

**Congregational Christian Fellowship Church of Spruce Grove**

**ABUSE PREVENTION  
POLICY**

**Revised Edition April 2005  
To be revised, reviewed, and approved**

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## Why does our church need this plan and how did the plan come to be?

"It could never happen here..."

But 11,781 children were abused in Alberta in the 1995/1996 fiscal years. Over 1300 of the cases were emotional abuse, over 100 were cases of/or risk of sexual abuse and over 200 were cases of/or risk of physical abuse. So abuse can happen in our church.

(OPFV, Child Abuse Fact Sheet, p2).

The primary function of this plan is to aid in the protection of the children of Christian Fellowship Church from the possibility of sexual abuse or other forms of abuse from happening within our church or within our gatherings. This is our primary concern.

We recognize this plan has two other functions as well. One being the protection of church ministry volunteers and staff from allegations of abuse. "Each time a congregation adopts a specific policy or procedure, it says to its staff, "You are so important to this congregation for the work you do that we do not want you to put yourself in jeopardy of losing that position." (Swagman, 1997, p9) The second being the protection of the church and its members from fiscal responsibility should a lawsuit happen. While these are all important concerns, the main purpose of this document is the protection of children who enter our midst.

This plan has taken two years to be formulated with many meetings and much assistance from other churches and organizations. Thank-you to the many people and organizations that have provided us with documents, advice and assistance. We would like to especially recognize and thank:

- The National and Ministry Alliance in Canada National Church Education Committee for their abuse prevention plan. Plan to Protect: A protection plan for Children, A protection plan for churches.
- Laurier Heights Baptist Church for their advice and plan.
- The Church Law and Tax Report publication. Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church.
- Beth Swagman's book Preventing Child Abuse.
- The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence for their extensive information on the topic of abuse, and
- Southside Assembly for organizing the conference that got us started.

These sources have been invaluable to us, as we have created this plan.

Thank-you also to all members of the committee past, present and future who have worked and will work so diligently on creating and implementing this plan. Your work has helped make the lives of the children in our congregation a little bit safer.

Because children matter,

Jennifer Lock

## **General Child Care Procedures**

The following procedures form the core of this program.

### ***A. Education of Staff, Volunteers and Children***

Every year new workers or supervisors should receive in house training as part of their orientation on child abuse and the relevant church policies for preventing and dealing with possible abuse. Educational resources (videos, books, pamphlets) will be made available through the church secretary or CE coordinator. Materials will be made available to parents and guardians to educate parents and children on risks children face and how to avoid them.

### ***B. Child Security***

#### *1. Volunteer Identification*

Volunteers working with children should wear a nametag which officially identifies their name and position. This will identify to visitors and members those responsible for their children.

#### *2. Registration and Record Keeping*

Registration cards of children shall be carefully maintained and kept in the church office. Each week, classroom teachers should document which children were in attendance. Parents or guardians of new children should fill in a registration card.

#### *3. Receiving and Releasing of Preschool Aged Children (0-4)*

Children should never be dropped off in a classroom in which a teacher is absent.

Children will only be released to a parent or guardian unless the parent specifies in writing on the registration card others (e.g. high school, junior-high school aged friends) may pick-up their child.

### ***C. Washroom and Rest Room Guidelines***

#### *1. Washrooms and Rest Rooms*

Children up to grade four should never be sent to the washroom alone. They should be accompanied by an adult worker or in the case of older children, with another child

If only one adult volunteer is escorting child(ren) to a washroom, the outside door should be propped open. The volunteer must remain outside the cubicle and wait for the child(ren) before escorting the child(ren) back to class.

If an adult volunteer enters the cubicle with a child, the door must be propped open.

#### *2. Diaper Changing*

The change table shall be in view of the doorway.

Diaper changing, shall be done in such a way that the table is visible to other workers in the room and the changer can see the other children in the room.

### ***D. Classroom Staffing and Supervision Guidelines***

Our desire is to provide a safe, loving classroom where children and leaders feel comfortable and learning takes place.

#### *1. Two-person Rule or Open Doors*

In any closed classroom without a windowed door, there must be two leaders in the room. If this is not possible, the door to the classroom must be left open.

