

# SafeConduct™ Hiring and Leadership Policy & Procedure Template

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**This template is provided as a service by Insurance Board**, a non-profit insurance and risk management ministry, as a service to churches and camps of the denominations it serves: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church USA, Alliance of Baptists, and United Church of Christ. The materials provided are based, in part, on guidance provided by **Praesidium, Inc.**, our business partner and consultant in matters of abuse prevention.

It is the responsibility of church leaders to determine the necessary components of policy.

While this template is focused primarily on child abuse prevention, opportunities will be identified to address other issues that relate to **SafeConduct™**, to include sexual harassment, professional boundaries, sexual orientation, bullying and exploitation of vulnerable adults. Users will find that principles applying to abuse prevention can apply to and are easily adaptable to the other vulnerable groups although different specific techniques may apply.

Depending upon the nature of [CHURCH NAME], whether a church, camp, or other non-profit, you may customize terms to suit your culture. For example, you may wish to insert a variety of scriptural references. This particular policy statement is very broad and goes beyond child sexual abuse to include elements of employment practices and other at-risk groups. For example, a church may routinely provide an overflow homeless shelter where families and persons with mental illnesses are present.

While many churches use terms such as “safe church”, “safe sanctuary” or similar terms for their policies, we have adopted throughout the policy template the term **SafeConduct™**. Our strategy is to focus less on a fortress place and more on the importance of personal behavior and personal responsibility in abuse prevention. ***While SafeConduct™ is a trademarked term, any church or non-profit camp within the denominations we serve is free to use it.*** Some have already chosen to incorporate it. We are pleased that you do.

**Congregational Approval** – Creating a policy for the first time will not always be easy and may take more time than expected. Some will resist the vetting and oversight that is implicit in an effective program. It will be important that you engage your congregation in the process and arrive at consensus. When it comes time to vote on adoption, the details of the policy and procedure must not be a surprise. Be sure to understand what your Constitution or By-Laws may require to obtain approval.

**Policy Language** – Throughout this template, procedures are expressed as imperatives (shall, will). Vague terms such as “should” or “may” are specifically avoided. Responsibility for specific actions are assigned to “individuals” (usually by title), not to groups or committees. Each individual must understand his/her specific responsibility.

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**Praesidium provides Sample Policies and Procedures to assist in the prevention of organizational abuse. However, it must be noted that no system can guarantee prevention of abuse.** This information is not legal advice, either expressed or implied. Consultation with qualified legal counsel is recommended.

When all recommendations are implemented and maintained, a risk for abuse continues to exist, as the problem of abuse is pervasive and no system to date can assure complete safety.

Accordingly, **PRAESIDIUM MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE AND MERCHANTABILITY, REGARDING THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF THE PRAESIDIUM SAMPLE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN PREVENTING OR REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF ABUSE**

**THESE POLICIES CONTAIN MODEL LANGUAGE BUT SHOULD BE REVIEWED BY LEGAL COUNSEL PRIOR TO USE TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL LAW**

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## Policy and Procedure Implementation

The policies and procedures within this document represent ways in which your church programs that serve youth or vulnerable populations can screen and select employees and volunteers, communicate your congregation's commitment to safety and abuse prevention, and to guide supervisors and congregational leaders in their responsibilities.

To ensure the best implementation, all leadership within the congregation must have a consensus on policy adoption. There is a higher level of responsibility for leadership within your church to understand the policy in its written format AND how it will be implemented into congregational activities.

### Language Statement

Praesidium uses general language throughout these Sample Policies and Procedures that can be modified to meet the needs of the Congregation and the consumers they serve. For example, a congregation may choose to change consumer(s) to student, participant, youth, member, etc.; or to use more inclusive language such as gender identity instead of gender.

Best practices:

- The policies should be reviewed by the leadership to customize each policy to the population being served and who has access to them.

