

# Hinsdale Covenant Church

## Safe Church Policy

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**Evangelical Covenant Church of Hinsdale**  
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**Introduction**

Child abuse affects the lives of thousands of children every year. Churches have long been perceived as organizations, which are lax or negligent in the screening, education, and training of children's and youth workers. The result has been missed opportunities to protect a child in need, as well as false accusations. Churches have a responsibility for their ministry programs and for the actions of the volunteers and staff that support them. Court decisions throughout the nation are holding churches liable when it can prove the church did not properly screen volunteers, educate workers, or provide adequate supervision. Much can and should be done by churches to make children's workers more aware of the seriousness of child abuse and procedures the church can and should implement to protect children from being abused.

**Our Response**

We desire to respond in earnest to make our facilities and programming a safe place for all minors through implementation of a Safe Church Policy. Steps must be taken proactively to screen and to train staff and volunteers having regular, recurring contact with minors. Precautionary measures must be communicated by providing guidelines and procedures that offer assistance to staff and volunteers. Through increased awareness and supervision, we hope to prevent any incidents from occurring, and hence support effective, caring ministries, which continue to further the cause of Christ and lead individuals to a personal relationship with him.

**Statement of Purpose**

The main purpose for Safety Church Policy is to protect minors.

Making Churches Safer is a statement that we value and are willing to undergo to help ensure the safety of children and of those who minister to them.

This purpose is accomplished in part by educating and training staff and volunteers on issues, which may contribute to dangerous and unsafe conditions affecting minors.

These issues include how best to avoid neglect and abuse. Staff and volunteers of the church are encouraged to act responsibly not only in caring for minors, but also in caring for each other (Matt. 19:13-14; John 15:9-17).

Guidelines and procedures have been developed to address concerns and/or allegations concerning safety, wellness, and abuse. The governing board of the church

will assume responsibility for evaluating the conditions under which the church ministries are carried out and for investigating charges and reporting misconduct. **Why the Church without a Safety Policy Is Vulnerable**

Minor's safety is a crucial element in church ministry. The Evangelical Covenant Church of Hinsdale established a safety policy because minors can become isolated and vulnerable to abuse. Staff and volunteers can be isolated with children and vulnerable to false accusations. There is the possibility of minor abduction. The church may unknowingly provide an abuser access to minor. Minors may be left unattended if a single teacher needs to attend to an emergency. Parents, teachers, volunteers and staff may all have differing expectations when they are not explicit. For these reasons, Hinsdale Covenant Church has implemented a Safe Church Policy to protect minors.

### **What Is Sexual Abuse?**

Sexual abuse is any sexual conduct with a minor which is either unlawful and/or contrary to the moral teaching of the Church, which is engaged in by any adult employee/volunteer of the Church. It is also the acquisition, possession, or distribution of pornographic images of minors for the purposes of sexual gratification, by whatever means or the use of whatever technology.

**For the Purpose of this document, Children and Youth are defined as Minors.**

### **Minor/Student**

A person who has not reached his or her 18th birthday.

### **Ministerial Relationship**

A ministerial relationship is established between persons when care or services are given. Persons' in a ministerial relationship with others include pastors, staff, volunteers, and interns.

### **Staff**

A full or part time paid employee of The Covenant Church of Hinsdale.

### **Worker**

A person who functions with or without compensation in any role within The Covenant Church of Hinsdale. To include but not be limited to:

- Volunteers ages 18 and older
- Interns

- Contract Employees (not on payroll)

### **Mandated Reporter Definitions and Requirements**

Beginning in January 2020, any child-care worker affiliated with a church, whether in a paid capacity or as a volunteer, is now classified by the State of Illinois as a “mandated reporter.”

Mandated reporters must report suspected abuse or neglect if they have “reasonable cause” to believe that a child may be abused or neglected. Illinois law defines reporting requirements with reference to a parent, other immediate family member, person residing in the child’s home, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare, as responsible for abuse or neglect. Mandated reporter requirements apply independently of and apart from any internal organizational requirements to report such matters to supervisors. See reporting procedures on page 11.

