

Our Savior’s Lutheran Church

**ABUSE PREVENTION AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Approved April 2013

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Council approved this policy in July 2006-Subjected to annual review  
Annual Review #1 July 2007

Our Savior's Lutheran Church understands that abuse, of all forms, are present in our nation, society, community, and our church. We understand that abuse has no race, economic, social, gender, or spiritual boundaries. Regrettably, a common theme throughout these situations has been the absence of the church in a supporting role for the victim and others who may be silently ignoring the abusive act. Our congregation recognizes that abuse occurs in our church families and extended families. This has been acknowledged by our resolution to keep our congregation safe. Our Savior's Lutheran Church believes it is imperative to institute a policy on abuse prevention and healing in the church.

The intent of this policy is to help reduce the risk of abuse and to help ensure intervention if it does occur within the church setting and among church family members. We are sad that this sin exists and recognize that our policy could possibly increase our responsibilities toward fellow church members. However, we believe that these principles serve the greater good of the church.

It is important to note that in some cases pastors are required to report to the proper governmental authorities cases alleging abuse. Persons entering into a counseling relationship with the pastors are made aware of this. Also, pastors understand that the church council requires this reporting. A biblical and theological perspective follows this introduction on abuse, definitions of important terms, standards for appropriate and inappropriate conduct, and possible indicators of abuse. Next follows the overall policy for abuse prevention and guidelines for the specific programs. Finally, forms are attached that all who serve our children and youth in any way must complete.

### **A. Occurrence of Abuse in Churches**

Within recent years it has been dramatically shown that abuse occurs in churches. Unfortunately, the risk of abuse occurring in churches has increased as other institutions that are responsible for children have taken steps to protect the children. Potential abusers being denied access to children in other places, find opportunity and trusting environments in churches.

## II. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

"The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord ..."

Isaiah 11:8 - 9

The kingdom of God is described in a variety of ways throughout the Bible, perhaps none so picturesquely and with so much vivid imagery as in the book of Isaiah, chapter 11. It's a beautiful and harmonious scene, culminating in the quotation above. This passage describes not only relationships within the whole of God's creation, but also human relationships.

The fall of the human race into sin destroyed God's original design and intent for this world and especially for our relationships. While it is true that sin in general affects the whole of human life, few sins tear at the fabric of relationships with as much human misery and pain as the sin of abuse. Abuse distorts the image of God, devalues human beings created in his image, and devastates its victims.

The biblical record realistically portrays the presence and results of abuse among the people of God (see, for example, the story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13). Studies and statistics today indicate an incidence of abuse within the church equal to that in the general population. Where such abuse is perpetrated by spiritual leaders within a congregation, there is not only a terrible perversion of power, but enormous spiritual damage results.

Yet, the Bible's message is not one of despair, but of hope! In Christ God's world is restored, and God's kingdom comes. In his life on earth Christ was the embodiment of righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation, and love. Through his death, he redeemed his church; by his Word and Spirit, he calls and equips us to model his kingdom until it comes in all its completion and glory.

The church is responsible for becoming a safe community that confronts sin, particularly the sin of abuse. The church seeks to bring healing to its victims and help to its perpetrators. It must consciously work for the prevention of all abuse.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church also seeks to encourage perpetrators to seek appropriate help. The church council will "help the congregation to publicly acknowledge that the sin of abuse exists among us; to support efforts that such abuse be addressed promptly so that abused and abusers may experience the healing power of God's grace; and to take positive steps to make OSLC a safe place for all persons." The church and each individual can become a "colony" of the kingdom where "they will neither harm nor destroy on all [God's] holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9), where every tear is wiped away (Isaiah 25:8), and where there is peace.

### III. DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT TERMS

- A. Adult: a person at least 18 years of age.
- B. Child or Youth: a person under 18 years of age.
- C. Child abuse: harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare which occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual molestation, sexual exploitation, prostitution, disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying pornographic material to children.
- D. Verbal/emotional abuse: degrading verbal statements, teasing, bullying, intimidating, posturing and any other unwanted and threatening verbal and non-verbal behaviors.
- E. Physical abuse: hitting, biting, scratching, bullying and any other unwanted touch or body contact.
- F. Sexual abuse: engaging in any sexual contact with a child, voluntary or involuntary; the sexual exploitation or molestation of any person, and/or disseminating, exhibiting or displaying pornographic materials regardless of whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the other person. Sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. It includes sexual behaviors involving touching, such as fondling, as well as penetration, intercourse and rape. It also includes sexual behavior that does not include touching, such as sexually suggestive comments, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, displaying pornographic materials, and allowing children to witness sexual activity.
- G. Staff member: any person serving at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in a paid or internship capacity.
- H. Volunteer program leaders: persons giving leadership in any of Our Savior's Lutheran Church ministries including but not limited to nursery helpers, Youth Club and Children's Ministry leaders/helpers, Sunday School teachers, counselors, youth group leaders, chaperones, council members and transportation providers.

