



Abuse Prevention and Reporting

August 2024

Important Contacts

Fort Lupton Police	(303) 857-4011
Colorado Child Protective Services	+1 (844) 264-5437
Weld County Child Protective Services	(970) 346-7676
Weld County Adult Protective Services	(970) 400-6700
Lead Pastor	Pastor@1ststreetchurch.com
Family Ministry Director	Family@1ststreetchurch.com
Moderator	Moderator@1ststreetchurch.com

Purpose

1st Street Church values our neighbor and values integrity. Therefore, we stress the sanctity of human life and the importance of caring for others—especially, those unable to help themselves. It is a priority to provide a safe and secure environment for those on our property, and especially for those entrusted to the supervision of our staff and leaders. This formal policy and procedures are purposed to prevent the opportunity for abuse, equip leaders to identify abuse, and detail reporting processes. These practices are adopted for the protection of our children, youth, seniors, employees, adult volunteers, and the church body as a whole.

For the purposes of this policy, any reference to a child, youth, or minor means a person under eighteen (18) years of age. Any reference to a senior or elder refers to a person

seventy (70) years of age or older. Any reference to an at-risk adult refers to an adult eighteen (18) years of age or older who is susceptible to mistreatment or self-neglect because the individual is unable to perform or obtain services necessary for his or her health, safety, or welfare, or lacks sufficient understanding or capacity to make or communicate responsible decisions concerning his or her person or affairs. Any reference to “child abuse” or “abuse” may include “neglect” of the person.

Colorado Statutory Definitions of Child Abuse

The elements of the Colorado statutory definition of child “abuse” or “child abuse or neglect” means an act or omission in one of the following categories which threatens the health and welfare of a child:

Neglect

Any case in which a child is in need of services because the child’s parents, legal guardian, or custodian fails to take the same actions to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision that a prudent parent would take. C.R.S. § 19-1-103. This also includes if a parent, guardian, or legal custodian has abandoned the child or has subjected him or her to mistreatment or abuse or a parent, guardian, or legal custodian has suffered or allowed another to mistreat or abuse the child without taking lawful means to stop such mistreatment or abuse and prevent it from recurring; the child lacks proper parental care through the actions or omissions of the parent, guardian, or legal custodian; the child’s environment is injurious to his or her welfare. C.R.S. § 19-3-102(1).

Physical

Any case in which a child exhibits evidence of skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, failure to thrive, burns, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, soft tissue swelling, or death and either: such condition or death is justifiably explained; the history given concerning such condition is at variance with the degree or type of such condition or

death; or the circumstances indicate that such condition may not be the product of an accidental occurrence. C.R.S. § 19-1-103.

Emotional

Any case in which a child is subjected to emotional abuse. Emotional abuse means an identifiable and substantial impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development or substantial risk of impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development or substantial risk of impairment of the child's intellectual or psychological functioning or development. C.R.S. § 19-1-103.

Sexual

Any case in which a child is subjected to sexual assault or molestation, sexual exploitation, or prostitution. C.R.S. § 19-1-103.

Drugs

Any case in which, in the presence of a child, or on the premises where a child is found, or where a child resides, a controlled substance is manufactured or attempted to be manufactured. This can also occur in any case in which a child tests positive at birth for either a schedule I controlled substance or a schedule II controlled substance, unless the child tests positive for a schedule II controlled substance as a result of the mother's lawful intake of such substance as prescribed. C.R.S § 19-1-103.

Screening Policy for Church Positions

Lead Pastor

The selection and screening of the Lead Pastor is outlined in the 1st Street Church Constitution and Bylaws. In addition to the procedure necessary for an individual to be eligible for a nomination to the office of Lead Pastor, the candidate must also fulfill the screening procedure outlined within this policy for Paid Employees.

Paid Employee (Church Staff)

Every applicant for any paid position shall complete an employment application and consent form authorizing a background check. In the absence of such a completed form, applicants will not be considered for employment by the church. No person shall be employed before the church has received and reviewed the applicant's completed employment application and completed background check of appropriate references.

