

**Safeguarding Policy & Procedure Manual**  
**Astoria Community Church**  
**2024, Second Edition**

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## 1 Overview

### 1-a Why does our church need this policy?

God created each of us in His image and for His purposes. As His image-bearers, all people deserve to be treated with dignity, decency and respect. (Gen. 1:27, Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:10). For this reason, Astoria Community Church (ACC) is committed to protecting everyone in our church and ministry environment from harassment, abuse and abuse of power, and responding to any concerning or harmful situations. This policy also exists to help the entire church raise their level of awareness and understanding of the dynamics of harassment, abuse and abuse of power so that ACC can become a safer and more loving church community. These commitments come from God, who loves justice, is a refuge for the hurting, and listens to the cry of the vulnerable (Psalm 9:4-12, Psalm 46, Amos 5:24, I Peter 5:7).

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Child abuse is a common reality in our world and even in churches. The data shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are sexually abused in the U.S. before they turn 18. Other forms of child abuse are also common. Jesus condemned anyone who would abuse a child in the strongest possible terms: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6) Intimate partner violence, clergy abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse against adults are also common. Jesus condemned those who used their spiritual position to exploit others (e.g. Mark 12:38-40). Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what must be lived out: as much as possible to take responsibility as individuals and as a church to prevent abuse and hold those who abuse accountable.

As a measure of prevention and of setting clear expectations between adults, children and youth, ACC has written this policy. Within the pretense or context of a ministry relationship, certain behaviors and situations are unacceptable. To ensure the proper monitoring of activities, especially those pertaining to youth and vulnerable adults, this policy intends to establish a balance between encouraging positive and appropriate interactions and hindering inappropriate and/or potentially harmful or unsafe interactions. Establishing standards of conduct with this balance in mind assists in creating and maintaining environments where there is no opportunity for harassment, abuse and abuse of power.

The public and private conduct of pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers, can inspire and motivate, but when the actions are inappropriate it can also scandalize and undermine the people’s faith. Pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers must know that God’s goodness and grace supports them in their ministry and they must also be aware of the responsibilities that come with the trust offered by those seeking their services.

Responsibility for adherence to this policy is not optional and rests with the individual. However, the ACC community is responsible to reinforce these boundaries with someone who may not be adherent to them. All of us at ACC are responsible to report violations of policy or concerns to ACC's Safeguarding Team, identified below. All adults performing work, ministry, or volunteer service within ACC are expected to follow these guidelines. Pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers who disregard this policy or fail to act consistently with this policy will be subject to corrective action by Astoria Community Church. Violations of this policy are a serious matter and will be investigated and resolved in accordance with ACC's response procedure. Corrective action may take various forms—from a verbal reproach to removal from the ministry based on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm or potential harm.

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for ACC to share certain information in order to properly respond to the matter, safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

We ask that all ACC community members who have concerns or knowledge of a policy violation and/or an abuse allegation to use discretion when discussing these incidents. Any important information pertaining to policy violations and/or an alleged abuser should be directed to the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible.

### **1-b Who is protected by this policy? Who has responsibilities?**

Everyone at ACC is entitled to a safe place to worship and serve, and each of us has the duty to ensure ACC is that safe place. Church leaders have additional responsibilities, as discussed later in this policy.

The ACC Safeguarding Policy addresses interactions and relationships between adults and between adults and children in the ACC church and ministry environment, including church leaders and staff, members, congregants and visitors.<sup>1</sup>

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores the cry of one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Astoria Community Church is committed to being a refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. Abuse is not a sin like any other sin. Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime) especially when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is powerless to stop it (see Ecclesiastes 4:1).

