

Sexual Misconduct & Child and Youth Protection Policy

RISE CHURCH

Approved by Session, February 17, 2016

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Purpose

The Christian church is called to express and give witness to the love of God through Word and action. This is how the Church reveals God's vision and Kingdom of justice in the world. Expressions of God's love are revealed to us and our neighbor through worship, study, prayer, and fellowship. Through this type of ministry together, the Christian community connects us to the most intimate, vulnerable, and sacred dimensions of our lives. The work of building God's new creation is done by church members (both adult and children), clergy, and church staff.

Central to the Reformed faith is the concept of "covenant." God entered into covenant with the people of God to assure survival and liberation. God's people made promises to God in order to live out the covenant in their lives. As the body of Christ, we covenant with one another to create a community where all the people experience the security, love, and acceptance of the Christian community. The promises we make to each other are sacred.

In the covenant of baptism, individuals and the congregation take responsibility for the spiritual well-being and growth of individuals entrusted to the believing community. In the covenant that takes place during communion, the cup and the bread represent our commitment to remembering the new covenant Jesus created with his friends and disciples.

Because of nature of relationships between church members, staff, and clergy and the vulnerability that arises from sharing our faith and life together, the church can potentially be a place where individuals can engage in abusive, inappropriate, and illegal behaviors and actions with other community members.

The purpose of this sexual misconduct and child protection covenant is to firmly address the presence of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in our social and ecclesiastical culture in

a proactive manner. Survivors and victims of sexual misconduct experience a rupture in their sense of belonging and identity within a community of faith. To that end, it will be the policy of the Rise Church to protect members, guests and staff of the Church from sexual misconduct including both the potential victim and potential accused person. To protect potential victim and accused person, the following covenant will be in force in all areas of Rise Church's ministry. In addition to this policy, all teaching elders are covered by the Presbytery of the Cascades Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Definitions

1. **"Child,"** as used herein, means any person under 18 years of age.
2. **"Child Abuse"** includes the following harmful conduct by an adult towards a child:
 - (a) causing physical injury to a child, other than accidentally;
 - (b) causing mental injury to a child through cruelty when it results in substantial psychological impairment;
 - (c) any kind of "sexual contact" with a child, as explained below; and
 - (d) soliciting or encouraging a child to engage in sexual conduct for the purpose of recording (by video or any other means) or exhibiting such sexual conduct by a child.
3. **"Sexual Contact"** means touching the sexual or other intimate parts of a child or causing a child to touch the sexual or other intimate parts of the person for the purpose of arousing or gratifying the sexual desire of the person or the child. Such sexual contact with a child is a criminal offense under State laws. A child – that is, anyone under 18 years of age – is considered legally incapable of consenting to any sexual contact.
4. **"Peer-to-Peer Misconduct,"** as used herein, means harmful conduct by one child towards another child. Peer to-peer misconduct includes (a), (b) and (d) under "child abuse" and any "sexual contact." Sexual contact between a child and another child is misconduct of both except where one child uses force, coercion, threats, or violence, or where one is significantly older than the other child.
5. **"Vulnerable Adult,"** any person who cannot speak or act with reasonable safety on one's own behalf.
6. **"Abuse"** as used in this document are defined as follows:
 - a. **Physical Abuse**, including any unwarranted touch, any physical contact intended to coerce or do harm, any hitting or touching in anger.

- b. **Emotional/Verbal Abuse**, including insults, name calling, belittling remarks, unfavorable comparisons with other children or youth, shaming, deliberately causing fear, or using speech to hurt.
- c. **Spiritual Abuse**, including using Scripture or church authority to coerce, control or shame; using threats about condemnation from God or making threats about God withholding love to control behavior.
- d. **Sexual Abuse**, which is defined as any sexual contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a leader's charge, including:
 - (a). fondling private parts
 - (b). oral, genital, or anal penetration
 - (c). sexual intercourse
 - (d). forcible rape
 - (e). suggestive sexual comments
 - (f). showing pornography (sexually explicit materials)
 - (g). exposing sex organs
 - (h). allowing children to witness sexual activity

Standards of Conduct

- a.) Volunteer adults working with children and youth in church related activities in a leadership position shall have attended Rise Church for at least six months and be well known to the supervisor. Exceptions can be made if the volunteer is previously known to the supervisor.
- b.) Paid and volunteer adults and youth helpers shall not touch or interact with children in any way that is intended or could be reasonably construed to be sexually stimulating. Care must also be taken that consenting adults do not act in a sexual way during any Church activity. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical caretaking (diapers, etc.) are appropriate as long as respect for others personal wishes about being touched are honored, not excessive, or imposed upon another individual.
- c.) Supervisors of programs involving children should work in pairs; whenever possible, two adults should be present with the children at all activities. An unaccompanied adult should not drive a single child in a Church-sponsored activity without the permission of the child's parent or guardian. When practicable, parental permission should be obtained in writing. It is recommended that children and youth be transported in groups rather than alone.
- d.) Christian education teachers, nursery advisors, and youth advisors should work in pairs when possible; a teacher may work alone when there is visual access to the classroom (door with window, or open door).

