



ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Grace Fellowship Church Don Mills is committed to the safety of the children and other vulnerable persons in her care and is committed to being proactive in preventing sexual, physical and emotional abuse. While it is virtually impossible to ensure that abuse will never occur, there are strategies, policies and procedures that may radically reduce its likelihood. This Abuse Prevention Policy exists to protect the vulnerable from suffering abuse and to protect the innocent from false allegations. This policy applies to every program and ministry of Grace Fellowship Church Don Mills.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Final responsibility for adherence to this policy rests with the pastors. The pastors will nominate an Abuse Prevention Committee for the purpose of monitoring implementation in all church activities. Procedures will be adopted, and revised from time to time, for the various activities and functions within the church. The current version of this policy as approved by the membership will be posted on the GFCDonMills.ca site. Policies and procedures for specific ministries will also be posted on the web site as they are developed and revised.

ABUSE PREVENTION COMMITTEE

The pastors will nominate an Abuse Prevention Committee, which will be subject to approval by the membership at a members' meeting. The Committee will consist of a minimum of four persons, two female and two male, who will serve for a maximum of six consecutive years. In addition the pastors will assign one of its members as liaison to the committee.

The Coordinators of the GraceKids, GraceKids Adventure Camp, Preschool, and Nursery programs will be members of this committee.

The mandate of the Committee is:

- To review the Abuse Prevention Policy and procedures and recommend to the pastors such changes as will benefit the Grace Fellowship Church family
- To monitor implementation of the policy in all programs and activities taking place under the auspices of Grace Fellowship Church
- To develop forms and procedures to facilitate consistent terminology and record keeping
- To review all appointments for leadership positions, paid and volunteer
- To maintain the records of reference checks and police records checks required under this policy
- To monitor and keep records of participation in training for abuse prevention
- To report at least once each year to the pastors on the work of the committee and measures taken for the safety of the church family

Persons assigned to the Abuse Prevention Committee will be provided with such training as is necessary to enable them to perform their tasks with wisdom and effectiveness.

POLICIES FOR ALL PROGRAMS

Risk-Reduction Strategies

Certain policies, when implemented and followed, reduce the risk of all forms of abuse. These general strategies apply to all the ministries of Grace Fellowship Church Don Mills.

Access

All rooms used for meetings involving vulnerable persons will have windows in or near the doors. These windows will not be covered or obstructed at any time. When possible and practical, doors will remain open.

Supervision

Two or more adults should be present for all activities involving minors or vulnerable persons. When only two adults are present to supervise an activity involving only one or two vulnerable participants, the activity should be done in a context that is visible to others.

Nursery and Preschool

Only women and young ladies may serve as volunteers in the Nursery and Preschool Class. No men are allowed in the classrooms during services. There must always be two adults (18+) present in these rooms. There is a four month waiting period before new volunteers are accepted to these ministries.

Meetings

Adults will meet one-on-one with minors, vulnerable persons, or members of the opposite sex, only in public spaces or locations where they are clearly visible to others. All leaders and volunteers are expected to exercise discretion and avoid situations that may lead to the perception of impropriety.

Hallways

Hallways will be monitored during the entire time that nursery programs, children's programs, or youth programs are in session. The Primary Greeter will be responsible for this.

Discipline in Church Programs

An integral part of ministering to children is providing a safe, nurturing and loving atmosphere. Occasionally a child's behavior may be dangerous or otherwise inappropriate. Such misbehavior will be dealt with in a firm but loving manner. The manner of discipline must be appropriate to the age of the child and, for that reason each of ministries involving children has its own discipline policy. Physical punishment is never permitted, unless administered privately by a parent to their own child, in a self-controlled manner.

Screening

Appointments to leadership positions of any program involving minors and vulnerable persons will be made by the pastors. Any member of the congregation who has reason to think that any staff or volunteers of Grace Fellowship Church might not be acceptable for work with young or vulnerable persons should inform one of the pastors.

Before assuming their responsibilities, the following persons (16 years of age and older) must submit a police records check that is not more than one year old:

- Paid Staff, including Pastors and Interns
- Trustees and Deacons
- Primary Greeters
- Nursery and Preschool Program Volunteers
- GraceKids Teachers and Activity Leaders
- Summer Camp Leaders
- Anyone who has opportunity to visit with or otherwise work unsupervised with youth or vulnerable persons
- Any individual or additional role that the Abuse Prevention Committee may determine should be required to provide a police records check

Grace Fellowship will use the services of MyBackCheck.com to collect and store records. Applicants for ministry will be required to complete their online check before beginning to serve. Alternately, written reports from the local police service are acceptable.

All costs for these police records checks will be paid by Grace Fellowship Church.

Police records checks will remain valid for three years, after which new ones must be submitted.