As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents." (Matthew 10:16) We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy. Jesus spoke often about abuse using the metaphor of wolves, shepherds, and sheep. Jesus warned about "wolves in sheep's clothing" who would prey upon the vulnerable (Matthew 7:15). The Bible affirms the value and

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<sup>1</sup> ACC employees are also covered by the ACC Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policy. This policy identifies the way ACC employees are protected in the work and ministry environment and the way ACC employees are expected to interact with others.

dignity of children and all who are made in God's image. God condemns abuse in all forms. Jesus calls every Christian and every church to walk in the light with him and "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

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## **2 Prohibited Behavior**

### **What types of harassment, abuse, abuse of power and other harmful behavior does ACC seek to prevent and address?**

ACC, as a mirror of God's concern for justice and protection of the vulnerable, seeks to prevent and address any type of harassment, abuse or abuse of power in the ACC church and ministry environment, including the following types of mistreatment.

**Note:** ACC will address reports of these behaviors when the interactions occur during an ACC activity (such as during church, a community group meeting or volunteer activity). ACC will attempt, when possible, to address interactions that occur outside of ACC but involving people who are ACC congregants or know each other because of their association with ACC (such as two church members socializing together outside of church activities).

#### **2-a Abuse**

In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that power to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, or spiritual.

#### **2-b Physical Abuse**

Any behavior that dominates another person with actual physical contact or other demonstration of physical power. It includes throwing things, damaging property, blocking a person's path/exit, raising a hand as if to strike, grabbing, and pinching.

#### **2-c Emotional Abuse**

A pattern of controlling behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering. Bullying is a common term for acts that typically constitute emotional abuse. In the case of emotional abuse to children, these behaviors can cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to a child's physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development.

## **2-d Neglect**

- Physical: failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision
- Medical: failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment
- Educational: failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
- Emotional: inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs

## **2-e Sexual Abuse**

When a person in a place of power and/or trust, engages in sexual behavior with a child, youth or an adult under their supervision, authority, mentoring, or spiritual care, including:

- a. Sexual Penetration: Any act or attempted act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a person's penis, finger, other body part, or an object, and/or any oral-genital contact.
- b. Sexual Contact: Any intentional touching of a person's breasts, buttocks, groin, genitals, or other intimate parts. Touching may be over or under clothing and may include the touching or making the person touch, or making the person touch their own body. This also includes contact with non-sexual areas of the body for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator (such as with certain [paraphilic disorders](#)).
- c. Non-Contact Sexual Acts:
  - observing a person's nudity or sexual activity or allowing a person to observe sexual activity;
  - recording, photographing, transmitting, showing, viewing, streaming, or distributing intimate or sexual images, audio recordings, or sexual information of persons;
  - exposing one's genitals or inducing a person to expose their own genitals; or
  - within a power dynamic (boss-employee, doctor-patient, teacher-student, pastor-congregant, adult-child) communicating romantic or sexual desire, interest, or sexually stimulating content toward a person

A child/youth cannot consent to any sexual behavior with an adult or another child/youth.

## **2-f Sexual Harassment and Violence**

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances or other unwelcome or inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment is committed by men and women, married and single people, and against persons of the same or opposite sex. Sexual harassment can occur in-person or virtually, or by email, text or social media.

**Sexual harassment may take different forms, including but not limited to:**

- Sexual innuendo, jokes or suggestive comments, including when the person making the statement believes he/she is being funny, rather than offensive
- Sexual propositions
- Threats of a sexual nature
- Repeated, unwelcome requests for dates or expressions of romantic interest
- Repeated, unwelcome calls, texts, social media contact of a sexual nature
- Display of sexual material including by email, text and social media.
- Leering, whistling, sexual gestures.

**Sexual harassment may also take the form of sexual violence or other unwanted physical contact, including**

- Any unwelcome, forced or coerced physical contact, including touching, tickling, pinching, patting, brushing up against, hugging, or cornering a person, as well as unwelcome, unwanted, coerced or forced kissing, groping, rape, or other physical sexual contact or violence.

Physical/sexual contact is “**coerced**” when the recipient feels he/she must comply as a condition of being involved with church activities, in order to remain safe or in order to protect his/her reputation and social connections. Coercion can also occur when the decision to comply is based on threats, lies, false promises or repeated, unrelenting demands.

