

Abuse-Prevention Plan

Purpose:

- A. To help Radiant Christian Life provide a caring, safe, and secure environment for children in all phases of church life.
- B. To help Radiant Christian Life reduce its legal risk and liability exposure.
- C. To ensure that appropriate action is taken when a young person up to the age of 18 years is suspected by mentors or workers of being abused.
- D. To protect volunteers and staff from false accusations made by minors
- E. To inform volunteers and staff about how to wisely handle situations where abuse has occurred.

While we, Radiant Christian Life Church (RCL), may not be able to prevent a child from being hurt outside of church, we can take proactive steps to make our ministry with children as safe and secure as possible. Here are the policies to protect the children God has entrusted to us. All child related policies or procedures here and elsewhere apply for all church sponsored events, whether in the building or off campus.

Screening of Volunteers and Staff

RCL requires all volunteers/staff workers who are probable to have direct contact with minors to complete the screening process beforehand. This process involves the following:

1. A written application with disclosure/statement. The application will include the volunteer/staff workers driver's license number and Social Security number. Applications and the results of any screening will be kept confidential by authorized church staff.
2. Personal references are considered to verify character.
3. An interview is arranged and performed by church representatives, or the Children's Ministry Director/Pastor .
4. Training material and policies information are provided to the candidate.
5. Background checks are performed. With permission from the applicant and the appropriate waiver/release form signed, background checks are required. Checks should verify the social security number with the social security department to verify that is a valid number and also check what counties that number has been used in. Additionally criminal records should be checked with due diligence on county, state, and federal level. Finally, sex offender registries should be checked. This should involve checking at pertinent states and at the national registry. Compliance with the FCRA in this process is recommended, particularly if the process involves a paid staff hiring. Further checking may be done if deemed necessary for particular positions (volunteer or staff), not excluding civil records, driving records, or credit history searches. These will be obtained with permission.

No adult members of the congregation, whether volunteer or paid workers, who have been convicted of a crime against a child or a violent crime against another adult, will provide services in any church-sponsored activity or program involving direct contact with minors. Furthermore, the ministry leadership reserves the right to use discretion in determining the eligibility of volunteers to work with minors.

No unauthorized or unscreened people are permitted to be in the classrooms or nursery while minors are present. If parents attend, they must stay in close proximity to their child/children; refusing personal contact with the other kids. If special guests attend, they must be

accompanied in close proximity to a leader, worker, or director; refusing personal contact with kids.

Previous Church Attendance

"Directors" must have been members or regular attendees of Radiant Christian Life for at least 2 years prior to the time they begin serving with children in church-sponsored activities. "Workers," "Leaders" and "Helpers" must have been members or regular attendees of Radiant Christian Life for at least 12 months prior to the time they begin serving with children in church-sponsored activities. Only the following exceptions may be made (these are considered "transfers" from other churches):

A. A volunteer is working only in the role of a "Helper", AND has attended this church for 6 months AND they are with a screened worker in class). AND is fully screened, AND passes all reference checks. Additionally, former churches must provide a positive reference AND attendance at former churches must be a consistent total of at least 6 months.

B. If the candidate has served in ministry with children for at least 12 months in the church he or she attended prior to coming to Radiant Christian Life; AND he/she was screened sufficiently at their former church AND we receive a good reference from the church representative who oversaw them at their former church, they may be considered. And the candidate must have been a regular attender at Radiant for at least 6 months.

Open Rooms

For accountability, classrooms or childcare rooms will be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday school superintendent. The coordinator of the ministry program or his delegate will conduct brief observations of childcare rooms and classrooms of children or youth during Sunday school and other meeting hours. Furthermore, all classrooms where children will be in must have an open door, window, or peep hole to allow a clear view of the classroom activities, including bathrooms if an adult accompanies a child into the bathroom. Additionally, we will always have an open invitation for any parent who would like to observe.

Supervision: Two-Adult Rule (No Alone Rule)

To help protect the reputation of volunteers and staff from false accusations made by minors, and to help in a medical emergency or disaster, two appropriate adults are needed to staff events or classes involving minors. For adults to be considered appropriate, they must be screened. In fact, no unscreened adult worker is to ever be found alone with a minor, especially in a potentially incriminating way. Furthermore, screened adults who are related by blood or marriage need a third person. If the class or event setting has both male and female minors, both male and female adult sponsors are preferred if bathroom assistance is needed. In considering special situations where classes can function with one teacher, the following factors will be considered: number of students & age of students, size of room, room obstacles, proximity of another adult in neighboring class or in the hallway, visibility of room's interior to the public, paging capabilities, surveillance equipment, etc.). This doesn't negate the need for accountability to prevent dangerous situations of liability. Indeed, nothing should prohibit a class from having accountability or the benefit of a second eyewitness.