Under the Act, the term “abuse” includes the infliction of physical injury, the allowance of such physical injury, or the creation of substantial risk of physical injury, all by other than accidental means and all that would be likely to cause death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function, as well as excessive corporal punishment, provision of illegal drugs, and involuntary servitude. Illinois law further defines sexual abuse as committing or allowing any sex offense as statutorily defined. Illinois law similarly defines “neglect” broadly as not receiving proper or necessary nourishment or medically indicated treatment as well as being subjected to an injurious environment as a result of a parent or other caretaker’s blatant disregard of his or her responsibilities.

Previously, if clergy had reasonable cause to believe a child is an “abused child”, they were required to report it. But such reporting obligation related specifically and exclusively only to sexual abuse. The new law expands the scope of abuse that must be reported. Like other mandated reporters, clergy members must report *all* suspected abuse and neglect as listed above.

*Notable: Clergy should be mindful of the expanded scope of reportable abuse.* Pastors will now need to report incidents of suspected neglect and proper care, as well as cases of suspected abuse. Some exemptions apply to clergy. For full definitions and clarifications of mandatory reporting requirements, see The Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act

(<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1460&ChapterID=32>).

Mandated reporter information from this and the next section is pulled directly from: <https://wagenmakerlaw.com/blog/illinois-mandated-reporter-changes-clergy-child-care-workers-and-other-mandated-reporters#.Xh9oh7zWleo.email>).

### **Mandated Reporter Training**

Mandated reporters as defined above must undergo training, if not prior to their children-related service, within three months of first serving. Training must be completed at least once every three years. *No exceptions exist for occasional or sporadic service.* Required training must be in-person or web-based. The training must be provided either through DCFS or through an organization approved by DCFS to provide mandated reporter training. The Covenant Church of Hinsdale will utilize the web-based training provided by DCFS training at <https://mr.dcfstraining.org/UserAuth/Login!loginPage.action;jsessionid=D0B309199AB8B99436868809EC4821BD>.

## **Policy for Reducing the Risk of Abuse and Injury**

### **I. Recruiting, Selecting, and Training Volunteers and Paid Staff Qualifications:**

Volunteer and staff who work with or have an opportunity to be alone with minors shall:

- Confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior
- Adhere to the affirmations of faith of the church
- Pass a criminal background check

**Procedures:** Volunteer and staff who work with minors shall:

- Complete an application

- Agree to a check of public records
- Complete mandated reporter training within three months of service via web based training provided by DCFS

#### A. Application Form

- The application acknowledgement form for volunteers and staff shall be maintained in a digital file and include:
  - Personal information: Name, address, etc.
  - Procedures: Concerning the care and guidelines for ministering to minors. ● An Acknowledgment Form stating the applicant has received a copy of the policies and procedures to reduce the risk of child abuse and injury.
- A link to a background check
- A link to mandated reporter training

#### B. Public Records Release Form

1. Form will be completed by volunteers and staff for a background check.
2. The Covenant Church of Hinsdale will conduct inquiries every three years on the National Sex Offenders database.

## II. Procedures

### Parental Consent and Medical Authorization

1. The parent or legal guardian will fill out a parental consent/acknowledgment form that includes designated persons allowed to pick up children. One form per family will include all children participating in the ministries of the church.
2. The Office Administrator(s) will keep the forms on file in the digital archive on Breeze CHMS.
3. Children/Youth Directors will keep copies of forms in the digital archive on Breeze CHMS which should accompany any activity that takes place outside the church facilities.

4. At the start of each ministry year parents or legal guardians will fill out new forms.
5. In the case of minors who visit church programming such as youth groups or Sunday morning worship, parent(s) will be required to complete consent/acknowledgement forms upon the second visit.

### **Release Guidelines**

A classroom release policy for minors from church programs will help to reduce the opportunities for both abuse and abduction.