**2-g Stalking**

Stalking is a pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behavior which is intrusive and causes alarm, distress or a fear of violence, including but not limited to:

- Making repeated, unwelcome phone calls/texts or sending repeated, unwelcome messages or emails (which do not have a legitimate ministry purpose)
- Following or spying on a person
- Showing up or waiting for someone without a legitimate reason
- Leaving unwanted items, such as presents or flowers
- Posting information or spreading false or confidential information about a person online, in a public place, or by word of mouth

**2-h Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence)**

Intimate partner violence is a pattern of behavior whereby a current or former spouse or romantic partner uses tactics of control, belittling, isolation, fear, stalking, and/or intimidation to dominate, harm, degrade, or otherwise undermine the worth and agency of the other person in the relationship. Intimate partner violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, social, or financial.

**2-i Non-Sexual Harassment and Violence**

Non-sexual harassment consists of unwelcome behavior of any kind that has the effect of belittling, threatening or making the church environment strained, unsafe or intolerable for the recipient or others. This includes behavior related to someone’s race, national origin, age,

disability, citizenship status, military status, pregnancy, marital status, or any similar characteristic. Non-sexual harassment also includes behavior that is unrelated to these characteristics, but which harms or threatens others.

Non-sexual harassment can occur in-person or virtually, or by email, text or social media. Non-sexual harassment may take different forms, including but not limited to:

- Offensive jokes, slurs or derogatory name-calling, including when the person making the statement believes he/she is being funny, rather than offensive
- Intimidation, ridicule, or bullying
- Physical violence or threats of violence
- Display of offensive objects or pictures

### **2-j Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse is the illegal or improper use of a vulnerable person's financial resources for profit or advantage. Examples include the taking of money or property, forging a signature, or getting a person to sign a deed, will or power of attorney through deception, coercion or undue influence. behavior that controls and dominates a person financially. It includes demanding exacting accounts, withholding support, making unreasonable financial demands, keeping financial information hidden.

### **2-k Abandonment**

The willful refusal to engage in marital responsibilities and family life either by perpetual absence physically or incessantly ignoring of family members and/or family activity. This includes long unexplained absences from the home, being in the home but physically removed, distant and silent and refusal to participate in parenting responsibilities.

### **2-l Abuse of Power**

Pastors, leaders and others with power in the church can abuse this power, due to imbalances in authority, knowledge, experience, and perceived spiritual maturity. Such behavior is a violation of the trust and promises of a leader's role in congregational life and ministry.

Following are some examples of abuse of power in the church environment. This is not an exhaustive list of all possible abusive treatment.

#### **2-l-1 Spiritual Abuse**

Spiritual abuse is when a leader (Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, leader of a ministry team or community group) uses his/her position of spiritual authority (or perceived spiritual authority) to manipulate, bully or intimidate people under the leader's authority as a means of asserting power and control.

**Some examples include:**

- Using Biblical language or spiritual concepts to defend bad behavior by the leader or others;
- Using church discipline, or the threat of church discipline, as a means of controlling others and silencing disagreement with the leader;
- Using sermons, other public teaching or public prayer to directly or indirectly criticize or “target” individuals;
- Speaking cruelly or hyper-critically to others, under the guise of spiritual authority; or
- Using coercion, threats or manipulation to ensure a person handles certain volunteer roles, or commits to extensive service hours. This can include repeated requests, or telling the volunteer that his/her service is “God’s will,” or “part of being in the ACC family,” in a way that makes the recipient feel threatened, controlled or fearful.

**The following are NOT spiritual abuse:**

- The leader teaches about Biblical standards and/or appropriately confronts individuals about choices to live outside those standards. If the teaching or confrontation is cruel or manipulative, it may be spiritual abuse. However, feelings of self-doubt, defensiveness or even hurt often result from being encouraged to repent from sin or change behaviors. Experiencing these feelings does not necessarily indicate the interaction has been abusive.
- The leader encourages involvement and service, including by teaching from Scripture or discussing the responsibilities of church membership.
- The leader has an assertive personality, lacks “people skills” or leadership skills, or makes poor management decisions.

