



SafeChurch

**Philosophy and Guidelines
for Parents and Leaders**

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ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

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“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” - Jesus

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & FORMATION

As the church gathers, we do more than learn together. We live together, building relationships with God and one another. God calls us to make certain that these are *safe* relationships, even when they extend beyond church property and events. This is a privilege and responsibility we as a congregation willingly commit to at the baptism of every child.



WHY THIS POLICY IS NECESSARY

This type of policy and practice is typical for most organizations working with children. Although we would like to believe the church is inherently a safe place for kids, the church is not immune to accident or sin. Over 260 reports of potential sexual abuse alone are made each year between minors and Protestant clergy, staff, or other church-related relationships.

These policies and practices are designed to safeguard children involved in the ministry of the church, inside and outside it's walls. It is also intended to provide guidelines and resources for our staff and volunteers so they understand church policies and have the resources to have caring relationships with our children. It also helps reduce compromising situations and false allegations.

All aspects of children and youth ministry are open to observation by parents and congregational leaders.

STATEMENT OF WELCOME

We welcome all children to participate in the ministries of Zion Lutheran Church, regardless of race, color, religion, membership status, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or ability to pay.

For the safety of all participants, we ask parents to exclude their children from activities in the case of illness or unresolved discipline issues.

Age requirements are to be followed so that we may appropriately meet the needs of your child and other youth.

Parents are most often the greatest experts on the needs of their children, especially when it comes to physical, mental, or emotional disability. Therefore, please notify us if your child has special needs and how we can best serve them. Space is available on the accompanying information form, but concerns may also be made in conversation with ministry leaders (listed on pg. 6).

We require that participation forms be filled out by the 3rd session of any ongoing activity on a yearly basis. This information allows us to note any special needs, and will help us contact parents in case of emergency. An event-specific form is required for any activity overnight or off premises. Adults are able to sign for any children in their care.

BEHAVIOR & DISCIPLINE

Good discipline is necessary for education to take place and for the safety of the children. Our congregation seeks to achieve a balance between fun and freedom, discipline and control. All children and youth will be treated with dignity and respect.

Discipline should be constructive, respectful, and reflect Christian values. Physical, sexual, or emotional punishment is prohibited. Spanking, hitting, grabbing, pinching, shaking, or other physical discipline is not allowed. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to other youth. Disciplinary issues should be reported to the child's parent or guardian, and to the leader responsible for the ministry involved in.

DROP OFF & PICK UP

Parents are asked to be prompt when dropping off or picking up their children.

Please do not send unaccompanied youth to church programs more than 15 minutes early, as we cannot guarantee adequate supervision. Tardiness is disruptive to the rest of the class.

Please be prompt in picking up your children. Most of our leaders are volunteers and have other commitments after activities. *If you are unable to pick up your child, please make alternate arrangements ahead of time. If an emergency will delay you, please contact the church office at 402-395-2043.*

For convenience, we do not require parents to sign-out or be present for their children to leave. However, **this creates opportunity for another individual to attempt to pick up your child.** Please communicate with your child about who will be taking them home from every activity. We recommend that you have spoken to your child about dealing with strangers (for resources, visit www.ncpc.org/topics/violent-crime-and-personal-safety/strangers). If you have concerns about specific individuals you do not want picking up your child, speak with a ministry leader (listed on pg. 6). **We cannot be responsible for children who leave the premises, including those who walk home.**

Weather Cancellation: Church activities will be automatically cancelled whenever Boone Central after-school activities have been cancelled due to inclement weather. If you have questions about whether an event will take place, please contact the congregation office at 402-395-2043. Weather conditions vary; always use your best judgment in determining if it is safe for you to attend church activities, even if the activity is not cancelled.

TRANSPORTATION

We comply with all Nebraska laws regarding transportation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- All children up to age 6 must ride correctly secured in a federally approved child safety seat.
- Children ages 6 up to age 18 must ride secured in a safety belt or child safety seat.
- Children up to age 18 are prohibited from riding in cargo areas.
- NHTSA recommends that children 12 and younger sit in the rear seat away from the force of a deploying air bag.
- A driver of a motor vehicle shall not be subject to the requirements of this section if the vehicle is being operated in a parade or exhibition and the parade or exhibition is being conducted in accordance with applicable state law and local ordinances and resolutions.

Drivers transporting other participants during congregation-sponsored events are to hold a valid driver's license and be at least 21 years of age. Rare exceptions may be made to this policy if parents of all drivers and passengers have signed an event-specific form granting permission. The congregation is not responsible for youth who carpool to events before they begin or after their conclusion. The congregation will not organize such carpools.

CONGREGATION LEADERSHIP POLICY

We welcome any active member of a sponsoring organization who recognizes talents to share them with our congregation. Any information indicating that a person poses a threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse will make that person ineligible for serving in youth ministry. Background checks have been performed on anyone in a leadership position and on adults who participate in overnight activities.

Congregation policy dictates that no adult and child may be alone in a closed room together without a window or open door. No event will take place without a leader over 18 years of age. The following adult to youth ratios are to be observed: preschool 1:6, elementary/middle school 1:8, high school 1:10 (may include nearby ministry leaders).

When both male and female youth are participating in overnight or off-campus church-related programs, both male and female adults must be present. Overnight activities require that genders be split into separate rooms or areas of a room, with gender appropriate adults remaining in close proximity. Adults and youth may not share a bed unless they are a related parent and child.

Congregation staff and volunteers must not consume alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances while in the presence of anyone under 21 years of age, nor prior to, during, or after any ministry-related activity or trip where youth are involved, even when youth are not physically present.

