

Mill Creek Community Church

“SAFE CHURCH for ALL” ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

As a community of Christ-followers, we seek to be a place where each person can experience the love, compassion, healing, and forgiveness that God pours out on us in Jesus Christ. This means being a congregation where all can worship and grow in their faith free from abuse and where those who have been victimized by abuse can receive support in their journey toward healing. By instituting this policy, we commit to protecting and supporting the value and dignity of each person, especially the most vulnerable among us, and to being a community that makes every effort to prevent abuse in our midst.

Purpose of the “Safe Church for All” Policy is to:

1. Reflect the high value that Jesus places on those who are vulnerable. As Christ’s church, we reflect Christ by ensuring that honor and dignity are shown to every person created in God’s image.
2. Educate staff, leaders, and volunteers about abuse, the dynamics of power, and especially the responsibility required by people in positions of power.
3. Ensure that clergy, elders, deacons, staff members, and volunteer leaders are following appropriate boundaries and have appropriate structures of accountability and support.
4. Provide a safe place for any person to come forward with a disclosure of abuse and receive help.
5. Protect children, youth, vulnerable adults and all people from potential abuse.
6. Safeguard staff and volunteers from potential false allegations.
7. Equip the church leadership and congregation with clear guidelines for how to respond effectively with justice and compassion to situations of abuse.
8. Create opportunities to talk about abuse and increase awareness. Abuse thrives in silence and secrecy, and we must not let it thrive in our communities (Eph. 5).
9. Practice the diligence required as the church and also to abide by the laws of our state and country.

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GENERAL TITLES & DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are given for the purposes of both the general and specific policies. To reduce risk and liability, adopted policies shall be consistently followed.

All references to "Staff" shall mean "paid & volunteer staff", unless otherwise defined.

- **Adult Staff** (Adult Program Staff) paid or volunteer, who teach/lead in the infant, child, youth program, must be age 21 & over and screened, background checked and trained annually in Safe Church procedures. This includes those employed by the church who occupy the same facilities with children or youth programs.
- **Compliance** – all staff (paid and volunteer) must agree to comply with the MCCC's Abuse Prevention policies. Staff (paid or volunteer) who refuse to follow Safe Church policies or who violate these policies will be required to relinquish their position. If a particular policy is viewed as unrealistic or for some other reason is not being consistently observed, this shall be reported to the Safe Church Team for appropriate action.
- **Discipline** –All adult staff (paid or volunteer) who work with children, youth or vulnerable adult shall abide by the adopted Discipline policy.
- **Internal Reporting** – Anyone who becomes aware of possible abuse, harassment, bullying or violence in any church program or activity, or that is committed by a church volunteer, attendee or employee must immediately report the incident to the Safe Church (SC) Director, a SC Team member, or the Pastor, if they are not involved. Never talk to the potential abuser about any aspect of the incident. Any abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable adult indicated through observation or stated by the victim must be reported immediately.
- **Ministry Leader** - a person (paid or volunteer) ordained or not, in a position of leadership over an area or aspect of ministry or who has a position of spiritual authority over other volunteers or attendees of the church. This includes but is not limited to: pastors, directors, elders, deacons, youth leaders, staff, VBS, children's programs, etc
- **Nursery** is infants to 4 yrs old. **Children** are 4 - 11 years of age. **Youth** are 12 to 18 years of age.
- **Screening** –adopted screening procedures for all staff (paid or volunteer) to help discern who is qualified to serve in child/youth programs. Specific steps are under "**Screening and Selection**".
- **Training** – all staff (paid or volunteer) serving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, and when possible, all other volunteers, will attend annual trainings on abuse: signs and symptoms, awareness, reporting, dynamics of power, etc. Attendance at these trainings shall be kept on file.
- **Vulnerable Adult** is a person over the age of 18 who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation because of a mental or physical impairment.
- **Youth Assistant** is a youth, age 12-20 years old, who assists adult staff in a program/activity and is at least four years older than the children or youth in the program.

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

As a body of believers working to create safe places for all who participate with MCCC, it is our responsibility to understand and create an awareness of the meaning of abuse, neglect, harassment, bullying, and other forms of abuse. For our purposes, the following definitions are intended to assist this understanding and guide behavior towards children, youth, vulnerable adults or any person. For further guidelines and definitions related to the terms below, refer to: Preventing Child Abuse: Creating a Safe Place by Beth Swagman, 2009, and Washington State RCW's.

