

Child Safety

.... "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own Blood" Acts 20:28

DEFINITIONS:

WORKER:	for the purpose of this document only, the term "worker" refers to any paid employees or volunteers.
YOUTH:	for the purpose of this document only, the term "youth" refers to any persons 12-18 years of age.
CHILD:	for the purpose of this document only, the term "child" refers to any persons under the age of 12.
CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM OFFICIAL:	One designated church staff member (pastor or assistant pastor), not directly connected to youth or children ministries responsible for receiving all reports of inappropriate behaviors or concerns with children/youth.
NEGLIGENCE:	a failure to exercise reasonable care.
NEGLIGENT SELECTION:	a failure to exercise reasonable care in selecting workers.
POLICY:	a rule which describes or structures the proper working behavior of a church member.
REASONABLE CARE:	the care which would be exercised by an ordinary, prudent person under similar circumstances.
SEXUAL ABUSE:	acts of sexual assault on and sexual exploitation of a minor. Sexual abuse encompasses a range of behavior and may consist of many acts over a long period of time (chronic molestation) or a single incident. Victims range in age from less than one year through adolescence.

The issue of physical and sexual abuse seems completely out of context for the church setting and the ministry environment. Sadly, however, the church has not been exempt from such concerns. In fact, the disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation and society. Every church must take direct responsibility to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse within its programs. The following policies reflect our commitment at The River Christian Reformed Church to provide protective care of all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in church sponsored activities.

1. Adults who have been convicted of either child sexual or physical abuse should not volunteer service in any church sponsored activity or program for children or youth under 18 years of age.
2. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. Individuals who have such a history should discuss their desire to work with children or youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in any volunteer service.
3. All volunteers working with children or youth are required to be members or active attendees of The River Christian Reformed Church for a minimum of six months. Any exception must be reviewed by the church staff.
4. Properly screening all potential volunteers is not intended to restrict but rather to ensure safe and effective ministry to all our children and youth. As the first line of defense in providing a safe ministry environment, all staff and volunteers will be required to complete the steps outlined in the Child Safety & Screening Program. These policies and procedures are contained in our ministry training manuals.
5. Membership is required for specified levels of leadership.

Selection and Screening

All information obtained during the screening process will be treated as confidential. The only exception would be if disclosure is believed to be necessary to protect a child from possible harm.

- Application. The application includes:
 - Name, address, phone (previous address for last 5 years)
 - Marital status, children
 - Employment:: Current and previous
 - Previous church involvement
 - Statement of faith
 - References
 - Disclosure of any criminal record or investigation
 - Applicant to list any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared him/her for working with minors
 - Is applicant a survivor of child sexual abuse? If applicant answers yes, ask for additional information.
 - List of previous church affiliations (name, address, date)
 - Applicant's statement to be signed

- Fingerprint background check and Information release form
 - This will allow the church to perform a criminal background check. The form also releases the church from liability in releasing information if a church in the future inquires about the applicant's involvement with your church.

- If the applicant is hired or brought in as a volunteer, the church's safety policy will be signed. The worker/volunteer should have an extra copy to keep for review/reference purposes.

- Contact references on written application.

- Conduct a personal interview with applicant.

