

Criminal History and Involvement in the Church

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Safe Church Reps.

Three Ways A Church Can Respond:

1. Do nothing
2. Exclude someone from attending
3. Conditional Attendance Policy/
COVENANT OF CONDUCT



Risks in allowing an offender to attend church without a defined Plan:

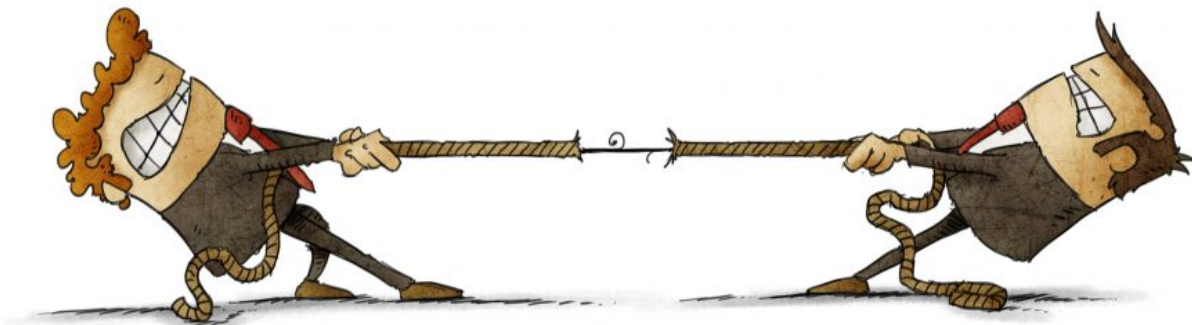
1. Re-offend
2. Cause uncomfortable/strong feelings (example: parents; trigger intense emotions for anyone with history of abuse)
3. Liability to a church - once Council is aware there is a duty to respond
4. Creates an environment of secrecy and fuels gossip

TENSIONS

“There is going to be a *tremendous urge* on the part of church leaders (and church members) to show **mercy, forgiveness, restoration, giving a second chance**. This is understandable and those are Biblical Principles”

However there are “counter-vailing Biblical principles of **justice and the protection of the innocent.**”

(<https://network.crcna.org/safe-church/criminal-sexual-history-and-involvement-church-supplemental-resources>)



Protective versus Open Communities:

- ▶ ‘If anyone causes one of these little ones who trust in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.’
Matthew 18:6
- ▶ Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.
Matthew 9:12-13

Navigating the TENSION between...

Maintaining a safe protective environment,
especially for children and those most vulnerable

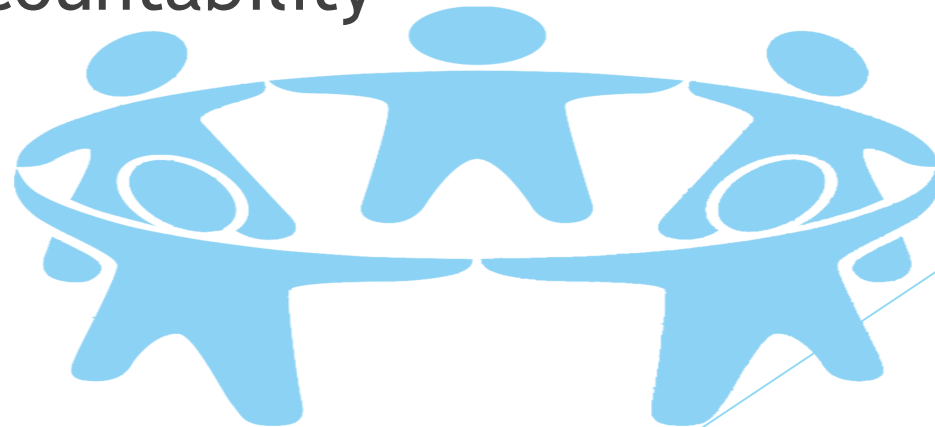
AND

Creating a welcoming and grace-filled response for
those who have offended

**HOW DOES THE CHURCH DO BOTH OF
THESE THINGS ?**

A Community of Support and Accountability

- ▶ A small group of individuals who genuinely care for the one who has offended
- ▶ Who commit to “walking alongside” in discipleship, prayer, and maintaining accountability
- ▶ Two things exist together: Genuine caring relationships and Accountability



