

ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

Washington New Covenant Fellowship Church

I. INTRODUCTION

As a community, Washington New Covenant Fellowship Church (“NCFC”) is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores their cry (Psalm 9:9, 12). Our community seeks to embody Jesus’s priority of justice for the vulnerable, especially children.

Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime) when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Abuse is sadly a common reality in this world. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16). We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy.

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the NCFC community on what we all must take ownership of as we together walk with God who loves justice and hates oppression.

Topics covered in this policy include:

- Definitions of key terms (Section II)
- Roles and responsibilities (Section III)
- Healthy boundaries (Section IV)
- Responding to abuse and harassment (Section V)
- Caring for survivors (Section VI)
- Policy on known sex offenders (Section VII)

II. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1. **Abuse:** In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, etc.) and uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable (e.g. a child, someone who is sick, elderly, or disabled, student, supervisee, intern, immigrant, etc.). That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, and spiritual. See Appendix I for potential indicators of child abuse.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** When a person in a place of power and/or trust and engages in sexual behavior with a child or an adult under their supervision, authority, mentoring, or spiritual care, including:
 - Sexual Penetration: Any act or attempted act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a person's penis, finger, other body part, or an object, and/or any oral-genital contact.
 - Sexual Contact: Any intentional touching of a person's breasts, buttocks, groin, genitals, or other intimate parts. Touching may be over or under clothing. This may include, but is not limited to, the touching of the person, making the person touch the accuser, or making the person touch their own body. This also includes contact with non-sexual areas of the body for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator (such as with certain paraphilic disorders).
 - Non-Contact Sexual Acts such as:
 - o observing a person's nudity or sexual activity or allowing a person to observe sexual activity;
 - o recording, photographing, transmitting, showing, viewing, streaming, or distributing intimate or sexual images, audio recordings, or sexual information of persons; or
 - o exposing one's genitals or inducing a person to expose their own genitals
 - o within a power dynamic (boss-employee, doctor-patient, teacher-student, pastor-congregant, adult-child) communicating sexual desire or sexually stimulating content toward a person
3. **Sexual Assault:** sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the consent of the victim. Sexual harassment generally violates civil laws—all have a right to work or learn without being harassed—but in many cases is not a criminal act (see more on harassment below). Sexual assault usually refers to acts that are criminal. Some forms of sexual assault include:
 - Penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape.
 - Attempted rape.
 - Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetration of the perpetrator's body.
 - Fondling or unwanted sexual touching.

4. **Consent:** words or overt actions indicating a freely given agreement to the sexual act or contact. Silence or the absence of an explicit “no” does not equal consent. Physical submission by the victim - such as “freezing” or “fawning” - does not equal consent. Consent also implies the ability to say no in a mutual relationship. Children, certain vulnerable adults (based on functioning related to factors such as intellectual disabilities, age, mental health, or other vulnerabilities), or those within a power differential (e.g. with a religious leader, mentor, teacher, or supervisor) are unable to consent to sexual activity. Other circumstances such as intoxication or unconsciousness also render a person unable to give consent to sexual activity.¹ Deception or manipulation of a person also render that person unable to consent.

A child cannot consent to any sexual behavior with an adult or older child. An adult under the authority, care, or mentorship of a leader cannot consent to sexual activity with that person. Even when both people are adults and the contact is not forcible, any crossing of sexual boundaries within a power structure is not an “affair” or a “relationship” but an egregious abuse of power. Adult sexual abusers often develop an emotional and spiritual connection and then exploit it. While not always recognized as a crime according to state laws, this is a serious violation and NCFC will treat it as such.

5. **Sexual Harassment:** The legal definition of Sexual Harassment by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980) is “Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:
 1. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;
 2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual;
 3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.”

Beyond the legal definition, harassment, sexual or otherwise, can also occur in a community, conference, or event when the people involved are not employees of the church. In accord with our values, sexual harassment is not restricted to what is defined as sexual harassment under the law. NCFC considers any unwanted sexualized behavior or sexualized behavior within a power differential to be a serious form of harassment (including unwanted touch or communication, other unwanted sexual attention, or any behavior that objectifies or degrades). Other common forms of harassment include bullying and acts of discrimination. Harassment can include discrimination against a specific group of people based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status.

