

Child Safety Policy

Covenant Reformed Church

Sacramento, CA

A Congregation of the Reformed Church in the United States

Covenant Reformed Church of Sacramento (CRCS) takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our young people. This policy applies to church staff and youth workers, providing guidelines for promoting a safe environment in the nursery, Sunday school classes, and youth groups, both in the church building and during church-related activities regardless of location. We also encourage parents to educate their children about child safety and how to respond to anything that may seem inappropriate. Thankfully, most interactions between adults in the church and children are good and proper. We expect all adults to be examples of wisdom, maturity, humility, kindness and Christian love, not underestimating how the Lord uses them in the lives of covenant children.

Definitions

- **Children and Youth** — People under the age of 18, including the children of members, friends and visitors of Covenant Reformed Church. In this document, the terms *child[ren]* and *youth* are used interchangeably.
- **Adult** — A person age 18 or older.
- **Youth Worker** — Any person, paid or volunteer, who works with children as church officers (pastor, elders or deacons), Sunday school teachers and helpers, VBS teachers and helpers, youth group leaders and helpers, nursery attendants, or in any other role as part of CRCS's activities (for example, camp counselors, kitchen staff and chaperones for youth activities).
- **Child Abuse** — Neglect of a child and/or physical, verbal, or sexual abuse of a child.
- **Child Sexual Abuse** — “Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child. This includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants, and all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of resisting. Sexually abusive acts may include sexual penetration, sexual touching, or non-contact sexual acts such as exposure or voyeurism” (US Department of Health and Human Services). Child sexual abuse also includes any conduct constituting sexual abuse under California law.
- **Mandated Reporter** — California Penal Code 11165.7 defines who are mandated reporters in California. CRCS regards all adult youth workers as mandated reporters.
- **Director of Child Safety** — A person appointed by the Spiritual Council to implement this policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all CRCS youth workers in their interactions with CRCS youth as part of CRCS's ministry and activities, regardless of the location of the interaction. It does not apply to interactions

that take place outside CRCS's ministry and activities, including (but not limited to) play dates, get-togethers, parties, etc. Such activities are the responsibility of parents to arrange and supervise.

To assure that youth workers are above reproach, adult youth workers must secure the approval of parents *before* providing purely social interactions (i.e., interactions not considered a part of CRCS's ministry or activities) for their children and their children's friends. It is the youth worker's responsibility to secure this permission, not the youth's. Transparent and safe relationships between youth workers and CRCS youth are critical for keeping our children safe.

Qualifications of Youth Workers

Every youth worker must be a communicant member of Covenant Reformed Church for at least one year or satisfy one of the following criteria before his or her service begins:

- Be a communicant member of another congregation of the Reformed Church in the United States or a church in a fraternal relationship with the RCUS for at least one year. His or her pastor and/or elders must provide a written affirmation of the same to the Spiritual Council.
- Serve as a youth worker with an approved Reformed parachurch ministry that has adopted a child safety policy in accordance with California law. The overseeing ministry must provide the Spiritual Council a copy of its child safety policy and a record of each volunteer's background checks and training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting.

In exceptional circumstances, exemptions from this requirement may be granted by the Spiritual Council for CRCS members under 18, individuals who have been members of CRCS for less than a year or individuals who are well known to the congregation.

Requirements of Youth Workers

All youth workers, including those who have been granted exemptions from the qualifications listed above, must satisfy the following requirements:

- Read this Child Safety Policy document and sign the attached Youth Worker Acknowledgement.
- Provide a complete and accurate Volunteer Application to the Spiritual Council. Upon approval, the Spiritual Council will note its approval in its minutes and provide the applicant with a written letter of approval to work with children.
- Complete training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting that satisfies all the requirements prescribed by California law. The Consistory will choose a suitable program that also incorporates all additional training required by this document and complies with accepted standards of care (i.e., what a reasonable person would do to foresee and prevent child abuse and neglect). This training must be repeated every two years.
- Undergo a criminal background check to identify and exclude persons with a history of child abuse from serving as youth workers. This background check will include, at minimum, a fingerprint background check through the California Department of Justice, a check of the National Sex Offender Registry, and a check of a multi-jurisdictional database. At its discretion, the Spiritual Council may require a criminal background check on individuals who occasionally help with children but are not regular volunteer youth workers. Criminal background checks must be repeated every two years.

CRCS, in accordance with California law, requires training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting and passing criminal background checks only for administrators, employees, mandated reporters and regular volunteers. A "regular volunteer" is someone who is 18 years of age

or older and who has direct contact with, or supervision of, children six or more times per year or, according to California law, “more than 16 hours per month or 32 hours per year.”

