Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church

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Code of Conduct for Child Safety

What is a Code of Conduct?

All staff and volunteers who work with children are expected to interact with children in a mature, capable, safe, caring, and responsible manner, with a high level of accountability. This Code of Conduct describes how adults will interact with children and the boundaries they are expected to observe.

This Code of Conduct includes, but is not limited to, the following expectations of staff and volunteers. By being vigilant in following the Code of Conduct, we will help protect children from abuse. The most effective way to reduce abuse of children is to be vigilant.

Accountability

All adult staff and volunteers are responsible for giving and accepting feedback from others in order to maintain our high level of professionalism. As an adult working with children, you agree to interact with the children by observing these principles. It is our expectation that you understand your responsibility to observe the interaction between adults and children and when you see interaction that is questionable, inappropriate or crossing a child’s boundaries, you will intervene on behalf of the child. Such intervention may include:

* Remaining present with the child in order to provide him/her a sense of security;
* Redirecting the child to join other children in a different area;
* Speaking to the adult and stating the boundary violation you have observed and reminding them of the responsibility to abide by this code of conduct; or
* Speaking to the ministry director regarding your observation.

**You also give permission to the other adults in our programs to take these intervening actions if you are seen crossing safe boundaries or violating this code of conduct.**

Visibility

All work with children shall be planned and carried out in a way that minimizes risks as far as possible. This includes being visible to other adults when working with children. Adults shall not be in a room alone with a child with the door closed (unless there is another viewing option into the room), or in any area of our building that is secluded or hidden from view.

Overcoming Isolation

To protect our children, staff and volunteers, at no time during a program may an adult be alone with a single child where others cannot observe the adult. We expect all adults to reduce isolation by having a minimum of two children present, informing the child's parent of any meeting you wish to have with the child, and doing it during a time and/or in a location where your interaction with the child is visible to others. Isolation could be overcome, for example, by taking two or more children to the bathroom together rather than only one.

When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed, as applicable:

* Always be accountable to other adults regarding your interactions with children by informing an elder and/or parents when, where and for how long your one-on-one interaction will be.
* The activity must be in a public place that is visible to others, never in a private or secluded location, such as a room with the door closed or in a home alone with the child or student.
* Counseling or other necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and willing to stay in the vicinity until it is completed; and
* Parents and/or supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activities with children.

In an emergency situation, find someone to go with you if at all possible, or notify any available adult.

Parent Involvement

Parents are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents shall be informed of planned activities. Parents shall be encouraged to make unannounced visits to program activities as a way of reducing isolation and monitoring the interaction between adults and children.

Supervision

Supervision reduces risk. An elder can periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together.

Technology

Technology should be used appropriately to protect children or youth from abuse and exploitation. Volunteers and staff shall not engage in social networking, texting or any other means of private communication with children and youth without the permission of the parents or guardian. All electronic communication must not be erased or deleted and made available for review upon request by an elder.

Discipline

Discipline should be used to teach and correct rather than punish. It should not include slapping, hitting, shaming, yelling at, or belittling a child.

Touch

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

* Touch shall be open rather than secretive.
* A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors.
* Touch should be in response to the need of the child, and not the need of the adult.
* Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult.
* It should be with the child's permission and any resistance from the child should be respected.
* Touch should always communicate respect for the child.

Adults should avoid doing things of a personal nature for children that they are able to do for themselves, including personal hygiene and bathroom breaks, dressing, bathing, etc.

Adults and other youth or children should not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, choke, or otherwise assault children.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts: verbal praise, side hugs, shoulder to shoulder hugs, pats on the shoulder, back, or head (when culturally appropriate). For smaller children, touching their hands, faces, shoulders and arms, arms around their shoulders, hugs, or holding them when others are present.

The following behaviors between staff or volunteers and children are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate and shall not be engaged in: touching buttocks, chests, genital areas, or thighs; showing affection in isolated areas or when alone with a child; sleeping in bed with a child; inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development; flirtatious or seductive looks; any form of affection that is unwanted by the child; showing sexually-suggestive videos or playing sexually-suggestive games with any child; any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature.

Adult members shall monitor each other in the area of physical contact, helping each other by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

Showing Favoritism

Adults shall avoid favoring or showing differential treatment to a particular child or youth to the exclusion of others.

Adults shall not give gifts to any child or youth without requesting and receiving permission from that child or youth’s parent or legal guardian.

Verbal Interaction

Words can also be used to support and encourage a child, such as praise, positive reinforcement, and appropriate jokes. Inappropriate verbal interaction includes the following: shaming, belittling, humiliating, name calling, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate the child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about the child.

Inappropriate verbal interaction also includes telling off-color or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children.

Reporting of Abuse

When anyone has reason to suspect or has knowledge of child abuse within the scope of Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church’s work and ministry, he or she must notify the session immediately.

Code of ConductAcknowledgement Form

I acknowledge that I have read and agree to follow Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church’s Code of Conduct. In addition, it is my responsibility to read and comply with any future updates to any and all of our child protection documents.

I confirm that I have not been accused of (to the best of my knowledge), been investigated for, or prosecuted for instances involving any form of abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child.

I agree not to engage in any such behaviors.

I further agree that as an individual who has engendered trust from a child, I will not tolerate physical, emotional or sexual child abuse or neglect.

I understand the importance of accountability to the other adults who work with children. Therefore, I give my permission for anyone who observes any inappropriate or questionable interaction between me and a child to speak to me regarding their observation. I will not take offense when approached by someone with concerns about my interaction, because I understand that the protection of each child must be my first priority.

I agree to immediately report to the appropriate leadership any reasonable suspicion of or disclosure of inappropriate behavior between an adult and a minor or between two minors when one has power over the other by virtue of age or physical abilities, in accordance with this Code of Conduct.

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Position Elder/Minister’s Signature