¹ For more discussion on consent including state laws see <https://www.rainn.org/articles/legal-role-consent> and https://apps.rainn.org/policy/?_ga=2.24798265.200928410.1590493313-413255437.1539433206

6. **Grooming:** a tactic where someone methodically builds a trusting relationship with a child or young adult, their family, and community to manipulate, coerce, or force the child or young adult to engage in sexual activities.
7. **Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence):** A pattern of behavior where a person in or who has been in an intimate relationship uses tactics of control, belittling, isolation, fear, stalking, and/or intimidation to dominate, harm, degrade, or otherwise undermine the worth and agency of the other person in the relationship. Intimate partner violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, social, or financial.²
8. **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of controlling behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering. Bullying is a common term for acts that typically constitute emotional abuse.
9. **Financial Abuse:** The illegal or improper use of a vulnerable person or his/her financial resources for another's profit or advantage. Some examples of financial abuse may include: the taking of money or property; forging a signature; getting a person to sign a deed, will or power of attorney through deception; coercion or undue influence; or, illegally or improperly adding names to bank accounts or safety deposit boxes. The elderly in particular are often targeted for financial abuse.
10. **Physical Abuse:** Non-accidental physical injury (ranging from bruises to severe fractures or death) by way of bodily contact (such as slapping, punching, pushing, beating, kicking, shaking or striking with an object) or non-injurious contact with the goal or effect of intimidating, threatening, or controlling.
11. **Spiritual Abuse:** a form of emotional abuse, meaning a pattern of coercive or domineering behaviors using religion. Many acts of abuse in a religious environment will have a spiritual dimension. Examples include:
 - Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm
 - Compelling a person to engage in religious acts against his or her will
 - Abuse that occurs in a religious context or by a religious leader
 - Invoking of divine authority to manipulate a person into meeting the needs of the abuser
 - Using spirituality or spiritual authority to dismiss a person's perspective, agency, or value
 - Attempts to use the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality to put their leadership or decisions beyond questioning or accountability
 - Attempts to spiritualize or justify harm using the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spiritualitySee Appendix II for dynamics, definitions, and impact of Emotional and Spiritual Abuse.

² For more information and examples an excellent resource is The Duluth Model at <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

12. **Stalking:** A pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behavior which is intrusive and causes fear of violence, alarm, or distress. Stalking is a terrifying reality and is now recognized as a crime in all fifty states. Examples of stalking include (from The Justice Department's Stalking Victimization Survey):

- Making unwanted phone calls/texts or sending unwanted messages or emails
- Following or spying on the victim
- Showing up or waiting at places without a legitimate reason
- Leaving unwanted items, presents, or flowers
- Posting information or spreading false or confidential information about a person or victim on the internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth

III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Safeguarding Team

The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping the community of NCFC for effective prevention and response. Our Safeguarding Team is comprised of a minimum of two Korean Congregation members and two English Congregation members. This team will have a minimum of two women. You may reach them at “safeguarding-committee@ncfcmd.org”,

Duties of the Safeguarding Team includes:

- Implement and oversee compliance with the NCFC Abuse Policy
- Maintain rigorous familiarity with the NCFC Abuse Policy
- Brief all staff, volunteers, and members on the application of the policy on a regular basis
- Receive, document, and respond to any policy violations or concerning behavior (see below)
- Lead in responding to any allegations of abuse (see below)
- Conduct or coordinate screening of pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers
- Complete continuing education from a qualified organization on an annual basis and help leaders with an ongoing education plan for the whole church

B. Standing Board

The Standing Board is NCFC’s top leadership group composed of Active Elders and Senior Pastors for both congregations.

C. Screening

NCFC shall implement the following screening tools and procedures commensurate with the role of the individual. If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child or others in any way, or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may not work with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity. If any potentially concerning information comes to light OR if the screening process shows that a candidate has ever been accused or convicted of any type of crime, NCFC may consult with an expert to help assess the situation.