Adults over 21 may not date or be romantically involved with youth in the congregation. Sexual contact between adults and youth is prohibited. This includes sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual material, and exposure of private parts.

Appropriate steps to take for any perceived congregation policy violations or abuse:

- If you would like to clarify questionable events that took place, it is perfectly appropriate to talk directly with the staff member or volunteer in question. However, if abuse is suspected, it is important to report it.
- **If you suspect a volunteer or other student** may have violated policies, speak directly with the ministry leader (see next page).
- **If you suspect a ministry leader** may have violated policies or is not appropriately addressing your concern, you may speak with a pastor.
- **If you suspect a pastor** may have violated policies, you may speak with the congregation's president or vice-president.

For 2017-2018, ministry leaders include:

- Sunday School Superintendent: Becky Lindgren
- Confirmation & Conf. Warm-up Coordinator: Pastor Meg Sander
- High School Coordinator: Dorothy Grosch
- Senior Pastor: Pastor David Frerichs
- Congregation President: Dallas Choat VP: Tom Fick
- Nebraska Synod ELCA Bishop: Rev. Brian Maas
- Others designated as various ministries arise
- The office administrator can help you reach any of these individuals

MEDIA RELEASE

By filling out the accompanying participation form, your child is opted in to our media release, unless otherwise noted. Pictures of you or your child may be publicly displayed, including but not limited to on bulletin boards or online, as well as in print and digital publications produced by our congregation. Certain events, including worship and special programs, may be broadcast on the local cable public access channel.

ABUSE STATISTICS

- Studies show that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of 18 (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2006).
- Our community is not immune to these kinds of crimes, with local statistics close to the national statistics.
- The majority of abuse is perpetrated by someone that the victim or victim's family knows.
- Inappropriate behavior can be perpetrated by same-age peers, as well as adults.

SIGNS OF ABUSE

We offer these signs of abuse as a resource to parents and our ministry leaders (from "Safeguarding God's Children" by the Church Pension Group of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.).

Some general warning signs that are yellow flags regarding abuse for children and teenagers:

- Major behavioral changes and/or drastic changes in schoolwork
- Complaining about people/activities they used to like.

- Excessively touching their genitals, and/or inability to stop
- Preoccupation with sexual themes/images, especially aggressive ones
- Sexually explicit conversation, innuendo, teasing, embarrassing others
- Sexual knowledge, language, or drawing more advanced than is usual for a child of this age
- Attempt to expose others' genitals (pulling pants down/skirts up)
- Simulating foreplay with dolls or peers who have clothing on (petting, practicing French kissing)
- Feelings of low self-worth
- Unexplained anxiety, moodiness, or depression
- Distancing from family and/or friends
- Difficulty making friends the child's own age
- Ease of befriending adults & authority figures

Some general warning signs that are red flags regarding abuse for children and teenagers:

- Abrupt changes in behavior or attitude
- Depression, withdrawal from previously enjoyable activities
- Acting out—may include restlessness during classes
- Extreme neediness, incessant demands for adult attention
- Intense anxiety or fearfulness, sleeplessness
- Bedwetting and/or inability to control bowel movements
- Confused sexual identity
- Degrading or humiliating self or others with sexual themes
- Sexually explicit conversations with a person of a significant difference in age
- Repeated or chronic peeping or exposing one's self
- Repeated or chronic use of obscenities or pornographic interest
- Touching or forced exposure of another's genitals
- Sexually explicit proposals or threats, including written notes
- Compulsive masturbation or task interruption to masturbate
- Simulating intercourse with dolls, peers, animals
- Inducing fear or making threats of force
- Complaints of pain, itching, or irritation in genital or rectal areas
- Frequent urinary tract infections
- Regression to immature behaviors such as wetting pants, thumb sucking, or rocking

Some signs suggesting there is no question sexual abuse is happening:

- Any genital injury or bleeding not explained by accidental cause
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Child has difficulty walking or sitting
- Presence of a sexually transmitted disease
- Oral, vaginal, or anal penetration of dolls, children, or animals
- Simulated intercourse with peers with clothing off

IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

- **Take action.**
- **If told by a child, believe him/her.** Let the child know that no matter what happened or what they say, you will still love them.
- **Take the time to reassure the child that he/she has done nothing wrong.** Let the child know you are someone he/she can safely talk to about this issue, and that you will do whatever you can to keep them safe. Listen carefully to the responses without suggesting answers. Recognize that confusion, guilt, and shame about abuse can make the conversation difficult, both for you and for the child. Acknowledge the child's discomfort and offer praise for their courage to talk about a confusing experience.
- **Get help.** It is important to seek professional help and not confront this alone. Healing from child sexual abuse is possible with specialized treatment and support. There are resources that can help a family through this difficult situation. Filing a report can be a first step to accessing support services. Even if you are uncertain about abuse, the Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-652-1999) can help you determine if further investigation is warranted. Calls are confidential.
- **State law requires any citizen to report suspected child abuse and neglect** to law enforcement such as the police, sheriff's office or State patrol, to a Health and Human Services office, or to the Child Abuse Hotline (noted above). Reporting the abuse to authorities is an upsetting prospect for many families, but protecting other children in your family and community from further abuse is important. Anyone who is harming a child sexually needs help to stop the behavior.
- **If you need help getting information about questionable events** that happened at a church function, you can ask the appropriate congregational authority (listed on pg. 6) to help sort things out.
- **We support our staff and volunteers, but acknowledge the reality of sin.** We will not hide evidence and we will cooperate with law enforcement in any investigations.

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT PERSONAL TOUCH

Prevention is the first line of defense. For information about talking to your children about good touch, bad touch, and healthy respect for their bodies, visit www.theadvocacycenter.org/adv_abuseprevent.html