1. **Abuse of Power/ Power Differential:** The act of using one's position of power in an abusive way. This can take many forms, such as: having inherently greater power and influence over people they help or supervise. Power differentials may exist in relationships based on cultural standards, age, race, gender or education. This may include:
 - taking advantage of someone;
 - gaining access to information that shouldn't be accessible to others;
 - manipulating someone by threatening to punish them if they don't comply.

Additional information in Appendix ____

Bullying - Aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. Characteristics of bullying include: (1) it is intentional, (2) it is repeated, and (3) it involves an imbalance of power. Bullying is serious as it has major life-long implications for those who bully and for the victims of bullying. For Christians, bullying is a spiritual issue as God's design for healthy self-concepts, loving relationships, and the community of believers is threatened. (*Preventing Child Abuse*, 2009.). Additional information in Appendix ____

2. **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of behavior in which a person insults, humiliates, manipulates an individual or group, in order to establish or maintain control over them. This includes:
 - threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones;
 - isolating a person from family, friends, acquaintances or as a means of punishment;
 - demeaning, bullying, belittling, shaming, or humiliating a person;
 - delivering constant criticism;
 - emotionally blackmailing or harassing a person;
 - requiring obedience to the abuser;
 - requirements for secrecy and silence;
 - censorship of decision making;
 - coercion to conform, inability to ask questions.
3. **Grooming:** a method of building trust with a child, youth, even adults in an effort to gain access or time with them. This may include:
 - threats and physical force to sexually assault or abuse a child/youth;
 - subtle approaches designed to build relationships with families;
 - befriending a child with ill intent;
 - exploiting position of trust and authority.

Additional information in Appendix ____

4. **Harassment** - MCCC is committed to providing an environment that is free of harassment. The church prohibits harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law. MCCC will not tolerate harassment within its ministry or its workplace, whether the harassment is a minister, employee, church member, visitor or a member of the public.
5. **Non-physical Sexual Abuse:** Abuse that does not include physical contact between the abuser and the victim, occurring against a person without their consent or against a person who is unable to refuse. Non-physical sexual abuse may include:
 - exposing naked parts of themselves;
 - obscene phone calls or texts;
 - peering in windows, voyeurism;
 - requests to engage in sexual activity;
 - taking/posting inappropriate photos without consent.
6. **Physical Abuse:** Behavior that is used to maintain power and control over a child, youth, vulnerable adult or any another person, including domestic abuse and dating violence:
 - threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on any person,
 - offensive or harmful contact with an adult.
 - sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of behavior.
7. **Sexual Abuse:**
 - exploiting or grooming (preparing) a child, youth or vulnerable adult – regardless of consent or circumstances – for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control.
 - unwelcome, unwanted sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy. Sometimes between co-workers, co-volunteers, or between a supervisor and a subordinate.
 - the development of or the attempt to develop a sexual or emotional relationship with a person by a ministry leader, supervisor, person in power, or other person.
8. **Spiritual Abuse:** A form of emotional and psychological abuse, characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context. This may include:
 - manipulation and exploitation by appeal to religious convictions and beliefs;
 - use of church doctrine to improperly influence or control the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of a person;
 - coercion to conform, inability to ask questions;
 - suggestion that the abuser holds a 'divine' position.
9. **Violence** - Language, physical threats or actions intended to do harm or intimidate others. Firearms, knives, chemicals, explosives and other such items, carried for the purpose of injury or intimidation are not permitted on the MCCC property.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In order to protect the dignity and well-being of any person who has been victimized by abuse, it is important that their identity is kept confidential. It is also important that the identity of the person accused of abuse is kept confidential until the investigation is complete or the abusive action is determined. The following measures shall be implemented to protect the privacy of all parties and to ensure that information about any alleged act is limited to those listed below and those who have a specific need to know.