1. Screening of Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and Staff

- The completion of a written application including questions related to abuse and protecting the vulnerable
- At least three references to be contacted (two for volunteers). These references should include:
 - Previous employers (if applicable) and any work with survivors or vulnerable persons
 - At least one reference not supplied directly by the applicant

- A background check that includes the following information:
 - Confirmation of education and employment
 - Local criminal record check (if available)
 - State criminal record check
 - FBI criminal record check
 - State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check
 - State sex offender registry check
- An internet and social media search
- An interview that explores a candidate's written application and includes questions related to abuse, protecting the vulnerable, and the NCFC Abuse Prevention Policy

2. Screening of Volunteers

- A background check that includes the following information:
 - Confirmation of education and employment
 - Local criminal record check (if available)
 - State criminal record check
 - FBI criminal record check
 - State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check
 - State sex offender registry check

3. Screening of Members

- The completion of a membership course including questions related to our abuse policy and whether they have ever abused any person or been accused of abuse
- A commitment to the NCFC Abuse Prevention Policy
- State sex offender registry check

D. Training

The pastors, elders, deacons, staff, volunteers, and other members of NCFC shall receive regular continuing education on abuse and harassment issues from outside experts and regular internal briefings on our policy.

IV. HEALTHY BOUNDRIES

A. Standards of respect and safety

At all times our community upholds the following standards of respect and safety.

1. Show respect in physical touch, space, and visibility:

- Appropriate touch, whether an adult or child, must be welcomed by the person (If you are not sure, just ask - e.g. Can I give you a hug?).
- Touch within a significant power difference should be observable to others (e.g. between an adult and a child).
- Children who need assistance in the restroom outside of the children's ministry must be helped by their own parent or guardian. Within the children's ministry, all diapering or assistance must be observable by two screened adults.
- Be considerate of others and give them appropriate space: Notice the body language of others and be aware of your impact on others.
- Stay in visible and accountable spaces: No one should be alone with a child who is not their own child (including giving rides).

2. Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others.
- Avoid any language that belittles, threatens, or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a person's body or sexual attractiveness).
- Avoid sexualized comments including jokes, stories, experiences, or sharing sexualized content (such as images, video or other media) or engaging in any other sexualized communication.

3. Show respect in agency and personal boundaries:

- Healthy people do not seek to control others, but rather encourage and empower others to take healthy agency in their own life (e.g. making decisions for someone or taking control of an aspect of their life such as directing their finances or career or social life).
- Avoid volunteering inappropriately intimate information or asking someone to reveal intimate details or personal information when the person is not ready or comfortable doing so.
- Give agency to others (e.g. "Where would you be comfortable meeting up?").
- Always respect the "no" of others in setting personal boundaries.

B. Boundary Violations and Response

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others. The following behaviors are unacceptable by any pastors, elders, deacons, staff, or lay leader at NCFC:

- Any abuse of power as defined by this policy
- Sexual harassment of any kind, including unwanted sexual attention, comments, or unwanted physical touch
- Behavior or words that discriminate against anyone based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status
- Any words that belittle or threaten

If any pastor, elder, deacon, staff, or lay leader wishes to pursue a consensual romantic relationship with someone under their spiritual care or a power hierarchy within NCFC, they must contact the Standing Board for the sake of transparency and to discuss any appropriate boundaries given the power dynamics or other factors.

Abusers often use charm or other tactics to manipulate others. Targets of abuse often report feeling flattered and then later confused, upset, guilty, ashamed, and like it is all their fault. Victims should know that although it is normal to feel this way, abuse is never their fault. Those in positions of power and trust are responsible and able to respect appropriate boundaries.

Abusers are often skilled at explaining away concerning behavior. Anyone who experiences or has information regarding concerning behavior or a policy violation should document it and speak up as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team. All of us should be mindful of what is happening around us and speak up to the Safeguarding Team if anyone is demonstrating concerning behavior, crossing boundaries, or violating this policy in any way.

NCFC takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety. Any person - staff, lay leader, volunteer, parent, or church member - who witnesses a violation of this policy is encouraged to intervene if you feel safe to do so or get someone who can. Then speak up to the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible. Furthermore, any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability. Any concerns about the Safeguarding Team may go to the Standing Board.

V. RESPONDING TO ABUSE AND HARRASSMENT

NCFC is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any allegations or findings of abuse or harassment within our church. We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to abuse, NCFC will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons. It is hard for victims to come forward in most circumstances. NCFC will do its best never to blame victims for struggling to come forward, delaying disclosure, or other common disclosure behavior.