Examples of populations served	Who has access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Children, Adolescents and Teens</li><li>- Persons with disabilities including mental, physical, or intellectual</li><li>- Homeless, Refugees or undocumented people</li><li>- Trafficking victims</li><li>- Elderly or homebound</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Church leaders</li><li>- Lay employees</li><li>- Long term volunteers</li><li>- One-time volunteers</li><li>- The general congregation of your church</li><li>- Public- when hosting public events</li></ul>

# Hiring Employees and Volunteers

## Ministry Employees

A comprehensive hiring procedure for all employees who work with minors or vulnerable adults is essential to ensure your congregation is communicating zero tolerance for abuse and assessing employees for their level of abuse risk. From the application, in-person interview, reference and background checks, our congregation must stay vigilant to risk factors that indicate risk to abuse. Not one indicator is indicative of the intentions of the person being considered. When your church looks at all areas of screening combined, there should be a clear picture of who the individual is and their motivations for serving in your community. It is ok to use discernment and the tools below to determine who is right person to serve. Not everyone is fit for every role. All laws governing employment and discrimination should be followed. Please refer to an employment attorney for laws in your specific situation. Ensure you have proper authorization from the applicant to conduct background checks during the hiring process.

**Standing of “Authorized Clergy”:** Each denomination served by the Insurance Board has a process of granting professional standing to clergy. Employment of clergy who do not fulfill denominational requirements may have an impact on insurance programs. Consult your insurance agent if there are concerns.

## High-Access Volunteers

**High-Access Volunteers** typically interact often or over an extended period with consumers (minors or vulnerable adults). Such volunteers may be readily known to consumers under their supervision and to other volunteers and employees in the program. They may also supervise consumers with or without an employee present. High-Access Volunteers may carry a substantial amount of responsibility in a program serving consumers and may have opportunities to develop relationships with consumers over time. Examples of High-Access Volunteers include a volunteer program instructor, a regularly scheduled volunteer coach, or a mentor for a consumer.

Volunteers must be active members of [CHURCH NAME] for a minimum of six months before being permitted to work in youth-oriented programs. There should be no exceptions to this policy, even when volunteer candidates come from another church with similar programs.

## **Required Screening Steps for Employment and High-Access Volunteers**

The following should be completed for all employment or high-access volunteer applicants:

- Complete a standard application with a Code of Conduct attached
- At least one in-person interview with standard, behaviorally based questions to assess for abuse risk.
- Three reference checks, two professional and one personal reference who have known the applicant more than 1 year.
- Criminal background check that includes:
  - a. national multi-state criminal database
  - b. national sex offender registry,
  - c. social security number trace and alias search, and;
  - d. county criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked for the past 7 years.

Please note for minor volunteers:

- *Minors may not have the required references. Additional personal references, including educators, or other volunteer organizations are good references to consider for minors.*
- *Minors may not be required to complete background checks. Please refer to state and local laws on background check requirements.*

## **Standard Application**

At (CHURCH NAME) all employment and volunteer candidates must fill out a standard application. The application is the first opportunity to learn about work history, skills, and background of the person interested in representing (CHURCH NAME). Applications should be filled out in their entirety and should include addresses where the person has lived for the past seven years. Applications should be stored in compliance with employment law in personnel files. A sample application can be found in Appendix A.

High Risk Indicators for Applications

- Application has gaps in dates for employment, education or residence that were not addressed.
- Application includes conflicting or incorrect information.
- Application has omitted or incomplete information.
- The applicant has an unstable work history.

- The applicant provides vague reasons for leaving previous jobs or volunteer positions.
- The applicant is unwilling to use former supervisors as references.
- The applicant is overeducated or overqualified for this or other positions with (consumers: minors, vulnerable adults).
- The applicant is moving to a lesser-paying job.
- The application shows a pattern of work and volunteer positions with the same type of (consumer).
- The work pattern shows themes of problems with authority.
- The applicant found out about the position through dropping in on the program.
- The applicant describes consumers as helpless, vulnerable or perfect.

