



SAFE CHURCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

Right now, you're probably thinking, "WOW, this is a BIG packet!" or "What did I get into?"

First of all, thank you for volunteering! Our goal with this packet is not to overwhelm you, but to obey our Lord. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them." We believe that abuse (in any form) hinders our relationship with God and each other. In order to protect our church family from abuse, we have created these policies and procedures. While this is a big packet, most parts of being a "Safe Church" can be summed up by these four "BIG IDEAS":

BIG IDEA #1 – No youth is to be alone/one-on-one with another youth or adult. "Alone" is defined as being out of the sight of other adults.

WHY: While it is possible for abuse to occur when others are present, most abuse happens when two individuals are out of sight for a few moments. Each ministry has age-specific policies in place to prevent a youth from being left alone with an adult or another youth.

BIG IDEA #2 – All communications with youth will A) include the parents/guardians ("keep them in the loop"), AND/OR B) be done in a public manner, AND/OR C) go through church-supervised channels.

WHY: Most sexual abuse is preceded by a period of grooming where the abuser seeks to create a special relationship with their intended victim. It starts by building up trust through frequent private interactions, sharing of 'secrets' and sometimes small gifts. We encourage the building of healthy, public relationships by making sure that communications are not secret.

BIG IDEA #3 – It's OK to speak up! It's OK to speak up about unsafe situations, and it's OK to speak up about abuse!

WHY: If we see a situation that is unsafe – for example, a youth alone with an adult – then we have a responsibility to speak up. Even if we trust that particular adult, even if it is just an accidental lapse, we still need to lovingly help the child and adult learn to recognize and avoid unsafe situations in the future. If we do not correct the mistake, it could set a precedent that allows abuse to occur later with another child or adult. The only way for us to be a Safe Church is if we commit to speaking the truth in love to one another when we make mistakes.

If we suspect abuse has already occurred, we *must* report our suspicions so the authorities can

properly investigate them. God tells us to “rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:4) – we can only do that if we speak up. Our words can help stop the abuse, and our report can lead to the survivor connecting with programs that promote healing and restoration. If we keep silent, then *our silence implies approval* of any abuse that *is* happening – or abuse that *could* happen in the future as a result of our silence.

BIG IDEA #4 – Anyone who wants to work with youth or vulnerable adults will be screened prior to serving and must agree to follow these Safe Church Policies & Procedures.

WHY: Those who seek to abuse children know churches always need volunteers and that Christians tend to be welcoming of newcomers, sharing love and forgiveness. They exploit these traits to gain access to children. Screening deters repeat offenders from trying to gain access to our children. We believe that Jesus can forgive any sin, but forgiveness does not mean we give everyone access to our children and vulnerable adults. If someone has offended in the past and is truly repentant, then we welcome them to be a part of our church, but we also place protective barriers between them and our vulnerable members through a written covenant of behavior.

Screening is necessary for more than just those working in youth ministries. Those in leadership (council members, chairpersons, ministry leaders, etc.) are expected to enforce the Safe Church Policies & Procedures as well as to encourage youth and vulnerable adults to participate in the life and ministries of the church. Therefore, *every* leader is expected to undergo screening and to become a champion of Safe Church.

So am I done? Can I quit reading?

No. Sorry, but you need to keep going. The rest of this packet explains the details about all the ways we try to fulfill these “BIG IDEAS.” We think it’s worthwhile to read and think and talk about these things *before* abuse has occurred. Abuse is an unpleasant topic, but talking about prevention is infinitely better than having a member of our church family suffer the trauma of abuse.

So grab a cup of coffee, tea, or cocoa and settle in for a bit of a read. We thank you in advance for reading through this document carefully. Jot down any questions you might have and be sure to get them answered from the Safe Church Coordinator or your ministry leader.

Cheerfully in Christ,

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Safe Church Coordinator

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NOTE: Some language and ideas for policies were borrowed from the safe church forms created by other CRC churches, including Westwood, Brookside, St. Albert, and Friendship. We thank these churches for their willingness to share the work they have already done.

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Definition of Terms

Before we start, let's all make sure we're all using the same terms:

1. **Child, Youth, or Minor** – A person under 18 years of age.
2. **Volunteer** – An adult who holds a position with direct supervision over youth.
3. **Staff member** – A worker who receives monetary compensation for his/her activities at Milwood Community Church. This includes not just salaried staff like the pastor but also any long-term contractors (such as the custodian) that would be working inside the building and/or interacting with families. It does not include contractors that typically do *not* interact with our families because they exclusively work outside, off-site, or only for specific short-term repairs (e.g., a piano tuner, an electrician, the website server company, etc.). **NOTE: Any part of this document that applies to a “volunteer” shall also apply to staff members.**
4. **Ministry Leader** – An adult who leads a ministry of our church (whether it involves youth or not).
5. **Helper** – A person who assists an adult volunteer or staff member in a ministry but is not permitted to work with children by himself/herself. Examples of individuals who would be designated as helpers include
 - minors between the ages of 12 and 17,
 - adults who are not members of the church, or
 - adults who may have a condition or disability that prevents them from being able to assume a supervisory role.
6. **Physical abuse** is any non-accidental injury to a person by another who is perceived by the victim as having more power. Non-accidental injuries may include beatings, shaking, burns, strangulation or bites with resulting bruises, welts, broken bones, scars or internal injuries. Physical abuse is sometimes a single event but more often a pattern of behavior that repeats over time. Abuse may also result from punishment that is too severe. Physical abuse includes child abuse/neglect as defined in Michigan Compiled Law 750.136b.
7. **Sexual abuse** is the exploitation of a person for the sexual gratification of another person. Sexual contact is defined in section 750.520a of the Michigan Compiled Laws and includes “the intentional touching of the victim’s or actor’s intimate parts or the intentional touching of the clothing covering the immediate area of the victim’s or actor’s intimate parts, if that intentional touching can reasonably be construed as being for the purposes of sexual arousal or gratification, done for a sexual purpose, or in a sexual manner for: (i) revenge. (ii) to inflict humiliation. (iii) out of anger.” Sexual abuse can also include non-contact behaviors such as sexual harassment, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and involving another in pornography. It can also include any role-inappropriate sexual encounter, even if consensual at the time (e.g. between teacher & student, supervisor & subordinate, or pastor & church member during counseling).
8. **Verbal or Emotional Abuse** is any attempt to control another person through threats and fear. Verbal abuse is a chronic pattern of behaviors such as threatening, belittling, humiliation, and ridiculing through which repeated occurrences cause the gradual loss of self-esteem.
9. **CPS – Children’s Protective Services**. The 24/7 Hotline for reporting abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults is 855-444-3911.

BIG IDEA #1 –

**No youth is to be alone/one-on-one with another youth or adult.
“Alone” is defined as being out of the sight of other adults.**

What this looks like in Youth Ministries (i.e. any program targeting youth):

1. Each age level has minimum staffing levels:

- a. Ministries for children under 3 (e.g. Nursery) must be staffed by a minimum of **two** volunteers **per** room for the **entire** time. If more than eight children are present, there should be one additional volunteer or helper for each additional four children.
- b. Ministries for children ages 3-4 (e.g. Children’s Worship, Storyhour, etc.) should have each room staffed by at least a) two volunteers, or b) a volunteer and a helper, or c) a volunteer operating in the room adjacent to the nursery while the nursery is also staffed.
- c. Ministries for children ages 5-17 should be staffed by at least two volunteers in each room OR one volunteer in each room with a hall monitor actively circulating.