- A. Need-to-Know positions include: Safe Church Director, Council/Elder President, Pastor and the Safe Church Team. The names and information in any abuse allegations shall be limited to these positions. Any request to release names of any involved party (victim, accused abuser, or witnesses) must first be cleared by the church's legal counsel, along with the Safe Church Director, Council/Elder President and Pastor. If any of the above people are the accused or are involved in any way in the alleged act, do not notify this person or their family members.
- B. Discussion by Council or Safe Church Team shall be conducted without the actual names of involved persons being used. Instead, descriptions such as "reporter", "victim", "alleged offender", "witness", or "claimant" shall be used until the accused person is officially charged.
- C. Situations of abuse involving children/youth or vulnerable adults require sensitive care and full transparency with law enforcement investigations. In these situations, there shall be a designated Safe Church Team member, Pastor or Elder who communicates with the appropriate authorities.
- D. Parents will be informed of the incident as soon as possible without identifying the alleged abuser or witnesses. The MCCC Incident Report, which documents witnesses and other initial information, will be kept confidential and will not be given to the parents or family members.
- E. No one, including staff, should contact the victim, victim's family, the abuser or the abuser's family. The investigation must be left to the Police, Child Protective Services (CPS) and other skilled authorities, unless a different direction is given by the authorities to the Safe Church Director, Pastor or Council President.
- F. The Safe Church Director, together with the Pastor and Council/Elder President, will develop a plan for responding to the abuse in ways that provide care and confidentiality for the one who has been victimized by abuse and respects the privacy of all involved.
- G. Subject to the best interest of the person victimized by abuse, the MCCC Council and Safe Church Team shall notify the congregation in writing if it's concluded that anyone associated with MCCC has abused a child, youth or vulnerable adult. This notice shall protect the identity and confidentiality of all innocent parties, including the person who was victimized by abuse.

For further information, see: "Reporting and Responding" pg. 14-15, and
"Responding to a Child Disclosing Abuse", Appendix B-1.

NURSERY

(All references to “Staff” shall mean “paid & volunteer staff”, unless otherwise defined.)

1. MCCC Nursery will serve children, infant to 4 years old.
2. All adult staff must be screened, background checked and complete Safe Church training annually.
3. Two approved adult Nursery staff must be present in the nursery at all times. An approved Youth Assistant may serve in the Nursery along with the two adult Nursery staff. The on-duty Nursery staff, adults & youth, must be unrelated and not living in the same household.
4. The child/staff ratio is 1 adult Staff for 4 children under 1 yr old (1:4). Two adult Staff may serve up to eight children under 1 yr. old, maintaining a 1:4 ratio by adding staff when the number of children increase. Additional staff will be added as needed.
5. An adult or youth who is not an approved Nursery staff should only spend a short time in the nursery to comfort an upset or distressed child.
6. No child(ren) should be in the nursery unattended at any time.
7. Parent/adult must sign-in each child and provide a cell number. Special instructions (including allergies & bathroom assistance) should be noted on the sign-in form. Each child should have a name tag.
8. Children are to be picked up by the parent or adult who signed them in or a person designated by the admitting parent/adult.
9. A child must be accompanied to the bathroom by an adult Nursery staff. The door between the Nursery and bathroom must remain open so the two adult Nursery staff are within view of each other. For children who need assistance, the adult staff may assist the child onto or off the toilet with the stall door open, then step out. Nursery staff should never be in a closed stall with a child. All other times, the Nursery door to the bathroom shall remain locked.
10. Diapers will not be changed by Staff. Parents will be called if a child requires a diaper change.
11. Adult Nursery staff may only take a child from the nursery for reasons such as, to use the bathroom, to be taken to the parent or in case of an emergency. In order to take the children outside to the Play Yard, all children must go as a group with both teachers accompanying them.
12. If a child becomes upset, distressed or is inconsolable, the parent may be called to help.
13. Any medical problem or accident must be reported immediately to the child’s parent. An Incident Report must be completed and given to the Children’s Ministry Director or Safe Church Team.
14. The Discipline Policy applies to all children’s programs and may include more options.

15. Classroom doors without a window must be left open to allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
16. In case of emergency: One Nursery staff shall stay with the children, while one Nursery staff calls or gets help. If necessary, follow posted evacuation directions.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

(All references to “Staff” shall mean “paid & volunteer staff”, unless otherwise defined.)

1. MCCC Sunday School will serve children, 4 years old through 5th grade.
2. All adult staff must be screened, background checked and attend Safe Church training annually.
3. Two approved adult staff must be present in each classroom. The child/staff ratio is 1 adult staff to 10 children (1:10). Two adult staff may serve up to 20 children maintaining the 1:10 ratio, adding adult staff when the number of children increases. An approved Youth Assistant may serve in the Sunday School along with two adult staff.
4. The on-duty Sunday School staff, adults & youth assistant, must be unrelated (not family members) and not living in the same household.
5. Children must never be unsupervised in classrooms, restrooms, empty rooms, rooms without windows, etc.
6. Parent/adult must sign-in each child and provide a cell phone number. Special instructions (including allergies, health issues & bathroom assistance) should be noted on the sign-in form. Each child may receive a name tag.
7. All Children must be picked up by the parent/person designated on the Sign-in sheet.
8. Children must be accompanied by an adult Sunday School staff to the bathroom door. The adult staff will stand with the bathroom hall door open, visible to the adult staff in the classroom and wait for the child(ren) to exit the bathroom stall and return to class. The adult staff will not enter the bathroom unless there is a second staff (Nursery staff, hall monitor) able to assist. Sunday School staff should never be in a closed stall with a child. The adult staff will visually monitor the classroom (with classroom door open) as they wait for the child using the bathroom. The two adult staff must be visible to each other throughout this process.
9. An adult staff may take a child from the classroom for these reasons: to use the bathroom, to return to the parents or in case of emergency. The two Sunday School staff may take the full class outside or to a different classroom for additional activities.
10. Classroom doors without a window must be left open to allow for an unobstructed view of the room.