**2-1-2 Misuse of Position for Personal Gain**

- Using the position of power to generate any form of financial or personal gain, such as by manipulating church relationships as a means of attaining employment, securing an apartment or gaining school admission for one’s children.

**2-1-3 Abuse of Power in Romantic Relationships**

- Entering into a seemingly consensual romantic relationship with a person of lesser power or authority in the church, in a manner contrary to the Romantic Relationships provision, below.
- Any romantic or sexual relationship involving a married church leader and anyone in the church other than his/her spouse is automatically considered an abuse of power.
- Any romantic or sexual relationship involving a church leader with anyone else in the ministry context with less authority and power, which violates Biblical principles for sexuality and purity, will automatically be considered an abuse of power.

In each of these situations, even if the romantic or sexual relationship is initiated by the person with less authority and power, it is still the responsibility of the church leader to establish appropriate relationship boundaries and to notify the leader’s supervisor, if required to do so (see below).

## **2-1-4 Preventing Abuse of Power in Romantic Relationships**

Single ACC congregants, including leaders, are encouraged to engage in healthy and Biblical dating relationships within the ministry environment. However, because of the potential for abuse of power (see above), leaders are required to report certain relationships to their staff ministry supervisors, in order to ensure ACC is a safe worshiping and ministry community for everyone, and to proactively avoid potential conflicts of interest and abuse of power.<sup>2</sup>

**Pastors, Elders, Deacons and Deaconesses** have a special responsibility to care for the church body and to seek its purity. Accordingly, Pastors, Elders, Deacons and Deaconesses who enter into a romantic or dating relationship with any person who is connected with any ACC church or ministry, including other officers and leaders, are required to make their staff ministry supervisors aware of the relationship, and be willing to address any conflicts of interest or potential for abuse of power. Informing the staff ministry supervisor of the relationship is a condition of the office and failure to do so may result in removal from the office.

**Other leaders, such as community group and ministry team leaders,** are to inform their staff ministry supervisors if a romantic or dating relationship develops with an individual under his/her ministry leadership or in his/her area of responsibility. For example, if a community group leader begins dating a member of the community group, or if a hospitality team leader begins dating a volunteer on the team, the leader's staff supervisor will be made aware of the relationship, and have the opportunity to address any conflicts of interest or potential for abuse of power. Informing the staff ministry supervisor of the relationship is a condition of the leadership position and failure to do so may result in removal from the position.

## **2-m Other Prohibited Behavior**

### **2-m-1 Alcohol, Cannabis and Illegal Substance Use**

The following behavior is prohibited by staff and volunteers:

- Smoking or use of tobacco products in the presence of children and/or youth
- Being under the influence of alcohol and/or cannabis while in one's role for ACC
- Using, possessing, or being under the influence of any non-prescription illegal drugs or substances at any time

### **2-m-2 Electronic Communications**

The following behavior is prohibited by staff and volunteers:

- Connecting with children and/or youth electronically, including social media, without advance approval from a supervisor

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<sup>2</sup> Certain church leaders, including Pastors, are also ACC employees. Under the requirements of the employee anti-harassment policy (see *footnote to 1-b*), Pastors and other ACC employees are required to report certain romantic relationships within the ministry environment to their staff ministry supervisors.

## **2-m-3 Other Harmful Behavior**

- Posing any health risk to children and/or youth (i.e. fevers or other contagious illnesses)
- Using profanity in the presence of children and/or youth

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## **3 Reporting**

### **3-a Who should report harassment or abuse of power? How is a report made?**

Anyone who experiences, observes or learns of harassment, abuse or abuse of power (or possible harassment or abuse of power) in the ACC ministry environment is strongly encouraged to raise the situation to a Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, or Trustee, or by using the [ACC Reporting Form](#). ACC has a Safeguarding Team in place who will be responsible for responding to any concerns or reports. Church leaders who observe a situation of possible harassment, abuse or abuse of power or otherwise become aware of it, are required to report the situation immediately to their staff ministry supervisor (unless the report involves the supervisor) and by using the [ACC Reporting Form](#). The ministry supervisor will also need to contact the Safeguarding Team Leader. For purposes of this reporting requirement, church leaders include: Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Deaconesses, Trustees, and Community Group Leaders (those who lead community groups or groups for men, women, parents, etc.). Church leaders are required to report possible harassment, abuse or abuse of power within ACC or involving any ACC ministry entity, including situations that occurred in the past.