#### *2. After Class*

Following classes, parents are expected to supervise their children.

## ***E. Overnight and Away From Building Trip Guidelines***

### ***1. Common Guidelines***

The church leadership board must approve the event.

Parents must be notified in writing of the event at least two weeks before the event and sign written consent and medical release forms for each child.

All supervising adults must be approved volunteers.

When transporting of the children is involved, all drivers must have a valid drivers license, registration and insurance and be driving a suitable vehicle in good repair with enough seatbelts.

### ***2. Overnight Events***

Each group of seven children or less should have one adult leader responsible for them during the event. When there are events involving both sexes, a male and female supervisor shall be present.

### ***3. Away from Building Events***

All trips must have at least two approved volunteers present.

## ***F. Worker Behavior / Proper Displays of Affection / Ministering to Children***

### ***1. Worker Behavior***

Workers shall always conduct themselves in a godly manner, being an example to young Believers.

If a child is injured from an accident and it necessary to remove clothing to examine any part of a child's body other than a limb, there should always be two staff present and the incident shall be documented and reported to the parents or guardians.

### ***2. Proper Displays of Affection***

Physical touch is an essential part of nurturing growth. Volunteers need to be aware of differences in comfort levels of children relating to touch, cultural differences, family backgrounds and special needs. Physical touch and displays of affection should be developmentally appropriate.

#### **Appropriate Touch**

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

- Bending down to the child's eye level and speaking kindly: listening to him or her carefully.
- Taking a child's hand (younger children) or putting an arm around the shoulders. (older children) and leading him or her to an activity.
- Putting an arm around the shoulder of a child who needs comforting or quieting.
- Patting a child on the head, hand, shoulder or back to affirm him or her.
- Holding a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his or her attention while you redirect the child's behavior.
- Holding a preschool child who is crying

#### **Inappropriate Touch**

You must avoid:

- Kissing a child, coaxing a child to kiss you, extended hugging, and tickling.
- Touching a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit (except when assisting a child with toileting or medical emergencies as outlined previously).
- Carrying older children or having them sit on your lap.
- Being alone with a child. (Plan to Protect, 1996, p 14)

### *3. Ministering to Children*

Counseling shall be done in such a way that both child and adult are protected from the possibility of abuse or allegations.

"Conduct counselling appointments within normal daytime hours whenever possible.

Prohibit counseling within the child's home unless another adult is present.

Each meeting should be with the consent and knowledge of the child's parents or guardians. If at all possible avoid transporting the child alone.

Do not close the blinds on an office window when meeting with a child.

Be accountable to a colleague, spouse or peer.

Give attention to your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being."  
(Laurier Heights Baptist Church, 1997, p6)

### ***G. Architectural Considerations***

As construction or renovation work takes place, consideration should be given to ensure the building is safe for children. For example, windows should be installed in all doors or half doors should be installed, walls should not obstruct the view of other areas, etc.

## **Recruitment of Ministry Volunteers**

The impetus for congregations to develop screening policies comes from a variety of sources. First, having a screening policy in place tells church members that the church is serious about preventing abuse and reducing volunteer/staff liability to claims of abuse. As well, church officials who are responsible for assigning volunteers/staff to serve in church programs have more data to help them make an adequate match between a person's interests and skills and the available positions. Finally, in some cases, the fact that a screening policy exists will deter an individual who poses a threat to children and does not want to risk exposure.

No screening policy can guarantee the prevention of abuse. As with prevention policies, the goals are to reduce the incidence of abuse and to reduce the liability of volunteers/staff."

(Swagman, 1997,23)

### ***A. Confidentiality***

All forms related to the procedure will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the church office. The forms will be kept for at least five (5) years. Information contained in the forms will only be released to the police if they are conducting an investigation or to a member of the Abuse Prevention Committee (APC).

On the application form each member has the option of having the form viewed by only the pastor or having the form available to any member of the APC.

The members of the APC will keep all information contained in the forms strictly confidential.

### ***B. Application Process***

#### ***1. Ministry Application Form***

The Ministry Application Form provides the church with information about the applicant and his or her suitability for the position. Volunteers who are already serving in a position will be required to complete an application when this policy is adopted. Volunteers who continue to serve in the same or similar positions will be asked to fill out volunteer renewal forms every three years.