Written (paper) reports of police and reference checks will be placed in a permanent, confidential file in a secure location in the church office, to be consulted only by members of the Abuse Prevention Committee and the pastors. Online reports will be stored by MyBackCheck.com and will be accessible only to the Abuse Prevention Committee. Anyone may request to see the content of his or her own file.

When large numbers of volunteers are needed for short-term activities, such as a Vacation Bible School, those who will not have opportunity to meet alone with children may be exempt from the police records check provision. Everyone will be provided with a copy of the abuse prevention policy for the particular ministry and will be expected to comply with it. In advance of the event, the leader will recommend to the Abuse Prevention Committee which positions can be exempt; the decision of the Abuse Prevention Committee will be final.

If a police records check reveals past criminal activity that has no bearing on possible relationships with children and vulnerable adults, the Abuse Prevention Committee may approve that person for activities with children, youth or adults.

Transportation

Persons who chauffeur minors for church activities must be familiar with and concur with this policy. An activity leader may deny someone permission to serve as chauffeur for any particular activity and the leader's decision will be final.

Transportation for church activities will be arranged in advance as much as possible. There will not be fewer than three persons at a time in the vehicle, except upon the specific request of a parent or guardian at the beginning or end of a route.

Note: Arrangements to transport minors between home and church by someone other than the parent or guardian will be considered a private arrangement, not a church arrangement subject to this policy.

Training

All members of Grace Fellowship Church will be asked to become familiar with this policy, to adhere to it, and to suggest improvements.

All leaders of programs involving children or teenagers must annually review the church's policy and procedures pertaining to abuse with their volunteers.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

While the purpose of this document is to prevent abuse, there are times when even the greatest vigilance will fail. There are also times when a person may suspect abuse though none has occurred.

General Policies

Evidence or suspicion of abuse must be reported and handled with care. The purpose of reporting is to stop the abuse, to provide assistance for the victim, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to begin the process of correction and redemption. All reports of suspected abuse will be investigated and records will be kept in the church's permanent files.

Confidentiality will be respected. The name of a victim will not be made public without his or her consent. We will not assume an alleged abuser is guilty before conviction or confession. The Abuse Prevention Committee and Pastors will determine when and to whom the names of the alleged victim and alleged abuser will be revealed.

Evidence or disclosure of abuse of a person who is a minor must be reported to civil authorities, in keeping with the provisions of provincial law. Abuse of a person who is not a minor will be reported to outside authorities only with the consent of the victim, even if the abuse occurred while the person was a minor. In situations where the victim is a vulnerable person, it may be necessary to notify civil authorities.

Grace Fellowship Church recognizes and respects the right of a victim to pursue legal remedies through civil courts, independent of any action taken by this church. Spiritual support, pastoral help, and other forms of appropriate engagement by the church will be provided, whether or not legal action is taken in a particular case.

Protocol for Reporting Suspected Abuse

All suspicion or disclosure of abuse must be brought to the attention of a member of the Abuse Prevention Committee or one of the pastors. When a Committee member or pastor receives such information, he or she must make it known to all pastors and all Abuse Prevention Committee members. Another pastor or a second member of the Abuse Prevention Committee will tell the person who suspects abuse that the issue has been reported and is being investigated.

For the purpose of accuracy, the person reporting is asked to write down as soon and as accurately as possible what was observed or heard (a Suspected Abuse Report Form) and to submit it to the Abuse Prevention Committee in confidence.

The Abuse Prevention Committee will, in consultation with the victim, as appropriate, determine what course of action will be taken, including:

- Referral to the pastors as a matter requiring pastoral counseling;
- Notification of civil authorities, if required under the provisions of provincial law

The Abuse Prevention Committee operates in an advisory capacity to the designated authorities in the church. Any pastoral and/or disciplinary action will be taken by the designated authorities.

If the situation involves a minor, the incident must be reported to the appropriate civil authorities, under the provision of provincial law. If pastoral staff is available and not implicated, they will call the appropriate authorities. Failing that, if a member of the Abuse Prevention Committee is available, they will call the appropriate authorities. If neither is available, the person with evidence or disclosure should report, as required by the law. If there is a question about the need to report, advice can be obtained by contacting the Children's Aid Society.

If the situation involves a vulnerable adult who may be subject to provincial trusteeship, the Abuse Prevention Committee will determine the need to notify civil authorities.

If the situation involves a church leader, matters such as notification, temporary suspension from office, and disciplinary measures will be led by the pastors. Depending on the circumstances and severity of the incident, suspension from a position, with pay for paid staff, may be required to allow time for further investigation, and will be done without prejudice as to the final determination. Suspension may include limitations or conditions on contact with children or other church members, pending the conclusion of a more formal hearing process.

Approved by the Membership _____ (date)