SPECIAL NOTES:

- **If, at any time, a ministry accidentally turns into a one-child-with-one-adult situation,** then the volunteer should relocate the ministry to someplace where they will be in the observable presence of other adults (e.g. the nursery, library, fellowship hall, etc.).
- Spouses may serve together in the same room at the same time **ONLY** if a non-family member volunteer is also present. For example, a husband and wife may serve together in nursery only if a third, unrelated adult is also present.
- Minors may be helpers, but they may not care for children without adult supervision.
- During overnight activities, sleeping areas will be off limits to members of the opposite sex. Male/female contact will not be allowed after the designated bedtime.
- For Youth Group, the volunteers should be at least four years older than the oldest youth group member. Regardless of age, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other.

2. Volunteers should be in place at least 10 minutes before their ministry starts.

If a parent/guardian tries to drop off a child when there is only one volunteer present, communicate to the parent that they must stay until the other volunteer(s) have arrived.

3. At least two volunteers should remain until all children have been picked up.

Children may only be released to their parent/guardian or to an adult authorized in writing by the parent/guardian. Each ministry will create its own procedure for ensuring that children are only picked up by authorized adults.

4. Keep the ministry area secure – only those who are *supposed* to be there *may* be there

- a. If an adult or minor is not assigned to be in a ministry area (e.g. nursery) then they should **not** be spending time in that space during the ministry or while parents are dropping off / picking up their children. The only exceptions would be

- i. A volunteer scheduled to be in that ministry may bring with them any minors that would normally sit with the volunteer in the sanctuary (e.g. a volunteer may bring their own children into nursery).
- ii. Parents/guardians may enter the ministry area for the purposes of
 - calming or assimilating a child to his new environment
 - assisting their child with toileting or diapering needs
 - nursing / breastfeeding
- b. If someone wishes to observe the ministry for an entire service/session, they should contact the ministry leader to arrange for special permission to stay.

5. Keep the ministry area as visible/public as possible.

- a. Windows in doors/walls should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
- b. Hall monitors should be actively circulating throughout the church, checking on ministries in progress as well as on bathrooms and unused areas. If they find a youth unsupervised, or an adult and youth in a one-on-one situation, the hall monitor helps correct the situation. (See page 19 for more information about what hall monitor tasks look like.)
- c. No helper, volunteer, or staff member will take a child from the scheduled room to another part of the church except to a restroom (as provided below) or for an URGENT reason such as illness. If a child is ill or needs significant medical attention, the parent/guardian should be notified as soon as possible as well as the ministry leader.

6. Restroom Assistance Guidelines:

- a. Children should be encouraged to use bathroom facilities before and after the ministry session. If they must use the restroom during the ministry session, they should be instructed to use the bathroom closest to their area of ministry.
- b. If a child is old enough to use the restroom without assistance, the volunteer or helper shall remain outside the restroom.
- c. In those cases where children need assistance.
 - i. For infants and toddlers, an adult volunteer should change diapers or clothes only in the nursery and only in the observable presence of another volunteer.
 - ii. For children ages 2-5 that need assistance, the volunteer or helper should assist the child in the nursery bathroom, or if that bathroom is not available, in another bathroom with the stall door ajar.
 - iii. For minors over the age of 5 that have a special need or medical condition that requires help in the restroom, they should be assisted in whatever manner has been pre-arranged with the parent/guardian, OR, if an unexpected situation arises that necessitates assistance, then the parent/guardian should be notified of the details of that assistance as soon as possible.
- d. Volunteers will not change diapers or assist with toilet needs if a parent has requested to be contacted and wishes to assist their own child.

7. Transporting youth (e.g. youth group outings, Kids Hope events, etc.)

Children or youth should always sit in the back seat, and there should always be at least three people in the vehicle – either a youth in the back seat with two non-related volunteers in the front, OR at least two youths in the back seat of the vehicle.

If due to unforeseen events (such as a parent picking up one child early from an event) an adult must transport a child and there is no one available to ride along, the adult should call the parent and ministry leader (or church office) to notify them of the situation prior to transporting the child AND make contact again immediately when dropping the child off. If they can not reach a person, the volunteer must leave a voicemail or text those persons so there is a record.

What BIG IDEA #1 looks like in OTHER ministries:

1. Outreach or Fellowship Events that target families/all generations/etc.

(e.g. Trunk-or-Treat, Easter Egg Hunt, V.B.S., Park Party, Prayer Partners, WE events, etc.)

No one is alone (or away from the observable presence of other adults) with children or vulnerable adults at Outreach or Fellowship programs/events. These programs/events will be held in large, visible areas such as our fellowship hall, the parking lot, or the Little League fields.

NOTE:

- **If a program or event will take children into separate rooms (such as with V.B.S. or an indoor Easter Egg hunt) then the procedures for Youth Ministries from the previous pages must be followed as well.**
- If a program is targeted at strictly adults (no youth present), then this section does not apply.

2. Worship

We encourage all ages and ability levels to participate in our worship services, but worship teams are not subject to screening. Since we want our worship practices to be safe for our youth (and vulnerable adults), any time when youth participate in a worship service, **one member of the worship team will be scheduled to be the “Safe Church” person.**

The “Safe Church” person on a worship team must have passed the Safe Church screening process and must have explicitly agreed to assume responsibility for watching over any youth or vulnerable members involved in that week's worship. **They would ensure that any youth (or vulnerable member) does not end up alone with another youth or adult.** For example, if practice wrapped up early, this person would recruit another screened adult and the two of them would stay until the youth is picked up by their parent/guardian. Or if two youth went up to the balcony by themselves, this adult would remind them to come back down and stay with the rest of the worship team.

3. Other/new ministries

A healthy church is always growing and changing. If there is a ministry or event not listed that involves youth in some way, discuss with the others in the ministry how best to fulfill **BIG IDEA #1 – No youth is to be alone/one-on-one with another youth or adult.** And then

please let the Safe Church Coordinator know how you decide to fulfill this “BIG IDEA” so that it can be added to this document.

Examples of what SHOULD NOT HAPPEN because it would violate BIG IDEA #1

- Meeting with a youth one-on-one.
- Allowing youth to be with each other unsupervised. When youth are left alone, we allow for the possibility of one youth to abuse another youth. For example: allowing children downstairs before or after a ministry without a volunteer to supervise them. Or allowing children to play hide-and-seek in any spaces where there are not volunteers.
- Taking youth to another area of the church in a manner that allows the adult to be alone with that youth for any period of time longer than the time it takes to walk from point A to point B. In other words, walking a child to and from the restroom is acceptable, but it is not acceptable to spend time alone with a youth chatting in a quiet corner of the basement, seated alone up in the balcony, or even in an empty classroom with the door open. If a conversation starts in an isolated area, you can talk *as you walk* directly to a more visible area.

