

CHILD AND YOUTH ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Revised
July 13, 2022

Introduction

The congregation of Trinity Lutheran Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in the ministries and activities sponsored by the church.

Ministry to our children is deeply valued and because of that, procedures must be implemented and followed to protect everyone from potentially harmful situations. Trinity is committed to preserving this church as a sanctuary for all who would enter as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

To help protect children, Trinity Lutheran Church (Trinity), has adopted the following Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program. It is important that all Trinity paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent abuse against children. The following includes the Purpose and Definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of Protection and Prevention, Trinity's Response to Abuse and an Acknowledgement to be signed by those people working with children.

Purpose

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of child abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist Trinity in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

Definitions

The following terms used herein and are defined as follows:

1. *Paid Staff*: Any pastor, minister, preacher, cleric, or employee who is paid.
2. *Children/Youth/Minor*: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by state law.
3. *Adult*: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday or as defined by state law.
4. *Volunteer*: Means any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. *Abuse*: Anything that falls under the following definitions.
 - **Child Neglect**: Omission of the child's basic needs, physical, environmental, emotional and nutritional, that are necessary for a child's well-being, or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.
 - **Emotional Abuse**: Verbal or nonverbal violence toward a child that gives the child the message that the child is "not good" and never will be. Verbal abuse is a very common malady that attacks every human being at some point in their lives; some more than others. It can be a very devastating form of abuse when the person experiences the attacks frequently. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and/or material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
 - **Physical Abuse**: Physical violence toward a child. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth. Often it is the transference of adult anger.
 - **Sexual Abuse or Sexual Molestation**: Any sexual contact with a child by an adult or an older youth. These acts may range from touching of the penis, vagina, buttocks, or breast/chest area to sexual intercourse. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth.

Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.

- **Drug & Alcohol Abuse:** There is an increase in the use of alcohol among junior and senior high school students. Children or youth that show up at church under the influence of alcohol or drugs, who bring these substances with them on church retreats, camp or other activities or those who are reported by peers to be intoxicated may need help to stop dangerous behavior.
- **Economic Exploitation:** Economic exploitation is the deliberate use of a child or youth for money or power. This includes forcing a child to work, using someone against their will or using another person's labor without offering them adequate compensation.
- **Bullying:** Bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose. Usually, bullying happens over and over. Bullying also can happen on-line or electronically. Cyber bullying is when children or teens bully each other using the Internet, mobile phones or other cyber technology. Unfortunately, not everyone takes bullying seriously, including adults.

Protection and Prevention

Abuse Prevention Training

All paid staff and volunteers who have oversight of children or youth will be required to complete Trinity's selected training process. Completion of this training will be kept on file and will be required to be renewed no less than every five years.

Volunteer and Employee Screening Procedures

The following screening procedures are to be used with paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All information collected should be maintained in confidence.

Criminal Background Check: Trinity will conduct a criminal background check on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the regular care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. Specifically,

- A background check will be initiated by the chairperson of the Personnel Committee **for all paid church staff members**. Results will be shared with Pastor prior to the staff member's first workday.
- A background check of **all volunteers who work with children** will be conducted by the Faith Formation/Youth Ministry coordinator OR a well-chosen member of either the youth board or the board of Christian education. These results should be shared with the Pastor prior to the volunteers' first workday.
- All criminal background checks will be updated periodically (not to exceed 3 years).
- Background checks are not transferable. Trinity will not share or accept background checks completed by other individuals or agencies.
- An authorization for background records check form (either paper or electronic) must be completed in its entirety for the individual to qualify to work with children.
- Trinity reserves the right to run additional background checks as deemed necessary.

Confidentiality

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. Only the Pastor, **Faith Formation/Youth Ministry Coordinator** (Education Coordinator and the Youth & Families Director) shall have access to the information. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted if possible. These materials will be archived.

Supervision Procedures

Unless an extenuating situation exists, Trinity:

1. Will have adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity.
2. Will monitor facilities during activities involving children.
3. Will release minors only to a parent or guardian and utilize sign-in and sign-out sheets.
4. Will obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips and should provide information regarding the trip.
5. Will attempt to have two paid staff or volunteers when transporting minors in vehicles or make reasonable accommodation.
6. Will require anyone who is transporting children or youth in their own vehicle to submit a copy of their current proof of automobile insurance and a copy of their current driver's license.
7. Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the minor.
8. Will encourage minors to use a "buddy system" whenever minors go on trips off of Trinity property.
9. Will screen all paid staff and volunteers and approve those individuals in advance for any overnight activities.
10. Will insure safe and supervised sleeping arrangements while on any overnight activity. Whenever possible, males and females will be separated in different rooms or areas for sleeping. Youth and leaders will not share beds. Any other reasonable provision will be taken to insure the safety and security of our youth.
11. Will provide "confidential counselors" to whom any minor can go at any time, without special permission, to discuss any problems he or she is having. Including pastors, paid staff, and event leaders.