All adults and minors sixteen years of age and older will be required to fill in a Ministry Application Form when applying for a position which involves working with children.

Anyone applying for a position working with children at CFC must have been regularly attending or a member for at least six months before applying.

The Code of Conduct Contained in the Ministry Application Form must be signed. It is an indication of how CFC expects all its volunteers to conduct themselves when ministering to children.

#### ***2. Reference Checks***

Three references are requested on the Ministry Application Form. These references should not include relatives and must include at least one person from outside the church.

All three references must be contacted and the resulting conversations documented and included with the person's Ministry Application Form. If a reference is not available to be contacted another reference must be provided by the applicant.

*3. Criminal Records Check*

Each person who wishes to work with children must complete a criminal records check. The name of the individual is returned by the police stating the individual is "cleared" or "uncleared" of convictions. All records secured will be attached to the Ministry Application Form. Should an individual be "uncleared" they will be given an opportunity to explain the circumstances and provide documentation that may clear them.

*4. Interview*

Each person volunteering will be interviewed.

*5. Church leadership board Approval*

The church leadership board upon recommendation from the Abuse Prevention Committee must approve all individuals wishing to work in a position, which involves children. This step provides another check to ensure our children are safe.

## Reporting Procedures and Response to Allegations of Abuse

### *A. Obligation to Report*

“The Child Welfare Act states that 'any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report the matter to a director.’”

(OPFV, Child Abuse Fact Sheet, p2)

"A child is in need of protection under the Family and Child Service Act if he or she is:

- abused or neglected so that his or her safety or well-being is endangered,
- abandoned,
- deprived of necessary care through the death, absence or disability of his or her parent,
- deprived of necessary medical attention, or
- absent from his or her home in circumstances that endanger his or her safety or well-being.

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p18)

No person is personally liable for anything done or omitted in good faith in the exercise of the responsibility of reporting suspected or known abuse.

The reporting individual should also call the RCMP or the Child Abuse hotline or be present when the call is made if possible to seek further assistance and advice. Any suspicions or disclosures should be immediately reported to a member of the Abuse Prevention Committee.

### *B. What to Report*

It is not the responsibility of the reporting person or the Children's Safety Committee to substantiate any allegations or suspicions. An investigation will be conducted by police or Child Welfare

"Signs of abuse to watch for are as follows:

- has an unexplained injury - a patch of hair missing, a burn, a limp or bruises,
- has an inordinate number of explained injuries such as bruises on his/her arms and legs over a period of time,
- gives verbal testimony,
- makes drawing in conjunction with verbal testimony,
- alludes to incidents in writing or through prayer requests, etc.,
- exhibits an injury that is not adequately explained,
- complains about numerous beatings,
- complains about others doing things to them when others are not home',
- is consistently dirty and smells or has bad teeth or hair falling out,
- is regularly inadequately dressed for inclement weather, or
- wears long-sleeved tops during the summer to cover bruises on the arms.

"Abuse or neglect need not have already occurred for a child to be in need of protection; it is not necessary to wait until a child has been harmed to intervene. When abuse or neglect can be reasonably anticipated and there are reasonable grounds to believe a child is in need of protection, the legal obligation to report applies."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p16)

### ***C. Responding to a Child***

"When the child first comes to you (with an allegation), be sure to take his or her word seriously. Don't deny the problem, but stay calm and listen to the child. Give emotional support, reminding the child that he or she is not at fault and that the child was right in telling you about the problem. Do not promise the child you will not tell anyone."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p17)

"Do not offer extensive medical or psychological help. Child welfare, the police or a hospital will provide these services. Well meaning interventions by church members may delay the victim from receiving professional help, and may inadvertently interfere with the investigation, distorting or destroying valuable evidence."

(Laurier Heights Baptist Church, 1997, p7)

Do not solicit information from the child and do not have the child disclose to a third party

### ***D. Report Forms***

Document carefully and precisely the entire conversation you have had with the child as soon as possible after it has occurred. Use the reporting form contained in the package to guide your documentation. Document when and who made telephone calls to the authorities, who else was informed and any other details necessary.

