

Abuse Prevention Policy

The purpose of the Abuse Prevention Policy of Essex CRC is to ensure that our church and its programs remain a haven of safety for all people. Through education and awareness, we are mandated to protect all participants from any form of abuse, to protect church leaders, staff, and volunteers from false accusations of abuse, and to prudently guard the legal liability and reputation of our congregation. This document embodies policies and guidelines intended to foster this purpose and are developed through consultation by the Council of the Essex CRC. Program representatives must inform the Council chairperson of any contraventions of this policy.

General Provisions of the Abuse Prevention Policy

- a) All volunteers and volunteer helpers must fill out a Volunteer Profile Form prior to involvement with church programs. There will be a standing committee of three individuals to process completed checks. Care will be taken to maintain confidentiality. Criminal background checks must be completed by all staff and heads of programs.
- b) All volunteers and volunteer helpers should conduct themselves in a godly manner, being an example of obedience, respect, and honesty to those in their care.
- c) The provisions of the Discipline Policy apply to all programs.
- d) All volunteers, teachers, assistants, leaders and helpers should attend at least one general education and information seminar regarding abuse prevention.
- e) During the first week of each program, leaders and volunteers should review the specific provisions of Essex CRC Abuse Prevention Guidelines and the background information associated with these guidelines.
- f) The general abuse prevention guidelines will be communicated via newsletter to the parents.
- g) When the congregation is in worship, the ushers aim to maintain the security of the building and restrict access to area where children are gathered for their activities. Ushers should be seated in places where entrances can be observed.

General Bathroom Procedures for Sunday School and Nursery

- a) Parents should encourage their children to use bathroom facilities before class. This practice will help limit bathroom usage during Sunday School or Nursery.
- b) Whenever possible, children should use the nearest designated bathroom.
- c) For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who do require assistance, the adult attendant or helper must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Whenever possible women should help girls and men should assist boys.
- d) Information sheets will be available for children in Sunday School and the nursery. These sheets will have the child's name, age allergies and columns for signing the child In and Out when going to the washroom is necessary. Preschool children ages 3 – 5 are to use the nursery washroom.

Physical Touch

- a) Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Be aware of and sensitive to the differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate.

- b) We recommend the following guidelines as pure, genuine, and positive displays of God's love.

Appropriate Touch

Love and caring can be expressed in the following appropriate ways by:

- i) bending down to the child's eye level and speaking kindly, and listening to him / her carefully.
- ii) taking a child's hand and leading him / her to an activity.
- iii) putting an arm around the shoulder of a child who needs comforting and quieting.
- iv) taking both of the child's hands as you say, "You did such a good job," or "I'm glad to see you. We've missed you!" etc.
- v) patting a child on the head, hand, shoulder, or back to affirm him/her.
- vi) holding a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his/her attention while you redirect his/her behaviour.
- vii) gently holding a child's chin to help him/her focus on what you are telling him/her.
- viii) holding a pre-school child who is crying.

Inappropriate Touch

- i) kissing a child, coaxing a child to kiss you, extended hugging and tickling.
- ii) touching a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit (except when assisting a child with toileting, in the presence of another adult.)
- iii) carrying an older child or having them sit on your lap.
- iv) being alone with a child.

Discipline Policy

- a) The purpose of the Discipline Policy is to:
 - i) reduce the risk and incidence of minors being subjected to abusive discipline.
 - ii) reduce the risk of volunteers or staff persons being accused of using abusive discipline.
 - iii) provide clear guidelines about how to administer discipline in child and youth programs sponsored by Essex CRC.

- b) General Provisions of the Discipline Policy
 - i) Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers or staff before the church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
 - * corporal punishment is not permitted (e.g. slapping, hitting, pushing, or spanking)
 - * verbal punishment is not permitted (e.g. yelling, insulting, threatening, degrading or humiliating)
 - ii) Whenever possible, leaders should try to address difficult behaviour of a child or youth by choosing one of the following options:
 - * redirect the child to an acceptable behaviour
 - * isolate the child or youth if another volunteer or staff is available to assist
 - iii) Expectations for behaviour should reflect the appropriate age and comprehension level of each child.
 - iv) Similarly, discipline should reflect the child's age and level of comprehension. For young children, time outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child.