#### **IV. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

##### **A. Prohibited Conduct**

To attempt the goal of preventing any forms of abuse or the potential of false allegations of abuse prohibited conduct must be defined. No persons including staff members, guests, volunteer program leaders or any church members, whether paid or volunteer, shall engage in any of the following whether consensual or non-consensual:

1. abuse of any kind, including sexual abuse;
2. sexual exploitation or molestation;
3. disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying pornographic material;
4. hitting, kicking, slapping or shoving;
5. selling, giving, or furnishing any child with any tobacco substance, alcohol, or controlled drug;
6. swear or use obscene, foul, or sexually explicit language;
7. demonstrate any romantic or sexual interest in a child;
8. remove any clothing from another person, except when appropriately required under necessary circumstances;
9. wear anything but appropriate attire in the presence of others, especially children;
10. kiss any child or non-family member on the lips or in an intimate area;
11. extended or inappropriate hugging or embracing;
12. sleep in the same bed or bedding with any child;
13. remain in any building, room, motor vehicle or private place with a child except as permitted in this policy;
14. assist any child in the rest room except as permitted in this policy;
15. denying anyone, who is not a threat to a child, access into a room, vehicle, or other place in which you are present with a child.
16. telling any jokes of a sexual nature.

##### **B. Permitted conduct**

It is quite natural, appropriate and desirable for Christians to express and share their love and affection for each other and Christ. This sharing is essential for healthy emotional and spiritual well-being of individuals, and for the growth and development of a loving and caring Christian community such as Our Savior's Lutheran Church. This sharing of love is especially important to children for their normal, healthy, and happy growth and development. The expressing and sharing of one's Christian love to a child or another adult member shall not be considered abuse or be in any way prohibited, restricted or limited by this policy. The following conduct by any person, be it a staff member, volunteer program leader or any other church member, whether paid or volunteer, shall be considered to be an expression of this Christian love:

1. verbally expressing one's Christian love and affection to another;
2. appropriately holding and comforting another person;
3. occasionally and appropriately hugging or embracing another person, especially when initiated by the other;
4. sharing emotional and spiritual concerns with another person;
5. providing necessary medical care and attention to another person with appropriate consent;
6. encouraging another member to appropriately express and share their Christian love.

### C. Guidelines for Private Conversations

The opportunity for a church member, whether child or adult, to share confidentially his or her private and personal concerns with another member can contribute significantly to his or her spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Indeed, this may be the only time when a person may be willing to disclose any abuse he or she may be suffering. Such private and confidential conversations are an integral part of a caring and loving Christian community.

On the other hand, such private conversations could create a risk environment for potential abuse situations to arise. They can create an ideal opportunity for: (1) abuse to occur, (2) a false appearance that abuse may be occurring, and (3) a false, but difficult to refute, allegation that an incident of abuse did occur.

Thus, there is a tension between two valuable objectives designed to reach a common ministry goal. A proper balance is difficult to achieve with any set of policies or guidelines, especially given the variety of circumstances and relationships that may exist.

Therefore, before engaging in a private conversation with another member, whether child or adult, every staff member, volunteer program leader or other member engaged in ministry should weigh and balance the following considerations:

1. Location. Private conversations can be conducted more safely in public and populated locations. If possible, all conversations should be conducted in a public place, easily accessible to others.
2. Necessity. If the conversation does not involve confidential matters, but is generally "small talk," it is not necessary to be alone in a private location.
3. Relationship. Be sure you have a good, healthy relationship with the other person. Private conversations and meetings should be avoided if any romantic interests start to develop.
4. Gender issues. Private meetings and conversations with members of the opposite sex are more prone to abuse and the appearance of impropriety.
5. Frequency. Frequent private conversations can create difficulties in a child's healthy development or lead to dangerous relationship dynamics among adults.
6. Personal ability. If a person's spiritual or emotional needs are significant, the listener should refer him or her to the pastor or to a professional counselor. Don't overestimate your own counseling abilities.
7. Reliability. Consider the emotional stability and maturity of the individual. If lacking, private meetings with that person may be dangerous because such individuals may create the highest risk of false accusations.
8. Appearance. Maintain an appropriate appearance at all times. Remember, words and conduct that you may consider to be appropriate at the time can subsequently be made to appear very inappropriate or sinister.
9. Substance of conversation. The substance of the conversation should be appropriate at all times.
10. Touching. Although hugging another person in a public location when several others are present may be appropriate, physical contact in a private, isolated location creates a very high risk of being misconstrued and should be avoided.
11. Safeguard. As an extra precaution, consider keeping records of all private meetings, and let some other adult besides his or her spouse know that the conversations are occurring, as well as the reasons for the conversations.