Worker Volunteer Policy

- Prior to working in the youth or children's ministry, workers must undergo child protection and safety training.
- One church staff member (Child Protection Program Official), not directly connected to youth or children ministries, will receive all reports of inappropriate behaviors or concerns with youth and children.
- Workers to attend the church for at least 6 months prior to service.
- All workers will complete a confidential application. It is to be signed and returned to the church before the screening process can continue.
- **References will be contacted on workers.**
- All workers must sign a background consent form.
- All workers must sign a release of confidential information form. This allows your church to disclose information if another church contacts you about a previous volunteer.
- Anyone in substance abuse recovery or "clean" less than two years should not work directly with youth/children.
- Anyone who has been accused of sexual abuse, physical abuse or family violence should NOT work with youth/children.
- If a potential worker is a survivor of sexual abuse, be sure that the designated Child Protection Program Official talks extensively with them. The church may wish to allow the worker to speak to a licensed counselor.
- Unannounced visits may be made to all classrooms and activity rooms.
- Church staff should ONLY use an Internet service provider that blocks adult websites.
- Church computers should be "serviced" yearly. Employees will know that inappropriate downloads will be discovered, therefore, deterring such behavior.
- Adult volunteers will observe the "two adult" rule. This requires that an adult is never alone with children or youth without an adult partner. Someone other than a spouse should be present. This is for the protection of the child and the worker.
- If a worker needs to give a child/youth a ride, written permission is required by a parent.
- During over-night outings, adults should not be alone in sleeping quarters with youth/children. There will be two adults sleeping in the same room with youth/children.
- Youth of the opposite sex are never to be in sleeping quarters without an adult present.
- All youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. (Medical release and consent forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually).
- Volunteer adult chaperons and supervisors (even just one time event volunteer) will be required to comply with all of the outlined policies.
- Church members that open their home for a youth event must comply with church policies.
- Counseling with youth/children should take place in a designated area that is easily visible to others. Any adult alone in a car, home, office or room with the door closed (or no window) is prohibited.
- If a worker finds himself alone in the car with a youth/child, ask the youth/child to sit in the back seat, avoid any hugs goodbye.
- Any verbal and non-verbal sexual behavior is prohibited.
- Any sexual gestures or comments to staff or volunteers by youth should be reported to the department director (youth/children's minister).
- Dating any member of the youth is prohibited.
- Any romantic feelings toward a youth/child should be discussed with the designated staff member in charge of the Child Safety Protection program.
- Youth are not to sit on laps of other youth or workers.
- Workers should not discuss their personal problems with youth/children.
- Workers active in a life-style that is not reflecting a Christian walk will be removed until they reflect a Christian walk.
- There should never be any excessive touching or hugging.
- All workers should report any child abuse or suspected child abuse to the designated Child Protection Program staff member or ministry director.
- If the youth/children's director or staff senses that a worker is getting too "close" or too "personal" with one or more children, it is their responsibility to address the issue. This is not placing the worker under suspicion; it is however, protecting the worker, the church, and the child, against a multitude of potential problems. If the behavior persists after an initial warning, the worker should be removed.
- Adult volunteers will immediately report any behaviors which seem abusive or inappropriate to their supervisor.
- There will be an immediate suspension of any worker using physical threats to keep youth/children under control.
- If it is observed that a youth/child leaves a meeting with a person they did not arrive with, the parent should be contacted immediately. Most parents will appreciate the observant and caring nature of the church.
- These policies are to be read and signed by the worker. *I certify that I have read the above guidelines and I agree to abide by them. I understand that violation on any of these guidelines can lead to my immediate termination as a paid employee or volunteer.* _____ (signature)

Youth Conduct Policy

These policies are to be read and signed by the student and the student's parent.

- Youth will not be dropped off earlier than 30 min. prior to scheduled youth events.
- Youth will not be picked up later than 30 min. following scheduled youth events.
- Tobacco (cigarettes, chewing or dip), alcohol, controlled substances, or weapons are strictly prohibited.
- Youth will not wear any clothes that they cannot wear to school. Girls are not to wear revealing short or tight clothing. T-shirts will not reflect negative, obscene or sexual messages.
- During swimming events, girls will be required to wear one-piece swimsuits or dark colored T-shirts over two-piece suits. The parent(s) will be contacted immediately or the youth would not be permitted to participate in the swim activity.
- Any verbal or non-verbal sexual behavior is prohibited.
- Racial or derogatory remarks will be strictly prohibited.
- Any sexual gestures or comments made toward staff, volunteers or other youth are prohibited.
- Youth are not to sit on laps of other youth or adults (same or opposite sex).
- Youth will hug other youth and adults from the side only (arm around shoulder) but never, full frontal hugging.
- There is not to be any excessive touching or hugging and NO kissing.
- Once on church grounds, youth will not leave without parent's permission.
- Youth will not leave church with anyone they did not arrive with unless a parent has given verbal consent to the youth pastor or worker.
- Parents will be contacted immediately if a youth is observed leaving with a person they did not arrive with.
- All youth participating in out-of-town and over-night trips will have written consent and a medical release form.
- Medical release forms will always be signed (yearly release forms is recommended).
- Any youth deliberately breaking rules during outings, out-of-town and over-night trips will not be permitted to continue trip. The youth pastor will have the option of calling parents to arrange pick up at their own expense.
- All cell phones and beepers will be turned off during services.
- Youth will respect church leaders and obey rules.
- These policies are to be read and signed by the student and parent. *I certify that I have read the River Christian Reformed Church Student Ministries' Youth Conduct Guidelines" and I agree to discuss these guidelines with my child. I understand that I may be called if my child violates any of these guidelines.* _____ student
 _____ parent/guardian