### **3-b When should harassment, abuse or abuse of power be reported?**

Concerns regarding harassment, abuse or abuse of power should be reported as soon as possible, to allow ACC the opportunity to address the situation, provide care to anyone hurt by the mistreatment and seek accountability for anyone who has acted wrongly.

Church leaders (as defined above) who observe or otherwise become aware of possible harassment, abuse or abuse of power are required to report the situation immediately.

### **3-c Should I report if I am not certain that the situation is harassment, abuse or abuse of power?**

You are strongly encouraged to report, to allow ACC to ensure that no one is being hurt or mistreated. If you are a church leader (as defined above), you are required to report, even if you are not sure of all the facts. The Safeguarding Team will take steps to find out what is happening and to determine which next steps are appropriate to ensure everyone's safety.

### **3-d What about situations involving church leaders or members that took place in the past or outside of the ACC context?**

ACC expects its leaders and members<sup>3</sup> to interact with others, including people outside the ACC environment, in a respectful, honoring and lawful manner. Church leaders and members are prohibited from engaging in harassment, abuse or violence of any kind, in any situation. Any reports of this behavior by ACC leaders or members, including reports of past action, will be reviewed and addressed.

### **3-e Should I report to law enforcement?**

Certain forms of harassment and abuse of power are also criminal acts. ACC encourages the reporting of criminal harassment or abuse to law enforcement, and will not retaliate against anyone who reports a crime to law enforcement, including if the individual who reportedly committed the crime is a church leader or member. Reports to law enforcement may be made whether or not the situation is also reported to ACC.

In NYC, crimes can be reported by contacting the NYPD at the police precinct where the crime occurred. Sexual crimes may also be reported by calling the NYPD Special Victims Division hotline at (646) 610-7272. If a person is in immediate physical danger, he/she should call 911. Similarly, anyone who receives a disclosure of child abuse or sees evidence of child abuse in the ACC environment should report this immediately to the Safeguarding Team Administrator. If warranted, call 311 in NYC or the New York State Central Register (SCR) directly at 1(800) 342-3720. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911.

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## **4 Response Process**

### **How will ACC respond to a report?**

ACC has a process for responding to a report of harassment, abuse or abuse of power (or possible harassment or abuse of power). The process is designed to be fair to everyone involved, and to provide care and protection for anyone who has been hurt. ACC has in place a Safeguarding Team, composed of both men and women, who will receive reports of concerns and have the responsibility for implementing ACC's process, detailed below.

Certain elements of this process reflect the guidance found in the Presbyterian Church of America *Book of Church Order (BCO), Part II, The Rules of Discipline*, and others reflect the Biblical mandate to seek the peace and purity of the Church, while also upholding justice and protecting the victims in our midst. (Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 82:3, 89:14, Eph. 1-2)

ACC is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any report of harassment or abuse within our church and ministries. We will work to create an environment in which anyone can feel comfortable raising questions and concerns, knowing that all situations will be taken seriously, and responded to professionally and with care.

### **ACC's response process:**

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<sup>3</sup> "Members" are congregants who have completed the membership process and been admitted into church membership.