## Sample Resource: Code of Conduct for Employees and Volunteers

A code of ethics can be included in the application to communicate to candidates a zero tolerance for abuse and a commitment to safety of all who are served in your church.

### Sample Information for a Code of Ethics:

- Our employees and volunteers will exhibit the highest ethical best practices and personal integrity.
- Our employees and volunteers will provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
- Our employees and volunteers will not physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect (consumers).
- Our employees and volunteers will share concerns about suspicious or inappropriate behavior with their supervisor or administrator.
- Our employees and volunteers will report any suspected abuse or neglect of a consumer to the state authorities.
- Our employees and volunteers will accept their personal responsibility to protect (consumers) and adults from all forms of abuse.

## In-Person Interviews

At (CHURCH NAME) it is best practice for all employees and volunteers to have an interview in-person with at least two hiring personnel. Hiring personnel must be trained to conduct interviews using behaviorally based questions. Zero tolerance for abuse of children or vulnerable adults should be communicated to the applicant. Standardized behaviorally based questions to assess abuse risk should be included in every interview. Questions may include job related skills and experiences where the applicant handled challenges or maintained boundaries with children or vulnerable adults. Responses from applicants should demonstrate

past behavior, not hypotheticals. It is important for hiring personnel to pay close attention to higher risk indicators, such as evasive or angry responses. Hiring personnel may screen out applicants after the interview or choose to continue the hiring process.

## Reference Checks

Each applicant must submit the names and phone numbers of three references. Two references must be professional references, and one personal reference. Professional references must be familiar with the quality of the individual's work and have known the individual in a work environment for a minimum of 6 months. If the applicant has identified previous employment or volunteer work with minors or vulnerable adults, the references must include a supervisor or co-worker from that position. The personal reference should only include individuals who have known the applicant for more than one year.

### Reference Procedure

Sample Professional and Personal Reference Check Forms can be found in Appendix A.

References should be contacted after an in-person interview with the applicant. Individuals who conduct references must be trained in how to conduct reference checks and the types of responses that could indicate risk.

A standard form should be completed for each reference. The interviewer should ask behaviorally based reference questions and document each of the responses. The interviewer should maintain documentation of responses and the completed reference checks in personnel files.

All references must be completed before an offer is made.

## Background Checks

(CHURCH NAME) will conduct a criminal background check on all new employees and high-access volunteers before they have contact with our (consumers). Background checks will be in accordance with all federal, state and local laws. At a minimum the following checks will be completed. Refer to your state or local jurisdiction for additional required checks.

At a minimum the following checks will be completed:

- a. National multi-state criminal database
- b. National sex offender registry
- c. Social security number trace and alias search



- d. County criminal records search for every county where the applicant has lived or worked for the past 7 years

*For positions that require driving, sample forms for driver qualifications can be found in Appendix A.*

## Sample Policy Requiring Sex-Offender Registry Screening for Employees and Volunteers

### **PLEASE REVIEW FOR YOUR STATE AND JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LAWS LEGAL COUNSEL MUST REVIEW**

(CHURCH NAME) will complete a National Sex Offender Registry database check on all employees and volunteers upon hire, re-hire, return from seasonal absence or furlough longer than six months, and every two years, or more frequently if required by local, state, or federal law. and prior to working or volunteering with (consumers). *[When not mandated specifically to utilize the Department of Justice's Public Sex Offender database, an organization may consider vetting private database resources to fulfil this step in a time and cost-effective manner. It is important to learn more about how these private databases are compiled and updated, and how results are analyzed before you use them.]*

## Repeat Background Checks

### **Church hiring personnel must ensure they have proper authorization from the employee to conduct background checks during employment.**

(CHURCH NAME) will conduct a criminal background check and National Sex Offender Registry Search on all continuously employed staff and high-access volunteers at least once every two years or more frequently if required by local, state, or federal law or program-specific requirements.