- v) Children are to be reminded to the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
- vi) When children are unresponsive to limit setting and frustration is occurring the supervising adult should get help from other available staff, volunteers or leaders. If misbehaviour continues and all available options have not had positive results, the parents of the child involved should be notified to come and remove the child from the program.
- vii) Parent (s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child or youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehaviour continues.
- viii) Concerns about a child's behaviour and the response to a child's behaviour should be reported to the parents.
- ix) When misbehaviour is an ongoing problem, the child who is misbehaving must be removed from the particular program until he/she is able to control his/her behaviour unless the parent is willing to accompany the child to the program.
- x) If discipline is suspected or reported to be abusive, the church's reporting procedures must be followed (see point 8)

Program Staffing

- a) Nursery -- at least two persons present at all times in infant nursery (e.g. one adult and one helper) and two persons in the toddler nursery at all times (e.g. one adult and one helper)
- b) Recommended ratios are as follows -- (these are the same as day-care ratios)

Nursery	at least one adult, one helper for nursery
Toddlers	at least one adult, one helper for toddlers
Pre-school Sunday School and Other Programs	
3 - 4 years	at least two people per class (teacher plus helper)
5 years	at least two people per class (teacher plus helper)
Grade 1 - 6	preferably two people per class (teacher & helper)
GEMS & Cadets	at least two adults present for all activities
Catechism	One adult for each class
Young Peoples	at least two adults present for all activities

Specific Program Guidelines

- a) Nursery Programs / Pre-school Sunday School
 - i) There will be an information sheet for each child on which the following information is noted:
 - * child's name / parent's name
 - * age
 - ii) Minors (under 16 years of age) are encouraged to volunteer for service; however, an adult must also be present.
 - iii) Attendants may take children from the nursery / Sunday school only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in a case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child's parent (s).
 - vi) Nursery staff / Sunday School leaders and helpers will not be alone with a child in a closed room.
 - v) The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery and in such a way that another nursery worker can easily see the child that is being changed.

- vi) Only one adult member of a family should serve in the nursery at a given time.
 - vii) An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for that particular service may only spend time in the nursery room (s) at the discretion of the scheduled adult attendant.
 - ix) Any person not complying with these guidelines must be reported to the nursery coordinator and the pastoral staff.
- b) Sunday School (Grades 1 - 6)
- i) Only one adult member of a family should serve in a classroom at a given time.
 - ii) Whenever Sunday School is in session, two volunteers, including at least one adult, should be present.
 - iii) Children may leave the worship centre or classroom only for illness, bathroom assistance, or other compelling reasons.
- c) Cadets and GEMS
- i) One-on-one outings (boy and counselor or girl and counselor) will require notification to the head counselor and parents with name, date, time and purpose. There must also be a follow up call to the Cadet / GEMS head counselor for a progress report. (This notification and follow up call protects both the teacher and the child and shows concerns for them both. Without these provisions, a rule of two people with every child must be followed.)
 - ii) Cadet and GEMS should have adequate supervision (See staffing recommendations above)
 - iii) Cadet and GEMS counselors may meet privately with members of their group, but any such meeting should take place in a public place or room with unrestricted view.
 - iv) If a child needs significant medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.
 - v) Cadets and GEMS should arrive ten minutes before the start of a class, and leave within ten minutes after the dismissal by the leader(s).
 - vi) Outings and / or out-of-town activities: the parents should sign permission slips detailing the type and length of activity.
 - vii) Displays of affection should be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. The counselors right to refuse any of these will be respected.
- d) Youth Group Programs / Catechism
- i) Adult youth group leaders (leader(s) may meet privately with a youth group member (member(s) but such meetings should only occur in a public place.
 - ii) Regardless of their relative ages, it is never appropriate for a leader and a member to date each other.
 - iii) All functions should be under the supervision of more than one leader.
 - iv) Displays of affection between leaders and members ought to be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict these displays to a public area. A leader's or a member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
 - v) No gifts, phone calls, or letters of a personal nature should be directed to a member by a leader or vice or versa.