This does not include contracted workers who provide services for the church.

Volunteer Leaders

Volunteer Leaders are recognized as unpaid volunteers who provide services and labor for 1st Street Church, and by the nature of their duties are in a position of authority to other people. Any such volunteer is subject to an application for consideration of their role as a Volunteer Leader. However, an application is not mandatory for consideration of a Volunteer Leader position. Regardless of whether an official application is required for a Volunteer Leader position, any volunteer with duties that require them to be responsible for the management of other people, must undergo a background check screening.

All Volunteer Leaders must be over the age of eighteen (18). Volunteer Leaders are distinct from Staff, because they provide services and labor without payment from the church.

The selection and screening of various church officers is outlined in the 1st Street Church Constitution and Bylaws. In addition to the procedures necessary for the placement of a church officer, candidates must also fulfill the screening procedure outlined within this policy for Volunteer Leaders.

Adult Volunteers

Any adult aged eighteen years or older, who provides unpaid volunteer services or labor for 1st Street Church is considered an Adult Volunteer. An Adult Volunteer is distinct from

a Volunteer Leader insofar as the nature of their duties do not require them to be responsible for the management of other people.

Adult Volunteers positions may be filled with the use of an application. However, the use of an application is not required for filling Adult Volunteer positions. Adult Volunteers are not required to be screened by a background check. Any volunteer who has not been screened by a background check is not a Volunteer Leader, and thus not responsible for the management of other people.

Minor Volunteers

Any volunteer under the age of eighteen (18) is considered a Minor Volunteer. An application may be requested for filling a Minor Volunteer position. However, the use of an application is not required for filling Minor Volunteer positions. Minor Volunteers are not required to be screened by a background check. However, any Minor Volunteer assisting with programs or events that are held exclusively for children and minors, must submit character references as part of their screening.

A Minor Volunteer shall not have duties that require them to be responsible for the management of other people. Minor Volunteers may be recruited to assist Volunteer Leaders in settings with children and other minors, but a Minor Volunteer shall never have leadership authority on behalf of 1st Street Church.

Employee and Volunteer Leader Screening Procedure

In order to prevent the occurrence of abuse at church-sponsored activities and programs, all Paid Employees, Volunteer Leaders will be carefully screened. This shall also be the case for any Adult Volunteer working with minors.

The procedure used to screen volunteers and employees is as such:

1. When 1st Street Church receives an application for a position that requires a background check screening, the application will be kept in a secure file that the Lead Pastor, Moderator, and staff will have access to.
2. When references are requested, a written record of the interview will be kept with the application.
3. Background check screening will be done through a third-party servicer. The results will be kept in a secure file that only the Lead Pastor, Moderator, and Church Staff can access.

Worker Supervision of Minors

No person shall interact with children or youth without supervision by the children's ministry staff, youth staff, pastoral staff, or be alone with a child or young adult prior to completion of the individual's background check. The employment and volunteer applications and reference checks will be placed in secured personnel files of the church office.

At least two adult workers, or an adult and teenage assistant (6th grade or older), whether volunteers or employees, shall be present at all church activities involving children and youth. At no time shall only one worker be allowed to be alone with one child or youth, including guidance sessions, unless a waiver is signed by the parent(s) or guardian authorizing only one childcare giver to be present. Pastors and department directors are exempt from this "two adult rule". However, where continuing guidance sessions are considered, either (1) parental permission shall be obtained for such meetings, or (2) the two adult rule shall apply. Further, whenever possible, that shall always be at least one male and one female adult at all children and youth events and meetings, unless the activity is dedicated to only one gender.

When guidance sessions or one-on-one meetings occur with minors, the guiding staff must inform another staff member of the time and location of the session/meeting and the approximate end time. If a volunteer staff member has any guidance sessions or

one-on-one meetings with a child or youth, the child or youth's parents shall be informed to the extent possible, as well as the Family Ministry Director.