e.) All overnight activities must have a minimum of two adults present; for mixed youth overnights there must be both a male and female present. Parental permission in writing is required for all overnights. On those occasions when one-on-one counseling is appropriate, the adult should notify another adult where he/she and the youth will be.

f.) Christian education teachers, youth advisors, nursery supervisors and helpers shall discipline with kindness with the goal of helping children develop a sense of responsibility and self-control. Corporal punishment of any kind within the church is unacceptable. Corporal punishment includes but is not limited to slapping, spanking, pinching and/or shaking. Punitive techniques that cause physical pain such as assuming an uncomfortable position are not appropriate. Physical restraint of children should be used only when someone's safety is at risk. Derogatory remarks or comments that humiliate or frighten the child shall not be used. Appropriate discipline establishes clear expectations, provides rewards and incentives for acceptable behavior. Appropriate discipline uses verbal disapproval, loss of privileges, and redirection to teach children acceptable behavior.

Supervision and Accountability

a.) Christian education leaders will seek volunteers in sufficient numbers to allow staffing of the programs as stated above. Church staff may participate in these programs and may be present at random time to help with supervision.

b.) Communication and explanation of this policy will be included annually in all training and orientation programs for Christian education volunteers, as well as during officer training events. All adult staff and volunteers working with children shall complete online "Safe Conduct" training, to be renewed every three years. This training is accessible at http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety_solutions/safe_conduct_workbench.aspx

c.) Written information about this policy shall be sent to all church members and posted in the office. Mention of this policy will be included in new member orientation classes.

d.) As a condition of paid or volunteer involvement with children, all people agreeing to work with children and/or youth will be required to disclose whether he/she has ever been convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse or misconduct, as defined in this covenant or applicable state laws, or terminated from employment for sexual abuse, harassment, or similar misconduct. Three references will be required for all paid employees and volunteers in a leadership position. For temporary employees or volunteers at a Vacation Bible School, Rise Church may modify this requirement but also limit contact with children and youth, have such volunteers under constant supervision or partnered with someone who had been screened and trained. References will be asked whether the person has ever been convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse or similar misconduct. A background into his/her arrest records may be required.

Mandatory Reporting

1. State laws require the reporting of all suspected cases of child abuse not previously reported to the appropriate authorities, regardless of when the incident(s) may have occurred.
2. This policy requires that the pastor be immediately notified of any suspected child abuse. If the suspect is the pastor, the report should be made to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.
3. Having reviewed the situation, the Pastor or Stated Clerk will determine whether there is suspected child abuse or an obligation of mandatory reporting, in which case the required reports will be made following the procedures for reporting outlined below.
4. If the person making the initial report believes that a case of child abuse has been overlooked or ignored and has gone unreported, that person should contact the appropriate state authorities.
5. Law enforcement should always be notified of any crimes or criminal activities (such as rape or assault), whether the perpetrator is an adult or a child.
6. Detailed procedures for leaders to follow are described in Addendum A, which is made a part of this policy by incorporation and reference. Leaders are to note the particular situation they are facing and use the appropriate procedure noted in Addendum A.

Response Plan

A sacred trust exists between Rise Church and all who are served by its ministry. Abuse of any kind is a matter of gravest concern. Knowledge of such abuse calls for a special response so that the safety of the child/youth/vulnerable adult and the community is assured and healing can take place. This applies whether the occurrence happens at a church event or is past abuse that is previously unreported.

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously.

Assure the safety of the alleged victim. Make sure he/she is in a safe place and watched over. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the matter can be investigated. Pastoral support shall be available and offered to all persons involved with the incident. The confidentiality of all involved in an alleged incident shall be protected, both at the event and in the future. In the event that the incident has become public knowledge, the Event Coordinator (Pastor, Clerk of Session, staff member, church officer, or responsible volunteer) will use respect and discretion in acknowledging that an incident has occurred and that all involved are safe and being cared for.

In all cases of reported or observed abuse in an activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

Addendum A - Procedures to be used in Reporting Abuse

I. Reporting suspected child abuse by an adult

A. Any staff member who either makes the observation of suspected child abuse or who receives information from a participant describing suspected child abuse by an adult should contact the Pastor immediately and notify the Clerk of Session. The suspected incident should not be discussed with anyone else.