11. If a child becomes upset or the child's behavior is disrupting the class, the parent may be asked to help or the child may be taken to the parents.
12. Any medical problem or accident must be reported immediately to the child's parent. An Incident Report must be completed and given to the Children's Ministry Director or Safe Church Team.
13. The General Discipline Policy applies to all children's programs and may include more options.
14. In case of emergency: One Sunday School staff shall stay with the children, while one adult staff calls or gets help. If necessary, follow posted evacuation directions.

DISCIPLINE

When children or youth act out or misbehave during church groups, programs or events, adult program staff will address the misbehavior in ways that are consistent with the following guidelines:

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
2. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted (yelling, insults, threats).
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and may be involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor infractions, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
4. Concerns about a child/youth's behavior or the appropriate response to a child/youth's behavior should be discussed with the Program Director.
5. Appropriate forms of discipline and options are to be reviewed at least annually with staff.
6. Whenever possible, adult staff should address disruptive behavior by choosing one or more of the following options:
 - redirecting the child/youth with another activity,
 - helping the child/youth focus on a more acceptable behavior,
 - discussing appropriate behavior and group rules.
 - return the child/youth to the parent/adult if they are on site.

YOUTH GROUPS

These policies apply to activities at or away from the MCCC site. All references to “Staff” shall mean all “paid & volunteer staff”, unless otherwise defined.

1. All adult staff must be screened, background checked and attend Safe Church training annually.
2. MCCC Youth groups serve youth ages 12 - 18, often in two age groups depending on maturity.
3. A parent/guardian must return the Participation/Medical Release Form (Appendix X) at the beginning of each church program year. Parents and youth will be informed of policies and expectations annually.
4. Two approved adult staff must be present in each classroom, vehicle, gathering, and event, at MCCC or off site. Youth should not congregate unsupervised in restrooms, empty rooms, rooms without windows, etc. Approved MCCC adult staff must provide the required supervision of the youth in their care at all times. The youth/staff ratio should not exceed 2 adult staff per 20 youth or 1:10, adding additional adult staff as needed.
5. Approved adult staff must be at least 21 years old, unrelated and not living in the same household. Youth Assistants must be at least 4 years older than the children or youth in the program. If the two adult staff are married or related, then a third approved adult staff must be present. A youth assistant does not replace the two required adult staff.
6. Parents must give permission for any scheduled one-to-one meeting between an adult staff and their youth. Any one-to-one meeting between an adult staff and a youth should be observed by a second adult staff person. Outside of the church facility, a one-to-one meeting must occur in a public place (ie. restaurant, coffee shop, library, etc.) and when possible, observed by a second adult staff person. (Refer to: One-to-One Meetings)
7. Regardless of the individuals ages, it is never appropriate for an adult staff or youth assistant to date or have a relationship with a youth group member. Similarly, an adult staff should not date a friend or an acquaintance of a member of the youth group.
8. Each year, and more frequently as appropriate, adult staff shall sponsor a class about abuse for the youth groups. This class should cover topics appropriate to the age level, such as date violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, signs and prevention of abuse, reporting and responding guidelines, etc.
9. While an appropriate display of affection (a hug) is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. For that reason, displays of affection between an adult leader and youth group member should be limited to such actions as a brief side hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or a handshake or a high-five. Everyone’s right to refuse any display of affection must be immediately respected.
10. No gifts, phone calls, letters or electronic communication with the intent to develop a private personal relationship shall be directed to a youth group member or his/her friend or an acquaintance of similar age by an adult staff.

11. Behavior expectations shall be clearly communicated and discussed at the beginning of each season, with reminders of the need for Christian attitudes, words, and actions given as necessary. Involving the youth in developing group expectations creates additional buy-in, acceptance of the expectations and is strongly encouraged. (see Discipline Policy)
12. If a youth leaves a meeting or event without permission, the parent/guardian will be called immediately. At the discretion of the adult staff, the youth may or may not be allowed to return to the meeting or event.
13. Any significant medical problem or injury must be reported immediately to the child's parent. An Incident Report must be completed and given to the Youth Group Leader or Safe Church Team.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION and SOCIAL MEDIA

When using technology to encourage good connections between adult program staff and youth, it is important to follow guidelines that safeguard youth from potential abuse.