#### **A. Sunday Procedures for Nursery, Little Lambs, and Sunday Kids Camp:**

1. Each parent or designated person 18 years and older will sign minors participating in the Nursery/Little Lambs/Sunday Kids Camp in via electronic check-in. Children will receive a name tag and a security label that is required for pickup. Without the security label that was received at check-in, designated persons 18 years and older will be required to show identification via a driver's license.
2. Minors participating in Nursery/Little Lambs/Sunday Kids Camp on Sundays will not be released except into the care of the parent or designated person 18 years and older (with the exception of siblings who are high school aged or older).
3. If the electronic check-in system is down, volunteers will have a manual roster of kids present in each classroom. A parent or guardian must confirm their phone number and sign the roster in order for the student to be released from class. A copy of the paper roster will be maintained for one year after the date of class.
4. Minors participating in Club 56 do not require sign in or out procedures by parent(s) or other designated person(s).

#### **B. Weekday Programs:**

1. Each parent or designated person 18 years and older will sign minors participating in weekday programs in and out of the program and will note where he/she (parent/guardian) will be in case of an emergency.



2. Minors participating in weekday programs will not be released except into the care of the parent or designated person 18 years and older.
3. Minors participating in Club 56, Flipside, or Hi-League do not require sign in or out by parent(s) or other designated person(s).

### **C. Emergency Situation:**

1. In case of emergency, if someone picks up a minor(s) that is not on that minor(s) designated list, the person(s) must show identification and a call or email from the parent or guardian to the Children's Ministry director or senior pastor will suffice as proof of relationship for pick up.

### **D. CovSports and CovKids Camps**

1. Each parent or designated person 18 years and older will sign minors participating in CovSports and CovKids Camps. Children will receive a name tag and a security label that is required for pickup. Without the security label that was received at check-in, designated persons 18 years and older will be required to show identification via a driver's license.
2. Minors participating in CovSports and CovKids Camps will not be released except into the care of the parent or designated person 18 years and older.

### **Two Staff Rule**

Staff and volunteers are to observe the two-staff rule. This requires that staff and volunteers are never to be in an isolated setting with an individual minor. No two workers can be related without a third unrelated person present.

1. On site events: There must always be two or more staff or volunteers in each location where minors are present. No two workers can be related without a third unrelated person present.
2. Off site events: When away from the church on an outing or at a church "overnight," volunteers and staff are to work together as a team and never be isolated with a minor.

3. If it is necessary for a volunteer or staff member to meet individually with a minor, it should be done in a public setting, where they are visible by others. And whenever possible with the awareness and written consent of that individual's parents or legal guardians.
4. CovSports and CovKids : High School Students under the age of 18 are permitted to supervise children without an adult over the age of 18 present, as long as there is still at least one other leader on property at all times. High School Students are still required to follow the guidelines listed above.

## **Touch**

Touching is a difficult area because touch can be very positive and it's important for minors to understand and receive positive touch. Context and situation must always be taken into consideration. It is appropriate to hold and comfort an infant, toddler, and young minor or one who is in distress and discomfort.

It may be best to consider the types of touch that are inappropriate. Below are some examples of both. This is not a comprehensive list.

Appropriate touch:

1. Celebrating: high fives, handshakes, side hugs
2. Circle prayer: holding hands, hands on shoulders
3. Comfort and redirection: a hand on the shoulder, side hugs

Inappropriate touch:

1. wrestling, tickling, sitting on laps, back rubs, piggy back rides, full frontal extended hugs, caressing, grabbing, slapping, hitting, or spanking

## **Protecting Yourself from Accusation**

Because you are working/volunteering with children, you are susceptible to accusations of abuse. Take the following precautions to ensure your credibility as a caregiver. • Be

aware. Know the possible indicators of abuse.