For employees or high-access volunteers who are returning, rehired, or seasonal workers, (CHURCH NAME) will conduct a criminal background check and National Sex Offender Registry Search when the employee or volunteer returns from an absence longer than six months, and at least once every two years. (CHURCH NAME) will keep documentation that the checks have been completed and reviewed in the employee or volunteer's personnel file.

*For sample policies on Registered Sex Offenders in the congregation, please see Appendix A.*

## Sample Procedures for Criminal Background Check Review

### **PLEASE REVIEW FOR YOUR STATE AND JURISDICTION SPECIFIC LAWS LEGAL COUNSEL MUST REVIEW**

*Praesidium provides these sample procedures based on its work with various organizations across the nation.*

*It is important to recognize, however, that this sample set of procedures is only a starting point. **The laws governing employers' acquisition and use of criminal history vary significantly across the United States.** What may be legal and appropriate in one jurisdiction may not be legal and appropriate in another. **Therefore, it is critical for each church to make sure that its screening procedures align with all federal, state, and local laws that apply to it.***

*Use of sample procedures made available by Praesidium is strictly optional. Therefore, if you choose to use such sample procedures in part or whole, you understand and agree that such procedures should be considered your own (not that of Praesidium). Please consult with legal counsel as appropriate to make sure your screening process complies with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.*

### **Sample Criminal Background Screening Procedures for Employment Candidates**

In the interests of preserving the safety and security of employees, clients, and members of the public, as well as ensuring a high-quality workforce, \_\_\_\_\_ (“the Church”) operates a background screening program. This document outlines the steps that the Church’s management and human resources employees are expected to take to facilitate criminal background checks.

**Step #1:** Make each offer of employment contingent upon the results of a criminal background check.

**Step #2:** Once a candidate has received a conditional offer of employment, arrange for the candidate to: (1) receive all necessary background screening disclosures and (2) provide written consent for the background check to be run. **Note: Only approved background screening disclosure and consent paperwork may be used. Such materials shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.**

**Step #3:** Wait for the background screening firm to prepare the background screening report.

**Step #4:** Once the screening report has been returned to the Church, assess whether the report reflects any criminal convictions.

- a. If it does, move to Step #5.
- b. If it does not, continue with the hiring process.

**Step #5:** If the screening report contains a criminal conviction, assess whether any federal, state, or local laws require the candidate to be automatically disqualified (e.g., state law indicates that an individual in X position cannot have a conviction for Y).

- a. If federal, state, or local law requires automatic disqualification, move to Step #8.
- b. If not, move to Step #6

**Step #6:** If the screening report contains a criminal conviction, but it does not result in automatic disqualification under federal, state, or local law, make a preliminary assessment of whether there is a substantial relationship between the job and the crime. To make this assessment, analyze: (1) the nature of the job, (2) the nature of the crime, and (3) the amount of time that has passed since the conviction. Refer to [EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions](#) for more details.

- a. If there appears to be a substantial relationship between the job and the crime, move to Step #7.
- b. If there does not appear to be a substantial relationship between the job and the crime, continue with the hiring process.

NOTE: If non-criminal conviction information in a screening report is used to deny employment, retention, promotion or any other adverse decision, employer must follow adverse action procedures.

**Step #7:** If a substantial relationship between the job and crime exists, double-check that there are no federal, state, or local laws that preclude the Church from making a decision based on the criminal conviction at issue (e.g., based on the amount of time that has passed since the offense).

- a. If there is no legal restriction prohibiting the Church from making a decision based upon the criminal conviction, move on to Step #8.
- b. If there is a legal restriction prohibiting the Church from making a decision based upon the criminal conviction, continue with the hiring process.