Social Media Messaging, Email, or Texting:

1. Electronic communication should not take place with children 12 years of age or under.
2. All adult staff and youth assistants must read and follow the Electronic Communication and Social Media Usage Policy in their interactions with youth and children.
3. Youth shall sign an agreement annually to follow all MCCC Youth Group policies.
4. Parent/adult permission via the Annual Media Release Form (see Appendix XX), will allow ministry staff to maintain email addresses for the youth.
5. Communication should not take place between program staff and youth between 9:00pm-7:00am, unless in an emergency.
6. Emails, texts, messages, or phone calls should usually be a brief communication to arrange or remind the youth of a meeting or event. Messages should communicate facts not feelings.
7. When the content of a received email or text raises concerns or questions, it should be shared with a program leader or Safe Church Team member.
8. Direct person to person messages should be avoided between youth and staff. When possible electronic communication should be sent to the entire group as an email, text, on the group's social media wall or other public areas. Ongoing conversations or lengthy personal communications should not happen.
9. Adult staff, youth assistants and youth may not transmit any content that is illicit, abusive, pornographic, discriminatory, harassing or disrespectful. Adult staff, youth assistants or youth who

become aware of activities such as above must immediately notify the Program Leader or Safe Church Team. The Program Leader will consult with the appropriate persons and report abuse as required by law.

10. When an adult staff or youth assistant leave a ministry involving youth, all youth contact information must be removed from that person's devices. If an adult staff or youth assistant leaves due to misconduct of any kind, they shall receive notice directing them to not contact any youth in the programs.

Social Media Groups/Platforms:

Youth groups may have a Social Media group page (ie. Facebook/Instagram) provided they follow the guidelines below:

1. The group must be "closed" or "private" so that it is not public information. Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group see them. Apply privacy settings that are consistent with all youth across all platforms.
2. Adult staff, youth assistants and youth may not use any image of a child or youth without written consent of the parent and only in ways that protect the value and dignity of those pictured.
3. The content and photos must be monitored weekly by at least two adult staff who have administrator rights over the social media group/platform.
4. Other forms of communication that can't be recalled or reviewed are not allowed (ie. Snap Chat).
5. The adult staff & parents must be notified if any youth is contacted by an adult outside the program.
6. Church events may be posted on the group social media platform.
7. Adult staff, youth assistants and youth may not transmit, post or distribute personal identifiable information of any youth/child age 18 or under. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: name, address, email address, phone number, or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a youth/child or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS

There are times when a ministry leader or adult staff needs to meet one-to-one with a child, youth or vulnerable adult. Because the imbalance of power is particularly pronounced when a child, youth or vulnerable adult is alone with an adult, it is crucial that ministry leaders and adult staff follow these safety protocols.

1. A parent/adult shall be notified and a written, text, or email permission form must be received before a planned one-to-one contact with their child/youth or vulnerable adult.
2. In the church facility, a second adult staff must observe any one-to-one meeting between an adult staff and a child/youth. Outside of the church facility, one-to-one meetings must occur in a public place (ie. restaurant, coffee shop, library) and with the permission of the parent. A second adult staff should observe the one-to-one meeting even in a public space.
3. The ministry leader or adult staff shall notify the Safe Church Director prior to any one-to-one meeting.
4. When two adult staff are required, they must be unrelated and not living in the same household. A youth staff assistant does not replace the second adult staff.

TRANSPORTATION

When children and youth are transported by MCCC adult staff, the guidelines below must be followed:

1. A parent must give written consent allowing his/her child to be transported by MCCC adult staff.
2. To transport children or youth, adult staff must be 21 or older, must have a current Volunteer Driver Form (see [Appendix ___](#)), including a copy of their driver's license and current insurance on file at MCCC.
3. Two adult staff must be in the vehicle, sitting in the front seat when transporting children or youth.
4. All children/youth must use a seatbelt and must sit in the back seat. Children up to 4 yrs. must be in a car seat and children 4 yrs. & older, up to 4'9" must sit in a booster seat.
5. Transportation of one child/youth by one adult staff should be avoided. In the event that it is unavoidable, one of the following provisions must take place:
 - a. permission from the parent/guardian of the child/youth is received by text or phone; or
 - b. the program leader or parent is texted or called when the adult staff leaves with the child/youth; followed by a text or call to the program leader or parent when the child/youth arrives safely and is no longer in their care or supervision.
6. Adult staff are to avoid all cell phone use while driving on ministry business. The adult should never send or read phone/text messages - even hands-free - when transporting children as this is in violation of the law.