1. The Safeguarding Team (ST) will receive and review the report. If the accused person or reported victim is a member of the ST, the report will be forwarded to the Pastor for further action. If neither the accused person nor the reported victim is a member of the ST, the ST will process the report, as described below.
2. To the extent possible, within two business days of the ST's receipt of the report, the ST will contact the individual who reported the concern. Based on the information provided, the ST will contact others involved, including the person being accused. If a third party reported the concern, the ST will contact the reported victim.
3. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911.
4. The process is designed to be as clear and non-intimidating as possible for those involved in it. Both the reported victim and the accused person will be informed of their protections and obligations during the process and the anticipated approximate timing for ACC's response to the complaint. When appropriate, both will be advised of external legal remedies and avenues for reporting, such as making a report to law enforcement.
5. As appropriate, the ST will provide resources and support to the reported victim, the accused person or others.
6. Reports will be kept confidential, except to the extent information about the report must be shared in order to implement ACC's response and shepherding process and/or to ensure a fair and thorough investigation and the safety of others.
7. Depending on the nature of the report, an investigation may be conducted. Any investigator will be experienced in investigating the type of complaint made, and may be a third party investigator. During the investigation, barring any extenuating circumstances, the investigator will interview the reported victim, the accused person and any relevant witnesses to determine what occurred. Church leaders with relevant information will be required to cooperate in an investigation, if called upon to do so. Church members are strongly urged to do so, as a moral obligation.
8. The investigator will provide a report (preferably written) of his/her findings to ACC.
9. ACC will review the investigator's report and findings and take appropriate action, if warranted, which could include church discipline.
10. The reported victim and the accused person will be informed of the findings of the investigation and, as appropriate, any outcome.
11. As appropriate to the situation, ACC will provide additional care and support to the reported victim, accused person or others.

## **5 Retaliation**

ACC prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any protected activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Session. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.

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## **6 Screening and Training Requirements**

All staff and volunteer positions will be screened before assuming their position. [See here](#) for the procedural process for being screened. All staff and some volunteer positions will also be required to watch either a 2 or 3:10 hour online sexual abuse prevention training. All of the ACC community, especially parents of minors, will be strongly encouraged to read this policy and watch the training. Parents of minors will also be highly encouraged to and commit to discussing healthy boundaries, sexuality and sexual abuse and misconduct with their children and youth at an age appropriate level. We will offer continuing education on an annual basis that all screened volunteers will be required to complete.

An annual 1 hour training covering mental health, suicide prevention and self-harm identification, neurodiversity and bullying will be offered in person and online. All leaders and volunteers who work with children and youth will be required to attend as well as youth (6th - 12th grade).

All prospective members of ACC will complete a two-part membership course, be invited to read this policy and express a willingness to abide by it. We will also check a free, national public registry for sex offenders.

If any current or prospective volunteer or leader refuses to abide by the requirements of this policy, they should be willing to meet with a member of the Safeguarding team and a member of the Session to discuss their position and hear more details on the importance and rationale of this policy. If after this meeting occurs, the volunteer still refuses to abide by the requirements, they will not be able to volunteer at ACC.

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## **7 Miscellaneous**

These policies and procedures have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors and other vulnerable populations. The following is the official receipt denoting that the individual whose signature appears below has read and understands the guidelines contained in this manual. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. ACC reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with ACC or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

## **8 Acknowledgement**

I have received and read ACC's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure Manual and agree to follow the behavioral standards outlined in the manual. I understand that any action inconsistent with the behavioral standards of this manual may result in my removal as an employee or volunteer. I understand that these policies and procedures are the property of ACC.

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Full Legal Name (Please Print)

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Signature

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Date

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## 9 Resources on Harassment, Abuse and Abuse of Power in the Church

The PCA Ad Hoc Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault (DASA) issued an extensive report on abuse in the church context, and recommends numerous resources.  
<https://dasacommittee.org/resources>

GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), [www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org)

Safe Horizon. NYC organization with resources and support related to sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. [www.safehorizon.org](http://www.safehorizon.org)

*The Bully Pulpit*, by Michael Kruger, related to spiritual abuse

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673)

SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP).

The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE)

## 10 Appendices

### Appendix A: Detecting Sexual Abuse

Most cases of sexual abuse go undetected. There might be no apparent physical signs, or there might be physical signs detected only by medical examination. The cases that are reported are generally reported by abused children to their parents, siblings or other “caretakers” -- often in the form of casual remarks that lead the listener to query deeper. But most children say nothing. They might not realize that what was done to them was wrong or not even have the language for what has happened or is happening to them. They might be too embarrassed or frightened to speak up. Or, the offender may have threatened further harm if they tell. Often, the offender blames the victim for what he/she has done. And the victim might not want to get the offender in trouble -- especially if a “friendship” has developed between the offender and victim.