Two appropriate adults are especially important when minors are involved in discipline and while traveling to and from a church event, even if the vehicle is not owned by the church. Albeit, there are situations like those of professional counseling where being alone with a child is permissible. We, if at all possible, keep accountability in numbers.

Supervision in Restrooms

No adult is to accompany an able or mature child into the bathroom alone. Children who can go to the bathroom without adult assistance should be supervised at a distance in such a way that privacy is maintained. Such children may go to the restroom in pairs, or with the help of a hall monitor. If bathroom care is required, the adult should leave the doors open or involve some other adult to maintain supervision and accountability for both parties. Teachers will recommend parents take their child to the restroom before class begins.

Diaper changing

When changing the diaper of an unrelated child, there should always be at least two adults in the room. Gloves are required for all diaper changes. Never leave a child unattended in the changing process. If you cannot reach something ask someone for help.

Classroom Discipline

Discipline in the classroom is to be done with wisdom and restraint from abuse or even the appearance of it. All volunteers will use the discipline measures outlined in the discipline section of this volunteer training manual. NO CORPORAL DISCIPLINE or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be recorded on a disciplinary incident form. The incident will be discussed with child's parents or guardian as soon as possible in a manner that communicates Radiant Christian Life's care for the child, not criticizing the child or expressing the worker's frustration.

Gifts

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give personal gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible leadership. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

General

All volunteers must follow any other policies or procedures related to the safety or care of minors. Additionally, those who work with kids will commit to be familiar with all administrative & aptitude related tips, particularly warning signs for abuse. Policies and procedures may be published in the *Volunteer Training Manual*, the church website, or any other method of distributing information preferred by the children's ministry department.

ABUSE REPORTING POLICY

If a volunteer/staff worker sees any questionable, suspicious, or inappropriate behavior, or if a volunteer/staff worker suspects any type of child abuse, the volunteer should immediately report it to the Children's Ministries Director (CMD)/Children's Pastor. If that's not possible, it should be reported to a staff pastor. He/she will initiate an internal investigation of the allegations within 24 hours of notice. Remember, until an abuse is verified, it's only suspected. Such behavior is considered highly confidential and must not be shared publicly, but only to those authorities and supervisors who are legally obligated to act. Keep in mind, perpetrators may be of parents, guardians, caregivers, adult visitors to the home and other responsible adults. Similar action should also be taken in the case of a young person suspected of being abused by another young person, including within a young person's

own relationships, abuse between siblings etc.

If Radiant Christian Life receives an allegation of child abuse, it will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, Radiant Christian Life personnel will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that Radiant Christian Life takes them seriously and will take appropriate actions; notifying authorities and state agency of the allegation. Radiant Christian Life pastoral staff will immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the allegations.

When it becomes necessary to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the legal responsibility of any person with responsibility for the care of children to report all cases of child abuse they observe, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the church, the observer or both. Radiant Christian Life has determined that it is the responsibility of the program staff to report all cases of suspected child abuse to the proper legal authorities. While the confidentiality of the pastor/parishioner relationship is very important, reporting reasonable suspicion of child abuse has the potential for helping individuals receive help for a previous problem and may prevent further harm to a child, that person or others.

What is reasonable suspicion? Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

Procedures for Reporting Abuse:

- Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
- Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation
- As appropriate, the Radiant Christian Life pastoral staff shall immediately notify the church's insurance carrier of the possibility of a claim.
- If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person will be temporarily relieved of his duties until the investigation is concluded.
- The pastor should extend whatever care and resources necessary. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an official investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.
- Radiant Christian Life pastoral staff will secure the safety of the child or student before

confronting the accused.