- **Be in view of others whenever possible with the students. If you are meeting alone with a student or minor, (ie. for a one-on-one), seek a spot that provides enough privacy for conversing, but is still out in the open and in view of others. (If this is not an option, make sure a staff member is aware of your meeting and location)**
- Always involve the staff in charge of the ministry area in any situation involving a student where you feel uncomfortable with his or her actions.
- Take care in choosing what you share with students about your private life. ● Do not allow children to initiate inappropriate contact (physical, verbal, cyber) with you. Maintain boundaries. Follow the touch guidelines.
- Report and record suspicious or unusual observations to the staff or council.
- Supervise private activities in pairs. If possible, activities should be watched over/lead by at least one male and one female.
- Be aware that student to leader crushes develop. Do not encourage them, but be sensitive when they occur. Be aware that what you say and do can be easily misinterpreted. Do not in fact or just “date” or initiate any inappropriate contact (physical, verbal, cyber) with a student.

### **Nursery Procedures**

1. Follow Parental Consent & Medical Authorization Guidelines.
2. Follow Release Guidelines.
3. Eliminate any toys or objects that may present a choking hazard.
4. Clean and disinfect toys in the nursery.
5. Disinfect changing station, dispose of dirty diapers in a closed container, then wash hands.
6. Never leave a child unattended on a changing station.
7. Cover all outlets.
8. Clean and disinfect the room thoroughly after each use.
9. Mesh Cribs
  - Mesh less than 1/4 inch in size, smaller than the tiny buttons on a baby's clothing.

- Mesh with no tears, holes, or loose threads that could entangle a baby.
- Mesh securely attached to top rail and floor plate.
- Top rail cover with no tears or holes.
- If staples are used, they are not missing, loose. or exposed.

## **Bathroom Procedures**

### 1. Responsibilities of Parents/Guardians

- Parents/Guardians should take their minors to the bathroom prior to a scheduled church activity.

If the minor is not toilet trained:

- Parents will be notified via text message that a diaper change is necessary.
- Staff or volunteers will not change the diaper of a minor.

If the child is toilet trained:

- Parents are encouraged to ensure their child has used the bathroom prior to signing their children into our programming.
- If a child needs assistance in the bathroom, parents will either 1) be notified via text message or asked to step out of service to assist or 2) a volunteer will stand outside the door to monitor for safety while child goes to the bathroom.

## **Reporting Procedures**

Reporting Obligations:

1. Workers are to immediately report to the Children's Ministry Director/Youth Director or church staff any behavior, which seems abusive or inappropriate, or incidents reported by a minor.
2. Workers are to follow mandated reporter guidelines.

Line of Reporting:

1. Workers report directly to the Children's Ministry Director, Youth Ministry Director, or staff.
2. Children's and Youth Directors report directly to the pastoral staff.
3. If the allegation is directed toward a pastoral staff member, reporting may be made to another pastoral staff member and/or the acting church chair.
4. The pastoral staff or church chair shall report to the police department for any allegation of abuse.

### **Emergency Action Plans - needs signage**

If vacating the building is necessary, parents/guardians are encouraged to exit the building using the nearest available exit. Parents are discouraged from picking up their child in such a scenario to avoid jamming the hallways and exits that will be utilized to help children safely exit.

### **Loft Emergency Action Plans**

#### **In Case of Fire**

Evacuate together out of western exit, following stairs downward and out the 4th street door.

If fire is out of western exit, exit on eastern side following the stairs downward and exiting out the back eastern entrance.

#### **In Case of Severe Weather**

Gather together and follow western stairwell downward into the basement. Find shelter in art room on the eastern wall.

#### **In Case of Active Shooter**

Gather into Youth Ministry office on the northern side of the loft. The Youth leader and/or support staff will lock the door and cover the window. Gather together in the far northern corner of the office.

### **Sunday Kids Camp Emergency Action Plans**

#### **In Case of Fire**

Children line up together and follow a leader up the stairwell and out the 4th street door. If fire is out of the western exit, use the southern stairwell and exit out the back east entrance.

### **In Case of Severe Weather**

Children line up and follow the leader to the art room on the eastern wall. Sit together against eastern wall and close the door.

### **In Case of Active Shooter**

Children will follow the leader into the storage room on the western side of the theater room. The leader will lock the door. Sit together on the back southern wall.