**Step #8:** If the Church's preliminary review finds that the candidate likely needs to be disqualified, send the candidate: (1) a pre-adverse-action letter, (2) the relevant background screening report, (3) a governmental notice entitled "A Summary of your Rights Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act," and (4) Required state or local notices (if applicable)(5) a written questionnaire/invitation for the candidate to provide the Church more context about the potentially disqualifying criminal matter as well as additional information about how he or she has grown/matured/functioned since the time of the crime. **Note: Only approved background screening pre-adverse action paperwork and related materials may be used. Such materials shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.**

**Step #9:** Wait at least five business days from the date of the pre-adverse-action letter to allow the candidate to dispute the accuracy of the report and/or provide the Church additional information related to the matters covered in the report.

**Step #10:** After the waiting period has elapsed, assess whether the candidate has disputed the accuracy of the report.

- a. If the candidate has disputed the accuracy of the report, allow the screening firm to reinvestigate the information and resolve the dispute before taking any further steps.
- b. If the candidate has not disputed the accuracy of the report, move to Step #11.

**Step #11:** Review any additional information submitted by the candidate about the crime and their actions since the crime.

- a. If the additional information submitted by the candidate sufficiently allays concerns related to the crime, continue with the hiring process.
- b. If not, move to Step #12.

**Step #12:** If the Church reaches a final determination that the candidate will not be hired, send the candidate an adverse action letter communicating the decision. **Note: Only approved adverse action letters and materials may be used. Such materials shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.**

**Step #13:** Document the reason why the candidate was not hired (e.g., “Candidate has criminal conviction that is substantially related to the job. Criminal Conviction Questionnaire responses did not reflect reduced risk.”)

#### **Additional Items to Consider**

- Some churches may wish to identify specific points at which legal counsel should be consulted (e.g., when trying to determine whether the “substantial relatedness” test is met).
- Some churches may wish to include procedures for conducting repeat background checks on active employees and volunteers, since checks every two years can help limit risks.
- Some churches may wish to identify decision-making processes for background screening information other than criminal convictions (e.g., sex offender registry information, employment verifications, employment reference checks, education verifications).

- Some churches may wish to reference a background screening committee in their set of procedures. Some congregations establish a committee for the purpose of reviewing and making decisions based upon background screening information.

# Training

## Abuse Prevention and Awareness

(CHURCH NAME) requires that all employees and high-access volunteers are trained on the following foundational abuse prevention topics prior to having access to consumers:

- Policies related to preventing and responding to abuse
- How to maintain appropriate boundaries with (consumers)
- Definitions of abuse
- Facts about sexual abuse
- How abuse happens in congregations
- Information about sexual grooming
- How to manage high-risk activities (i.e., bathroom and locker room activities, transition periods, diapering and toileting, transportation, camps, etc.)
- How to prevent false allegations
- How to recognize and respond to suspicious or inappropriate behaviors and policy violations
- How to recognize and respond to suspicions or allegations of abuse
- How to respond to (consumer-to-consumer) sexual activity

Insurance Board partners with Praesidium to provide training that covers the topics mentioned above for FREE to participants and members through Praesidium Academy.

## Annual training

Employees and high-access volunteers are required to complete abuse prevention training annually. Topics include:

- Up-to-date policies related to preventing and responding to abuse
- How to maintain appropriate boundaries with consumers

- Additional topics that contribute to employee and volunteers' skills and knowledge related to abuse prevention. These may vary according to an employee's role within the congregation (*working with children, adolescents, teens, vulnerable adults, etc.*)

## Supervisor and Leadership Training

Church leaders, hiring personnel and ministry leaders who supervise employees or volunteers are required to receive additional training dependent on the role they play within the congregation. (*The frequency of training should be outlined by your congregation here.*)

- Interview techniques and use of standardized behaviorally based questions to assess applicants for abuse risk
- Responsibilities in responding to policy violations, abuse allegations, or (consumer-to-consumer) sexual activity

(CHURCH NAME) keeps documentation of training records for all employees and high-access volunteers. Failure to complete required training will result in disciplinary actions up to and including termination or removal from the congregation.