A Community of Support and Accountability

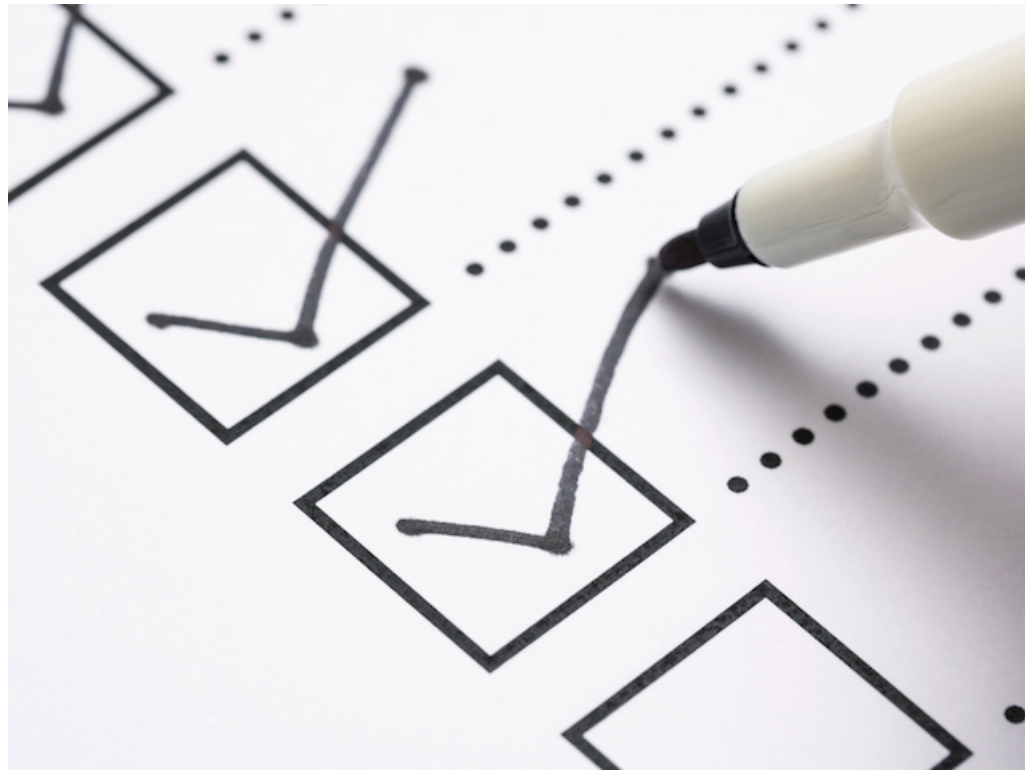
- ▶ Recognizes that the church commits to providing a safe caring environment for all
- ▶ Recognizes that children are vulnerable and at risk and puts their protection at the forefront
- ▶ Recognizes that God's grace extends to all
- ▶ Allows someone with a criminal history to live in the grace of the church
- ▶ Includes a COVENANT OF CONDUCT



1. Establishes actions of the Church to maintain a Caring Environment for everyone
2. Establishes actions/agreements of the covenanter
3. Is discussed and signed by both the Church and Ministry representatives/ and the Covenanter

COVENANT OF CODUCT INCLUDES:

- Supervision
- Limitations
- Notifications
- Noncompliance
- Support



What is Forgiveness?

- ▶ **Forgiveness does not mean forgetting.** It's normal for memories to be triggered in the future.
- ▶ **Forgiveness is a process, not an event.** It will take time to work through our emotional problems before we can forgive. It is a process of letting-go time and time again.

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is not letting the offender off the hook. We can and should hold others accountable for their actions or lack of actions. God commands us to forgive others, and He also calls us to hold each other accountable.



A Process:

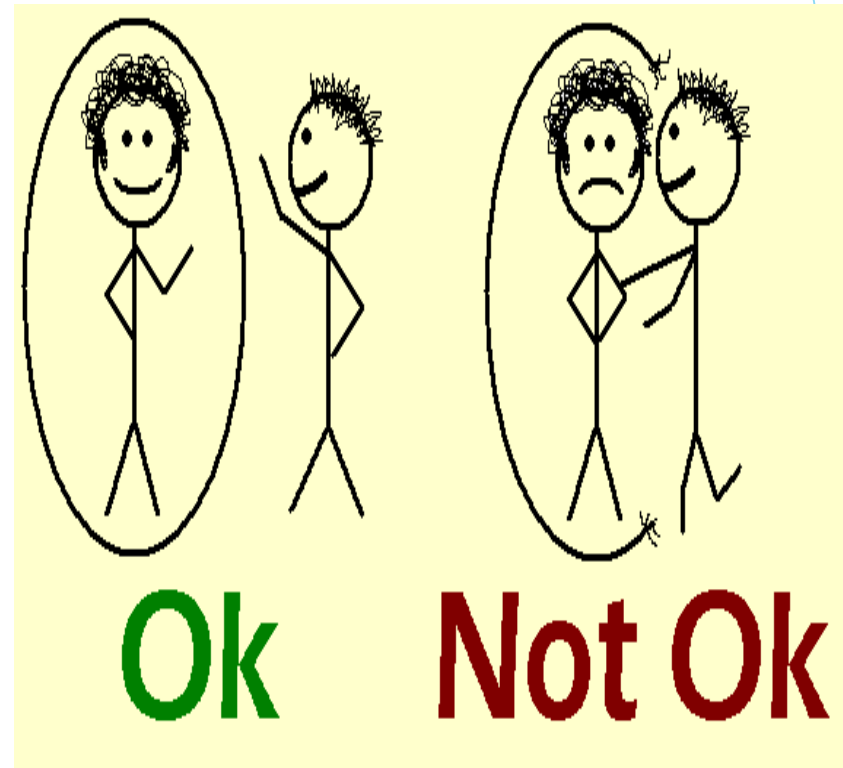
- ▶ **Forgiveness starts with a mental decision.** The emotional part of forgiveness is finally being able to let go of the resentment.
- ▶ **Letting go of the bitterness while remembering very clearly your responsibility to healthy boundaries.**



BOUNDARIES

Boundaries:

- ▶ are a physical or emotional limit that a person defines as safe or appropriate.
- ▶ are consistent, reliable, and establish that certain behaviors cannot come in or will not go out.
- ▶ take time and effort to maintain.
- ▶ are high maintenance for people who have them; people with unhealthy boundaries are high maintenance for others who interact with them.



People with healthy boundaries....

- ▶ have limits and recognize what they are.
- ▶ know what they will or will not do.
- ▶ know what they will allow others to do or not do.

People with unhealthy boundaries....

- don't know what information to share.
- trust too easily.
- have poorly defined limits.
- are overly tolerant of inappropriate behaviors.

Know the difference between Secrecy and Confidentiality:

- ▶ Secrecy raises suspicion and is unhealthy and encourages rumours and gossip
- Confidentiality means sharing information only with those who need to know in order to maintain the physical and emotional safety of the individual or individuals involved in the situation; all other information is kept private Eg Duty to inform police, Children's Aid Society, physician



SEASONS IN THE CHURCH:

- ▶ Every church experiences the different seasons, including the hard season of Winter which prepares us again for the season of new growth in Spring.
- ▶ Winter allows for a time of review of policies, a deeper understanding of accountability, and sharing of compassion and empathy.
- ▶ Often times it is Safe church issues that initiate this season of winter.

Guarding a Sacred Trust:

- ▶ God is present in every Season.
- ▶ Churches that have grappled with this Winter season, say that while it was difficult, they drew closer to God.
- ▶ Churches have to grapple with what they are about, and whether they truly love each other. When there is deep conflict, our love is tested.

Guarding a Sacred Trust:

- ▶ Church councils require the prayer support and patience of the congregation to make necessary changes in policies, attend additional meetings, and make difficult decisions about the health of the church.
- ▶ Congregations require transparency and the dedicated follow through of the council to protect the safety of the congregation, especially the young and vulnerable.
- ▶ The rebuilding of trust requires time for healing.

A Sanctuary Church Is:

- ▶ A place for all people to find grace
- ▶ A place where God is present with His people, where His glory is revealed, and His name is honored
- ▶ A safe place where guarding God's glory and honour creates tension and requires boundaries
- ▶ Lord, prepare us, prepare me, to be a sanctuary

RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES

▶ **Classis Chatham website - Safe Church page**

<http://www.classischatham.ca/information/classis-chatham-safe-church-team.html>

Includes: Links to CRCNA Safe Church Ministries

Sample letter to congregation

Contact information for Classis Chatham Safe Church Chair

And more.....