If you see any of these situations happening, you have a responsibility to immediately speak up – in a loving and grace-filled manner – to let the adults and youth know that this situation is not safe. Please also let the ministry leader and/or Safe Church Coordinator know of the lapse so they can help prevent it from occurring again.

BIG IDEA #2 – All communications with youth will

- A) include the parents/guardians (“keep them in the loop”), AND/OR**
B) be done in a public manner, AND/OR
C) go through church-supervised channels.

What this looks like for ALL ministries:

A. If youth are involved in a ministry, then parents/guardians are intentionally included in any communications or plans made between the ministry leaders and the youth.

1. Parents/guardians must give permission for children to participate in Milwood ministries. They can convey this permission by either filling out an Agreement & Release form (for ongoing ministries such as GEMS, Cadets, Sunday School, Kids Hope, etc.), by personally signing their child in to the ministry each time they participate (such as with Nursery, Storyhour, etc.), or by giving consent directly to the ministry leader.
2. If a youth is going to be invited to or scheduled for an event, program, ministry, meeting, etc. then **the parent/guardian should know about it in advance**. For example:
 - If a youth group leader thinks it would be fun to meet with some youth for cocoa and conversation at a local coffee shop, the youth leader must first get permission from the parents/guardians. **This is true even if the meeting is in a public place** – the parents/guardians still need to be kept in the loop.
 - If a youth is scheduled to run the screen for worship, then **parents/guardians should be copied on any emails sent to the youth** about the worship practice or plans.
 - If a letter or gift is not being given to the entire class/group of children, (i.e. it's only going to a few or just one), then it must **go through the parent/guardian's mailbox and/or be given in the physical presence of the parent/guardian** so that they are aware of it. NOTE: This does not apply if identical letters/gifts are being passed out to the entire class, in which case it counts as public communication (see the next section).

B. Communication with youth can also be done through public methods.

By making the communication public, it means that even though the communication may not be witnessed by the parents/guardians it **is** being witnessed by many other members of the church. For example:

- Something is passed out or shared with all or most of a group/class. Everyone in class (including the other volunteers) can see the flyer/gift/etc and know that the communication is happening. Examples would be passing out flyers about the pinewood derby or awarding prizes for those who learned memory verses in Sunday School.
- Something is posted publicly on the church's website, social media, or the “What's Happening” email list, so that everyone (including the parents/guardians) can see it.

C. If some piece of communication cannot go through parents or be done publicly, then it MUST go through “church-supervised” accounts.

Many adolescents (and adults) prefer to use electronic mediums that are not public in nature (for

example, texting, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, etc.). These methods of communication (along with private phone calls) are also the methods preferred by those who seek to groom and then abuse children. Therefore, we put limitations on when and how a volunteer may use these methods to communicate with the youth in our ministries.

1. Volunteers should choose public methods of communication and/or methods of communication that can be witnessed parents/guardians/church members **as much as possible**. For example, if a personal phone call must be made, the volunteer should call the home phone or the parent/guardian's cell phone and then ask to speak to the youth rather than calling the youth's cell phone directly.
2. If a volunteer needs to communicate electronically using a less-public method (such as text messages or emails sent just to the youth), then the volunteer **MUST** use a church-owned and -controlled account to send the messages. Some examples:
 - i. If a leader wants send text message reminders to youth, they should talk with the Director of Technology and get added to our church's texting service (Remind) so that their text messages to youth will be recorded and can be monitored by the church leadership.
 - ii. If a youth member wants to connect with leaders on social media, it should be via a church-owned and controlled page where messages can be accessed by multiple administrators and thus the communications can be monitored. Leaders should talk with the Director of Technology about how to set up such pages.
 - iii. If a ministry leader wants to be able to email the youth directly and cannot copy their parents on the message (either because the parent/guardian does not use email or for another reason), they must either
 - a) copy the office on the email and request that the office keep copies of these messages as part of an official record, or
 - b) request a church-owned and -controlled email address from the Director of Technology so that their messages will be accessible to the church leadership and can be monitored.

Examples of communication that SHOULD NOT HAPPEN between volunteers/ministry leaders/etc. and youth.

- Giving letters, gifts, etc. directly to a single child (or only a couple children) without their parents/guardians' knowledge.
- Phone calls, emails, texts, or any communication using personal email, personal social media accounts, personal cell phones, etc. in a manner designed to allow the volunteer to communicate privately with a youth.
- Using any method of communication designed to keep communications secret, such as SnapChat, private chatrooms, etc.

If you discover that one of these situations happening, you have a responsibility to speak up. Please let Safe Church Coordinator know immediately so that they can speak with the volunteer and help them find safer methods of communicating with youth.

BIG IDEA #3 – It’s OK to speak up! It’s OK to speak up about unsafe situations, and it’s OK to speak up about abuse!

What if I come across a situation that isn’t covered by our procedures?

SPEAK UP! If you see a hole in the fence protecting our lambs, then let us know so that we can find a way to patch it!

What should I do if I see a volunteer behaving in a way contrary to the BIG IDEAS behind Safe Church policies?

As you’ve already read at the end of BIG IDEAS #1 and #2, we want you to SPEAK UP when you see an unsafe situation. Notice that we say “when” mistakes happen, not “if” they happen. The truth is that we are only human and mistakes *are* going to happen. What we want to do is catch the mistakes and lovingly help one another to do better next time. If you do not feel comfortable speaking with the volunteer directly, then simply let the ministry leader or Safe Church coordinator know. Our goal in talking about our mistakes is to speak the truth in love so that we don’t make the same mistake twice!

Imagine what would happen if we chose to ignore the mistake instead of speaking up about it. A single mistake, uncorrected, can easily become a habit of unsafe behavior that keeps happening over and over. We must constantly fight against the little mistakes that lead to a pattern of complacency. Complacency is extremely dangerous because it leaves our children vulnerable to those who would seek to abuse them.

What should I do if I see or hear of someone behaving in a way that is technically compliant with Safe Church but something about it feels uncomfortable?

If you feel a nudge from within you that something is not right, then you should speak with either the ministry leader or the Safe Church Coordinator. It may be that the person is pushing the boundaries of what is safe by accident, and the ministry leader or Safe Church Coordinator simply needs to have a conversation with them. No one is going to be harassed or removed from a position simply because of a gut feeling, but it may be that this person or situation needs extra supervision. We have to remember that sometimes the Holy Spirit prompts us to be on our guard in situations where we (with our human eyes) see no danger, but God (who sees everything) knows we should be wary.

What should I do if I see or hear something from a youth that sounds like it might be evidence of abuse?

Signs and symptoms of abuse, and reports of abuse, need to be taken seriously. Volunteers and staff members should **not** try to conduct an investigation of the matter themselves. Our job is not to determine whether the child is telling the truth – our job is to report what we’ve seen or heard and to allow the professionals to investigate the situation. Instead, remain calm and follow the procedure on the next page. (If you want to see what the church’s response will be after your report, visit Appendix D.)