Reporting Procedures

- Observed, reported or suspected child abuse should be reported immediately to the designated Child Protection Program Official or a mandated reporter on staff.
- Workers should not take it upon themselves to determine if questionable behavior is appropriate. One single act or suspicion often goes unreported. However, if all workers comply and report suspicions and concerns, the designated Child Protection Program Official may discover a pattern and avoid disaster.
- All reporting is confidential and should be signed by the person making the report and the designated safety official.
- The report is to contain the date, time and detailed information about the incident. This written report is to be made within 36 hours of “suspected” abuse.
- Although many churches stand on legal loopholes and do not report a staff or volunteer’s sexual abuse of a child, you should consider your moral obligation. By reporting a criminal act, the church can stop another child from being sexually abused.

Response Plan

Victimization, as well as false accusations can happen in any church. It would be foolhardy to wait and hope it does not happen in our church. In a crisis, we may not think clearly and possibly later regret the decisions we made. By creating a response plan, we will save the church, victim and accused much pain.

The following is our response plan:

- Immediately report any accusation of sexual abuse to program director or authorities. The church can still minister to the accused, even if guilty. However, no one should be beyond the law.
- A “response team” of about 3-5 members has been established at the River CRC.
- Response team members will be periodically educated on child sex abuse, its issues and legalities. At least 2 members will be professionals working in the field of Child Protection/Welfare.
- A designated staff member will document (in writing, with date and signature) all efforts in the handling of any incident.
- The victim and the victim’s family should receive support and counseling.
- Document all your efforts in handling the situation. An example of this form is contained in your handout and should be filled out immediately along with the ministry director or member of the response team.
- Believe the child. Be sure to take his or her word seriously. Even if the accusation turns out to be false, you must respond to protect the child; his or her safety is the first priority.
- React calmly. Show concern. Be a source of stability and sensible reaction for the child, his or her family and others involved.
- Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person will be immediately relieved of contact with minors until the investigation is completed. If the person is found guilty, appropriate church discipline will be taken with special attention given to protection of the victim.
- Avoid interrogation. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person or paid staff to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. Leave in-depth questioning of the victim and suspect to professionals who are trained to investigate and assess the need for intervention. Never speak to the accused to “get their side of the story.”
- Reassure the child. He or she needs to know they were right in telling and that he or she is not at fault. Do not promise the child/youth that you will not tell anyone.
- All suspected abuse should be reported to the ministry head and “response team.” In no case should the youth worker try to handle the situation without outside assistance.
- Confidentiality: Be careful to handle the confidentiality of all involved. Any contact with the media should be handled by the Pastor only. In the event of an accusation, the congregation will be notified by the Pastor on or by the following Sunday.
- Do not engage in denial, minimization, nor blame.
- Immediately contact your insurance agent and lawyer.

*No action will be taken against a person who, in good faith, is making a report unless it is made maliciously or without reasonable grounds for belief, (immunity).

*Action is taken when a person fails to report (no immunity).

Volunteer Application For Children and Youth Ministries

Note: Background and fingerprinting is required on all applicants 18 years old and older.

This application is to be completed for all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. It is being used to help The River CRC provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities. All of the pastors on staff at The River CRC and designated department heads hold strict confidentiality; however, they hold the option to confer with the Senior Pastor if any question over fitness of service arises. If therefore, a pastor or director needs to discuss this application and disclaimer with a pastor other than the Senior Pastor, he will ask your permission before doing so. The Senior Pastor will also opt to discuss such issues with another pastor if necessary. This application will be reviewed and references may be called.

Personal Information

Name _____ Date _____
Last First Middle

Present Address _____
Street City State Zip Code

Phone Number _____ Work Number _____ Other _____

May we call you at work? _____ Best time to call _____

Occupation _____ Place of Employment _____

Are you 18 years or older? _____ How long have you lived in CA? _____ SSN _____

Do you have a current drivers license? _____ DL # _____ Exp. Date _____

Marital Status _____ Name of Spouse _____

Name and ages of your children _____

Your Preference

What area of ministry do you desire to be involved in? _____

Why do you desire to be involved with children or youth ministry? _____

Because you are a role model, the following questions are important to consider:

Based on the pace of your life and all its priorities, what are some of the possible conflicts you may need to consider because of the responsibility of serving in this ministry? _____

Is your desire for godliness in your own life an example for children to follow? _____ Yes _____ No

If you **are** married:

Is your spouse supportive and encouraging to you in your desire to be involved with children? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, how? _____

If no, why not? _____

If you are **not** married:

Are you committed to purity in all your relationships with members of the opposite sex? _____ Yes _____ No

Previous Experience

How long have you attended RCRC? _____ Member? ____ Yes ____ No

What church did you attend regularly before coming to RCRC? _____

How long? _____

What ministries are you currently involved in at RCRC? _____

What leadership/volunteer experience have you had with children and/or youth? List all previous church work involving children and youth (List the name of the church and type of work performed). _____

List all previous non-church work involving children and/or youth (List name of each organization and type of work performed). _____

List any spiritual gifts, education or other factors that have prepared you to work with children or youth. _____

Do you have medical training, first aid or CPR training? ____ Yes ____ No

Describe training and date received _____

Can you perform the essential functions of the position you are applying for with or without reasonable accommodation? _____

Spiritual Information

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? _____

Please describe how and when you became a Christian _____

How do you know you are saved? _____

To be most effective in ministry, one needs a strong spiritual life. Describe your spiritual walk with the Lord (prayer life, Bible reading habits, church attendance, other) _____

Legal and Lifestyle Information

The questions below are part of our interview process in order to provide a safe and secure environment for our children and youth. **If you prefer, you may refuse to answer a question, and instead, you may discuss your answer in confidence with the senior pastor rather than answering it on this form.** Answering yes or leaving a question unanswered will not automatically disqualify an applicant for children or youth work. All information is held in strict confidence. Thank you for your understanding.

- Are there any circumstances involving your lifestyle or your background that would call into question your ability to work with children or youth? ___ Yes ___ No
- Have you ever been convicted for any sexually related crimes? ___ Yes ___ No
- Have you ever been convicted for any abuse related crimes? ___ Yes ___ No
- Have you ever been convicted for a criminal offense **other** than minor traffic violations and/or those violations exempted by California Labor Code? ___ Yes ___ No
- Do you take illegal drugs or narcotics? ___ Yes ___ No
- Have you ever been hospitalized or treated for alcohol or drug abuse? ___ Yes ___ No
- Have you ever been asked to resign from a position working with children or youth? ___ Yes ___ No
- Were you the victim of abuse or molestation as a minor? ___ Yes ___ No

Have you had any difficult experiences in your life that have better equipped you or may hinder you from a productive ministry with children/youth? _____

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Would you like to meet with a pastor regarding this circumstance? ___ Yes ___ No

If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, please explain further unless you prefer to do so in person with the Children's Ministry Director and a pastor.

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Statement of Faith

- Scripture Alone (Hebrews 4:12). We hold the Bible to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and practice and our ultimate point of reference.
- Christ Alone (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ alone is to be trusted for salvation. There is no salvation outside Christ.
- Grace Alone (Ephesians 2:4-5). The absolute sovereign grace of God in Christ is the only ground of our salvation.
- Faith Alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is by grace, through faith alone, and not by works.
- To God Alone Be Glory (Jude 25). We seek to glorify our Triune God alone. We believe that ultimately all things must work together to bring glory to God alone.

Are you in agreement with this statement? ___ Yes ___ No If you disagree with any part of it, please state why.

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Personal References

Please list personal **adult** references (other than employer or relative).

Name

First Middle Last

Address

Street City State Zip Code

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____ Years Known _____

Name

First Middle Last

Address

Street City State Zip Code

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____ Years Known _____

Name

First Middle Last

Address

Street City State Zip Code

Phone Number _____ Relationship _____ Years Known _____

Applicant's Statement

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches in this application to give you any information including opinions that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children/youth work. I release such references from any liability for furnishing such evaluations to you, provided they do so in good faith and without malice. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf. I understand that my employment/volunteer relationship with The River Christian Reformed Church is at will.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Bylaws and policies of The River Christian Reformed Church, and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I further state that **I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT.** This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understood.

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____

Adult Witness _____ Date _____

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (Print Name), am an applicant for a position working in the nursery, children and/or youth ministry at The River Christian Reformed Church. Recognizing the importance of safety and security to our children, I understand and consent to the following policies contained in the Child Protection Program:

1. **Six-month minimum rule**, which states that all volunteers working with children under 18 years of age are required to be regular attendees of RCRC for a minimum of six months.
2. Completion of written application
3. Allow RCRC to contact references listed on written application form.
4. Fingerprint background check - Child Abuse Registry
5. Attend orientation/child abuse awareness classes.
6. Fingerprint background check
7. Agreement to observe all policies of RCRC regarding work with children under 18 years of age.
8. Photo ID

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____