- vi) Leaders should sponsor a yearly class about abuse for members of the youth group. Topics for this class may include date violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, awareness of the signs of abuse, prevention of abuse, or a teen's response to a teenage victim or perpetrator.
- e) Pastoral Ministry
 - i) The elders, deacons, pastors and pastoral counselors should exercise good judgement when visiting alone with parishioners of the opposite sex in the privacy of their own homes. A second party's notification of time of visit, expected length of stay, etc., would be helpful.
 - ii) It may be wise to use public places such as restaurants for such meetings.
 - iii) Be cautious with touch. Hugs can be misconstrued as meaning something more than the giver intended. For some, hugs are an invasion of personal space and are unwelcome.
 - iv) Consider asking that an elder of the same gender be assigned to someone who needs frequent visits.
 - v) The elders, pastor, and deacons need to report all pastoral visits to their respective coordinating bodies. Informing your spouse of visits to persons of the opposite sex is also a good check.

Obligation to Report -- Reporting Procedures

- a) In creating a compassionate environment for children, we need to be sensitive to the need of the whole child. The percentage of children in our culture who experience abuse is high -- one out of every four boys and one out of every three girls. As we continue to extend Jesus' healing to the hurts of our world, we will encounter children who have been abused.

In fulfilling our mandate to protect children, we need to watch for signs of abuse in children and know how to report things that concern us to the appropriate leadership. We need to have an atmosphere of openness and compassion for the needs of children.

Following are some definitions of abuse and what it looks like:

Child Abuse is defined as a non-accidental physical or mental injury or mistreatment by the acts of omissions (neglect) by the child's parents or guardians.

Physical Abuse means any physical force or action, which results in or may potentially result in a non-accidental injury to the child and which exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline or injury.

Sexual Abuse means any sexual exploitation of a child whether consensual or not. It includes touching of a sexual nature and sexual intercourse, and may include any behaviour of a sexual nature toward a child. This would exclude normal affectionate behaviour toward children and normal health hygiene.

Sexual Interference means any invitation or exposure to sexual activity, behaviour, or material. This may include indecent exposure, invitation to be touched or touch sexually, exposing children to pornographic material, or indecent language.

Emotional Abuse means acts or omissions of those responsible for the care of a child, which will produce long term and serious emotional disorder (e.g. scare tactics, insults, yelling, temper tantrums, name-calling, and continuous criticism).

Neglect means the failure of those responsible for the care of the child to meet the physical, emotional, or medical needs of a child to an extent that the child's health, development, or safety is endangered.

b) What and to Whom do we need to report?

Any volunteer or paid leader of **Essex CRC** involved with children (0 - 18 years old) will **immediately** report any concerns relating to abuse or neglect of which they have knowledge or observe within the scope of their duties to their ministry supervisor, the Child's Pastor, Senior Pastor or Chair of Council for instruction and support regarding the report to Family and Social Services and / or the LOCAL Police Department. **A person who knowingly fails to make such a report may be in violation of the law and may be found to have committed an offence.**

If the victim is a child or a minor up to the age of 16 years old, the LOCAL County Department of Family and Social Services must be notified immediately. A high degree of proof is not necessary -- a reasonably based suspicion is enough to trigger the duty to report. If the victim is between the age of 16 and the legal age of 18, notify the police if:

- * the child is related to the abuser, and / or living in the same residence;
- * the child is being abused by parents, sibling, or a non-relative either living in the same home or during custodial arrangements;
- * the child's safety is at risk and parents are not protecting the child.

If the victim is a child or minor under the age of 18 notify the LOCAL Police Department if:

- * the victim does not know the abuser
- * the victim is not related to the abuser and does not live with the abuser;
- * the victim may have contact with the abuser without protection;
- * the victim is under the authority of the abuser