A. Immediate Response Protocols

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911.
2. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (age 17 or younger) or vulnerable adult (e.g. elder abuse, or abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities), all adults within NCFC must immediately report to the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services (CPS) Office 24-hour line at 240.777.4417³ or the Montgomery County Aging and Disability Resource Unit at 240-777-3000.⁴ Child abuse or abuse against a vulnerable adult should also be reported to the local police department. DO NOT try to investigate the matter. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team. If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. The only exceptions are if the abuse occurred within our church community or the name of the perpetrator is known.
3. If there is a disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse or harassment against an adult, all persons within NCFC are encouraged to report as soon as possible to a member of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team member shall immediately document the information and then inform the entire team (except a member or partner of a member involved in any allegation). If the misconduct allegations involve the Safeguarding Team, the report may go to any member of the Standing Board. Although the state of Maryland does not mandate reporting of any accusation without the consent of the victim, the Safeguarding Team may decide to file a complaint to the local police without naming the victim or without the victim's consent.

³ For more information on reporting suspected and/or known child abuse or neglect visit the Montgomery County Government website at [Child Welfare Services Information](#)

⁴ For more information on reporting suspected or known abuse of an adult with intellectual disabilities and/or the elderly visit the Montgomery County Government website at Adult Protective Services

4. The Safeguarding Team shall respect the agency of the adult victim(s) in reporting any and all suspected crimes to the appropriate authorities. The decision to report adult abuse is ultimately up to the adult victim(s). However, the Safeguarding Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way and there may be situations where the Safeguarding Team feels consciously bound to report information pertaining to a potential crime against an adult. When reporting seems in the best interest of the safety of the community, the Safeguarding Team shall also consult with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others at NCFC may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault, or threats). The Safeguarding Team will also seek to communicate as sensitively as possible the reason for reporting to the victim.
5. If the alleged perpetrator is a staff member at NCFC, upon recommendation from the Safeguarding Team, the Standing Board shall immediately place the alleged offender on administrative leave until the completion of any investigations and/or NCFC has sufficient information to make a determination concerning any personnel decisions and/or other accountability. If the alleged perpetrator is a member within NCFC, the Safeguarding Team shall coordinate any immediate steps required for the protection of the vulnerable and the community and inform the Standing Board. Any person connected to an allegation, including a family member or mentor must recuse themselves from response, whether a member of the Safeguarding Team or the Standing Board.

B. Further Response Protocols

Whenever possible, the Safeguarding Team should refer the victim(s) to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations such as The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE), The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN – 1-800-656-4673), or SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP).

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for NCFC to share certain information in order to safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate further appropriate response including but not limited to:

- Ensuring all potential crimes against children have been reported to appropriate authorities according to the policy above
- Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons
- Facilitating cooperation with any investigations including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the church or with others
- Ongoing, appropriate care for the victim(s) including helping them connect with professional trauma informed care if desired

- When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward victims
- Maintaining contact with the alleged offender during any investigations or administrative leave to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially with regard to controlling the narrative, retaliation, and access to other vulnerable people
- Caring for others in the church and coordinating with outside resources as needed
- Documenting relevant actions and information related to the case
- Reaching out to qualified experts with questions or when an Independent Consultation or Investigation is appropriate

C. Independent Consultation and Investigation

There are several scenarios when it is strongly advisable that NCFC pursue independent consultation or investigation in response to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as:

- Authorities decline to investigate a report of abuse even though there is evidence of wrongdoing
- An adult victim is not ready to report allegations of a criminal nature to the authorities
- The alleged offender is not charged with criminal wrongdoing by the authorities after an investigation, but sufficient concerns remain whether the alleged offender engaged in wrongful conduct that may disqualify him/her from continued participation in the organization
- There is a serious pattern of misconduct denied by the alleged perpetrator
- The alleged offender is a member of executive leadership or the Safeguarding Team
- The alleged victim(s) requests an investigation or there is a strong belief that there may be other victims
- The organization wants to investigate and assess how it responded to the allegations of abuse in order to better understand how it could have responded more effectively and to improve for the future

The Safeguarding Team will make a recommendation to the Standing Board regarding the wisdom of independent consultation or investigation. When the Standing Board decline to engage an independent consultation or investigation, they, along with the Safeguarding Team shall document all related information along with an account of their decision. The documentation shall be made known and available within the church for the sake of transparency while protecting the privacy of any potential victims.

When the Standing Board decides to engage an independent investigation, it must be conducted by an organization or persons completely independent of NCFC and experienced in investigating cases of the specific form(s) of abuse or misconduct in view. The organization or persons should utilize a multidisciplinary team of trained investigators (examples can include current or past law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and/or mental health experts) who are trained in best practice investigative standards, have significant experience investigating a wide range of misconduct and/or abuse cases, and utilize trauma-informed practices in their investigations.

