

Abuse Response Procedure

The Abuse Response Procedure is guided by the following core values: Safety, compliance, and care. The procedure is meant to ensure safety for the abused person, compliance with the laws of the civil authorities, and ongoing spiritual, emotional, and social care.

This procedure is not exhaustive. It is intended to provide a starting point, along with guidance for future action.

OUTLINE

- I. Responding to known or suspected abuse
 - a. If a childcare worker has a reasonable suspicion of abuse of a child
 - b. If a pastor or staff member learns of abuse of an adult
 - c. How elders should proceed with church discipline of an abusive member
 - d. How the church should respond to an allegation of abuse against a staff member, board member, or pastor
- II. Childcare worker abuse training
 - a. Training schedule
 - b. Training content
- III. Resources and contacts
 - a. For children
 - b. For adults
 - c. For perpetrators
 - d. Counseling
 - e. Instance and Legal support
 - f. Additional Guidance on responding to abuse disclosures

PART 1: RESPONDING TO KNOWN OR SUSPECTED ABUSE

If a childcare worker¹ has a reasonable suspicion of abuse of a child:²

- If the childcare worker believes that there is in imminent danger to the child, or that the child will be in imminent danger when returned to their primary care giver, he/she should call the police
- Childcare workers who have a reasonable suspicion of abuse must make a prompt report to CPS
 - Ensure that the child is safe while making report
 - Gather factual information about the child before making the report (i.e., full name, address)
 - Attempt to make the report when the child is not present
 - An oral report should be made immediately (855-444-3911), followed by a written report within 72 hours
 - The childcare worker is responsible for making sure that the report is made but the report may be made in conjunction with the Ministry Director

¹ Church volunteers: "Childcare workers" as defined in the Wyoming Park Bible Fellowship Child Protection Policy: <http://www.wpbiblefellowship.org/pdf/WPBF%20Child%20Protection%20Policy.pdf>. All church members, whether or not they are officially "childcare workers" are free and encouraged to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

² Refer to Michigan's Mandated Reporter's Resource Guide for more information: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/d_hs/Pub-112_179456_7.pdf. This document contains the Michigan Child Protection Law, the reporting process, definitions of abuse/neglect, and indicators of abuse/neglect.

- The childcare worker should report the incident to the Ministry Director. If unavailable the incident may be reported to a pastor or vice-chair of the board.
- If the church volunteer or staff member learns of abuse through the child
 - Inform the child of your obligation to keep the child safe and report the information to those who can help
- If the church volunteer or staff member learns of abuse through another adult
 - If possible, assist that adult in making a report to CPS
 - Otherwise, inform the adult of the obligation to report and file the report
- If the report results in a safety plan (as developed by CPS or law enforcement) the staff should ask to see the plan to ensure compliance with the plan
- Do not alert the abuser that a report will or has been filed
- Sensitive details should be handled with discretion, respecting confidentiality in a way that does not undermine safety, compliance, and care

What if a pastor or staff member learns of abuse (physical, sexual, other) of an adult?

- Connect the victim with a trained counselor with expertise in the area of abuse
- Support the victim's decision on whether/when to take legal action
- Assist the victim in developing a safety plan
 - Work with domestic abuse experts and/or law enforcement
- Assemble a care team by asking "Who in our church do you trust enough to walk with you through this time?"
 - Designate one person as the care team coordinator
 - The care team's responsibility is to:
 - Provide social and emotional support
 - Coordinate deacon care for physical needs (housework, benevolence, meals, etc.)
 - Assist pastor in providing pastoral care
 - Consider designating a member of the care team as a "counseling advocate"³
 - The pastor should follow up regularly with the care team
- Do not confront the abuser until the abused person is ready and do not do it without a safety plan in place
- When counseling in cases of non-criminal spousal abuse counsel each person individually

How should the elders proceed with church discipline of an abusive member?

- If the abuse is criminal, work with the civil authorities, receiving information about the abuse from the criminal investigation
- Remove unrepentant abusive individuals from membership, in accordance with the church discipline process outlined in the church Constitution. The goal of church discipline is true repentance that leads to reconciliation
 - True repentance will be accompanied by consistent appropriate behavior over time
 - Reconciliation, in whatever form it can take, should not compromise the safety of others
- If the abuser demonstrates true repentance but the abused is slow to trust, "advocate for continued patience on the part of the formerly abusive spouse for as long as safety arrangements are not causing greater distress for the children" as determined by an experienced child therapist.⁴
- Keep record of the disciplinary process and be prepared to share that document with other churches

³ "A counseling advocate is a peer-based relationship... who serves as a *periodic* guest in counseling. ... Their role is to provide support and reinforcement while the individual is in counseling" and afterwards. *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*, p127.