Clergy Members / Religious Leaders as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

"Clergy Members" is a class of mandated reporters that was added to the list of mandatory reports. The statutory definition of Clergy Member is as follows: "Unless the context otherwise requires, 'clergy member' means a priest, rabbi, duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed minister of a church, member of a religious order, or recognized leader of any religious body." C.R.S. § 19-3-304(aa)(III).

The statute does not define "recognized leader of a religious body". However, recognized leader of any religious volunteers at youth events and meetings. The important thing to remember is that the victim, not the mandatory reporter, controls whether he/she believed the mandatory report was a recognized leader.

1st Street Church's Mandatory Reporters

The church has identified the following positions, and currently serving persons in such positions, as mandatory reporters under this policy: Lead Pastor, Church Staff, and Volunteer Leaders. These positions shall encompass: officers, pastors, department directors, ministry leaders, and adult volunteers at children and youth events/meetings.

Determining Suspected Abuse

Colorado requires all mandatory reporters to report child abuse if the mandatory reporter has "reasonable cause to know or suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect or who has observed the child being subjected to circumstances or conditions that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect...". C.R.S. § 19-3-304(1). The statute does not require reporting regardless of whether a child is in immediate

danger. However, the agency the report must be made to will be different if the child is immediate danger.

In determining whether there is a reasonable suspicion that abuse of an at-risk person has occurred, the primary responsibility of church staff and ministry volunteers is to the potential victim of abuse and his/her safety. It is the policy of the church that all situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect for the privacy and confidentiality of all persons involved. Confidentiality regarding the complaint and preliminary investigation will be maintained as much as possible. Each person interviewed will be instructed not to disclose any information to other persons, unless otherwise permitted. No complaint will be treated as frivolous. Each complaint will be considered to be legitimate until determined to be otherwise. In order to best minister to and serve the needs of the church, the procedures as set forth in this section are to be taken to determine whether there is reasonable suspicion of abuse.

It is not the responsibility of 1st Street Church personnel to make judgements or heavily investigate whether abuse and/or neglect of an at-risk person has in fact occurred. Rather, it is our responsibility to assess whether there is “reasonable suspicion” of abuse and/or neglect, and, if so, to report it accordingly.

Any suspected or alleged abuse, or any questionable activity involving minors, seniors, or at-risk adults, is to be reported immediately to a staff member. It is the responsibility of staff members receiving a report to immediately report the incident to the Lead Pastor or Moderator of the Church Council. Both officers must be made aware of any reported incident of abuse. If the accused person is the Lead Pastor, the Moderator is to receive the report and lead an investigation into the validity of the report. In addition to reporting incidents to church staff, reporters are still required to report to the necessary authorities under the Mandatory Reporter statute. Church staff receiving a report are also required to make a report to the appropriate agency of local law enforcement, along with the Lead Pastor. An internal report does not remove a mandatory reporter’s obligation to report abuse.

Such reporting staff and volunteers are to put in writing on the day of the alleged incident a confidential and complete account of the observation and/or accusation. Upon receipt of the written report, the Lead Pastor and Moderator will take appropriate steps to ensure the report is made to the appropriate local law enforcement agency or county department within twenty-four (24) hours of receiving the complaint or allegation.

Due to the sensitive nature of these issues, it is the policy of 1st Street Church to adhere to procedural guidelines of the Weld County Department of Human Services in determining whether there is reasonable suspicion that abuse may have occurred. Great Care must be used during interviews to protect against an adverse effect upon subsequent investigations. To the maximum extent possible, and as appropriate given the circumstances of each complaint, allegation, or observation, the church will attempt to do the following:

- Immediate assessment of abuse to determine if there is reasonable cause for the case to be reported to the authorities.
- Interview alleged victim without the presence of the alleged abuser. In the case of a minor, parents may not be allowed to be present depending on circumstances. The interviewer should be careful not to ask leading questions. The interview shall be conducted with at least two adults present.
- If deemed appropriate to continue the inquiry, interview the accused.
- Interview supervisor of the accused (if any).
- Interview witnesses (if any).
- Assess the danger of the situation. Never let a child return to the custody of the alleged abuser before finishing interviews and making the report to local law enforcement or the county department.

