

Abuse Prevention Policy

I. Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to help Fairlawn CRC develop an environment for children, young people, and volunteers that reflects the care of Christ for his people. In particular, this policy is designed to protect children and young people from the risk of abuse or neglect by establishing guidelines for those who work with children and young people, whether paid or volunteer. Another purpose is to train adults who work with children and young people to act prudently to avoid false accusation of abuse, as well to provide an environment that promotes good health standards and emergency procedures.

II. Definitions

- **Abuse:** Physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.
- **Adults:** Persons who are eighteen years of age or older.
- **Minors, young people, youth, and children:** Persons under eighteen years of age.
- **CORI Administrator:** Coordinator of CORI information.
- **Council:** the governing body charged with matters of administration for the church, as defined in the CRC's Church Order
- **Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI)** is Criminal History Systems Board (CHSB) information about persons with criminal convictions by Massachusetts.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Attempting to control a child's or young person's life through words, threats, fear, and bullying; harming a child or young person through harassment, threats, or deprivation.
- **Executive Committee:** the leadership of Fairlawn CRC's Council, as defined in the Operations Manual for Fairlawn CRC
- **Helper:** Person who serves without pay in the children's or youth program, who has direct contact with minors in their care or supervision. A helper will be from 9 to 17 years old.
- **Member:** for the purposes of this policy, a "member" is an individual who, by confession of faith, is formally recognized as being a part of Fairlawn CRC and under the authority of the Council.
- **Physical Abuse:** An intentional act that inflicts physical pain or injury on a child or young person whether or not it leaves a wound, mark, or bruise. It is sometimes a single event but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.
- **Physical Neglect:** Failure to meet the physical needs of a child or young person in one's care. Neglect interferes with or prevents the normal development of the child or young person.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Exploitation of a child or young person for another person's sexual gratification. This includes, but is not limited to, inappropriate touching, such as fondling, as well as overt sexual acts.
- **Staff person:** Individual who is paid by the church to serve a children's or youth program and who has direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.
- **Volunteer:** Individual who serves without pay in the children's or youth program and who has direct contact with minors in their care or supervision. A volunteer must be 18 years old or older. While most volunteers will be members of Fairlawn CRC, differing procedures and expectations for volunteers who are not members of Fairlawn CRC are defined throughout this document.

III. Scope

This policy is applicable to all workers, including paid and volunteer, in Fairlawn ministries who have the responsibility for the care and/or teaching of children (birth – 5th grade) and young people (6th – 12th grade).

IV. General Policies and Guidelines

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is prohibited.
2. Abusive, verbal discipline (including but not limited to yelling, insulting language, and threats) is prohibited.
3. If medical attention is needed, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.
4. Expectations of children's and young people's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Appropriate types of discipline are to be reviewed with the volunteers/staff members before church programs begin a new season. Periodic reminders are to be given to the volunteers/staff members as needed.
5. Concerns about a child's or young person's behavior or the appropriate response to behavior should be reported to the parents, and to the supervisor of that particular program as appropriate.
6. Children and young people who attend church programs should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of the program or stay longer than ten minutes after the session ends. The exception is the Sunday morning Church School program when children and young people will normally be waiting after the session for the church service to begin.
7. Any youth activity away from the church facility, out of town, or overnight needs to be conducted in general compliance with these church policies and guidelines.
8. All staff members, volunteers, and helpers must complete an application form (see Appendix A). The application process shall include permission to conduct a criminal background check where necessary.
9. All teaching staff, volunteers, and helpers should watch for signs of abuse from sources other than church personnel. This includes signs of abuse present when students arrive at church and signs of abuse from other children or young people at church. Teachers, volunteers, and helpers must report the suspected abuse to a supervisor in their program.

V. Guidelines for the Nursery and Pre-K Church School

1. The General Policies and Guidelines as stated in Section IV apply to the Nursery Program.
2. At least two attendants, including one adult (age 18 or older), shall serve in the nursery at all times. A couple (husband & wife, boyfriend & girlfriend, parent & child) should not serve alone together at the same time in the same classroom.
3. Minors, fourth grade and above, may serve in the nursery as Helpers provided that an adult is present. Minors may not care for children without an adult present.
4. Attendants may only take children from the nursery for good reason, such as in case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported to the parent(s) immediately.
5. For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who require assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door left ajar. The diapering of an infant or toddler must take place in the nursery room where another attendant is present. When a girl needs diapering or needs assistance in the bathroom, only a female nursery attendant may be involved.
6. An adult or minor, including a parent, who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant may not ordinarily spend time in the nursery during the service, with the exception of nursing mothers. Pickup of children from the nursery should be done by the individual who dropped the child off, or by another individual approved by the child's guardian.
7. At least one attendant should be present for approximately each four children in the nursery.

