Safe Church to monthly leadership meetings.
4. Help provide training and support for all staff, Elders and Deacons, and ministry leaders.
5. Provide funds to implement this abuse prevention policy.
6. Regularly monitor progress with assistance from the Safe Church Team.
7. Take the safety of our members and community seriously, including our children and youth.

Approved by Vogel Center Christian Reformed Church council on: _____

Signature of Council President: _____