### ***E. Don't Engage in Denial, Minimization, or Blame***

"Many churches, when confronted with an allegation of abuse, respond in one or more of the following ways:

- Deny that the incident occurred, despite clear evidence to the contrary.
- Acknowledge that the incident occurred, but minimize it. For example, a church leader may say, 'It only happened once,' or 'it wasn't that serious'.
- Blame the victim's family.

These responses are all inappropriate and should be avoided."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p21)

### ***F. Select a Spokesperson***

"One person in leadership should be designated as the only spokesperson for any allegation. Everyone involved in any part of the ministry of the church should know who this person is and make no comment but refer all inquiries to the appointed spokesperson

(Plan to protect, 1996, p19)

This person should most likely be the pastor of the church or the chairperson of the church leadership board.

The statement below is suggested for a public response until all facts are uncovered and the case reviewed:

"It is always tragic when children are abused or exploited. The Congregational Christian Fellowship Church of Spruce Grove is aware of the ever-growing nature of child abuse. We have taken careful precautions to protect the children entrusted to our care.

"We are distressed by any accusation of child abuse. We will do everything in our power to address any needs in this situation. For the welfare of those involved, all information has been directed to the Department of Social Services."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p23)

Having a carefully prepared position statement "is an opportunity to influence public opinion positively by emphasizing an awareness of the problem of child abuse, a concern for the victim, and the extensive steps the church has taken to reduce the risk and provide a safe environment for children.... Do not surrender the pulpit to those who will criticize and condemn the church."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p21)

***G. Use a Lawyer***

Have the church's lawyer present when answering questions from the police, social service agencies, or the press. Consult with a lawyer before taking any major steps.

**Works Cited**

Laurier Heights Baptist Church, Congregational Safety Committee. (1997).

Policies and Procedures For the Protection of our Children and our Church Ministry

Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. (Alberta Family and Social Services).

Child Abuse Fact Sheet. Phone: (403) 422-5916.

Plan to Protect: A protection plan for children, A protection plan for churches. (1996)

The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada National Church Education Committee.  
Phone: (416) 492-8775.

Swagman, Beth. (1997). Preventing Child Abuse. Grand Rapids, Michigan: CRC Publications.

## Appendix A

### The Church's Responsibility

Jesus loves all His children - both big and small. Parents would bring their children to Jesus and He took them in His arms and blessed them. We at CFC love our children too. Scripture tells us we have an awesome responsibility to our children:

1. Avoid every kind of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:22,
2. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality ... because these are improper for God's holy people. Ephesians 5:3
3. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Matthew 18:6
4. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

Scripture tells us to create a safe, loving place for all God's people to worship in.

### Civil and Legal Liability of the Church

"Increasingly and often more dramatically, churches and their personnel (i.e. staff, directors, officers and ministers) are being held accountable for the acts of individual abusers within the church even though the church, nor its leaders were aware of the abuse or condoned it. Churches are being sued in Civil Court for damages sustained by victims and their families. Those victims and their families are attempting to hold churches accountable by alleging that:

1. the church is vicariously liable for the acts of its personnel, be they paid staff or volunteer-staff, regardless of whether the church was itself negligent or even knew of the abuse.
2. the church was negligent in its hiring or accepting personnel, whether paid or volunteer, and
3. the church was negligent in the supervising or monitoring of its personnel or membership.

Most churches will discover that their insurance coverage excludes matters of child molestation; therefore, from a purely fiscal point of view, churches must protect themselves in every reasonable way."

(Plan to Protect, 1996, p4)

## Appendix B: Document Definitions

*Child:* A child is any person under the age of 18.

Abuse of children may take several forms:

*"Physical Abuse* is the intentional application offered to any part of a child's body such that injuries are sustained. It may be a single incident or a series or pattern of incidents.

*"Emotional Abuse* consists primarily of verbal attacks on a child's sense of self. Persistent humiliation, rejection or the constant reiteration that a child is bad or stupid undermines the child's self-image, sense of worth and self-confidence. Other behaviors, which are emotionally abusive, are forced isolation, restraint or purposely instilling fear. Emotional abuse is usually chronic and part of a particular style of child rearing.