VI. Guidelines for GEMS and Cadets

Fairlawn Church GEMS and Cadets programs currently meet with Pleasant Street Cadets at Pleasant Street Church and therefore operate under the guidelines for abuse prevention of the Pleasant Street Church.

VII. Guidelines for Church School

1. The General Policies and Guidelines as stated in Section IV apply to the Church School Program.
2. Displays of affection shall be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch on the forearm. These displays need to be restricted to public areas where other people are present or likely to pass by. A Church School teacher's or a student's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
3. Only adults may assist children with bathroom needs. Bathroom assistance is conducted as in the nursery policy. Children will be encouraged to use bathroom facilities before and after class.
4. Classroom doors need to be left ajar or have a window for unobstructed observation.

VIII. Guidelines for Choir Fest

1. The General Policies and Guidelines as stated in Section IV apply to the Choir Fest program.
2. Those who are not members of Fairlawn Church who wish to teach in the Choir Fest program must provide at least three references.
3. Teachers who are not members of Fairlawn Church need to agree to submit to a criminal background check. If background check results are not available by the time that Choir Fest is held, an adult from Fairlawn Church approved by the Choir Fest Director must be present in those classes.
4. All Choir Fest classes and activities will be conducted with at least two volunteers/staff, at least one who is an adult. Volunteers/staff should not meet alone with a child without another adult or leader nearby to observe.
5. Children should not leave their classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom, or for other compelling reasons.
6. It is the responsibility of the recreation director and helpers to be sure that Choir Fest students treat fellow students in an appropriate manner.

IX. Guidelines for Middle School and High School Youth Groups

1. The General Policies and Guidelines as stated in Section IV apply to the Youth Group programs.
2. Immediate counseling or disciplining of a youth group member needs to be done in the presence of two (2) youth group leaders away from the other youth group members. Whenever possible this contact needs to take place with a member of the same sex. Preferably this type of contact should not take place with two (2) leaders from the same family.
3. Youth group leaders may meet privately once or twice with a youth group member and thereafter only with the permission of the parent. Any such meeting needs to occur in a public place.
4. During youth group activities, youth group leaders need to provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders should not hold a youth group function without appropriate or sufficient supervision. Youth group functions need to be under the supervision of at least two youth group leaders. These guidelines apply both to activities held at church and activities held away from the church site.
5. Youth group leaders should be at least two years older than the members of the youth group which with they are working. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and youth

group member to date each other. Similarly, a youth group leader shall not date a close friend of a youth group member.

6. Displays of affection shall be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch on the forearm. These displays need to be restricted to public areas where other people are present or likely to pass by. A Church School teacher's or a student's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected. No gifts, emails, letters, or telephone calls of a personal nature should be directed to a youth group member from a youth group leader.

X. Responsibility for Implementation

Under the direction of the Executive Committee of Council, the Education Ministry Team will:

1. Coordinate and implement this policy, including performing criminal background checks through the CORI Administrator.
2. Conduct training sessions each year with all children and youth-program volunteers. This training session will be offered at the beginning of each church-school year. A record of attendance shall be maintained at each of these training sessions.
3. Periodically educate and update the congregation (especially parents of children participating in church programs) regarding the Abuse Prevention Policy.
4. Keep a current file of signed forms:
 - a. Declarations of Agreement with and Understanding of the Abuse Prevention Policy
 - b. Youth Ministry Volunteer Applications
 - c. Background Check Authorization Forms
5. Maintain a current version of the Abuse Prevention Policy on file in the Church Office.
6. Make copies of the Abuse Prevention Policy available to staff, volunteers, program leaders, youth workers, teachers and helpers.
7. The Education Ministry Team will insure that there is periodic review of all abuse prevention policies and procedures. All policy changes will be approved by the Education Ministry Team and then be presented to the Executive Committee and to Council for final approval.

XI. Screening Procedures for Staff and Volunteers

1. All adults and minors sixteen years old or more, seeking a volunteer position working with children or youth, must complete the Youth Ministry Volunteer Application Form (Appendix A) before they are permitted to work with or provide services involving children. Whenever possible, the individual who will supervise the applicant should review the application and make selections with at least one other church program leader. The Youth Ministry Volunteer application is not an application for employment. This application should be submitted to the Education Ministry Team or to the supervisor of the particular program to which the person is applying. Applications for paid positions will be provided separately based on the position.
2. To be considered for any volunteer leadership or teaching position in the church, an applicant should have been a member of the church for at least six months. Non-members of Fairlawn may assist in positions involving contact with children, provided an approved Fairlawn member is also present. Any non-Fairlawn church member who desires to volunteer will give the program coordinator the name of his/her most recent pastor, or of a teacher/counselor who knows the person well. The program coordinator or youth director will contact that reference and request a written recommendation on the volunteer. Applicants for paid leadership or teaching positions for programs like Choir Fest who are not members of Fairlawn must provide at least three references.
3. Fairlawn CRC reserves the right to deny an applicant for any position. An applicant may be rejected because of a known history of violence or abuse. The applicant may withdraw his/her application for any reason without prejudice.