Upon completion of an investigation, the independent investigating body will deliver to the Standing Board a report that will consist of its investigative findings, analysis, and recommendations. Any personnel decisions will be made in view of the recommendations of the report, by the Standing Board, according to the values and employment practices of our organization and in communication with the Safeguarding Team.

Those who use any position of power to abuse as defined by this policy shall never again serve in any formal role within NCFC.

D. Retaliation

NCFC prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Standing Board. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.

VI. CARING FOR SURVIVORS

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support.

This support will include:

- Listening and staying calm
- Affirming without judgment
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging and empowering their agency
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate
- Asking if there is anything practical the church can do

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other professional advice, but will focus on personal support and empowerment. We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances - even when the abuse is alleged and not proven - will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief
- Attempt to silence the victim
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the perpetrator
- Urge meeting with, reconciliation with, or forgiveness of the perpetrator

Receiving an abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. NCFC encourages anyone receiving an adult's abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

DO Say

Thank you for telling me.

I believe you.

I'm so sorry this happened to you.
How can I help?

Take as much time as you need.

I am here.

The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.

DON'T Say

Why are you telling me this?

Why didn't you _____
(run/scream/stop him etc.)

What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?

You need to forgive and move on.

It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.

It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.

It is okay to be angry.

It's understandable you're feeling that way.

Your reaction is not an uncommon response.

You're not going crazy. These are normal responses following abuse.

It wasn't your fault.

Try to be strong.

Out of tragedies good things happen.

You're lucky that _____ didn't happen.

I know how you feel.

Perhaps you misunderstood...

VII. POLICY ON KNOWN SEX OFFENDERS

NCFC is committed to holding admitted or convicted offenders we believe are repentant to a high standard of accountability. Known offenders who demonstrate evidence that they are not repentant are extremely dangerous and are not welcome in our church. Jesus welcomed sinners, but he did not command us to welcome wolves among the sheep. Known offenders who wish to have any connection to our church must be willing to undergo a process designed to assess their individual situation, ongoing repentance, and what safeguards are appropriate. Offenders must agree to accept whatever accountability and safeguards our leadership, in consultation with experts, deem appropriate. Offenders must be willing to agree to this before the process of assessment begins. No assessment will begin if the victim(s) of the perpetrator are still in our church as any victim should be free to worship without their perpetrator present.

If a convicted offender asks to join our community, we will contact experts to assist with the assessment of the situation. Similarly, if an individual was in the past credibly accused of abuse, the Safeguarding Team will contact an outside expert on how to best proceed.

Leaders will use the following process:

1. Interview with the Known Offender
2. Interview with other Relevant Parties (e.g. family, treatment provider, counselor, parole officer, etc.)
3. Acquiring Records relating to the Offender
4. Assessing Repentance in Consultation with Experts
5. [If applicable]: Setting Level of Participation, Accountability, and Safeguarding Requirements (Including listening to any known survivors about the impact in their life, and accountability on and off church property).

Leaders will consult with experts as needed throughout this process to ask appropriate questions and assess them.

No one who is convicted of or who has admitted to abusing a child may work with children or vulnerable persons in the ministry of our church, have any access to children in our church (on or off church property), or hold any position of power or trust, even if it is not directly connected to ministry to children. Any offender who evidences deception, minimization, excuses, victim blaming, or other indicators they are not repentant shall not be allowed any connection to our church. Unrepentant offenders are not welcome.

Any adult who is a convicted or admitted sex offender who attends group activities shall agree to have their name known to the congregation and shall abide by all accountability and safeguards. Any adult offender who is known or believed to be attracted to children or fantasizes about children will not attend in any settings with children.

The safeguards shall address accountability on and off church property and will involve communication with appropriate persons such as family, friends, employers, counselors, and parole/probation officers. The safeguards shall be reviewed as needed, and at a minimum

every year by leadership and the Safety Team, and in consultation with child protection experts.

When a known offender is judged to be repentant and has some connection to the church, those who have responsibility to minister to him or her will have specific training.