⁴ Quote from *Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused*, p151. In this case "The church should position itself with the best interest of the weakest and most vulnerable at the forefront of their concern – in this case, the children."

What should the church do if there is an accusation of abuse against a staff member, board member, or pastor?

- A single accusation is sufficient to warrant an investigation
- The board should meet, without the accused, to decide whether the accusation warrants a level 1 or a level 2 investigation process.
 - A level 1 investigation is in response to a petty or otherwise spurious accusation that does not require the staff member, board member, or pastor to change their role or status during the investigation (e.g., misunderstandings arising from interpersonal conflict). At any time during the investigation the board could upgrade it to level 2 (e.g., accusations of sexual or physical abuse)
- During the investigation the board should appoint a Response Coordinator to coordinate the following action
 - Turn the investigation over to an independent investigator
 - If criminal charges are brought, the police will be the investigator
 - Otherwise, the investigator should
 - Have sufficient expertise in the subject matter
 - Be committed to transparency
 - If a level 2 investigation:
 - Confiscate staff members church issued technology, key to the church, and access to church email
 - Remove staff/board member from functioning in their role
 - Inform the church that an accusation has been made, without revealing the identity of the accuser
 - Provide a way for other potential victims to come forward
 - Appoint a care team (see above)
 - Connect the victim to a counselor who is neither an employee or member of the church

PART 2: CHILDREN'S MINISTRY TRAINING SCHEDULE AND CONTENT

Children's Ministry Volunteer Safety Training Schedule

Weekly Workers (Nursery, Garden, Registration, Young Explorers)

- Every Volunteer must view (or pass quiz for) MinistrySafe Video Training every 2 years
- One Hour-Long Training a year ("Keeping Kids Safe at WPBF" and "Caring for an Abused Child")
 - Nursery/Garden/Registration – During BFG one week in March
 - Young Explorers – Wednesday Night before Fall Carnival in September
- Monthly Huddle Meetings (5-10 minutes) that review a topic each month
 - *January*: Worker to Child Ratios, Bathroom Use Policy
 - *February*: Guidelines for Listening to Disclosures of Abuse
 - *March*: Setting Safe Boundaries
 - *April*: Reporting Abuse to CPS
 - *May*: First Aid, Food Allergies, and Other Health Concerns
 - *June*: Ministering to Children with Trauma
 - *July*: Recognizing Signs of Abuse
 - *August*: Incident Reporting
 - *September*: Photography and Social Media Use
 - *October*: Pursuing Transparency
 - *November*: Recognizing Grooming Behavior
 - *December*: Our Approach and CPP Values

Sunday School Teachers (Young Disciples)

- Every Volunteer must view (or pass quiz for) MinistrySafe Video Training every 2 years
- One Hour-Long Meeting Every Two Months (January, March, May, July, September, November)
 - This meeting would also cover non-safety topics, such as Curriculum Preview
 - This meeting would also cover two topics covered in the above schedule of Monthly Huddle Meetings

VBS Volunteers (Young Travelers)

- All Approved Child Workers (orange tag) must view (or pass quiz for) MinistrySafe Training every 2 years
- One 2-Hour-Long Meeting the Sunday evening before VBS
 - Covers all CPP and Abuse Response Topics outlined below

Children's Ministry Volunteer Safety Training Content

Sexual Abuse Awareness (MinistrySafe)

- Facts and Misconceptions
- Characteristics of an Abuser
- Grooming Process
- Peer to Peer Training
- Methods to Reduce Risk
- Impact on Children
- If a Child Reports Abuse
- Responsibility to Report

Keeping Kids Safe at WPBF

- Our Approach & Child Protection Policy Values
- Our Child Protection Policy
 - Requirements for Children's Ministry Workers
 - Worker to Child Ratios
 - Bathroom Use Policy
 - Setting Safe Boundaries (Defining Appropriate Touching and Combatting Grooming Behaviors)
 - First Aid, Food Allergies and Other Health Concerns
 - Photography and Social Media
- Incident Policy

Caring for an Abused Child

- Guidelines for Listening to a Disclosure of Abuse
- Reporting Abuse to CPS
- Incorporating an Abuse Response Team
- Ministering to Children with Trauma