7. Parents/guardians who give permission for someone other than MCCC staff to transport their child/youth to MCCC activities will not be subject to this policy and MCCC will not be responsible for the transportation.

PASTORAL CARE VISITATION

Pastoral care carried out by church representatives (ministers, elders, deacons, pastoral care team) is an important ministry of the church, reflecting the love, compassion, and presence of Christ. Pastoral care often involves one-on-one visitation and often with those who are housebound, in the hospital, or experiencing a time of suffering or grief. The following guidelines are provided to ensure safe and healthy practices of pastoral visitation:

1. All pastoral care visitors must be screened, background checked and complete Safe Church training annually.
2. Pastoral care visits should be conducted in the morning through early evening.
3. When a pastoral care visit is in a private location, two pastoral care visitors will meet with the person, whenever possible. If the two pastoral care visitors are related or live in the same household, a third person (non-relative) should be within sight. If a pastoral care visitor meets one-on-one with a person, they shall text or call the Pastor, Council President or Safe Church Director before and after the visit.
4. In the case that the person may be in a vulnerable state or have a memory issue, a Pastoral Care card (including visitor's name, church address and contact info) must be left at the residence. A family member should also be notified of the visit.
5. In the interest of confidentiality, all records of pastoral care visits should be kept securely on the church premises. Records should be minimal, only including the name of the person visited, date, time, and a brief indication of the reason for the visit.
6. All pastoral care visitors will honor the limits of their role in giving care, referring the person with their permission, and as the situation requires, to the services of counselors, pastors and others who are better trained and resourced to meet their needs.
7. The Pastor, Council President, and Safe Church Director are responsible for overseeing that risk is being assessed and these pastoral care guidelines are properly managed.

REPORTING and RESPONDING to Disclosures and Allegations of Abuse

All MCCC staff (paid & volunteer) with a reasonable suspicion of sexual, physical, emotional, or spiritual abuse or neglect of a child/youth/vulnerable adult are **mandated to report it within 24 hours.** (Washington State Law & MCCC Policy)

All staff (paid and volunteer) **must follow the reporting requirements below if abuse is suspected.**

1. If person is in immediate danger or abuse is happening:

- **notify Police - Call 911.** (MCCC: 16415 North Rd, Bothell, WA 98012)

If you are uncertain whether what you heard or saw constitutes evidence of abuse, **consult with a member of the Safe Church Team**, contact info below.

2. Immediately and within 24 hours, do the following:

- Contact **Safe Church Director**:
Sue Gilmer - 206 276-2921 - safechurch@millcreekchurch.com
or a Safe Church Team member (info below)
- **Complete Incident Form** - capture critical information needed for further reporting.
 - **Return the Incident Form immediately** to the Safe Church Director or Team.
 - (Copies available in the Office hallway or from any Safe Church Team member)
- **Contact** one of the following:
 - **Police - Call 911** (Sno Co Sheriff, Mill Creek Police, Bothell Police)
 - **Child Protective Services (CPS)** - Snohomish Co.
866 829-2153 day / 800 562-5624 night/weekend
 - **ENDHARM (Abuse) Hotline 866-363-4276.** (WA St. Dept of Human Services)
(A Safe Church Team member will guide you thru calling.)

3. Return Incident Report immediately by Text / Email / Scan to:

- Safe Church Director: Sue Gilmer 206 276-2921 safechurch@millcreekchurch.com
- Safe Church Team member – TBD

Forms are available from the Safe Church team and in the church office hallway.
(also see: **Incident Report**: Appendix F-1).

**** Do not question or investigate** anyone involved or witness to the abuse concerns beyond collecting basic information to determine what happened, next steps and to complete the **Incident Report**. No one, including staff, should contact the victim, victim's family, the abuser or the abuser's family. The investigation must be left to the Police, Child Protective Services (CPS) and other skilled authorities, unless a different direction is given by the authorities to the Safe Church Director.
(See: **Responding to a Child Who Discloses Abuse**: Appendix B-1)

Confidentiality - Until the investigation is complete or abusive action is certain, all information must be kept confidential with only those who have a specific need to know. Completed Incident Reports and all notes will be kept in a locked file in the church office. (see **Confidentiality**: Appendix C-10)