Appendix I - Potential Indicators of Child Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse if a child has:

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty, pain or blood in the genital area when walking, sitting, or using the bathroom
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Injuries (e.g., bruises, tearing, bleeding), itching, or swelling in the genital, vaginal, or anal area
- Urinary tract infections, yeast infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy

It is atypical for children to engage in the following sexual behaviors:

- Placing mouth on sex part
- Asking others to engage in sexual acts
- Trying to have intercourse or imitating intercourse
- Undressing others, especially if done forcefully
- Imitating sexual positions with dolls
- Inserting an object into vagina or anus, especially if child continues to do so despite pain
- Manually stimulating or having oral or genital contact with pets
- Making sexual sounds
- Inserting tongue in mouth when kissing

Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, burns)
- Especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of injury
- These injuries may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments
- Pay particular attention to injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body

Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- Is obviously malnourished, listless, or fatigued
- Begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger
- Is consistently dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Untreated illness, injuries, health (e.g., unfilled cavities) or serious educational needs
- Broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aid, or other necessary aids or equipment
- Has an untreated need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Stays at school outside of school hours
- Frequently absent or significant academic struggles
- Is inappropriately left unsupervised

- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

Appendix II – Emotional and Spiritual Abuse

Basic Dynamics, Definitions, and Examples

Emotional abuse can be hard to define because it can encompass a range of behaviors that often leave victims confused and stunned. Emotional abuse is not usually a single event but a pattern of controlling behavior.

Emotional abuse is a pattern whereby a person in a position of authority and/or trust uses that position to domineer and control others through behaviors such as shaming, dismissing, bullying, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading, or insulting.

Healthy communities respect appropriate relational and emotional boundaries. As much as leaders are called to impart and embody wisdom and take responsibility for decisions, godly leaders do not domineer, control, or usurp agency from others. Healthy leaders focus on setting an example, equipping, listening, valuing others, and empowering others instead of making all of the decisions alone or ordering the lives of others.

All people are made in the image of God with inherent dignity and worth. There is never any justification to objectify, insult, demean, humiliate, threaten, shame, or rage at another person no matter what they have done.

When we use our power to dehumanize or insult or objectify others (especially those who are more vulnerable or downtrodden) we are ultimately insulting God:

Proverbs 14:31a, “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker...”

Proverbs 17:5a, “Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker...”

Common categories and examples of Emotional Abuse:

1. Insults and Name Calling:

- Name-calling and put-downs
- Any language or outbursts that objectify or degrade or shame others
- Refusing to use your name
- Using a tone of contempt and sarcasm
- Using jokes as a cover to insult
- “You are worthless.”
- “Shouldn’t you be home with the kids making sandwiches?”
- “You sure are easily entertained.”

2. Intimidation and Threats

- Shouting, outbursts, and unpredictable behavior that keeps everyone on edge
- Threatening body language (chest out, looks of contempt)
- Positioning themselves close to you in order to intimidate you
- Direct threats about your job or standing in the team

- Cornering you so you can't leave a room
- Slamming a table, wall, or other behavior that frightens
- Using personal information or other vulnerabilities to control or intimidate you

3. Humiliation

- Pointing out your flaws or mistakes in front of others
- Making fun of you (often jokes give plausible deniability for inappropriate behavior)
- Forcing you to talk about something private you don't want to talk about
- Revealing something personal you shared in confidence

4. Ignoring

- Acting like you are not there
- Not looking at you or listening to you when you talk
- Meeting with other team members formally or informally without you there
- Never following up when there is an issue to see if it is resolved
- Ignoring your comments and contributions
- Never asking you what you need or what you think

5. Dismissing Your Perspective

- Always opposing your ideas or dismissing them quickly or shutting you down
- Interrupting or talking over you
- Telling you what you think or feel is not what you think or feel
- Explaining your intentions to you
- "You take everything the wrong way."
- "You're too sensitive."
- "No one asked you for your opinion."

6. Domineering

- Controlling information, decisions, and what can and cannot be discussed
- "What I say goes."
- "You don't need to know that information." (when it is something that impacts them)
- "If you want to be on this team you have to accept my leadership."
- "I've made my decision and I'm not going to discuss it."
- "This is just my leadership style. I've been doing this so much longer than you please show a little respect."
- "This is what you signed up for. Get on board or get off."

7. Dismissing Your Agency

- Telling you what to do in your personal life - such as who to date or marry or seeking to direct your life decisions such as your career.
- Seeking a mentoring relationship where their role is to make decisions for you.

- Seeking to direct your finances or take control of your finances.