- Do not prejudge the situation, but take the allegations seriously and reach out to the alleged victim and his or her family. Showing care and support without expressing an opinion can help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority. In some situations, churches have responded in a negative or non-supportive manner to the alleged victim. This can increase the anger and pain of the alleged victim and his or her family. Further reconciliation can then be more difficult and the possibility of damaging litigation increases.
- Treat the accused with dignity and support. If the accused is a caregiver, that person will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is completed.
- If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the pastor. Only the pastor or his designee should make comments about the allegations. Pastor will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. The prepared statement shall be made only after consultation with the church's attorney and will include the steps the church has taken to protect children, such as the development and implementation of this manual, and the care and concern the church has for all parties involved. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved shall continue to be of primary concern.
- Communication—Church members' gossip about the situation can be very painful for the family, so we encourage the church to interact with the family and faithfully pray for them while not taking sides.
- Isolation—Some families isolate themselves because sometimes those trying to help may have the tendency to overcompensate and treat the family as special or different. The family needs to be treated as normally as possible while receiving whatever attention is needed.
- Shame—Help the child and family deal with feelings of shame and guilt by first identifying the difference between true guilt and false guilt. A victim and his or her family have no reason to feel guilty. The true guilt should be placed solely on the shoulders of the perpetrator. Help the family to understand that the child did nothing wrong.
- Love – It's critically important that children and families affected by abuse have people who are willing to take the time to listen intently to their story, as they feel able to share it. These families need to be lovingly pursued and initiate contact with them, recognizing that simply offering to be available may not be enough.
- Patience—The help offered will need to endure, just as the pain and struggles do. Abuse has physical and emotional consequences that can be tremendously devastating and traumatic for the child. These can be lifelong and include things such as sexually transmitted diseases, damage to the genitals, bladder control problems, issues of guilt and shame, feelings of low self-esteem, lack of ability to trust others, depression, anxiety, and anger. Families need people who'll be patient as they work through the physical and spiritual ramifications. Ultimately, they need the church to be real and to become educated about how to properly reach out and effectively care for them.

TOPICAL STATEMENTS REGARDING ABUSE:

CIVIL AUTHORITIES: If a staff pastor suspects or receives a report of suspected improper action or suspected child abuse, or if the staff pastor suspects an improper action or child abuse, he or she shall take all steps necessary to report any suspected child abuse to the proper state and county authorities. The staff pastor shall use reasonable judgment in interpreting and reporting such suspicions.

COURSE OF ACTION: If an allegation or suspicion of child abuse involving a volunteer/staff worker in a ministry involving children comes to the attention of the CMD, the CMD shall report such suspicions to the Senior Pastor who will take reasonable steps to confidentially suspend said volunteer/staff workers contact with any children in ministries of the church until the allegations have been properly investigated by the appropriate government agencies. In the absence of such an investigation, the church staff and members of the elders shall review the suspicions or allegations and make a judgment regarding the suspension or restoration of the volunteer/staff worker.

SUPPORT: If an allegation or suspicion of child abuse involving a volunteer/staff worker in a ministry involving children taking place at the church or church sponsored event comes to the attention of the CMD, the CMD shall promptly report such suspicion or allegation to the Senior Pastor who will report this to the church's insurance company, the church's legal counsel, and whatever other professional assistance appropriate or necessary to assure that the situation is dealt with professionally.

PARENTS: In the case of allegations of child abuse during a program, activity, or event of the church, the CMD or a pastor shall promptly and confidentially notify the parents or legal guardians of the child involved.

PASTORAL CARE: In the case of allegations of child abuse during a program, activity, or event of the church, the pastoral staff and appropriate church leadership shall take all reasonable steps to reach out to the possible victim and the accused and their families to provide them grace, love, and support through the difficult situation.

SPOKESPERSON: In the case of allegations of child abuse during a program, activity, or event of the church, the pastoral staff shall designate a spokesperson for the church to deal with inquiries from the media, from the congregation, and to the extent possible, from the appropriate authorities.

MINISTRY TO THE FAMILY: Our church can help the children and families who've gone through such a traumatic experience. An abused child and his or her family need others to come alongside them to provide support and encouragement as they begin the difficult journey of dealing with the abuse and learning to trust again. Abuse shatters trust. If the children who've been abused and their families don't find help and hope in the church, where will they find it?

REPORTING PROCESS SUMMARY (Involving Volunteers or Employees)

1. Individual reports observation or suspicion to CMD.
2. CMD reports observation or suspicion to Senior Pastor.
3. Parents are notified.
4. Senior Pastor reports observation or suspicion to the proper state and county authorities.

5. Volunteer or employee is suspended from contact with children pending investigation.
6. Elders are informed of the general details of the case.
7. A spokesperson for the case is designated.
8. Staff pastor notifies the insurance provider and legal counsel.
9. Pastoral care is extended to the victim and the accused.

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

- -Adult -- any person age 18 or older.
- -Minor, Child or Youth – any person under the age of 18.
- -Child Abuse – Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis), or stranger which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child’s physical or mental health or welfare. The law typically uses the following definitions and explanations in determining whether abuse of a child has occurred.
- -Physical Abuse – A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation, bone fracture, brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma, burns, scalding, cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, internal injuries, poisoning, sprains, dislocations, gunshot, and stabbing wounds.
- -Physical Neglect – The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child’s health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences of a one-time critical or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food, and malnutrition.
- -Sexual Abuse – Abuse that consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child including physical contact (fondling, sexual intercourse) and nonphysical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, voyeurism). Examples include: inappropriate touching of the genital area including the buttocks and, for girls, the chest area. Abuse can also happen by exposing children to movies, pictures etc. that have sexual content that they are not emotionally mature enough to handle.
- -Medical Neglect – Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental, or dental care for a condition which, if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.
- -Failure to Thrive – A syndrome of infancy or early childhood that is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.
- -Mental Abuse/Neglect – A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker that result in harms to a

child's psychological or emotional health or development.

