Rightful Use of Authority Policy Template

(Power Abuse Prevention)

Approved for Distribution to Affiliated PAOC Churches - GEX May 12, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church

(Date)

As a community of believers, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church is committed to being a healthy church with a culture that safeguards and protects all its members and adherents, especially children and youth, from experiencing any kind of power abuse. This policy supplements and complements our existing Child and Youth Abuse Prevention Policy.

Our goal is to prevent abuse and respond appropriately by being educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and be free from any form of abuse.

Our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. We acknowledge that abusers may act in predatory ways, especially toward vulnerable people. This policy affirms that we all must be aware of the potential for power abuse and walk together with God who loves justice and hates oppression (Psalms 11, 33, 72, 99, Isaiah 1, Luke 4:18-19).

Power abuse occurs when a person holding power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, board member, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable (e.g. a child, someone who is sick, elderly, disabled, student, supervisee, intern, immigrant, etc.). That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, or spiritual.

**Safeguarding Team**

The Safeguarding Team is a committee of the [Church Board or Pastor's Council]. The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church for effective prevention and response. Our Safeguarding Team comprises a group of 3-6 church members and is at least 50% women. Our current team is:

[insert team here including contact information]

**Healthy Boundaries**

Healthy boundaries are simply how we will live out Jesus’ words *to love our neighbour as ourselves and love one another as Jesus loves us* (Mark 12:31; John 13:34). Our church upholds the following standards of respect and safety for all in our Fellowship. This includes any interaction whether in person or online:

Show respect in physical touch, space, and visibility:

* Physical touch must always be welcomed by the other person (whether they are an adult or a minor). If you are not sure just ask - e.g. “Can I give you a hug?”
* Touch within a significant power difference should be observable to others (e.g. between an adult and a child).
* Be considerate of others and give them appropriate space. Notice the body language of others and be aware of your impact on others.
* Stay in visible and accountable spaces. No one should be alone with a minor or vulnerable adult who is not part of their own family (including giving rides, and online interaction and messaging).
* Best practice is that no one should be in a restroom with a child except a child’s parent or guardian. Parents or guardians must help with any restroom assistance or diapering. Nevertheless, in all cases, this church’s child and youth abuse prevention policy will be observed.
* Appropriate touch with minors that is observable and welcome may include: high-fives, fist bumps, short hugs, or pat on the shoulder or upper back.
* Inappropriate touch with minors also includes (for a child not in your own family):

Any touch that is unwanted by a minor or not observable by others.

Touching a minor’s thighs, stomach, or lower back.

Any intimate touch such as massage or any touch under clothing.

Tickling, piggy-back rides, or other games involving lots of touch with minors.

Lap sitting for minors older than three.

Corporal punishment.

Show respect in using your words:

* Use words that convey respect.
* Avoid language that belittles, threatens, or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a minor’s sexual development, or especially within a power differential, commenting on a person’s sexual attractiveness).
* Avoid sexualized comments including jokes, stories, experiences, or sharing sexualized content (such as images, videos, or other media) or engaging in any other sexualized communication in person or online, especially with a minor, vulnerable adult, or in a power differential (e.g. pastor-member, boss-employee).

Show respect in agency and personal boundaries:

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

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others. The following behaviours are unacceptable by any pastors, officers, or staff at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church:

* Any abuse of power as defined by this policy.
* Sexual harassment of any kind, including unwanted sexual attention, comments, or unwanted physical touch.
* Behaviour or words that discriminate against anyone based on age, race, sex, gender, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status.
* Any words that belittle or threaten, mock, or intimidate.
* Any attempts to put themselves or any other leader above the standards of this policy.
* Any attempts to enforce secrecy regarding violations of this policy.

Abusers may explain away concerning behaviour. Anyone who experiences or has information regarding concerning behaviour should approach the Safeguarding Team.

**Responding to Boundary Violations**

Any pastor, staff member, or officer who witnesses or learns of a violation of this policy is expected to intervene if necessary and/or inform the Safeguarding Team. Any person in our church is encouraged to intervene or get someone who can. Then, report the incident to the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible. In addition, any general or specific concerns related to vulnerable persons should also be brought to the attention of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response.

Any concerns about the Safeguarding Team itself, may be directed to the [Church Board or Pastor's Council].

**Responding to Abuse and Harassment**

We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any alleged misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to alleged abuse, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church will always prioritize the safety and needs of the alleged victim(s) and other vulnerable persons, acknowledging that it may be difficult for alleged victims to come forward.

*Immediate Response Protocols*

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911. After the call, contact a person on the Safeguarding Team (or a member of the [Church Board or Pastor's Council]). Do not choose a person who is involved in the situation or any family member of a person involved in the situation.
2. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (age 16 or younger) or vulnerable adult (e.g. elder abuse or abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities), the person made aware must immediately report to [insert province/territory/local specific reporting information for children and vulnerable adults][[1]](#footnote-2). Potential child abuse or neglect or abuse against a vulnerable adult should be reported to local law enforcement and appropriate social services (e.g. children’s aid or children’s services, or elder/vulnerable adult abuse services). We have an obligation to report abuse and neglect against children and vulnerable adults. Many adults also have a legal obligation to report.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Online sexual exploitation of children should be reported to the National Cyber Tipline at [https://www.cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca/). This site also has information and resources regarding the online sexual exploitation of children.