#### **D. Discipline Guidelines**

The primary means of discipline is the development of a healthy and respectful relationship between the adults leading the program and the children or young people involved. Therefore, adults should do all they can to foster respect and care in their program. As well, those adults should engage in praying regularly for the youth in their program, and treat the youth as they would like to be treated. But there are times when the usual methods of maintaining order appropriate to the setting fail. If this is the case, then the following procedure should be used:

1. Under no circumstances shall any of the prohibited conduct in section IV. A. be used as a means of discipline.
2. A misbehaving child should not be restrained unless he or she is about to harm another person in the program.
3. If someone is disrupting a program, he or she should be warned verbally. If he or she has to be warned a second time during the session of the program, the teacher/leader should speak to the youth one-on-one when that session is finished.
4. If the youth persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, the teacher/leader should contact the parents/guardians. If appropriate, the parent/guardian should stay with the youth in class for at least one period.
5. The child and the parent will be told of the possibility of being forbidden to attend the program.
6. If the youth persists in being disruptive in succeeding weeks, he or she shall be forbidden to attend the program until after he or she, his or her parents (or guardians), and the pastor have met to work through the problem. As part of that meeting a written contract for appropriate behavior and consequences for misbehavior shall be drawn up and signed by the youth and his/her parents/guardians.
7. If the youth violates the contract, consequences for violation shall be enacted including expulsion from the program for the year.

#### **E. Services offered at OSLC - Nursery**

1. Guidelines for a Safe Nursery-
  - a. Lead Pastor will establish a staff person in charge.
  - b. Follow directives outlined in our congregation's Child Protection Policy such as screening everyone who has access to the children and youth in your church.
2. Good Communication with Parents
  - a. Have a check-in system for parents, which includes having them fill out information cards on their children.
  - b. Keep up-to-date information on all children.
  - c. Ask parents to label their child's diaper bag, bottle, spare clothing, toys, etc.

#### **F. Guidelines for Programs**

All necessary precautions should be taken to reduce the risk of abuse to our children. The responsibility of the Children Youth & Family Pastor will be to monitor the programs and suggest and encourage the programs to make changes where there exists possible risk of our children. If the program disagrees with the pastor's recommendations a meeting will be called with the program chair/ reps, the Lead Pastor, a member of the council and a rep/ reps from the Youth Ministry Team. The Lead Pastor will lead the meeting. The parties will discuss the differences and come to an amiable agreement before the program continues with their ministry. There will be a follow-up meeting/discussion following the program ministry to evaluate the decision that was made.

**V. RECOGNIZING ABUSE**

The following lists include general characteristics of abused children. Any one indicator does not necessarily mean that abuse has occurred. They may also indicate stress or anxiety in a young child. However, if a number of indicators are present, it is wise to consider the possibility of abuse. Some characteristics may occur in more than one category. (E.g. speech problems, self-injury, rocking, etc.)

**Possible Indicators of Physical Abuse**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unexplained bruises or welts (bruises in various stages of healing). Unexplained burns (cigarette, etc.).</li> <li>2. Unexplained broken bones.</li> <li>3. Unexplained cuts or scrapes.</li> <li>4. Unexplained stomach injuries.</li> <li>5. Unbelievable explanations of injuries or claiming no knowledge of the source of injury.</li> <li>6. Exhibits habit disorders (sucking, biting, eating disorders).</li> <li>7. Fears adults; shrinks away from touch. Afraid to go home.</li> <li>8. Bald spots and scalp bruises (caused by hair pulling).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Human bite marks.</li> <li>10. Fears parent(s) or caregiver(s).</li> <li>11. Different colors, old and new scars together.</li> <li>12. Overly aggressive or withdrawn.</li> <li>13. Seeks more than average amounts of affection from other adults.</li> <li>14. Lags in emotional and intellectual development.</li> <li>15. Self mutilation (cutting, scratching, burning, head banging).</li> </ol>
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**Possible Indicators of Neglect**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Under-fed or constantly hungry.</li> <li>2. Constantly unclean/poor hygiene.</li> <li>3. Unattended medical needs.</li> <li>4. Growth rate below normal.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Begging or stealing food.</li> <li>6. Lack of supervision.</li> <li>7. Constantly fatigued or listless.</li> </ol>
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**Possible Indicators of Emotional Abuse/Neglect**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Significantly withdrawn.</li> <li>2. Slow mental or emotional growth.</li> <li>3. Anti-social or destructive behavior.</li> <li>4. Dramatic emotional swings.</li> <li>5. Low self-esteem.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Slow physical growth.</li> <li>7. Habit of sucking, biting, or rocking.</li> <li>8. Long-term depression.</li> <li>9. Loss of appetite.</li> <li>10. Speech problems.</li> </ol>
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**Possible Indicators of Sexual Abuse**