Procedure for Reporting Possible Child Abuse

IMPORTANT TIP: Write down what you see/hear/say with the child in as much detail as possible and do it as soon as you are able to do so. Even little details may matter later.

1. RECOGNIZING ABUSE

If you observe what may be a sign or symptom of abuse (see the next page), you should ask the child a few open-ended questions about how the sign or symptom appeared. For example: **what** happened, **when/where** did it happen, **who** did it, or just a neutral “**tell me more about that.**”

However, you should **not** interview the child in great detail about the signs or symptoms. Never attempt to interrogate a child or ask to see any part of their body that is covered by clothes.

Furthermore, it is never appropriate to suggest to the child that he or she has been abused. **Simply request more information in a neutral and calm tone.**

2. HEARING ABOUT ABUSE

If a child comes to you to describe a situation or incident that may qualify as abuse, take the child seriously. **Be sure to appear calm** – if you react with disgust, disbelief, or anger, it may cause the child to stop talking. Do not make any judgments – do not say that they were abused, do not talk about the police, and do not deny the problem. Stay emotionally calm, and simply **listen** to the child. Reassure the child that it was brave to tell someone what happened to him/her. Do not promise the child that you will not tell anyone. If appropriate, pray with the child.

3. DETERMINING WHETHER TO REPORT SOMETHING AS SUSPECTED ABUSE

If a child reports an incident of abuse or if you observe signs or symptoms of abuse, you should notify the legal authorities **within 24 hours**¹. If you are uncertain as to whether a sign or symptom warrants a full report, you are encouraged to talk with Child Protective Services (CPS) or the Safe Church Coordinator and they’ll help you decide. State law protects persons from liability when they report actual or suspected abuse, as long as they do not act maliciously. Additionally, as a “first reporter,” you are typically guaranteed anonymity during any subsequent investigation.

4. REPORTING SUSPECTED ABUSE

- a) If the suspected abuse occurred by a family member, contact Child Protective Services (CPS: 855-444-3911 day or night) and notify the Safe Church Coordinator.
- b) If the suspected abuse occurred by someone unrelated to the child but who is a member of the church, contact the local police department and notify the Safe Church Coordinator.
- c) If the suspected abuse occurred by someone unrelated to the child and who is not a church member, contact the local police department.

5. AFTER REPORTING

After a report is made to the police or CPS, you should notify the Safe Church Coordinator as soon as possible. After reporting the suspected abuse, respect the child’s privacy by keeping the information confidential. It is the responsibility of the police or CPS to notify the alleged offender of the allegations against him/her. Neither you nor anyone else from Milwood Community Church should communicate with the alleged offender until he/she has been interviewed by police or CPS.

¹ Clergy, regulated child care workers, teachers, nurses and many others are mandated reporters in the State of Michigan. These individuals not only need to make an immediate oral report to CPS, but they must follow up with a written report within 72 hours or they will face criminal and civil liability.

What should I report? – Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

Children rarely exhibit just one sign that they are the victims of abuse. Some symptoms may also represent typical developmental change or the after-effect of traumas in their lives other than abuse. Conversely, it is possible for abuse to be taking place without the appearance of noticeable symptoms because of the child's ability to mask or deny what would otherwise be very confusing and painful to acknowledge. Generally, several signs observed over a period of time suggest that a child may be suffering from abuse. We recommend that all volunteers and leaders read through this list to become familiar with the warning signs and symptoms.

A. Infants and Preschool Children

1. Regression to an earlier stage of behavioral development such as baby talk, thumb sucking, or bedwetting
2. Change in social behavior – excessive crying or clinging, or becoming aggressive or withdrawn – that is not associated with normal developmental stages
3. Physical manifestations such as loss of bowel control, bedwetting, frequent urination, headaches, stomachaches, breathing difficulties, sore throats accompanied by gagging, stains in the child's underclothes
4. Exhibiting signs of fear around a family member or a familiar person, fear of a familiar place or object, or vomiting at the approach of such a person or object
5. Fear of being touched, shying away from physical contact. Resistance to being diapered or assisted in the bathroom
6. Use of explicit language or sexual behavior that is beyond the child's comprehension or life experience
7. Attempting sexual behavior with other children or attending adults
8. Unexplained injuries and/or bruises, repeated injuries blamed on the child's carelessness, multiple bruises sustained in one event, or bruises to child's midsection, back, head, or back of thighs; signs of scalding, burning, or distinctive bruising, such as in the shape of a belt buckle or fingernail crescents; multiple bruises in various stages of healing
9. Name-calling toward other children, bullying behavior, sulking/brooding
10. Fascination with fires; playing with matches, lighter

B. School-age children – see prior list, and add

1. Physical manifestations as above with addition of complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the child's bottom; smearing feces on walls or objects
2. Pattern of injuries, multiple injuries, injuries about the face or neck; failure to complain about or explain an obvious physical discomfort
3. Unusual fears: a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences
4. Poor concentration in classroom
5. Exhibiting adult-pleasing behaviors, striving for perfection, acting miserable if failing
6. Engaging in self-injury; engaging in excessive masturbation or masturbation in a public setting
7. Acting enraged and out-of-control; expressing anger through destruction
8. Shyness about physical touch
9. Exhibiting sexual behavior beyond comprehension or maturity level; behaving in sexual manner with other children or adults
10. Exhibiting signs of needing to be in control of others or situations; bullying others
11. Hostility and distrust of adults, mood swings and irritability, violent disruptions
12. Acting out, including hoarding food and toys, lying, stealing, assaulting
13. Frequent absences from school or other scheduled events either because of being punished or to hide bruises
14. Low self-esteem, particular sensitivity to criticism
15. Hyper-vigilance – excessive and suspicious watching of other people; is easily startled
16. Preoccupation with fire and setting fires

C. Adolescents – see prior list, and add

17. Eating disorders, use of laxatives, unexplained and dramatic changes in weight
18. Change in sleep patterns, including excessive sleeping, sleeping during the day, and insomnia

BIG IDEA #4 – Anyone who wants to work with youth or vulnerable adults will be screened prior to serving and must agree to follow these Safe Church Policies & Procedures.

1. Who must be screened?

- a. All **helpers and volunteers who wish to serve in youth ministries** and/or work with youth must **pass** the Safe Church screening BEFORE they can serve.
- b. All **candidates for council** must **pass** Safe Church screening BEFORE their name appears on the ballot.
- c. All applicants to be a **staff member** must **pass** Safe Church screening BEFORE they are offered a position.
- d. Anyone seeking to **lead a ministry or Core Value Team** must undergo the screening process BEFORE they assume a leadership role. In these cases only, if an individual does not pass the screening, then they will have the opportunity to discuss their case with the Elders and the Safe Church Coordinator. If the Elders and Safe Church coordinator agree that a particular individual can safely lead that particular ministry, they may enter into a written covenant with the individual, outlining how they may serve and what limitations may be put in place to keep them and our more vulnerable members safe. Such covenants are written only at the discretion of the elders and Safe Church coordinator, and they shall be subject to annual review.
- e. Anyone seeking to **represent the church in a leadership/organizational capacity during Outreach programs/events** must **pass** Safe Church screening BEFORE the event. This includes anyone who looks like they are an 'official' part of the event – for example, wearing a Milwood Church T-shirt or an 'official' name-tag. Such individuals would be perceived as authority figures by visiting children and families, and by requiring those individuals to have gone through Safe Church screening, we want to make sure that those individuals are safe to be trusted with that role.
NOTE: Individuals working 'behind the scenes' do not have to go through screening. For example, being involved in the planning, set-up, take-down, etc. Additionally, this only applies to Outreach programs/events that target youth and/or families. If a program/event is targeted at strictly adults, this section does not apply.