## Responding

### Supervisor and Administrator Response to Red-flag or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations

If a supervisor or an administrator receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from an employee, volunteer, (consumer), or parent/guardian, the supervisor is instructed to do the following:

- Report to the next level supervisor or administrator
- Speak with the employee or volunteer who has been reported
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer to determine if similar complaints have been reported before
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report

- Take into consideration factors such as:
  1. Context of red-flag or inappropriate behavior or policy violation
  2. Severity of red-flag or inappropriate behavior or policy violation
  3. History of red-flag or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations
  4. Trainability of employee or volunteer
- Document the report on the appropriate form
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of red-flag or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, follow mandated reporting procedures and refer to the ***Supervisor or Administrator Response to Abuse Allegations*** below.
- If appropriate, notify parents/guardians. The parents/guardians of the (consumer) should always be notified if a boundary violation or abuse occurred from an employee, volunteer or another (consumer). If the abuse concern is about a parent/guardian, then it may not be appropriate to inform them that a report is being made.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

**Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:**

- Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, and/or program.
- If policy violations with (consumer(s) are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and report to proper authorities.
- If more information is needed to determine the circumstances of the potential policy or boundary violation, interview and/or survey other employees and volunteers or consumers. Interviews or other internal investigations should never be conducted prior to making a report to the appropriate local authorities if abuse is suspected, in accordance with local mandated reporting requirements. Doing so could interfere with official investigations, and authorities should be consulted before beginning any internal investigations.

**Organizational Response**

After the internal review of the red-flag or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations, determine if system changes are necessary, such as reviewing the need for:

- Increased supervision
- Revised policies or procedures

- Additional training

## Supervisor and Administrator Internal Review of Inappropriate Behavior or Policy Violations:

When a supervisor or an administrator receives a report of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from a staff member or volunteer, the supervisor is instructed to do the following:

### ***Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Response to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors and/or Policy Violations***

- Report to the next level of leadership and determine the appropriate ministerial authority to respond to the concern.
- Determine the appropriate response based on the report.
- Speak with the employee or volunteer who has been reported.
- Review the file of the employee or volunteer to determine if similar complaints were reported.
- Document the report on the appropriate form.
- If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the state authorities and file a report. Do not investigate the incident further. Share all documentation with authorities and preserve evidence.
- If appropriate, notify parents and/or guardians.
- Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- a. Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- b. Retraining of employee or volunteer on maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- c. If policy violations with youths are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and



prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Progressive Disciplinary Process outlined in this manual.

- d. If more information is needed, interview and/or survey other Clergy, employees, and volunteers or youths.

#### Organizational Response:

<b>Guidelines for Organizational Response</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review the need for increased supervision.</li><li>• Review the need for revised policies or procedures.</li><li>• Review the need for additional training.</li></ul>



## Procedure for Supervisor and Administrator Response to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse

As required by mandated reporting laws, employees and volunteers must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a (consumer)—whether on or off organization property or whether perpetrated by employees, volunteers, or others—to state authorities. The person with first-hand knowledge is the best person to report and, in some states, is the designated mandated reporter. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously.

A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability if the report was made in good faith and without malice. *\*Refer to state specific mandated reporting requirements for definitions of abuse, good faith reporting, and more specific reporting information about confidentiality or anonymity.* For a complete list of each state’s mandated reporting requirements and contact information, please see the *RAINN State Law Database* for reporting child abuse:

[RAINN | Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network](https://apps.rainn.org/policy/compare/children.cfm)

<https://apps.rainn.org/policy/compare/children.cfm>

#### Supervisor and Administrator Responsibilities:

Determine if the (consumer) is still in danger and if so, take immediate steps to prevent any further harm. Minor victims should not be interviewed. Statements made by victims may be documented to share with external authorities. There is no need to question a minor beyond the details needed to make a report.