Safe Church Response Team: Sue Gilmer - 206 276-2921 Denise Rietkerk - 971 232-7051
Sue Jansons - 425 297-3595 Betty Vanderzee Mary Riley Bev White

1. **Within 24 hours** of an abuse allegation the Safe Church Director shall inform the authorities, Council/Elder President, Pastor and Safe Church Team. Names and information in any abuse allegation are confidential and shall initially be limited to these Need-to-Know positions.
2. **Within 48 hours**, the Safe Church Team will meet to review the Incident Report and determine next steps. Council members will be informed as the investigation proceeds.
3. If a Pastor, Council member or Safe Church Team member is the accused – do not notify this person or their family members but follow all other notification steps. The Elders and Safe Church Director will follow the specifications for discipline, according to the MCCC Bylaws and this Policy.
4. Discussions by Council or Safe Church Team shall be conducted without the actual names of involved persons being used. Instead, terms such as “reporter”, “victim”, “alleged offender”, “witness”, or “claimant” shall be used until the accused person is officially charged.
5. Parents will be informed of the incident as soon as possible without identifying the alleged abuser or witnesses. The Incident Report, which documents witnesses and other initial information is confidential and will not be given to the parents or family members. If the parent/caregiver is the one suspected of abuse or neglect do not notify them.
6. Together with the Pastor and Council/Elder President, the Safe Church Director will develop a plan for responding to the abuse in ways that provide care for the one who has been victimized by abuse and respects the dignity of all involved. The plan will:
 - a. Place an accused staff (paid or volunteer) on administrative leave immediately, with or without pay for up to 90 days, or until the conclusion of the investigation.
 - b. Provide support and care for the person victimized and their family.
 - c. Provide a liaison to communicate with the authorities and/or media.
 - d. Provide an opportunity for the accused to meet with the Elders in response to the allegations.
7. If the accused is found guilty or admits guilt, the Elders may: (1) further suspend, depose, or terminate the employment of the abuser, or (2) take such other action against the abuser as the circumstances may dictate.
8. Subject to the best interest of the person victimized by abuse, the MCCC Council and Safe Church Team shall notify the congregation in writing if it’s concluded that anyone associated with MCCC has abused a child, youth or vulnerable adult. This notice should protect the identity and confidentiality of all innocent parties, including the person who was victimized by abuse. This written communication should be pastoral, succinct, and objectively factual. Public police reports, charges or court verdicts may be referenced.
9. If law enforcement or CPS decides not to investigate or charge an adult staff who has been accused of abusing a child or youth, an independent investigation should be considered in consultation with legal counsel, Safe Church Team and MCCC Council.
10. The Safe Church Director will notify the church’s insurance agent and legal counsel of any allegations of abuse by the Pastor, ministry leader, council member, or staff (volunteer or paid), or if the abuse happened during a church-sponsored activity.

SCREENING AND SELECTION

Implementing child abuse prevention policies is an integral part of the hiring process. The screening and selection procedure for implementing these policies and as outlined in the MCCC Human Resources procedures, consists of an: application, interview, and background check. If a person serves in more than one position, the screening steps for the position requiring the most steps will apply. All screening steps must be completed before offering the position to the applicant. As with all other positions, Elder and Deacon nominees shall complete an application, interview, and background check before they are nominated for the office. A written job description shall be provided to all applicants.

A. APPLICATION (Volunteer Profile)

Adult staff applicants (21 years and older) and Youth Assistant applicants (16-20yrs. old) for all paid and volunteer positions must complete an application (volunteer profile) prior to being considered for any position. Youth Assistants, 12-15 years old, are not required to submit an application as they will be under the direct supervision of an adult staff, but will provide parent consent and contact information.

References: All adult staff positions, paid and volunteer, are required to provide 2 or more references with contact information, preferably from previous employers, colleagues or others with specific knowledge. References may be contacted either before or after the interview but always before the person is hired. Reference comments are confidential and should not be disclosed to the applicant.

B. INTERVIEW

An interview shall be required of all adult staff and youth assistants, paid and volunteer positions, to assess the applicant's skills and experience. The job description shall be provided. The Interviewer must be familiar with MCCC's Safe Church Policies. A Safe Church Team member may participate in the interview or meet separately with the applicant. Notes taken during the interview are confidential and shall be attached to the application.

C. BACKGROUND CHECK INFORMATION

Adult staff applicants, paid & volunteer, must consent to annual background checks. MCCC conducts background checks through Washington State Patrol. Information regarding any criminal conduct or abuse that is received shall be disclosed only to the applicant, Program Director, and Safe Church Team member and may disqualify a candidate from hire. Costs will be covered by MCCC.