In some cases, there are “telltale” physical or emotional signs that may evoke suspicion.

Physical indicators:

- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Pain or itching in the genital area
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas
- Sexually transmitted illnesses

- Pregnancy

Behavioral indicators:

- Unwilling to change for gym or participate in physical education class
- Withdrawal, fantasy or infantile behavior
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
- Poor peer relationships
- Delinquency or running away

We must use caution as these signs can be indicative of other problems, and are not exclusively tied to sexual abuse. But the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the presence of several indicators, warrants further investigation. When there are a few signs or behavioral indicators or concerns that coincide, a report of abuse should be made based on “reasonable suspicion.” If a child or youth reports being sexually assaulted by a caretaker and/or discloses any form of abuse, this must be reported to the local authorities no matter how unconvincing or even if it is recanted (these are actually common disclosure behaviors). At a minimum, a call to a local child advocacy center should be placed to talk with someone with training about the concerns.

The above section is taken from Church Mutual’s *Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse* pamphlet and *The Educator’s Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* paper from The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/educator.pdf>

## **Appendix B: Profile of a Predator and/or Risky Adult**

Offenders will always adapt their tactics so no list will ever fully prepare us for someone we know and trust to act in a way that seeks to manipulate others in such a calculated way. Therefore, the below list is not exhaustive.

- a. Majority are known by the children/youth they abuse (90%)
- b. All have thoughts about being sexual with children, and act on those thoughts
- c. All actively seek access to children and the opportunity to be alone with them
- d. All genders (88% are male; 9% are female; 3% are unknown)\*
- e. All ages (including kids, teens and seniors)
- f. All socioeconomic groups (wealthy, middle class & disadvantaged)
- g. All races & ethnicities
- h. Diverse occupations
- i. Use the [Affection Lure](#) offline and online
- j. 20% of child sexual abuse occurs with children under 5 years of age; 50% with kids between 5-12 years old; and 30% occurs with teens between 13-17 years of age.
- k. Most child molesters are expert at getting children and families to trust them. Many target their victims and attempt to involve themselves in the child's life, including their family, school, house of worship, sports, and hobbies. They are often the first to offer to babysit

or drive your child to activities. Child molesters will smile at you, look you right in the eye and make you believe they are trustworthy.

1. Common grooming strategies include:
  - Befriending parents, particularly single parents, to gain access to their children.
  - Offering babysitting services to busy parents or guardians
  - Taking jobs and participating in community events that involve children
  - Becoming a guardian or foster parent
  - Attending sporting events for children
  - Offering to coach children's sports
  - Volunteering in youth organizations
  - Offering to chaperone overnight trips
  - Loitering in places children frequent - playgrounds, parks, malls, game arcades, sports fields, etc
  - Befriending youngsters on social media (Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) and online gaming platforms

\*Based on substantiated reports of child sexual abuse.

## **Appendix C: Caring for Survivors**

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support.

This support will include:

- Listening and staying calm
- Affirming without judgment
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging and empowering their agency
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other professional advice, but will focus on personal support and empowerment.

We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and **under no circumstances** - even when the abuse is alleged and not proven - will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief
- Attempt to silence the victim
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the perpetrator
- Urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator

Receiving an adult's abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. ACC encourages anyone receiving an adult's abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

**DO Say**

Thank you for telling me.

I believe you.

I'm so sorry for what you're going through.  
How can I help?

Take as much time as you need.

I am here.

*The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.*

It is okay to be angry.

It's understandable you're feeling that way.

Your reaction is not an uncommon response.

You're not going crazy. These are normal responses following abuse.

It wasn't your fault.

**DON'T Say**

Why are you telling me this?

Why didn't you \_\_\_\_\_  
(run/scream/stop him etc.)

What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?

You need to forgive and move on.

It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.

It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.

Try to be strong.

Out of tragedies good things happen.

You're lucky that \_\_\_\_\_ didn't happen.

I know how you feel.

Perhaps you misunderstood...