If a report of allegations or incidents of abuse is received, supervisors and administrators should ensure the following:

### ***Guidelines for Supervisor and Administrators Responding to Allegations or Incidents of Abuse***

- If receiving a report from an employee or volunteer, verify they have followed mandated reporting requirements or will follow immediately after making an internal report. Be available to support the employee or volunteer making the report, including making calls to the appropriate authorities with them.
- If you were the one to witness the incident of abuse or hear the initial allegation, contact the appropriate local authorities as indicated by your mandatory reporting procedures. Document the case number and the name and contact information of the person with whom you speak at the reporting agency.
- Gather as much information about the allegation as you can. For example, who made the report, who was allegedly abused, who was the alleged abuser, what was the nature of the alleged abuse, where and when did the alleged abuse occur, etc.
  - *Please note: Minors should not be interviewed regarding the allegations.*
- Report to any applicable external licensing or governing bodies.
- Accurately record everything you learn in as much detail as you can. Remember your notes may be read by others. Stick to the facts.
- If the alleged abuse involves an employee or volunteer, notify your crisis management team, and follow your crisis management plan.
- Suspend the accused employee or volunteer until the investigation is completed.
- Ensure that the consumer's parents/guardians are notified (when applicable). The parents/guardians of the (consumer) should always be notified if abuse occurred from an employee or volunteer or another (consumer). If the abuse concern is about a parent/guardian, then it may not be appropriate to inform them that a report is being made.
- Provide resources for survivors, families, and other stakeholders.

# Supervisors and Administrators Response Youth-to-Youth:

*Please note: If your congregation serves other vulnerable populations, this procedure can be modified to fit those needs. Consideration should be made to applicable laws to protect vulnerable adults such as those with intellectual disabilities or the elderly.*

Regardless of the age of consent, sexual activity is never appropriate in the church setting. If a supervisor or administrator receives a report of a youth's sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity, the supervisor should do the following:

## **Guidelines for Supervisors and Administrators Responding to Youth-to-Youth Sexual Activity**

- Meet with the employee or volunteer who reported the sexual activity to gather additional information.
- Confirm that the consumers involved have been separated or placed under increased supervision.
- Notify the proper authorities, if appropriate.
- Review the incident report to confirm it is accurately and thoroughly completed.
- Meet with parents/guardians of the consumers involved (when applicable).
- Review the immediate steps taken by the employee or volunteer who initially responded.
- Determine what additional actions should be taken to ensure there is not a recurrence, including following the Consumer Progressive Discipline Policy.
- In some cases, consumer behavior can be managed through a safety or behavior management plan.
- Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident.
- If you are unsure if a crime occurred it is best to err on the side of reporting to authorities for their expertise.
- Develop a written corrective action or follow-up plan in response to the incident

### Organizational Response:

After the internal review of sexualized behavior or youth-to-youth sexual activity,

the congregation will determine what can be done to prevent a reoccurrence, such as:

#### **Guidelines for Organizational Response**

- Review the need for additional supervision.
- Assess the suitability of the program for the youth involved.
- Review the need for revised policies or procedures.
- Review the need for additional training.
- Provide additional consumer education on appropriate behavior and boundaries.
- Alert others in the organization with discretion to only those who need to know to provide supervision or support.

## **Organizational Responsibilities in Responding**

### **A. Responding to Victims**

In the event of cases of reportable abuse, the policy of [CHURCH NAME] is to be responsive to the needs of victims within the constraints or obligations imposed under insurance contracts. In general, we will attend to the immediate needs of victims by providing support and pastoral care.

*Insurance Board clients only:* An incident of alleged abuse that requires medical or psychological care for a victim or family shall be reported to the Insurance Board by the (Chair, Financial Committee). The latter shall discuss with the Insurance Board Claims Department whether the circumstances warrant initiation of Crisis Management services which may include psychological counseling. Upon approval, counseling services may be offered to a perceived victim(s)/survivor(s), which may include family members.

### **B. Notification of Parents**

A minor may be involved in an incident either as an initiator or as the victim. Whether a child is initiator or victim may not be clear in all circumstances, such as a child-on-child incident. A violation of policy does not necessarily create a victim. While notification of parents of such circumstances may be warranted, utmost care in communication is required.