## **Anti-Bullying Policy**

Bullying is defined as;

when one or more people exclude, tease, taunt, gossip, physically assault, or put down another person with the intent to hurt another.

Bullying happens when a person or group of people want to have power over another and use their power to get their way, at the expense of someone else. Bullying can also happen online, causing hurt or pain to students in our community between programming.

**At Hinsdale Covenant Church, bullying is inexcusable, and we are committed to addressing and eliminating all types of bullying.** Our mission is rooted in the idea that all people are created in God's image, loved by God, and worthy of love by others. Bullying is an act that attacks another person's humanness, treats them as an object rather than a child of God, and disregards their dignity and life in order to advance their own.

As such, we address all incidents of bullying seriously and train staff and volunteers to promote communication. Every person has the right to be safe, cared for, and offered a loving experience at church. By working together as a team, we can identify and eliminate bullying, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to grow spiritually, socially, physically, and mentally.

## **The Basics of Bullying**

**Definition of Bullying:**

Bullying is an act of repeated aggressive behavior in order to intentionally hurt another person physically, emotionally or socially.

**Types of Bullying:**

Direct bullying – in the form of aggression

Indirect bullying – with the goal of social isolation of victim

**Manifestations of Bullying:**

Verbal harassment (name-calling, written abuse, rumor-spreading, threats . . . )

Online/social media harassment (embarrassing or explicit images, verbal assaults)

Physical assault (hitting, slapping, pinching, choking, throwing things . . . )

Manipulation (getting someone to do something they don't want to do)

Exclusion (social isolation through body language and actions)

**Dealing with students who are bullying . . .****1. First offense:**

Confront student(s) who are doing the bullying, being very specific about what they did and why it is not acceptable, calling them on the fact that they are breaking a church rule.

Either at that moment of confrontation or very soon thereafter, the child and worker or staff member will meet with the staff person in charge of the ministry area, who will reiterate church rules and rationale, as well as clearly indicate that another offense will result in a phone call to parents to discuss further action.

**2. Second offense:**

Student, staff person, and parents will meet together, and decide what the next steps are. (May include a parent needed onsite or in extreme cases a temporary removal of that student from the programming)

Staff 24-7/one-on-one supervision may be assigned in order to keep a close watch on the student(s) involved.

**3. Third offense (if applicable): Student will be asked to take a temporary**

**break from church programming.**

### **Dealing with students who are being bullied . . .**

1. Believe them. Reassure them that they did the right thing in coming to you.
2. Assure them of our rules against physical and social bullying, and ensure the enforcement of these rules.
3. Empower them by asking them, "What do YOU need to feel safe?" Follow up on that conversation with specific actions. (making sure they aren't around the bully, put in the same groups as the bully, or left alone with the bully.)
4. DO NOT suggest that they work it out with the bully. Staff and volunteers should deal with the bully on behalf of the victim.
5. Always follow through on what you promise to do, be careful what you promise.
6. Follow the process for reporting - do not let instances of bullying "slide" in hopes that they will get better on their own. We are committed to addressing bullying immediately and clearly.

## **Minor Rights and Code of Conduct**

### **Minor Rights**

At Hinsdale Covenant Church minors have a set of rights and it is the responsibility of the staff and volunteers to share these rights with minors and ensure that these rights are being upheld for all.

As a student of this church, you have the right...

To have privacy when in private areas (bathroom time)

To tell someone when feeling uneasy in ANY situation

To be treated with respect

To be taken seriously

### **Minor Code of Conduct**

To create an environment of safety (physical, emotional and otherwise) and security for all, the following conduct is expected, outlined by staff and volunteers whenever it is deemed necessary (quarterly, in special situations, etc):



Be SAFE - stand up for the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of yourself and others.

Be RESPECTFUL - Be respectful in words and actions of others, staff and volunteers, and church property. Treat others how you want to be treated. Listen to the direction of staff and volunteers.

Be INCLUSIVE - Include and encourage each other (no put downs, bullying (see "Anti-Bullying Policy"), name calling).

Be OPEN - Church is a place where new and beneficial relationships, ideas, and experiences happen.