2. What is involved in the screening process?

- a. First, an individual must read through this packet and commit to following our Safe Church Policies & Procedures by filling out the Safe Church Application for Ministry.
- b. All applicants ages 18 and older will be screened using the State of Michigan Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) to do a criminal background check.
- c. For applicants who have not been active members of Milwood Community Church for at least six months, three references and a personal interview with a ministry leader may also be required.

- d. For staff members or those volunteering for certain positions involving long-term, frequent, or one-to-one contact with children as designated by the council, additional screening tools may be required. These can include national criminal record checks, fingerprinting, etc.
- e. The church reserves the right to deny an applicant a volunteer position for any reason. Those reasons include (but are not limited to) having a previous history or impending charges of assault, sexual misconduct, or any crime related to the abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults. All applications will be reviewed by the Safe Church Coordinator and the Pastor (or the President of Council if the Pastor is unavailable) prior to their being approved.

3. Does screening only happen once?

- a. Additional steps of screening may be necessary when a volunteer or staff member changes to a position requiring additional steps.
- b. Re-screening for an ongoing volunteer (e.g. one who volunteers every year) is required every three calendar years.
- c. Any information provided by volunteers, including the results of the criminal background check, references, and interviews, will be placed in a confidential file. An individual may request to see their file at any time by contacting the Safe Church Coordinator.

4. But how can people help who have not been screened?

- a. Individuals who have not completed Safe Church screening are still encouraged to participate in adult ministries (Coffee Break, Telos, etc.) or intergenerational ministries/events/programs. They may still assist in a variety of ways – such as helping with planning, set-up, take-down, serving food, etc. – that do not put them in a role of authority over youth.
- b. Adults who are not members of the church but wish to help with an intergenerational program/event may do so only if a member of the church acts as their sponsor/partner during the program/event. The member of the church must be one who has passed Safe Church screening and who is willing to work alongside the non-member during the program/event.

You are doing a great job of reading through this! You're more than half-way through! We have a few more sections that don't necessarily fit under the "BIG IDEAS" but are still important if we want to be a "Safe Church" - things like discipline, transportation, and hall monitor duties! If a section is labeled "for Youth Ministries" and you are not in a Youth Ministry, feel free to skim past it and go to the next section 😊

REMINDER:

All Safe Church Policies & Procedures ALSO apply to any off-site events, programs, activities or meetings. Even if you aren't meeting on the church grounds, if it *is* for one of our ministries, then it *must* follow Safe Church Policies.

Behavior / Discipline Guidelines for ALL Ministries

Some of these guidelines may seem obvious, but we need to be clear on what is (and is not) permitted.

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
2. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening, belittling) is not permitted.
3. Participants should be reminded by the volunteers and staff of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Behavior expectations should reflect the age and level of comprehension of the participants. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
4. Volunteers and staff should try to avoid negative consequences by focusing on more acceptable behaviors.
 - a. With younger children, volunteers may redirect a participant to a more appropriate activity.
 - b. With school-age children, volunteers may remind participants about appropriate behavior or help the participant find on a more acceptable method for expressing their feelings/thoughts.
 - c. If child cannot be redirected or resists changing their behavior, a supervised time-out may be used. The child can be moved to a location away from the other children, but still under the supervision of volunteers. Time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child (e.g. time-out for a 3-year-old should not exceed 3 minutes).
5. Parents and the ministry leader should be informed and involved whenever a child or youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
6. Volunteers and staff will not ordinarily physically restrain a child in their care. Volunteers should ask for assistance if a child behaves in a manner that seems to require restraint. If the leader determines that restraint is needed, the child's parents will be notified immediately, and the child may be removed from the class until the parent arrives.
7. In some rare cases, an additional volunteer or parent/guardian may be required to attend classes/events/programs where behavior is an ongoing problem.
8. Volunteers, staff, and helpers are encouraged to use care when engaging in physical contact to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Any/all physical contact should only take place in a public area. Displays of affection between participants should also be monitored.
 - It is appropriate to hold, cuddle, or rock an infant or toddler if the child wishes to have the comfort of being on an adult's lap or in an adult's arms.
 - Gentle, casual touching on the head, arms, hands and feet are permitted.
 - With children ages 3 and up, displays of affection should be limited to a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, a pat on the back, a "high five," a handshake, or comparable gestures.
 - **An adult's or minor's right to refuse any of these forms of physical contact will be respected.**

Off-Site Events & Transportation Guidelines for Youth Ministries

1. OFF-SITE EVENTS and/or ACTIVITIES

1. If an event or activity is happening off-site, the ministry leaders should photocopy the Milwood Agreement & Release forms for each youth attending the event and take the copies along so that they have the parent/guardian contact information as well as the medical release forms on hand.
2. **Off-site events, meetings, programs, or activities must still follow ALL of the Safe Church Policies & Procedures of Milwood Community Church.**

2. TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES

1. Volunteer drivers must be at least 21 years of age, have a valid driver's license and insurance. They should have no more than 3 points on their record as well as no violations within the last 5 years for any type of reckless/careless/distracted driving or operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs. NOTE: Youth should not drive other youth during a ministry activity.
2. Volunteer drivers should secure permission (preferably written) in advance from the youth's parent or guardian. Additionally, volunteer drivers should document (for their own protection) the departure and arrival times for each youth they transport. **Ministry leaders may decide whether these logs need to be turned in or if the drivers should keep them in their vehicles.**
3. Volunteer drivers may not transport more passengers than available seatbelts. Everyone in the vehicle must wear their own seatbelt AND children under the age of eight must also be using an appropriate booster or car seat.
4. NOTE: Youth should *always* sit in the back seat, and there should *always* be at least three people in the vehicle:
 - When transporting only one youth, the youth is seated in the back seat, and two non-related volunteers or staff members should be present and seated in the front seats of the vehicle.

OR

 - At least two youths are present in the vehicle and are seated in the back seat of the vehicle.
5. Volunteer drivers must drive safely and with due care and caution, adhering to posted speed limit signs and observing road conditions. Volunteer drivers may NOT use their cell phone while driving. If a call or text needs to be made, it should be made by one of the passengers.

NOTE: These guidelines apply to any volunteer who is transporting youth during a ministry activity who are *not* the children of the volunteer. These guidelines do not apply to adults or minors who transport their own relatives to and from church-sponsored events. Nor does it cover parents/guardians who make a personal request of another adult to assist in transporting their youth to/from church sponsored events – that is a private agreement. However, even in those cases, we strongly recommend that our members follow these guidelines to protect themselves from false allegations of abuse.