1. Difficulty in walking or sitting.	8. Pain or itching around private parts.
2. Unusual knowledge of or interest in private parts.	9. Stomachaches.
3. Bed-wetting.	10. Sleep problems.
4. Depression or withdrawn behavior.	11. Sudden behavior changes.
5. Poor relationships with other children.	12. Reluctance to go to the bathroom.
6. Acting out adult sexual behaviors.	13. Anxiety, irritability, constant inattentiveness.
7. Indirect hints that allude to problems.	

**A. Procedure for Helping Children, Youth, and Adults when Abuse is Suspected**

1. When you first notice or suspect abuse and/or when the individual first comes to you, be sure to take the person seriously. Don't deny the problem. Stay calm, and listen to the claim. Remind the person that he or she is not at fault and that they were right in telling you about the problem. Do not promise that you will not tell anyone!
2. Immediately report such a case to one of the pastors, president, or vice-president of the council. A determination will be made as to whether more information is needed or whether Child Protective Services or law enforcement officials will be contacted. If a report is required you can remain anonymous
3. After reporting, respect the individual's privacy by keeping the information confidential.

**VI. ABUSE PREVENTION GUIDELINES**

A. Children and other members of the congregation will be encouraged to report abuse or inappropriate behavior to any adult in the congregation whom they trust. Adults will be trained to pass on the report to one the pastors, council president or council vice-president. These designated leaders will be introduced to the children and the congregation.

**VII. ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES**

A. The office bearers, leaders, teachers, and anyone in a position representing Our Savior's Lutheran Church are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the pastors, president or to the vice-president of the council. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse but only to report it to one of the pastors or to the president or vice-president of the council. Application of Child Abuse Reporting Laws to Ministers and Lay Church Workers for Minnesota

statute	what is reportable "abuse"	mandatory reporters	where to report	clergy privilege
Stats. §§ 626.556 et seq. (2001)	(1) sexual abuse by "a person who has a significant relationship to the child" (various relatives), a "person in a position of authority" (any person who is a parent or acting in the place of a parent, or a person who is charged with responsibility for the health, welfare, or supervision of a child, no matter how brief); (2) physical abuse by "a person responsible for the child's care" (an individual functioning within the family unit and having responsibilities for the care of the child such as a parent, guardian, or other person having similar care responsibilities, or an individual functioning outside the family unit and having responsibilities for the care of the child such as a teacher, school administrator, or other lawful custodian of a child having either full-time or short-term care responsibilities including, but not limited to, day care, babysitting whether paid or unpaid, counseling, teaching, and coaching) [626.556].	a person who knows or has reason to believe a child is being abused, or has been abused within the preceding three years, and who is  (1) a professional who is engaged in the practice of the healing arts, social services, psychological or psychiatric treatment, child care, education, or (2) "employed as a member of the clergy and received the information while engaged in ministerial duties, provided that a member of the clergy is not required by this subdivision to report information that is otherwise privileged"	the local welfare agency, police department, or the county sheriff	"a member of the clergy is not required...to report information that is otherwise privileged" [626.556]

Any allegation of abuse will be taken seriously. When a report is made, the appropriate action will depend on the ages of those involved and the circumstances of the particular case. If an initial assessment by the pastor, president or vice-president of the council gives reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred Child Protection Service (if a minor) and/or local police will be notified. The pastor, president, and vice president of the council will follow the operating procedures and protocol of the Child Protection Services.

If necessary/appropriate, other people directly involved will be notified. The allegation of abuse will remain within the confidence of these parties.

## Our Savior's Abuse Prevention & Child Protection Policy

The pastors and council president will maintain records of reported allegations of abuse, which must be kept, secure and confidential. When the pastors and/or council president leaves Our Saviors' Lutheran Church, he/she shall turn over pertinent records to his/her successor.