B. The Event Coordinator will begin a written report on the incident.

C. The Event Coordinator (and other appropriate persons) should promptly make an initial inquiry regarding the report, which in most cases will include:

- i. Taking a statement from the child involved. The Event Coordinator should have one other adult present, who may be the person making the initial report, if that person would put the child at ease. The Event Coordinator should be careful to listen to the child's own words and not to ask any leading questions.
- ii. Talking with the person accused of child abuse. Do not ask any leading questions.
- iii. Discern from the information gathered whether child abuse may have occurred. If there is any reasonable doubt, treat the case as suspected child abuse take the following action and document accordingly.
 - a. Isolate the accused adult immediately;
 - b. immediately report the suspected abuse to appropriate state authorities;
 - c. document and follow all instructions of state authorities;
 - d. advise the person making the initial report that state authorities have been notified;
 - e. and notify the child's parent or guardian as instructed by state authorities.

Staff and volunteers should observe strict confidentiality regarding the suspected child abuse, even after it has been reported to state authorities. Therefore, care should be taken not to discuss the incident with anyone except when absolutely necessary.

II. Reporting a disclosure of suspected child abuse which happened prior to a church event by a caretaker, relative, authority person, or other adult.

- A. Any staff members or volunteers who receive information describing suspected child abuse that may have happened away from the church shall contact the Pastor immediately and notify the Clerk of Session. The suspected incident should not be discussed with anyone else.
- B. The pastor or clerk of Session will begin a written report on the incident.
- C. Immediately report suspected child abuse to the appropriate state authorities.
- D. Volunteers and Staff should observe strict confidentiality regarding the suspected child abuse, even after it has been reported to state authorities. Therefore, care should be taken not to discuss the incident with participants or other event staff, except when absolutely necessary

III. Reporting and handling peer-to-peer misconduct at a church event.

- A. Any staff member or volunteer who observes peer-to-peer misconduct at a church event or who receives information from a participant describing such peer-to-peer misconduct should contact the Pastor immediately and notify the Clerk of Session. The suspected incident should not be discussed with anyone else.
 - B. The Event Coordinator will begin a written report on the incident.
1. If the peer-to-peer misconduct *does not* involve sexual contact, initial inquiry should be made by the Pastor or Clerk of Session to determine whether the report or claim of misconduct is serious and credible and, if so, what actions should be taken. The following procedure will usually be appropriate:
- i. Take a statement from the offended child, being careful to listen to the child's own words and not to ask leading questions. The Event Coordinator should have one other adult present, who may be the person making the initial report, if that person would put the child at ease. The Event Coordinator should be careful to listen to the child's own words and not to ask any leading questions.
 - ii. Talk separately to the child accused of the misconduct. Do not ask any leading questions.
 - iii. Talk separately with any witnesses to the misconduct. Again, do not ask any leading questions.

iv. If the report or claim does not involve misconduct that physically harmed or seriously threatened to harm anyone, you will need to decide on proposed disciplinary action, if any, which might include counseling, notification of the parents, or removal from the event. Document all contacts. The Book of Order shall be followed where appropriate.

v. If the report or claim does involve misconduct that physically harmed or seriously threatened to harm another person, isolate the accused child immediately and immediately report the incident to appropriate state authorities; document and follow all instructions of state authorities; if not otherwise instructed by state authorities, notify the parents or guardians of both the offended child and the accused child.

vi. Staff should observe reasonable confidentiality regarding any incidents of misconduct reported to state authorities. Therefore, care should be taken not to discuss the incident except when absolutely necessary.

vii. A full report must be submitted as soon as possible to the Executive Presbyter, but in no event later than two weeks from the initial report of suspected abuse.

2. If the peer-to-peer misconduct *does* involve sexual contact, initial inquiry should be made by the Event Coordinator to determine whether the report or claim of misconduct is serious and credible and, if so, what actions should be taken. The following procedure will usually be appropriate:

i. Talk to each child separately, being careful to listen to their own words and not to ask leading questions. The Pastor or Clerk of Session should have one other adult present, who may be the person making the initial report, if that person would put the child at ease. The Event Coordinator should be careful to listen to the child's own words and not to ask any leading questions.

ii. If there are witnesses, talk separately with them. Again, do not ask any leading questions.

iii. Determine whether the sexual contact resulted from the use of force, coercion, threats, or violence, or whether one child is so much older that the younger child either felt coercion or did not understand what was happening.

iv. If the sexual contact did not result from the use of force, coercion, threats, or violence, then follow the steps set forth above for handling cases of peer-to-peer misconduct that do not involve physical harm or the threat of physical harm by one child against another.

v. If the sexual contact did result from the use of force, coercion, threats, or violence, or age disparity, follow the steps set forth above (III, 1, v, vi, vii) for reporting to state authorities cases of peer-to-peer misconduct that involve physical harm or the threat of physical harm by one child against another.

Commitment Form

Rise Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. As a church officer, staff member or volunteer working with children, youth or vulnerable adults in this Church, I agree to observe and abide by this Safe Practices Policy, to observe the "Two Adult Rule," to participate in training events provided by the church, and to report promptly abusive or inappropriate behavior.

Signature

Position

Print full name

Date