Code of Ethics for Youth Ministries

Believing that God has called and gifted me to serve youth at Milwood Community Church...

1. My first priority in teaching/supervising/leading children will be to seek the welfare of the children physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. I will pray for the youth I work with and let them know I care about them.
2. I will listen to each child with respect. I will try to understand and respect the child or young person's cultural and socioeconomic background. I will respect the child's individual gifts and abilities, and if informed of physical, mental, or medical conditions, I will continue to encourage and support the child's participation even if the condition puts limitations on how he or she can participate.
3. I will keep my conversations wholesome and focused on positive behaviors. I will make sure that any gestures of affection are appropriate for the age and I will respect any youth's desire not to be touched.
4. I will work with children and young people to set agreed-upon guidelines for acceptable behavior within the group. I will expect children and young people to act on the basis of those guidelines. If a child or young person consistently breaks them, I will seek help from the parents and/or ministry leader to assist me in responding to the situation.
5. I will try to protect the child from all forms of abuse (from both adults and other minors) while he/she is in my care.
 - a. If I need to talk to a child or young person alone, I will do so within sight of other people. If a child or young person is in distress I will offer comfort and help. I will encourage him/her to find the appropriate help for his/her needs. I will not do anything to damage a child's or young person's trust.
 - b. If I am concerned that a child could be hurt by the words, actions or attitudes of another volunteer or staff at Milwood Community Church, I will report that concern to my ministry leader or the Safe Church Coordinator so that it can be addressed.
 - c. If I hear or see any signs of abuse or neglect, I will report it to the appropriate authorities immediately.
6. I will work to keep parents informed about the program of which I am a part, including the start and stop times as well as dropping off and picking up procedures.
7. I will respect the child's and parent/guardian's right to privacy. I will not give out or share their personal information (birthdates, phone numbers, addresses, photos, etc.) without their permission. This means I will ask before sharing any of that information with other participants or their parents, as well as before posting anything on the internet or social media.

Hall Monitor Duties

Whenever feasible, youth ministries will assign two volunteers or staff members to each room. However, if this proves unfeasible, a hall monitor may be used throughout the duration of the ministry in order to help ensure a safe and secure environment. Each ministry or Core Value team will determine procedures for their hall monitors, but at a minimum, hall monitor duties are as follows:

1. To periodically check all occupied rooms until all children/youth have left the facility. A check consists of looking into the room through the door or window in the door.
2. To periodically check all unoccupied rooms until the program ends and all children/youth have left. A check consists of opening the door to the room and turning on the lights. If a room (or closet) does not have a window, it should be locked and shut securely after being checked.
3. To periodically check bathrooms until all programs end and children/youth have left. A check consists of opening the bathroom door and looking inside. When checking the bathroom of the opposite sex (e.g. a man checking the women's bathroom, or a woman checking the men's bathroom), the hall monitor should open the door slightly and loudly ask if anyone is in the bathroom. If there is no answer, the hall monitor can announce that they are entering the bathroom to do a safety check and then proceed to complete the bathroom check. If there is someone in the bathroom, the hall monitor should wait until those individuals have left before completing the bathroom check.
4. To escort a child to the bathroom when necessary.
5. To direct children or youth found in the hallway to their meeting room when programs are in session.
6. To report suspicious activity and/or violations of Safe Church Policies & Procedures to the ministry leader and/or Safe Church Coordinator so that they can be addressed.

Thank you for reading through this document thoughtfully!

The rest of this document is a set of appendices that apply to those who are leaders here at church: ministry leaders, Core Value Team chairpersons, council members and staff.

* If you are **not** a church leader, you may skip right to the application at the end!

* If you are a church leader, then you have a few more pages to go!

In either case, after you have completed the Safe Church Application for Ministry, detach it from this document and submit it to the office.

You may keep this document for future reference OR you may recycle it.

A digital copy may be found on the secure members-only section of our website.

And PLEASE, contact the Safe Church Coordinator if you have any questions about any of these policies or procedures.

APPENDIX A – Safe Church Duties Assigned to Ministry Leaders, Core Value Teams, Council, Staff, & the Safe Church Coordinator

Safe Church Policies & Procedures exist to ensure a safe and secure environment for our congregation and guests to worship our Lord and grow in faith. We must encourage one another to continually follow these policies. In order to avoid complacency and to help us all stay vigilant against abuse, we expect everyone involved in leadership to become champions of the Safe Church Policies & Procedures.

Ministry leaders (for ANY ministry) will

1. Review any applicable Safe Church Policies & Procedures with their volunteers **each year**, preferably before their ministry season begins and providing periodic reminders as needed.
2. Require that the guidelines, policies and procedures in this document be followed by all the volunteers, helpers and staff working in the ministry they lead.
3. Assist volunteers in understanding the behavior expectations of children/youth in their particular ministry and discuss how to keep participants safe – including how to keep children safe from potential abuse or bullying from other children. Each ministry should proactively have policies or rules in place to discourage these behaviors.
4. (For Youth Ministries only) Check that their volunteers are on the list of people who have passed Safe Church screening **BEFORE** allowing those volunteers to serve. This list is maintained by the office staff and can be requested by email or paper.

The Chairperson of each Core Value Team (Fellowship, Outreach, Worship) will make sure that their team has one person devoted to Safe Church concerns. This person (who must have passed Safe Church screening) will perform the following responsibilities within their own Core Value Team.

1. Remind ministry leaders to review Safe Church Policies applicable to their ministry before the start of each educational year and provide support/accountability with that task as necessary. (For example, confirming that ministry leaders have screened their helpers, or that they have hall monitor plans in place, if appropriate.)
2. Support and assist the Safe Church Coordinator in educating and reminding volunteers about the importance of following the Safe Church Policies and Procedures. This may take the form of a training session at the start of the year, putting up Safe Church signage in ministry areas, etc.
3. Hold helpers, volunteers, staff members and ministry leaders accountable for following these policies and procedures by honestly noting when a policy or procedure has not been followed. This may be a private conversation for a minor lapse, or it may be a more formal meeting with the ministry leader and/or Council representatives if it is a serious lapse or a recurring problem.
4. Review with their Core Value Team, in the winter or spring of each year, the Safe Church Policies & Procedures applicable to their ministries and propose revisions (if appropriate) to the Safe Church Coordinator.
5. Discuss and handle any Safe Church-related concerns that may come up during the year (for example, helping to evaluate the application of a non-member who wishes to volunteer).

The Council and Pastor(s) will, within the first few months of each term,

1. Review the “BIG IDEAS” of the Safe Church policy (pgs 1-2) as well as the Procedures for Reporting Child Abuse (pgs 11-13) and Appendices B & C (pgs 22-23). Because elders and deacons are so often in positions where they can observe families and/or ministries in action, it is important they be familiar with applicable policies.
2. Familiarize themselves with any covenants currently in place and review/update them as necessary. Elders, in particular, are charged with supporting individuals who have a covenant and helping to hold them accountable to the terms of their covenants.