8. Denial, Minimizing, Justifying, and Blame when Accountability is Pursued

- “I never said that.”
- “I don’t know where you got that.”
- “That conversation never happened.”
- “You are making that up.”
- “You are getting upset about nothing.”
- “You have got to be crazy.”
- “He would never say anything like that.”
- “If you hadn’t been so ____, I never would have...”

Spiritual Abuse is a form of emotional abuse. It is essentially emotional abuse with a spiritual dimension. It is abuse using the tools of religion to control and domineer. Like emotional abuse, spiritual abuse is typically understood as a pattern of behaviors with the goal of keeping a person under control and using them.

Examples include:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm or control
- Controlling others through spiritual means is often accomplished through fear, guilt, and shame
- Compelling a person to engage in religious acts against his or her will
- Abuse that occurs in a religious context or by a religious leader
- Invoking of divine authority to manipulate a person into meeting the needs of the abuser
- Using spirituality or spiritual authority to dismiss a person’s perspective, agency, or value
- Attempts to use the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality to put their leadership or decisions beyond questioning or accountability (in extreme cases equating the leader’s decisions with God and opposition with opposing God)
- Attempts to spiritualize or justify harm using the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality

Many acts of abuse in a religious environment will have a spiritual dimension. Spiritual abuse is often connected to other forms of abuse.

A person can cause emotional and spiritual harm without “emotionally abusing” or being an “emotionally or spiritually abusive person.” For example, a pastor tells a woman she needs to have faith and move on from her sexual assault. He doesn’t understand how this causes her deep pain because she would love to heal and move forward. He doesn’t have the tools to help her heal or understand trauma. She suffered a deep wound to her person and the resulting trauma keeps her stuck. He is a caring pastor. He wants to help her. He is not controlling or domineering. He is not spiritually abusive. But he has caused spiritual harm.

Sadly, spiritually and emotionally abusive environments are not easy to change because the leaders hold so much power and actually maintain power through these tactics. Often the only option for lay persons is to seek out a healthier community.

Common Impacts of Emotional and Spiritual Abuse

The impacts of emotional and spiritual abuse can be as severe or more severe than physical and sexual abuse, including experiencing PTSD.

Common impacts include:

1. Common Emotional Impacts

- Anger
- Confusion
- Betrayal
- Grief
- Guilt
- Shame
- Humiliation
- Violation
- Fear
- Powerlessness

2. Common Physical Impacts

- Loss of Sleep
- Loss of Appetite
- Loss of Focus
- Increased Stress Levels
- Headaches
- Fatigue

3. Common Mental Health Impacts

- Anxiety (e.g. Panic Attacks)
- Depression
- PTSD
- Substance abuse
- Self-harm
- Loss of Motivation

4. Common Spiritual Impacts

- Loss of Safety in Church
- Feeling Betrayal by God, the Church, and Spiritual Leaders
- Feeling Distance from God
- Former spiritual places and practices can be triggering.
- Feeling Spirituality is Tainted

Victims of abuse should be treated with great compassion and never blamed for the abuse.

We should all be prepared to response with empathy:

- “I’m so sorry.”
- “This is not your fault.”
- “How can I support you?”

Seek trauma informed care when you experience symptoms of trauma if possible from professionals who are licensed. Symptoms may include:

- Nightmares and Sleep Trouble
- Hyper-vigilance
- Intrusive Thoughts, Terror (such as flashbacks or panic attacks)
- Sharp Changes in Behavior
- Depression and Anxiety
- Shutting Down, Numbing, Lack of Focus
- Self-harm (e.g. cutting, eating disorders, suicide)

Trauma can lead to an over-active stress response. Attention to our overall health can help manage this better:

1. Sleep
2. Exercise
3. Nutrition
4. Healthy Relationships
5. Mental Health

Trauma-informed communities can support healing by encourage practices such as:

- Prioritizing the importance of safety
- Affirming our God-given agency
- Focusing on validating dignity rather than trying to “fix” someone in pain
- Giving survivors agency over when and to whom to open up to and tell their story.
- Encouraging lament and expressing negative emotions rather than suppressing them (emotions such as anger, betrayal, grief, confusion are all normal in the wake of abuse)
- Avoiding spiritual platitudes to minimize or move on quick from pain
- Avoiding any form of minimizing abuse or blaming victims

- Encouraging the setting of boundaries