While communicating with a parent, and **being mindful of the importance of timely communication**, care shall be given to assessing:

- Who is sharing this information with the parents such as the Pastor
- What facts can be shared with the parents. In the interest of an external investigation, parents can be referred to the investigator to protect the integrity of investigation. Care must be taken not to identify other children, as victims or initiators of an incident.
- Whether a discipline or termination process is required
- What safety plans will be put in place if appropriate
- Whether a child should be dismissed from a program (requiring notification of other parents/guardians)
- Whether “mandatory reporting” is a factor
- Who shall and in what manner communicate with the parents/guardian
- If other children are possibly affected or involved, how to communicate with others to determine if additional victims or witnesses exist. This step should be done in coordination with external authorities who are investigating.
- Whether the Pastor should be involved in the communication
- Tentative remedial steps to prevent a further incident
- Notification of parents shall not be delayed when immediate medical care is required

### c. Responding to Media

Media publicity following an incident of abuse or exploitation may be detrimental to the reputations of individuals, the congregation and [CHURCH NAME]. Without intending ever to evade the media, contacts with media must be managed and conducted only by a person specifically designated by the Board of Directors to represent the church. No other person(s) may speak on behalf of the church. Unless designated differently by the Board in a particular circumstance, the exclusive spokesperson for the church shall be the [Board Chair].

Prior to speaking to media, [Board Chair] shall contact and consult with (Region (DOC), Presbytery (PCUSA), Conference (UCC)) Legal Counsel, to obtain an understanding of appropriate statements or admissions and issues of privacy that may apply to the situation.

*Insurance Board clients only:* [Board Chair] shall give immediate consideration to securing Insurance Board media relations and crisis management resources.

Considering the speed of news cycles, a prompt determination is required, erring on the side of seeking help.

## Congregational Awareness

We are dedicated to a policy of open communication and education for the benefit of the children, parents, vulnerable adults and guardians in our congregation. They are entitled to know what to expect of our ministries, the Ministers who serve them, and to know the related policies and procedures created to protect the respective ministry constituencies. Constituencies include the children, the parents, the vulnerable adults, the guardians, and the Ministers.

This entire policy shall be posted on the [CHURCH NAME] website, [[www.yourchurch.org](http://www.yourchurch.org)].

At the time children or vulnerable adults are enrolled in [CHURCH NAME] programs, parents or legal guardians shall be provided:

- A copy of the [CHURCH NAME] Code of Conduct.
- A copy of the [CHURCH NAME] Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Manual.
- A summary of the content of the orientation to be provided to children and vulnerable adults regarding boundaries and reporting when your church has these programs.
- Information regarding the means to report violations of policy or suspicions of abuse.
- Information regarding their personal obligation to report suspected abuse as it may exist under the laws of the State of [YOUR STATE].
- An invitation to visit programs in progress at any time at their convenience.

Children and vulnerable adults shall be provided an orientation covering the following subjects:

- Age-appropriate information about boundaries (with reference to the Code of Conduct);
- How to protect themselves from abuse; and
- How to report boundary violations or incidents of abuse.

The orientation shall be provided:

- Individually at the time a child or “vulnerable adult” begins participation in a ministry of the church; or
- As a group at the opening of a school term, event or league; and
- Annually when a program, event or league is perpetual.

Parents and guardians shall be invited to receive the same “abuse prevention” training as provided to Ministers to be taken at their option.

Parents/guardians shall be encouraged to report violations of policy, boundaries or suspected abuse to the Director of the respective ministry at which an incident has occurred or the Director. Alternatively, they may report incidents to the Ombudsman. Anonymous reporting is permitted in the same manner and with the same precautions as reporting by Ministers or other observers.

If for any reason, parent/guardian believes that the primary contacts have failed to respond or have not given credibility to the parent’s/guardian’s concerns, the latter may contact the church **Ombudsman** to report those concerns.

SAMPLE