D. SCREENING STEPS

POSITION	APPLICATION	INTERVIEW	REFERENCES	BACKGROUND CHECK
All Pastors (+retired, Youth, etc)	X	X	X	X
All paid & volunteer Staff	X	X	X	X
Worship Director	X	X	X	X
Youth Leaders	X	X	X	X
Youth Assistant	X	X		
Children's Ministry Adult Staff (Nursery - Sunday School)	X	X	X	X
Custodian (TBD by Safe Church)	X	X	X	X
Elders/Deacons (+ nominees)	X	X	X	X
Program Directors/Leaders	X	X	X	X
Safe Church Team	X	X	X	X
Security Team	X	X	X	X

* Guest Pastors and guest Worship Team members do not need to be screened unless they have contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults or meet one-on-one with individuals.

E. SELECTION PROCESS

1. **Selection Decision** – Positions shall be filled at the discretion of church program leadership, with approval from the Safe Church Director. Reasons for being denied a position may include but not limited to: incomplete screening step, inaccurate information provided, background check finding, or other reasons. The Elders may be asked for advice in handling the denial of a position to an applicant.
2. **MCCC Attendee** - An applicant for a volunteer position must be a regular attendee of MCCC for at least six months before being considered for a position working with children, youth or vulnerable adults. An exception may be permitted if the applicant comes highly recommended by the leadership of another church.
3. **Notification of Selection Results** – Applicant shall be notified of the acceptance or denial for a position by the program leader, Safe Church Director, or staff who interviewed the applicant.
4. **Safe Church Training** - New staff, paid and volunteer, shall complete an initial Safe Church training, a Code of Ethics form, and a Background Check upon hire. Annually, all adult staff, paid & volunteer, shall participate in a required MCCC Safe Church Training, along with an annual Background Check.

F. PERSONNEL FILES

- All forms, letters, emails, texts and records of information related to the screening and selection process of an individual shall be kept confidential and in a locked file cabinet. Only those persons who make hiring decisions shall have access to these files. The application and other documents of applicants not hired shall be shredded.

- Personnel files shall not be altered or destroyed. Personnel files of individuals who have left the church or are deceased will remain intact in a locked file cabinet as cases may come up for future investigation.
- An individual's personnel file may be subpoenaed by an insurance company or an attorney in case of a civil suit or criminal investigation. Caution must be exercised that only verifiable information is placed in a personnel file. Unsubstantiated information should be labeled as such. The source of any supporting documentation must be carefully identified.

CHURCH FACILITY

Annually, the Safe Church Team will do a walking tour of the MCCC facility to identify potential safety issues. Recommendations for modifications to the church facilities and changes to the ways that the facilities are used that would tend to reduce the risk of church-related child abuse will be coordinated by the Safe Church Team. These recommendations will be reviewed by the MCCC Council for approval, as necessary and forwarded to the appropriate committees. (Appendix: XX Facility Walking Tour)

SAFE CHURCH TEAM

The Safe Church Team (SCT) oversees the implementation, training and compliance of the Safe Church Policy, along with leading the response and reporting if abuse is suspected or reported. The MCCC Elders shall appoint a Safe Church Team (SCT) to serve an unlimited term. The SCT will be comprised of a minimum of three members, including one Council member. One member will be designated as the Safe Church Team Director, with a second member designated as the Asst. Director/Media Contact person. All remarks & facts regarding an allegation of abuse shall be confidential and referred to the Safe Church Director.

The Safe Church Team will:

- Oversee, update, and annually review the Safe Church Policy.
- Train and inform ministry leaders, council, staff, volunteers, and congregation in Safe Church policies and procedures annually and as needed for new staff/volunteers.
- Create clear understanding of and ensure adherence to the policies and procedures.
- Lead the response and reporting procedure if abuse is suspected or reported.
- Consult and report to civil authorities, if abuse is reported, as required by WA State law.
- Notify legal counsel and insurance agent, when necessary.
- Maintain and review records of abuse allegations, reports and responses in a locked file.
- Ensure disclosure and confidentiality as appropriate to: 1) protect victims from further abuse or neglect; 2) protect alleged offenders from unfair prejudice; 3) prevent additional persons from being victimized; and 4) promote healing.

Sources:

This policy includes information from the following sources:

- Preventing Child Abuse: Creating a Safe Place by Beth Swagman, 2009
- Christian Reformed Church, Thrive / Safer Churches, www.crcna.org/safechurch.org
- Mayoclinic.org

Appendix Listing