CRCS will cover the cost of both background checks and training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting for CRCS's youth workers.

No person whose background check reveals a history of child abuse or neglect, or about whom the Spiritual Council knows of an offense of this kind (whether it appears in a background check or not), shall be permitted to serve as a youth worker. While we recognize that God can and does forgive those who truly repent of such sins, we also acknowledge that parents must be confident that their children are as safe as possible.

Guidelines on Interaction between Youth Workers and Youth

- **Individual Counseling** — CRCS has a strict policy regarding officers (pastors, elders and deacons) formally counseling children not their own. No officer is to be alone with a child during counseling. If counseling takes place on church property, the door must remain open and a parent or adult church member (delegated by the Spiritual Council) must be present at all times. In the pastor's home study, the door to his study must be left open and his wife must be present. Should a child need private teaching or counseling from another youth worker, the same guidelines must be followed. In the latter case, the Spiritual Council should be notified before the counseling takes place, if possible.
- **Ratios of Youth Workers to Children** — California law requires that, to the greatest extent possible, two mandated reporters be present for all ministries and activities involving children. Youth workers should avoid being alone with children (other than their own children and other blood relatives such as nieces, nephews, and grandchildren). When this is not possible, the youth worker and the child (or children) must be in an open space where other adults may freely observe them, and not behind non-transparent closed doors. A youth group of mixed teens (boys and girls) should have at least two male and two female youth workers.
- **Bathroom Use** — No adult other than a child's parent or guardian or a person designated by them shall take a child to the bathroom alone. If a child is potty training, an adult should ensure the bathroom is safe before allowing the child to enter it and encourage the child to go on his or her own.
- **Nursery** — The nursery must be staffed with at least one, preferably two, adult youth workers whenever nursery services are offered. Women should change diapers, although a father may change his own child's diaper. Diapers should be changed quickly to respect the privacy of the child and only in a nursery or a restroom.
- **Physical and Verbal Contact** — It is unrealistic to think that there will be no physical contact between youth workers and children. Thus, Christian wisdom, maturity and discernment must be used when working with different groups of children, i.e., the nursery, older children in Sunday school classes, and youth groups. For example, a quick public hug may be appropriate for older youth, but not a lengthy embrace or a hug in private. Hugging is also inappropriate whenever it is unwelcome, too frequent or too prolonged, or of a romantic or sexual nature. Excessive displays of affection by young children toward youth workers should be firmly but gently discouraged. Youth workers should always be on the lookout for, and report to a church officer, any inappropriate sexual behavior of children toward other children.

Appropriate Behavior: Pats on the back or shoulder and occasional public hugs, if the circumstances warrant.

Inappropriate/harmful Behavior: Patting the buttocks, touching the chest or genital areas, kissing on the mouth, lengthy embraces, inappropriate communications (including email, text, social media), sharing sexually suggestive materials (photos/images, books, magazines, cards, videos, films, internet materials, etc.), allowing or encouraging children to engage in sexually suggestive activities, and corporal punishment by anyone other than the parents or guardians of a child in need of discipline.

Appropriate Verbal Communication: Instruction, praise and positive reinforcement for exemplary work and behavior, and correction when needed.

Inappropriate Verbal Communication: Sexually provocative or degrading comments, risqué jokes, opinions regarding a child's physique or physical development, and profane language.

- **Overnights and Mission Trips** — Adequate supervision is essential. Overnights with only one adult are not permitted under any circumstances. Supervision should include the youth workers who normally minister to the group and approved chaperones, if needed. Normally, overnights should take place at neutral locations such as the church building, retreat locations, mission trips, etc. Overnights in a youth worker's home are not permitted without the prior written permission of the Spiritual Council. The Spiritual Council must also approve a plan of transportation and supervision before arranging overnights and/or mission trips.

Transportation — Discretion must be used in transporting children to and from youth meetings and events. Ideally, parents should provide transportation for their own children. A youth worker should not be alone with a child (other than his/her own) in his or her vehicle without prior parental permission.

Sleeping Arrangements — There must also be separate sleeping quarters for male and female participants. Youth workers must not share beds with children (except their own) and should avoid sharing sleeping quarters with children unless another adult is present in those quarters.