PART 3: RESOURCES

Immediate Danger - Always call 911

Children

- MDHHS
 - website www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/ Information about children and adult protective services as well as domestic and sexual violence, including teen dating violence
 - 2300 Form for Reporting Found on the MDHHS website, you will have to print this and fax or email it to Centralized Intake for Abuse and Neglect in addition to phoning it in.
- Michigan Centralized Intake for reporting abuse and neglect call 855-444-3911
- Michigan Mandated Reporters Resource Guide https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dhs/Pub-112_179456_7.pdf
- Michigan Mandated Reporter Website www.michigan.gov/mandatedreporter
- Michigan Mandated Reporter Information Line 877-277-2585 Answer any questions you have about being a mandated reported
- The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline Available 24/7 If you have questions about what is considered child abuse
- 1-800-4-A-CHILD 1-800-422-4453

Adults

SafeHavenMinistires.org

- 616-452-6664 24/7 Confidential crisis line
- Lots of resources on Domestic Violence (How to screen for Domestic Violence, How to support victims, How to respond when victim reveals it to you, etc.)
- Offer training, and Church Certification
- Counseling- Residential and non residential services for Victims and Families

YWCA

- 616-454-9922 24/7 Confidential helpline
- Counseling (short-term individual and group at no cost)
- Advocacy Support
- Shelter and Safe Living
- No Cost Rape Exams and Medical Help
- www.ywcawcmi.org Resources (Trainings, How to help info, Men, women and children victims)

Perpetrators

Batterer Intervention Services in Kent County, MI

YWCA Men Choosing Alternative to Violence 616-459-4652

Men's Resource Center 616-456-1178

Counseling

<p>Rachael Kool, LPC Counseling</p> <p>616-929-0189 rachelkool@gmail.com</p> <p>rachelkoolcounseling.com 2335 Burton St. SE Suite 130 Grand Rapids, MI 49506</p>	<p>Works with Children, adolescents and adults Experienced with Trauma</p>
<p>Kelly Ram, LPC</p> <p>616-818-1637 4565 Wilson Ave Ste 3A Grandville, Michigan 49418</p>	<p>Specializes in Trauma and PTSD, Domestic Violence and abuse Works with Children and Adults in crisis and trauma</p>
<p>Deb Crater, LPC</p> <p>Centennial Park Counseling debcrater@cpcounsel.net 616-949-9550</p>	<p>Specializes in Trauma Counseling Works with Children Adolescents and young adults</p>
<p>3rd Chair thethirdchair.com</p>	<p>Works with Teen-young adults</p>

<p>info@thethirdchair.com 648 Monroe Ave. NW, Suite 100 Grand Rapids, MI 49503 616 -916- 3711</p>	<p>Many different therapist</p>
<p>Second Story Counseling 616-426-9034 7678 Cottonwood Dr. Jenison, MI 49428</p>	<p>Many different therapist</p>

Insurance and Legal Support

- Insurance: Brotherhood Mutual Legal Assist:
 - Quick legal questions: <https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/legalassist/quick-response-service/>
 - Attorney Referral service: <https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/legalassist/attorney-referral-service/>
- Kent Count Prosecuting Attorney: 616-632-6710. The office has access to Child Abuse Lawyers

Responding to Abuse Disclosers

How do we respond when someone discloses past or present abuse? While this document does not function as a comprehensive list of all skills a leader might use when he or she encounters potential abuse, it does list a set of key responses one might employ. For a more comprehensive conversation on this subject, see: “Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused” edited by Brad Hambrick.

It should also be pointed out that, as ministry leaders, we are not professionally trained counselors. This list does not give us license to use therapeutic tactics in places where they should not be used, and if the need arises, we should always refer to a professional counselor. The church staff have a list of recommended counselors in the area that uphold a biblical worldview.

1. Active and Safe Listening:

Whether it’s a child or adult who discloses abuse, our first response should just be to listen well. This means that we need to keep our voice quiet and slow. We should not make sudden movements or act startled. We need to remain calm so that we can provide a safe atmosphere for the discloser to feel comfortable.

It may be tempting to ask clarifying questions or to correct mistakes. It might also be tempting to either theologize or minimize their abuse through blame shifting (“do you think this person came onto you because of the way you dress?”) or comparison (“I know of someone else who went through this/I went through a similar experience myself”). Do not do this. Listen well, and know that it takes a great deal of courage and vulnerability for someone to share this type of information with another.

2. Affirm their Discloser and Express Grief:

There is nothing that you could say in the moment to fix the abuse disclosers situation. However, after you have listened well, there are a few steps you should take to make sure the discloser knows that you are still on their side.

Express grief (“I am so sorry that this has happened to you. This is wrong. And I am sad to hear that you have suffered in this way.”) You should also affirm that you believe them and that they are not responsible for the abuse that has happened to them.

It is also important to remember that one of the most important things taken from an abuse victim is their ability to choose. Because of this, it may be helpful to both ask questions and take action to give the discloser the ability to control their present situation (“Would you like the door open or closed? Would you like another person in the room with us right now?”)