- -Educational Neglect – The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.
- -Bizarre Discipline – Any action in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational, or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.
- -Compensated Worker – Hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employee who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.
- -Volunteer Worker - Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church-sponsored activity.
- -Caregiver – Any compensated or volunteer worker, sixth grade or older.
- -Mandated Reporter – Any persons with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter. Wisconsin law states that if a care giver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, that person shall immediately report or cause a report to be made to the senior pastor.
- -Corporal Punishment – Any punishment applied to the body but not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching, pulling, or squeezing.
- -Child sexual abuse-- According to The American Medical Association says is "the engagement of a child in sexual activities for which the child is developmentally unprepared and cannot give informed consent. Child sexual abuse is characterized by deception, force and coercion."

Talking with a Child Considerations

You as a volunteer/staff may be the first person the young person has discussed the abuse with. How you act at this stage is crucial. It is important to tell the young person that you will do something about it. The young person should be assured that the volunteer/staff worker would support them in getting information and help to stop the abuse.

Remember, a young person rarely lies about abuse, particularly sexual abuse. They may try to conceal the truth in order to protect adults, particularly where they have been told that something awful may happen to those adults or themselves if they tell. They may be confused on details like when and where, but the main point of the story is usually accurate. Young people have been known to try to tell adults of their abuse over a long period of time and been disbelieved. Volunteers/staff workers should tell the young person that they believe what they have said. (It is appropriate to express regret at the abuse - "I'm sorry that this has happened/is happening to you.) It is also helpful to praise the young person's courage in speaking out. This discussion should take place at the young person's own pace; they should not be 'cross-examined'. Young people may have to relate their experiences to other professionals and it is important that they do not have to do this more than necessary.

Volunteers/staff workers should never indicate to a young person that they would keep secrets. A feature of sexual abuse in particular is the secrecy that exists between perpetrator and young person.

Volunteers/staff workers can find themselves pulled into this relationship in a destructive way. If a child comes to you and says something along the lines of - "if I tell you something you won't tell anyone else will you?" - should be met with a firm but gentle explanation: I can promise that about most things, but if I have to tell someone to keep you safe, I promise to not go behind your back."

The volunteer/staff worker should take notes of what the child says about the abuse. Care should be taken to do this in a way that does not block the young person from talking. The notes, which a volunteer/ staff worker may keep, can be used as a basis for supporting the volunteer/staff worker during a difficult process. These notes should be kept safely in confidence like a locked cabinet in their office and a copy should be given to the CMD/Children's Pastor. These notes are not admissible as evidence and should only be shared with other agencies or individuals with the full agreement of the young person. At the end of the work there should be a joint decision about the destruction or further safe keeping of such notes. Where a case is referred to Social Services, the volunteer/worker and/or Project Manager may submit a written report of what has happened, drawing on the volunteers/workers notes.

If the absolute confidentiality is needed in a situation we can not act in organizations that may operate in confidence (e.g. Childline, Incest Survivors Groups) might be able to provide service.

Perpetrators are often abusing other children at the same time and although the volunteer/staff worker may not be in contact with these children their safety is also of concern and this needs to be taken into account in determining a course of action. Lastly, the child will probably need a good Christian counselor. The child will need to process all that has happened to them and they will need professional to help sort all of this out.

Talking with a Child Summary:

- ◆ **Listen** -- Be slow to speak and quick to listen.
- ◆ **Empathize** -- Don't lecture, but rather be someone the child can cry with, hurt with, and mourn with. Offer love unconditionally.
- ◆ **Affirm** -- Help the child understand that you believe him or her, and affirm that the child is an individual with infinite worth.
- ◆ **Direct** -- Point the child to God as the source of healing and wholeness. Help the child turn the responsibility of the abuse from him- or herself on to the perpetrator and realize this process of healing and recovery will take time.
- ◆ **Record** -- Take notes for these can be used later. These are confidential and need to be stored where they are safe.
- ◆ **Enlist** -- Allow the child to choose caring people who can encourage and offer a fuller support system. Rather than fearing these people's involvement, understand that they're trained professionals who, for the most part, care deeply about children.
- ◆ **Refer** -- Bring a professional Christian counselor into the situation. It's imperative to invite professionals into this very sensitive situation.

Important Contacts and Their Phone Numbers:

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD

State Child Abuse Hotline 800 562-2407

Indiana Child Protective Services: (1-800-800-5556)