*"Sexual Abuse* includes any sexual touching, sexual intercourse or sexual exploitation of a child by a caretaker who could be a parent, guardian, another relative or any person in whose care the child has been left.... A child is sexually abused if the child is inappropriately exposed or subjected to sexual contact, activity or behavior.

*"Neglect* is any act of omission which causes significant negative, emotional and physical consequences.

*Physical neglect* is the failure to meet the physical needs of a child, which include adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from harm.

*Emotional neglect* is the failure to meet the emotional needs of a child for affection, a sense of belonging and self-esteem. It can range from passive indifference to outright rejection."

Abuse of children is very rarely a single event. It is usually a condition, a style of child rearing or a pattern of interaction, which cumulatively is harmful to the children.

Children, who are abused, regardless of the method, suffer from physical and/or psychological damage. For example.

- their general health may be impaired.
  - they may be permanently disabled or suffer learning disabilities.
  - they may have a distorted self-concept.
  - their self-esteem may be low.
  - they will likely learn that it is OK to hurt those they love.
  - they may be mistrustful.
  - If sexually abused, they will likely be confused about their sexuality and expression.
  - they may feel stigmatized and think of themselves as victims and therefore powerless.
- (Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, Child Abuse Fact Sheet, pp 1,3,5)

*The Congregational Christian Fellowship Church of Spruce Grove* may be referred to throughout this document as CFC or "the church"

*Staff* includes any paid person employed at CFC.

*Volunteers* include any person who holds a non-paid position at CFC and comes into contact with children.

*Members* are those individuals included on the congregational list of CFC.

The *Abuse Prevention Committee (APC)* consists of the pastor and the CE director or another chosen member of CFC

*Approved volunteers* are those members who have been approved by the church leadership board upon recommendation from the APC.

## Personal Information

Surname \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth (Y/M/D) \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Company \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a valid drivers license? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you attended CFC? \_\_\_\_\_

List all other churches regularly attended in the last five years (Give name, phone number, and city).

Please list all previous experience (church and non-church) involving children and youth.

What areas of ministry are you interested in serving in and why?

Briefly, please provide us with your spiritual history.

Has a civil or criminal complaint ever been filed against you alleging physical or sexual abuse? (If yes, attach a separate page providing the details)

## Personal References

At least one reference must be from outside the church.

Non-relatives, employers and friends may be included.

I authorize only the pastor to contact these references.

I authorize all members of the Abuse Prevention Committee to contact these references.

Name	Phone
Address	Relationship

Name	Phone
Address	Relationship

Name	Phone
Address	Relationship

## Code of Conduct

Believing that God is calling me to serve children or youth in the 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 also respect and try to understand the child's/youth's cultural background.
3. I will be prepared to give the parent(s) full information about the program I am teaching/supervising/leading and what time it begins and ends.
4. I will not do anything that will damage a child's/youth's trust. I will try to protect the child/youth from all forms of abuse while he/she is in my care.
5. If I suspect the child/youth may be hurt by the abusive actions or attitudes of another person I will report the suspicion to the responsible person so that it can be investigated properly.
6. I will answer a child's/youth's questions openly and honestly.
7. I will pray for each child/youth regularly and let them know that I care about them.
8. If I wish to talk to the child/youth alone, it will be within the sight/sound of other people.
9. If a child/youth is distressed, I will try to offer comfort and help. I will encourage the child/youth to find the appropriate help for their needs.

## Criminal Records Check

I will have a criminal records check performed and will bring to the Abuse Prevention Committee all relevant paperwork within two weeks of submitting this application form.

### Signature

I authorize all references listed to provide any information requested concerning my background and pertaining to my participation in children's ministries of the church.

I have read and agree to the code of conduct on the previous page.

I agree to adhere to the child protection policies as adopted by this church.

The information contained herein is correct. I have read and understand each part of this application.

My signature testifies to the fact that I have read, understand and agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct.

I am not under investigation and have not been convicted of an offence involving all types of abuse.

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness (signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Witness (print name): \_\_\_\_\_