B. If the initial assessment gives reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, then the alleged abuser will be suspended from serving in the congregation for the protection of all parties. If the alleged abuser is the pastor, he/she will be suspended according to ELCA rules without prejudice pending a hearing. If the alleged abuser is another staff member, office bearer, or a volunteer program leader, he or she will be suspended from the church position without prejudice pending a hearing.

C. The church will cooperate with any investigation done by Child Protective Services or local police. In the event that criminal charges are dropped or prosecution does not result in conviction, the council must decide whether or not the church leader is to be restored to his/her previous position or duty. Conviction or lack of it is not the only criterion the church uses to discern ungodly conduct. An alleged abuser is not reinstated to a previous position of leadership until the council, in consultation with the police/child-protection authorities, legal counsel, and child abuse experts, deems it safe and proper to do so.

When appropriate, those who made false allegations may be held legally and ecclesiastically responsible for their actions.

D. If abuse is judged to have occurred, the congregation will be notified by announcement and by letter explaining the allegation and/or the reason for suspension and what steps have been taken. All adult members of the congregation should receive the same explanatory information in accordance with data privacy and confidentiality requirements. The information should be disseminated with discretion and sensitivity when an allegation of abuse becomes public knowledge outside of the church, the lead pastor or council president are the designees to interact with the media.

E. All staff and volunteers working with children and youth ministry will be strongly encouraged to attend a training meeting which will include a presentation about our abuse policy and how to recognize signs of abuse and inappropriate behavior. At this time, they shall sign and turn in the Code of Ethics and a release for a background check. The training and background checks should be completed for each staff/volunteer every three years. All staff/volunteers will complete the Code of Ethics on an annual basis.

F. The procedure for entry into children's and youth ministry at OSLC is as follows:

1. Volunteers for higher risk positions such as those engaged in overnight activities with youth or largely unsupervised activities involving children or youth may be interviewed by one of the pastors and the appropriate leader and references may be checked.
2. Volunteers whose interest raises concerns will be interviewed by a staff member and the appropriate program leader and references will be checked.
3. All forms will be kept confidential and in a secure area. For further accountability, they shall also be available to the president or vice-president of council.
4. Concerns about interpretation of this policy shall be discussed with the council.

G. All youth 6<sup>th</sup> grade and older will be informed annually of these policies as is fitting to their age and understanding. This will be done through their programs and will include information on how to protect themselves from abuse and who they can consult for help. Program leaders will be required to keep attendance records of these meetings.

## Our Savior's Abuse Prevention & Child Protection Policy

H. All parents/guardians will be notified each fall regarding our abuse policies and are invited to the classes where children are informed about these policies. All newcomer classes will also outline our abuse prevention policy for those interested in joining our congregation.

I. The council will ensure that there is a triennial review of all abuse policies and procedures.

**Appendix – Forms**

**CODE OF ETHICS FOR VOLUNTEERS, STAFF AND LEADERS  
IN CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAMS**

As part of the promise made at baptism to love, pray for, encourage, instruct, and sustain the children at OSLC, I will help fulfill that vow by being faithful in my commitment to the children/youth, to who I am responsible. Believing that God is calling me to serve children or youth in this congregation . . .

1. My first priority in teaching/supervising/leading children or youth will be to seek the welfare of the children/youth physically, socially, educationally, and spiritually.
2. I will try to understand and respect the child's/youth's cultural background.
3. I will give the parents/guardians full information about the program I am teaching in/supervising/leading, and what time it begins and ends.
4. I will arrive on time and be prepared for the activities to which I have committed. If I am not able to be present, I will find my own replacement/substitute from the approved list.
5. I have read Our Savior's Lutheran Church's Child Protection and Abuse Prevention Policy. I understand it, and I will live by it in my participation in Our Savior's Lutheran Church children's/youth programs.
6. I will try to protect the child/youth from all forms of abuse while he or she is in my care.
7. If I suspect that a child/youth may be hurt by the abusive behaviors of another person, I will report that suspicion to one of the pastors, or to the president or vice-president of the council so that it can be investigated properly.
8. I will answer a child's/youth's questions openly and honestly.
9. I will work with the children/youth to set some agreed-upon guidelines for acceptable behavior within the group. I will expect the children/youth to act on the basis of those guidelines. If a child/youth consistently breaks them, I will seek help from parents/guardians and others to assist me in responding to the child/youth.
10. If a child is distressed, I will try to offer comfort and help. I will encourage them to find the appropriate help for their needs.
11. I will pray for each child/youth regularly and let them know that I care about them.

Signature of Volunteer/Staff/Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_