Please note that domestic violence or intimate partner violence with children in the home is a mandated report.

[insert information from province, territory, or municipality here and link relevant website]

DO NOT try to investigate the matter but report immediately to the appropriate authorities. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, or enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team (or a member of the [Church Board or Pastor's Council]). Do not choose a person who is involved in the situation or any family member of a person involved in the situation.

If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. There is however a duty to report if an alleged abuser is still a staff member or in leadership or still serving as a volunteer whether the name of the perpetrator is known/remembered by the victim or not.

1. In the event of disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse against an adult, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team.
2. After receiving any information from any of the above steps, a Safeguarding Team member shall inform the entire team (except a person or family member of a person who is involved in any allegation) and document the information. If there are concerns or allegations involving a member or members of the Safeguarding Team, the report may go to any member of the [Church Board or Pastor's Council], (except a person or family member of a person who is involved in any allegation).

Any person facing an allegation of abuse and any family member of such a person must be recused from any response actions by the appropriate committee, board, or council.

1. The Safeguarding Team and [Church Board or Pastor's Council] shall ensure reports have been made to proper authorities (law enforcement and social services when applicable) in situations of potential abuse, as explained above, including child abuse and neglect, elder abuse, abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities, or clergy sexual abuse when such abuse is criminalized in provincial/territorial laws. In other cases involving an adult victim, the Safeguarding Team and [Church Board or Pastor's Council] will respect the agency of any adult victim(s) regarding whether the adult victim(s) reports personally to the appropriate authorities. The decision of a survivor to personally report adult abuse and/or co-operate with authorities is ultimately their choice. However, individuals and/or the Safeguarding Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way. There may be situations where the Safeguarding Team will report information pertaining to a potential crime against an adult or child even when the victim is not ready to do so. When reporting is required or is in the judgment of the Safeguarding Team in the best interest of the safety of others, the Safeguarding Team may co-ordinate with the [Church Board or Pastor's Council] as well as consult with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault, or threats). The Safeguarding Team will also seek to communicate to the victim as sensitively as possible the reason for reporting.
2. After receiving any information from any above steps, the Safeguarding Team will co-ordinate with the [Church Board or Pastor's Council] on critical response issues including:
   1. Assessing Safety
   2. Assessing Accountability or Boundaries for Alleged Perpetrators
   3. Implementing Care for any Victims and Families
   4. Connecting to Specialized Resources

When an allegation involves a pastor or person who holds credentials with The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Safeguarding Team will inform the District Superintendent who shall determine next steps, including the potential involvement of the District Safeguarding Team and/or District Executive.

When the alleged perpetrator is within the church or the report involves a staff member who does not hold credentials with The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Safeguarding Team shall make any recommendations regarding administrative leave, suspension, restriction, or discipline to the [Church Board or Pastor's Council]. When the situation involves a pastor, the local Safeguarding Team and/or [Church Board or Pastor's Council] shall work in co-operation with the District Superintendent, District Safeguarding Team and/or District Executive.

Any leave, suspension, other restriction, or discipline will be reevaluated as necessary as the situation develops.

*Further Response Protocols*

Whenever possible, individuals and the Safeguarding Team should help connect any victim(s) to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations:

Our local abuse resources include:

[Nearest Child Advocacy Center - Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

[Nearest Domestic Violence Shelter - Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

[Available Sexual Assault Center - Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

[Other Local Resources: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

An alleged victim has the right to privacy. The authorities, however, may release information to safeguard other potentially vulnerable persons and to encourage any other potential victims to come forward.

The Safeguarding Team shall co-ordinate further appropriate response including but not limited to:

* + Ensuring all potential crimes against children and vulnerable adults have been reported to appropriate authorities in accordance with this policy.
  + Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons.
  + Facilitating co-operation with any investigations, including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the church.
  + Ongoing, appropriate care for the alleged victim(s) including helping them connect with professional trauma-informed care if desired.
  + When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward alleged victims.
  + Co-operating with the District Safeguarding Team and/or District Executive.
  + Maintaining contact with the alleged offender during any investigations or administrative leave to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially regarding controlling the narrative, retaliation, and access to other vulnerable people.
  + Caring for others in the church and co-ordinating with outside resources as needed.
  + Documenting relevant actions and information related to the case.
  + Reaching out to qualified experts with questions or when an independent consultation or investigation is appropriate.

**Retaliation**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who is involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or providing potential evidence, or co-operating in a criminal or independent investigation. Actions in response to a good-faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the [Church Board or Pastor's Council]. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.

1. Footnote important pages on the province’s website for further information. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Footnote important information about reporting and mandated reporting information for your province, territory, or local area here. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)