4. A criminal background check (CORI) will be completed on persons who are paid by Fairlawn CRC to work with children and young people. A criminal background check will also be completed on any volunteer serving in positions involving contact with children and youth, whether the volunteer is a member of Fairlawn or not. When accepted as volunteers, all leaders and helpers must attend a training session on the Abuse Prevention Policy of Fairlawn CRC. Participation in this training session is required annually. A training session will be held at the beginning of each activity year and periodically as needed.
5. No person with a felony conviction or child-abuse conviction may serve in ministry to youth.
6. All paid staff and volunteers working with children or youth must sign the Declaration of Agreement with and Understanding of the Abuse Prevention Policy as found in Appendix B.
7. After a decision has been made concerning an applicant all applications shall be submitted to the CORI Administrator for proper filing. References and background check information must be kept on file in the church office in a locked file cabinet and should be available only to the pastor, to the CORI administrator, and to the person responsible for supervising the applicant.

XII. Reports of Abuse

1. The person with a reasonable suspicion of abuse should report the suspected abuse to the President of the Executive Committee or CORI Administrator.
2. The person reporting the suspicion of abuse must keep a careful dated record of observations and conversations related to the possible abuse.
3. The Executive Committee and CORI Administrator will conduct an initial assessment of allegations only after the proper authorities have been notified.
4. All information regarding the incident will remain private among those who need to know.
5. Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119, paragraph 51A, it is mandatory that suspicions of abuse be reported to the Department of Social Services by clergy, persons performing a pastoral role and persons employed by the church to supervise, educate, coach, train, or counsel a minor on a regular basis.
6. Fairlawn CRC supports mandated reporters to fulfill their statutory duty.

XIII. Procedure for Record Keeping

1. All applications including the release of information and authorization for a criminal background check shall be kept in a locked file in the church office. These records shall be available only to Education Ministry Team, to the CORI Administrator, and to the person responsible for supervising the applicant.
2. A copy of this policy and any changes adopted by the Education Ministry Team, as well as the records regarding implementation of this policy, shall be kept on file in the church office.
3. Documentation of all steps taken in response to an allegation of abuse must be kept on file in the church office.

XIV. Procedure for Reporting Suspected or Alleged Abuse

1. Sexual, physical, or emotional abuse allegations by a minor served in a church program, whether in a church facility or elsewhere, will be taken seriously and will be handled confidentially.
2. A volunteer or staff person who observes signs or symptoms of abuse or receives a verbal report of abuse from a minor is responsible to report this to the Department of Children and Families as soon as possible and should document all information and observations. Appendix C provides some guidance for listening to a child.

3. A volunteer or staff person who has questions or concerns regarding possible abuse should contact the CORI Administrator or President of the Executive Committee as soon as possible. The Department of Children and Families may also be consulted if it is believed additional steps need to be taken.
4. It is the responsibility of the Department of Children and Families to notify the alleged offender of the allegations against him/her. However, Fairlawn CRC will provide appropriate pastoral care for the accuser and the alleged offender after legal authorities have notified the alleged offender.

XV. Response to Allegations

1. Fairlawn CRC seeks to ensure that the accuser and the alleged offender both receive appropriate pastoral care as well as referrals to other professional counseling services. When appropriate, the CRC's "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader" (adopted by Synod 2010, with any subsequent amendments) will be consulted.
2. Any staff person suspected of abuse against a minor will be suspended from his or her position with pay for up to 90 days during the investigation period. Any volunteer suspected of abuse will be suspended from his or her position and any other responsibility involving minors during the investigation period.
3. If a volunteer or staff person confesses or is found guilty, he or she will be removed or dismissed from his or her position or office and should not be considered for reentry or reinstatement without the advice of legal counsel.
4. If the media and/or the larger community become involved, it is advisable to have one person act as the church spokesperson who can prepare a public statement with accurate but limited information. The Director of Safe Church Ministry for the CRC should be consulted concerning the best way to convey this information to the congregation and to the larger community.

Approved by Council: 09/21/2021 (Updated from September 21, 2021)

FAIRLAWN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Youth Ministry Volunteer Application

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any volunteer positions involving the supervision of minors. An interview may also be conducted. This is not an employment application form.

Circle the program you are willing to serve, or will be serving with:

Nursery Story Hour Youth Group
Choir Fest Sunday Church School Other _____

General Information:

Date _____ Full Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

E-mail Address _____

Date of Birth _____

Do you regularly attend our worship services? Yes / No

If yes, when did you start attending? _____ (Approx. date)

Ministry Information:

I have chosen to work with children at Fairlawn CRC because...