The Safe Church Coordinator will

1. Complete the iCHAT background checks for incoming Safe Church applications and arrange for reference checks for any applicant who has not been a member for at least 6 months.
2. Stay informed about events and recommendations from the denominational Safe Church office.
3. Report to the Executive Team at least annually and be available to assist Core Value Teams with their Safe Church duties as necessary.
4. Meet with any volunteer or staff member who has questions about a possible report of abuse.
5. Provide guidance if a report of abuse is made, helping those involved to follow the appropriate reporting and responding procedures.
6. Assist in the researching and writing of any covenants of conduct.
7. Refer allegations of abuse against a church leader brought forward by an adult to a Classical Safe Church Panel to conduct an investigation into the matter according to the guidelines approved by the CRC Synod.

The Church Secretary will

1. Maintain the list of volunteers and helpers who have passed Safe Church screening. Printed copies of this list will be kept in the office and in the nursery for easy reference and can be emailed to ministry leaders upon request.
2. Keep in a secure location the original copies of Safe Church Applications for Ministry and Covenants of Conduct.
3. Assist the Safe Church Coordinator in performing iCHAT background searches as needed.
4. Perform a name search on the National Sex Offender Registry for any individual who has *not* undergone Safe Church screening but *is* requesting a church directory, a mailbox or a key to the church. If his/her name is on the registry, the secretary will notify the Safe Church Coordinator.

The Executive Team will expect to be contacted by the Safe Church Coordinator annually with any revisions to the Safe Church Policies & Procedures and any recommendations for the facilities. If no contact has been made by September of a given year, it would be appropriate for the Executive Team to make contact to help hold the Safe Church Coordinator accountable.

The Director of Technology will assist leaders in youth ministries in setting up church-supervised texting, emailing or social media accounts if they request it. The Director of Technology and/or the Safe Church Coordinator must have administrator access to any such accounts.

APPENDIX B – Safety Guidelines for Visits to Vulnerable Adults

The opportunity for abuse exists when the pastor, elders, deacons, or other individuals representing Milwood Community Church pay visits to the elderly, the infirm, or other vulnerable adults. The guidelines in this section are offered to clarify expectations surrounding these visits and to minimize the chance of abuse.

Anyone doing a ‘pastoral care’ visit will provide a monthly report, including the name and date of the visit, to the council. These guidelines are designed to help protect both the visitor and the recipient of the visit since the visitor would know that the council is reviewing the frequency/content/duration of the visits. The notification of visits provides a record of visits to council to ensure that the pattern of visits does not develop into an unhealthy relationship.

1. Whenever possible, at least two representatives should go on all visits to the homes of vulnerable adults living alone.
2. If a one-on-one visit with a vulnerable adult is necessary, the representative of the congregation should notify a council member of the date, time and nature of the visit.
3. A kiss, hug, or other display of affection is often an appropriate means of offering encouragement or support. However, any representative of the congregation should carefully consider how such a display of affection will be received by the recipient before offering it.

Reporting Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult

Anyone who has reason to believe that a vulnerable adult (elderly or physically/mentally handicapped) has been or is likely to be physically harmed, sexually abused, or financially exploited is urged to report the matter to Adult Protective Services (which has the same number as CPS): 855-444-3911.

APPENDIX C – Procedure for Creating a Covenant of Conduct

Our church seeks to be a welcoming place for all who seek Jesus, but we have also been entrusted with the protection of our more vulnerable members. In the certain cases, to fulfill both of these missions, the church must create special boundaries between the vulnerable members of our church and individuals who have one or more events in their history which makes them unable to pass the Safe Church screening. For example, if an individual who is attending our church is also on the Sex Offender List, or if an individual with a past conviction for assault or criminal sexual conduct wishes to lead an adult ministry.

In such cases, the Safe Church Coordinator, an Elder, and the Pastor will work together as a team to create a written covenant of conduct that clearly articulates what that individual may and may not do while attending Milwood Community Church. Throughout this process, we will steadfastly work to

- a) treat the individual with love and compassion just as Jesus has treated each of us with love and compassion, and
- b) protect the youth and vulnerable adults with a fierce faithfulness, refusing to compromise their safety in any way.

In such cases, the team will go through the following process:

1. Factual information will be gathered about the past event(s) from sources other than the individual, including an examination of any court/criminal records available.
2. The individual will meet with the team who will be responsible for the writing of the covenant to discuss the past event(s) and what they have done since the event(s) to prevent their reoccurrence.
3. The team will use the information they gathered, along with examples of other covenants available from the denomination, to draft a covenant that addresses the particular areas of concern based on this individual's history. The purpose of the covenant is to **affirm** what the individual **may** do while also explicitly listing what they **may not** do so as to **prevent** any future incidents or accusations. The team may wish to contact the denomination's Safe Church office to seek additional guidance in the drafting of the covenant.
4. Once the team is satisfied with the covenant, the team will meet with the individual to pray with him/her and to discuss the proposed covenant. At this point, the individual is encouraged ask questions, suggest revisions, and to nominate at least three members of Milwood that he/she feels would be good support/accountability persons. It should be clear, however, that the church is not obligated to accept revisions or nominations if they feel the suggestions could in any way compromise the safety of our youth or vulnerable adults.
5. After the team has had a chance to revise the document, they will arrange another meeting with the individual and all of mutually-agreed-upon support persons to review the final covenant, to sign it, and to pray together.
6. In general, the covenant will be reviewed annually unless the individual, pastor, or Safe Church coordinator request a meeting earlier to revise or update it. Covenants continue until such time as the individual no longer attends or, in the cases of covenants written only to permit limited leadership roles, the individual no longer wishes to serve as a leader.

7. After the covenant has been signed, members of Council, the church staff, the leaders of youth ministries and the Safe Church representatives for each Core Value Team will be told about the covenant. This is essential if they are to be able to help protect the youth and vulnerable members of our church. Depending on the nature of the covenant, it may also be necessary to tell specific ministry leaders, hall monitors, or Safe Church persons who are supervising this person so that they can also help keep the individual accountable for following the covenant.

The elders and support persons are charged with helping to hold the individual accountable in following the covenant. Any lapses in following the covenant should be immediately addressed with the individual and then shared with the Safe Church Coordinator so that they can be properly documented.

If the individual repeatedly, intentionally refuses to adhere to the covenant of conduct, the church may revise the covenant to become more restrictive, such as removing the person from their leadership role or requiring the individual to have a support person with him/her at all times. In extreme cases, the elders may choose to deny that individual any access to church functions/property.