12. Will provide mandatory reporters and instruct all leaders to report any and all concerns to the appropriate people, and to use good judgement when counselling youth.

Behavioral Guidelines

All volunteers and paid staff will observe the following guidelines:

1. Do not provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband, or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.
2. To the extent possible, Trinity events that are co-educational will have both male and female chaperones.
3. Whenever possible, at least two unrelated paid staff or volunteers will be in the room when minors are present. Doors will be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present. Speaking to a minor or minors one-on-one should be done in public settings where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other people.
4. Avoid all inappropriate touching with minors. All touching shall be based on the needs of the individual being touched, not on the needs of the volunteer or paid staff. In the event a minor initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, it is appropriate to inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate.
5. Never engage in physical discipline of a minor. Volunteers and paid staff shall not abuse minors in any way, including but not limited to physical abuse, verbal/mental abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse of any kind.
6. If you recognize an inappropriate relationship developing between a minor and adult, maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the minor to another individual with supervisory authority.
7. If one-on-one pastoral care is necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments.
8. Anyone who observes abuse of a minor will take appropriate steps to immediately intervene and provide assistance. Report any inappropriate conduct to the proper authorities and officials of Trinity for handling. Specifically, any board member, program volunteer, paid staff member or parishioner should bring his/her concern/observation immediately to Pastor who will assist in discerning next steps, including assistance in contacting law enforcement, if necessary. If the concern involves the pastor, it should be brought immediately to the head of the personnel committee and, if situation warrants next steps, law enforcement authorities and Synod office.

Disqualification

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

Additional disqualifying offenses may apply. If in the judgment of the Pastor (with the possible assistance of the Education Coordinator, Youth & Families Director, or appropriate committee as deemed necessary) the adult leader presents a potential threat to the emotional, and/or physical safety of youth at Trinity Lutheran Church, the adult leader will be denied an opportunity to work with youth. Other disqualifying offenses will be determined by the Pastor in charge on a case by case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction or falsifying any information will also be a disqualifying event.

Response to Abuse

Trinity will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of any kind of abuse. All accusations of abuse will be taken seriously. It is important to be appropriately respectful to the needs and feelings of those who allege abuse and those who have been accused of abuse.

When an allegation is made involving abuse, the person reporting the complaint is to be told about the guidelines and the procedures to be followed. The Lead Pastor or an appointed person will begin investigating the allegations and may use the assistance of legal counsel or other consultants. If the Lead Pastor is the individual accused of abuse, then the Associate Pastor will conduct the investigation. The investigation will be conducted as follows:

1. Report the incident to appropriate authorities (including a pastor of Trinity) in accordance with the state mandatory reporting laws.
2. Report the matter to Trinity's insurance carrier.
3. Cooperate with authorities and the insurance carrier.
4. Trinity may suspend (with pay for paid staff) the alleged offender while a confidential investigation is being conducted.
5. An official of Trinity (and legal counsel or other consultants) will then meet with the governing body of Trinity and present a report on their investigation, which will include findings and recommendations of actions.
6. An official of Trinity will meet with the alleged perpetrator and notify him/her of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
7. An official of Trinity will meet with the alleged victim, along with his/her parents or guardians, and notify them of the results of the investigation and recommendations for actions.
8. During the investigation, an official of Trinity shall maintain contact with the alleged victim and his/her parents or legal guardian, and inform them of the actions taken and assist them in their process of healing.
9. An official of Trinity (and legal counsel or other consultants) may meet with the alleged perpetrator, the alleged victim, and any others with knowledge of relevant facts.
10. Communicate with criminal and civil legal counsel of Trinity.
11. Communicate with those affected by the ministry of the alleged perpetrator.
12. Hire a consultant or assign a spokesperson to respond to media or prepare a statement for the media if the need shall arise, subject to the approval of Trinity's attorney.

Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program Acknowledgment

These guidelines have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. Trinity 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 the Trinity or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received a copy of the Trinity's Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Program and have completed Trinity's 'Safeguard from Abuse' Training. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained herein. I am providing an email address to which a background authorization will be sent (or I am completing a written authorization form). I understand that these policies are the property of the Trinity Lutheran Church.

Print Name

Email Address

Signature

Date