Do you profess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior and are you committed to striving to display the character of Jesus through your life? Yes / No

Church History and Prior Children's Work:

Previous work involving children | List church or organization name, city, state, and type of work performed:

References (for those who are not members of Fairlawn CRC)

List at least one individual (pastor of a previous church, or a teacher/counselor who has known you for at least 2 years), persons who are not related to you but who have specific knowledge of your character and ability to work with children. A second reference may be supplied if desired.

1. Previous church pastor or staff person:

Name: _____ Nature of association: _____

Length of time known: _____ Phone: _____

2. Other:

Name: _____ Nature of association: _____

Length of time known: _____ Phone: _____

Personal Disclosure Information (for all applicants)

Please circle appropriate response.

1. Have you ever been arrested, convicted, or plead guilty to a crime? Yes / No

If yes, please explain: _____

2. Has your driver's license been suspended or revoked within the last 12 months? Yes / No

3. Is there any fact, circumstance, or pattern involving your background that would make it inappropriate for you to serve with minors or would compromise the integrity of the church? Yes / No

If yes, please explain: _____

Applicant's Statement:

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize the listed references to give any information (including opinions) they have regarding my character and fitness for youth work. I waive any right I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person identified by me in this application.

Applicant's Signature: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Request for Criminal Records Check and Authorization (CORI)

Important: A criminal background check will be completed on persons who receive pay or stipend from Fairlawn CRC. A criminal background check will also be completed on all volunteers who have contact with children and youth, whether the volunteer is a member of Fairlawn CRC or not.

FLCRC
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FE2704

CHAPTER 6, §172H CORI REQUEST FORM

Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church is requesting all the available criminal offender record information (CORI) on the following individual from the Criminal History Systems Board pursuant to Chapter 6 §172H which mandates organizations primarily engaged in providing activities or programs to children 18 years of age or less that accepts volunteers, to obtain all CORI regarding volunteers prior to accepting any person as a volunteer.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION (PLEASE TYPE)

LAST NAME

FIRST NAME

MIDDLE NAME

MAIDEN NAME OR ALIAS (IF APPLICABLE)

PLACE OF BIRTH

DATE OF BIRTH

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

(Last 6 numbers only. Requested,
not required)

ID Theft Index PIN*

(if applicable)

MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME

CURRENT AND FORMER ADDRESSES: _____

SEX: _____ *HIEGHT:* *ft.* *in.* *WEIGHT:* _____ *EYE COLOR:* _____

STATE DRIVER'S LICENSE NUMBER: _____

(include state of issue)

***THE ABOVE INFORMATION WAS VERIFIED BY REVIEWING THE FOLLOWING FORM OF GOVERNMENT ISSUED PHOTOGRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION: _____

REQUESTED BY: _____

SIGNATURE OF CORI AUTHORIZED EMPLOYEE

Form 2: CORI

APPENDIX B

DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

Please print your name, sign and date.

Abuse Prevention Policy

_____, hereby acknowledges the following:

1. That I have received and reviewed the current Abuse Prevention Policy for Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church.
2. That, as long as I volunteer at Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church in youth ministry, I will attend an annual training session to review this policy.
3. That my failure to comply with Fairlawn’s Abuse Prevention Policy, as may be amended, may result in my termination as a volunteer at Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church.

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Return completed forms to the church office in a sealed envelope marked “ATTN: CORI Administrator.”

To be completed by the Chairperson of the Education Ministry Team:

Initial training date: _____ | Continued training dates: _____

Form 3: DA

APPENDIX C

Guidance on Listening to a Child

1. If a child asks to talk with you at church, provide a room (with a window) in which to speak privately.
2. Listen carefully to what the child tells you and respond in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner. Disclosing abuse is a scary thing for children, and they need to know they are supported.
3. Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story, since this may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with him/her.
4. Avoid asking leading questions. Examples of what you could say: "Can you tell me more?" Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it didn't happen the way he/she reports it did.
5. Do not attempt to assess the truthfulness of the child's disclosure—that will be for trained professionals to decide. Assure the child you believe him/her and that you care about him/her.
6. Tell the child that whatever happened was not his/her fault and reassure the child that he/she does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
7. Do not tell or suggest to the child that he/she has been abused.
8. Reassure the child that he/she did the right thing by telling you.
9. Do not promise not to tell anyone. Tell the child that you need to find help so the incident can be prevented from happening again.
10. Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint. Instead, share with the child that other people need to know what happened and that they will talk to the child later.
11. Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child's underwear or clothing; observe only those bruises that are accessible.
12. If you feel comfortable doing so, speak to the child and offer support in the following weeks and months.