The Appendix D – Procedures for the Safe Church Response when Alleged Offenders are Helpers, Volunteers or Staff

1. Any suspicion of inappropriate sexual behavior, physical assault, emotional abuse or child abuse by a volunteer or staff member shall be reported to the Safe Church Coordinator as soon as possible. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate the alleged abuse, but only to report it.
2. Once notified of a suspicion of abuse, the Safe Church Coordinator will contact the pastor and elders. At least two elders and the Safe Church Coordinator will become the “Safe Church Team” designated to handle this situation. They will begin by meeting with the reporting person as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours. At the meeting,
 - a. The reporting person will present a written report indicating the specifics of the child's report, the specific signs or symptoms of abuse, the date of the child's report or when the signs or symptoms were noted, and what, if any, comment or response the child had either to the signs or symptoms or to his/her reporting of abuse.
 - b. The reporting person should be reminded to keep the child’s account confidential and to not speak with the alleged offender.
 - c. The reporting person should also be instructed on how to respond if the child or the parents contact him/her.
3. Upon reviewing the report, the Safe Church Team will determine if a reasonable suspicion of abuse exists.
 - a. If the Safe Church Team finds that it is highly unlikely that abuse occurred, they may choose several different courses of action, including any of the following:
 - i. Meet with the alleged offender to discuss what behaviors caused concern and create an action plan to change those behaviors in the future. The Safe Church Team and/or Ministry Leader would provide follow-up supervision to ensure that the plan is being followed and the behaviors are changing.
 - ii. Determine that no further follow-up is necessary. The report of the suspected abuse will be kept in a confidential file.

**NOTE: Even if the Safe Church Team decides that abuse was unlikely, the reporting member has the right to choose to report the suspicion of abuse to the legal authorities.*
 - b. If a reasonable suspicion of abuse exists, the Safe Church Team will confirm that the reporting person has notified the proper authorities and inform the pastor and elders that a report of suspected abuse has been made.
4. Once the Council or Safe Church Team is notified of a law enforcement or CPS investigation of a volunteer/staff, the Safe Church Team will
 - a. Designate one member as the liaison between the legal authorities and the church. This liaison will need to determine at what point we can notify the alleged offender of their suspension from ministry activities (pending the outcome of the legal investigation).

- b. Designate one member to engage the media in any discussion that should arise from the reporting of child abuse to police or CPS. This individual would also notify the church's insurance agent and legal counsel whenever a reasonable suspicion of abuse is reported, and ask for their recommendations on how to handle any public statements.
 - c. Designate one member to coordinate pastoral care for the individuals and families who are a party to the allegations. They can contact the Classical Safe Church Team to help provide support services to victims, offenders, and/or their family members.
5. When a reasonable suspicion of abuse has been reported to the police, CPS, or Safe Church Team, said volunteer/staff
- a. shall be suspended from services or activities which involve children and shall remain suspended until reinstatement or permanent ban.
 - b. shall be permanently banned from working with children and vulnerable adults if convicted of criminal sexual conduct or child abuse.
 - c. can request reinstatement from the Council if the courts find the volunteer/staff not guilty, the law enforcement investigation is closed without any charges being authorized, or the CPS investigation rules the charges as being unsubstantiated. However, Milwood Community Church reserves the right to refuse reinstatement for any reason.
6. If the authorities choose not to follow up on the report, and there is still concern for the child's well-being, then the reporting person who first reported the case should be notified. A written log of any further signs and symptoms that may reflect an ongoing pattern of abusive behavior should be kept. Of particular note would be a pattern of increased frequency or intensity of signs, symptoms, or complaints of abuse.

NOTE: When an allegation is made by an adult (either in a case where the abuse occurred when the adult was a minor but the legal statute of limitations has expired or in a case where the adult was abused as an adult) the alleged offender should not be notified of the allegations until a Classical Safe Church Panel has deemed the allegations to be probable and serious. Milwood Community Church will follow the Synodically approved guidelines for handling abuse allegations by an adult. We will follow CRC Church Order Articles 81-84 for the admonition and discipline of members and office bearers. Milwood Community Church should also ensure that pastoral care is provided for individuals and families who are party to the allegations.

Allegations of abuse that occur outside of the church programs, ministries, and facilities are not the domain of the Safe Church Team, however, if the victim, alleged offender, or their families are members of Milwood Community Church, then the Safe Church Coordinator can help them contact the Classical Safe Church Team for pastoral care and support.

Safe Church Application for Ministry at Milwood Community Church

We will do our best to match volunteers with the ministries they have requested; however the church reserves the right to not schedule someone as a volunteer in a particular ministry at their discretion. Completion of this application does not guarantee a position. NOTE: The contents of this application will remain in a confidential file. Applicants may request to see the original at any time by contacting the Safe Church Coordinator.

Please print neatly

Name (last, first, middle initial): _____

Date of birth: _____ Email address: _____

Home phone: _____ Other phone (work or cell): _____

Street address: _____

City: _____ ZIP: _____

If you are 18 years or older, please provide:

Sex: _____ Race: _____ Maiden/Other names: _____

Are you a member of Milwood Community Church? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, how long have you been a member? _____ 0-6 months _____ more than 6 months

PLEASE NOTE: If you have been a member of Milwood Community Church for fewer than six months or have not yet become a member, references and/or an interview will be required for the position to which you are applying. Contact the church office for a copy of the references form.

Please describe or list the ministries with which you would like to serve:

What kind of commitment would you like to make? (e.g. Volunteer how often in nursery? Committing to a month/semester/year in Sunday school? Be a leader or occasional support for GEMS/Cadets? etc.)

Is there any fact, circumstance, or pattern involving your background that would make it inappropriate for you to serve with minors or could compromise the integrity of the church? _____

If so, please explain below. Attach additional pages if necessary.

Acknowledgements and Release

1. The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge.
2. I have carefully read over and agree to follow the Safe Church Policies & Procedures. If a situation arises that has not been explicitly addressed in these documents, I will apply the “BIG IDEAS” and Code of Ethics to the situation and notify the ministry leader or Safe Church Coordinator immediately afterwards. I understand that if I refuse to observe any of these policies or procedures, I may be required to relinquish my position in the ministry.
3. I certify that [check one]
 - _____ I have never been convicted, pled guilty or no contest to charges of assault, sexual misconduct, or to any crimes for abuse or neglect of children or adults.
 - _____ I have disclosed the circumstances of past conviction[s] to the Elders and would like to enter into a written covenant with Milwood’s Council that permits me to be a leader in a ministry that does not focus on youth or vulnerable adults.
4. If I am 18 years of age or older, I authorize any required references or background checks to be made by Milwood Community Church. I understand that, if they should decide any conviction or charge disclosed might preclude me from the function I have applied for, I will be given an opportunity to see and discuss that criminal record.
5. Upon consideration of this application, I release any individual, church or church official, employer, or organizations from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family on account of compliance or any attempt to comply with this authorization.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If the applicant is under the age of 18, the parent or guardian should also sign, confirming that the applicant has permission to be a helper in this ministry and that the applicant has the ability to follow these policies and procedures.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

FOR CHURCH OFFICE USE ONLY

Is the applicant an adult? Yes / No If yes, the background check was completed on _____ by _____ and applicant was cleared / not cleared to supervise minors. If not cleared, was applicant given a chance to comment/explain? Yes / No

Has the applicant been a member of Milwood for 6+ months? Yes / No If no, references check/interview was completed on _____ by _____ and applicant was accepted / not accepted to work with minors.

NOTE: References form and interview notes should be attached to this application for records purposes.

This applicant’s name was shared with the Pastor & Safe Church Coordinator on: _____

This applicant should be listed as volunteer / helper / neither.