The completion of this process in no way removes a mandatory reporter's duty to report abuse if the mandatory reporter has reasonable cause to know or suspect that child abuse has occurred.

Reporting Suspected Abuse and/or Neglect

Every mandated reporter who reasonably suspects that an at-risk person has been subjected to abuse and/or neglect, or who has witnessed circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse and/or neglect, must immediately report the same to the Department of Human Services or the Police Department. If the alleged abuse and/or neglect occurred in a different city or county, the department of human services or law enforcement agency in such jurisdiction should be contacted.

If there is evidence that a person is in immediate danger, the appropriate law enforcement agency should be called. Otherwise, the Department of Human Services should be the primary contact. The statewide child abuse and neglect reporting hotline is +1 (844) 264-5437. For best practice, the report should be followed up with a written report to the appropriate agency. While the definition of “immediate” is not clear, the intent is that the report would be made as soon as possible after acquiring reasonable suspicion of child abuse or after observing abusive circumstances. When a report is made to a human services agency, confidentiality of the reporter is initially protected. Such confidentiality does not exist when reporting to a law enforcement agency.

Depending upon the circumstances of the case, follow-up action by the church may include the following:

1. Suspension of duties performed by the accused involving minors.
2. Disciplinary action by church leadership in accordance with church bylaws.
3. Keeping alleged victim and his/her family informed of church actions.
4. Staying in contact with the family to provide spiritual support and to make services of the church available to them, including biblically based guidance and counseling.
5. Reach out to the accused and his/her family, providing biblically based guidance and counseling.

Only the church's designated spokesperson shall speak to the media concerning any alleged or reported abuse or neglect. The church family will be kept informed, as appropriate, when a complaint or allegation is publicly reported.

State law protects employees and volunteers from personal liability when they report actual or suspected abuse, so long as they do so in good faith. Failure to report exposes the church, including its staff and volunteers, to liability and criminal action. C.R.S. § 19-3-304(4).

Preventing False Accusations of Child Abuse

It is important that the following policies and procedures be adhered to for the protection of both children from the threat of abuse and adults from false accusations.

- Avoid situations in which you are alone with a child. When it is necessary to speak privately with a child, find a place out of earshot, but within sight of others, for your conference. This includes not transporting minors alone in your car.
- The privacy of children in situations such as toileting and changing clothes should be respected. When it is necessary to supervise children in these situations, at least two adults, or an adult and an approved teenage assistant 16 years of age or older, should be present and intrude only to the extent that the health and safety of the children require.
- Avoid touching areas that are normally covered by swimming suits; breasts, buttocks, and groin. When hugging is appropriate, hug from the side of the shoulders, not from the front.
- When staff and volunteers supervise overnight activities, "the two adult rule" applies to sleeping quarters.
- Do not use corporal punishment in any form (e.g., spanking, slapping, hitting, etc.).
- It is the adult's responsibility to set and respect boundaries. When a child attempts to involve an adult in what may be considered inappropriate contact or behavior, the adult must reject the overture and, as appropriate, explain the

rejection to the child. The adult should make an internal report of the incident to church staff, which will be kept in a secure file. Only staff members having a reasonable need for such information will be allowed to access such files.

As horrendous as false accusations can be, it is essential that 1st Street Church take seriously and act expeditiously on every allegation of abusive behavior whether involving church staff and volunteers, members and attendees, or families of children and youth involved in church ministries or events. Child abuse is not only illegal, carrying severe civil and criminal penalties, but against the core values of the Christian faith. The church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for those entrusted in our teaching and care.

Communication

This policy and others can be found at <https://1ststreetchurch.com/info>

This policy will be periodically reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Amendments may be made with the approval of the Lead Pastor.