Responsibilities

All members of Covenant Reformed Church share the responsibility for the safety and welfare of our children. Besides a general responsibility, the following specific responsibilities are noted:

- **Pastors** — Pastors are the only full-time paid staff at Covenant Reformed Church; therefore, it is their responsibility to oversee all matters concerning child safety and child abuse in the church. Pastors should seek counsel from the Spiritual Council in these matters. They and the elders are the only ones who may speak for the church to the media about these issues. In addition, pastors will bear the primary responsibility for reporting suspicions of child abuse to Child Protective Services (CPS) or to another law enforcement agency in accordance with California law.
- **The Spiritual Council** — The Spiritual Council must inform the congregation of the church's policy and ensure that it is enforced. This policy will also be posted on the church's website. All amendments to this policy must first be approved by the Spiritual Council before being voted on by the Consistory.
- **The Consistory** — The Deacons, under the oversight of the Consistory, will ensure that the church building and its grounds are safe and secure.
- **The Director of Child Safety** — The Director of Child Safety shall facilitate the application process of youth workers, making sure that applicants are aware of all the requirements of this policy and follow through with them. The Director will also maintain all records in a secure

location at the church or online, including Acknowledgements of CRCS's Child Safety Policy, Volunteer Applications, copies of the Spiritual Council's letters of approval, training records and the results of background checks. It is also the responsibility of the Director of Child Safety to ensure that all CRCS youth workers are current in regard to background checks and training in child abuse and neglect identification and reporting.

- **Youth Workers** — Youth workers must refrain from every form of child abuse. Youth workers must familiarize themselves with this policy and submit to it without reservation. Youth workers must complete all training sessions required by the Consistory and/or Spiritual Council. Youth workers are also responsible for reporting any concerns regarding child abuse under the reporting procedure of this policy.
- **Parents** — Parents should talk to their children regularly about child safety in an age-appropriate manner. Parents should also be informed about and involved in friendships that their children have with youth workers. While at church, parents should know where their children are at all times, provide necessary and appropriate supervision, and remind them of basic safety considerations, especially during fellowship time before and after each Lord's Day service. Children should not be in unauthorized areas of the building, such as the furnace room, kitchen, church office, and pulpit area, without adult supervision. Unsupervised children playing outside of the building are not safe and are at risk of being struck by a car or wandering off church grounds.

Reporting and Investigating Alleged Child Abuse

If any youth worker or other adult member of CRCS reasonably believes that a child has been or is being abused on the church property, or elsewhere in connection with church-related activities, they should immediately report the matter to the pastor or an elder. If an allegation of abuse is made against a pastor or an elder, the report should be made to another elder currently serving on the Spiritual Council.

Timeliness in these matters is very important. Reports of child abuse, which may be given verbally or in writing, should be made as soon as possible.

All reports made under this policy will be taken seriously. Confidentiality will be maintained to the greatest extent possible consistent with a thorough investigation.

- **Reports to Civil Authorities** — All allegations of child abuse must be reported to CPS or other civil authorities, which will determine whether and to what extent they will investigate and file criminal charges. The Spiritual Council and all members of CRCS will fully cooperate with these investigations and any prosecutions that may arise from them.
- **Internal Investigations** — An internal investigation will also begin as soon as a report of child abuse has been received by the pastor/elders. All internal investigations will be conducted by the Spiritual Council, except as noted in the first paragraph of this section. The purpose of these investigations is not to determine whether a federal, state or local crime has been committed but to determine whether a violation of this policy is more likely than not to have occurred. If a violation has occurred, the Spiritual Council will determine appropriate remedial action, which may include, but not be limited to:
 - Counseling, training, warning, and/or exclusion from activities with children.
 - Church discipline, which must be exercised in accordance with Scripture and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in the United States. CRCS may exercise church discipline regardless of any conclusions reached by civil authorities.

Persons being investigated by the civil authorities and/or by the Spiritual Council will be excluded from working with youth and other applicable positions until all investigations have concluded. The Spiritual Council may also exclude them from continued church attendance during investigations. However, these precautionary measures should not be interpreted as a presumption of wrongdoing. When necessary, the Spiritual Council may seek legal counsel for assistance in investigating and responding to reports made under this policy.

Failure to Comply

Any youth worker who fails to comply with this policy or the reporting procedure outlined above will be subject to disciplinary action, including removal from CRCS activities with children and church discipline.

Allegations of non-compliance must be reported to the pastor or an elder.

No Retaliation

CRCS encourages members to report any violations of this policy to the Spiritual Council. We will not tolerate retaliation against persons who do so or cooperate in subsequent investigations. Any youth worker who believes he or she has experienced retaliation in violation of this policy should report the matter to the pastor or an elder.

Adopted by the Consistory on December 6, 2023.