

Hosanna Lutheran Church

Children and Youth Ministry Safe Church Practices

Thank you for your willingness to work with children or youth in our congregation. As a congregation we take to heart our mission: As a Christian family of faith we are gathered to grow and sent to serve. It is our responsibility and privilege to provide a safe place for all to gather in faith and experience God's grace and love so that we can be sent out into the world to share that love with others.

Children and youth are vital members of our congregation and are partners with us in the mission to which God has called us. The safe church practices identified in this document are intended to help us provide a safe and welcoming environment for all children and youth who participate in any ministry activity at Hosanna Lutheran Church. These practices were not adopted as a reactionary measure in response to an incident, but rather as a proactive measure to be in alignment with our society and the world around us.

The ELCA and the Southeastern Minnesota Synod strongly encourage all congregations to have safe church practices in place for the protection of children, youth, staff, and volunteers. In Luke 18:16, Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." We give thanks to God for your willingness to answer Jesus' call to create a place of welcome for all of God's children.

This policy is documented and structured via a series of appendices, covering the following topics:

- Appendix A - Definitions Found In This Policy
- Appendix B - Training / Education
- Appendix C - General Policies and Conduct
- Appendix D - Discipline Policy
- Appendix E - Monitoring and Supervision of Programs
- Appendix F - Screening Procedure
- Appendix G - Reporting
- Appendix H - Staff and Volunteer Code of Ethics

Appendix A - Definitions Found In This Policy

These definitions are in the context of relating to the children and youth ministries of Hosanna Lutheran Church.

- **Children caregiver** - someone who has accepted responsibility for the well being and safety of a child or youth while participating in a Hosanna Lutheran Church activity.

- **Child / Youth**
 - A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.
 - A youth is defined as anyone between the ages of 12 and 18 years old.
 - A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.
 - A young adult is defined as anyone between the ages of 18 (and out of High School) to 35.

- **Church leaders** - this term refers to anyone at Hosanna Lutheran Church who leads others in church activities. In addition to clergy, staff, and Council, this also applies to ministry team leaders.

- **Economic exploitation** - the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth's belongings or money.

- **Emotional Abuse** - mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.

- **Known sex offender** - a person who has been legally convicted or is required to register as a sex offender.

- **Neglect** - the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

- **Physical Abuse** – any intentional means of inflicting injury on another person whether a one-time event or a chronic pattern. Physical abuse may occur regardless of whether there is a cut, wound, mark or bruise.

- **Physical Neglect** – not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care, which interferes with or prevents a child’s normal development.
- **Sexual Abuse** – sexual exploitation or forced sexual intimacy of a person regardless of age or circumstance, which may or may not include physical contact.
- **Sexual Harassment** - harassment or unwelcome attention of a sexual nature. It includes a range of behavior from mild transgressions and annoyances to serious abuses, which can even involve forced sexual activity. Sexual harassment is considered a form of illegal discrimination, and is a form of abuse (sexual and psychological) and bullying.
- **Spiritual Abuse** - an example: a cult mentality, meaning but not limited to a heavily legalistic and or coerced conversion or over-emotional dependency on a leader.
- **Staff**–includes all employees of Hosanna Lutheran Church, including professional, support, full-time, part-time, and stipend staff.

Refer to this brochure from the Child Welfare Information Gateway site for details concerning recognizing the signs of abuse: *What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms* (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm>) or obtain a copy from the church office.

Appendix B - Training / Education

All staff and volunteers involved in children’s ministry shall participate in a safety training session at least every two years. The training includes:

- our church’s policies for the prevention of child abuse
- procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth
- appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse
- details of the state laws regarding child abuse

All staff and volunteers shall read *Hosanna Lutheran Church Children and Youth Ministry Safe Church Practices*.

All staff and volunteers shall read and sign the *Staff and Volunteers Code of Ethics*.

Appendix C - General Policies

- A. If a person is a known sex offender, then that person will never be able to volunteer with any of the child or youth programs in the church.
- B. If a person is suspected of child abuse, then he or she must take a leave of absence from their role at Hosanna Lutheran Church until an investigation by law enforcement has been completed. If, after an investigation has been concluded, it is determined that the person has been involved in abuse of a child, the person will be immediately dismissed from his or her current role.
- C. Harassment on the basis of sex, race, religion, color, disability, age, national origin, sexual orientation, or other applicable protected status is a violation of the law. It is the policy of Hosanna Lutheran Church to forbid all types of harassment.
- D. If staff or volunteers are ever unsure about how to handle a situation or feel uncomfortable about a particular issue, they should contact the Senior Pastor and ask questions.
- E. If a child needs medical attention, the parent or guardian should be notified as soon as possible.

New Volunteer Process

- A. Complete the confidential Child Safety Volunteer Application Form.
- B. Sign the written consent to a confidential background check.
- C. Read and sign the Staff and Volunteers Code of Ethics.
- D. Attend the next safety training session held for Hosanna Lutheran Church staff and volunteers.

Process for Acquiring and Maintaining Records

- A. The Safety Team is responsible for maintaining an up to date list of all staff and volunteers who have applied and had background checks completed for working with children and youth. The Safety Team will also ensure that staff and volunteers have background checks every two years.
- B. Any background checks reporting any information of note will be shared with the Senior Pastor for consideration. No other background check reports are saved or stored on Hosanna computers, and they are not printed or stored.

Reports shared with the Senior Pastor are stored by the Senior Pastor in his confidential document storage.

- C. Safety-related records include staff and volunteer applications and signed Staff and Volunteers Code of Ethics forms.

Avoid Isolation

- A. Staff and volunteers are to observe the two-worker rule. This rule requires that staff and volunteers should not be in an isolated setting with children or youth without another staff or volunteer.
- B. When away from the church on an outing or at a church event, staff and volunteers are to work together as a team and not be isolated with a child or youth.
- C. If it is necessary for a staff or volunteer to meet individually with a child or youth, it should be done in a public setting or where they are clearly visible by others.
- D. Staff and volunteers should not spend time alone with a child or youth without the permission of that individual's parent or guardian.

Release Guidelines

- A. Parents must have a release form on file with the church authorizing who can pick up their children.
- B. Students age three to grade two need to be released to their parents or anyone authorized on their release form.
- C. Parents can see any Sunday School teacher for a copy of the release form.

Advance Notice to Parents

The staff and volunteers of Hosanna Lutheran Church must always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will be participating. Staff and volunteers are also required to inform parents of any event in which a worker will be alone with their child. Prior to the event, parents must sign a permission slip and/or waiver giving their full permission for the child to participate in the event and to receive any medical treatment, if necessary.

Children or youths who do not have a permission slip on file for the particular event will not be allowed to participate in that event unless and only if the Director of Faith Formation speaks with one or both of the child's parents and receives verbal permission for the child's participation and medical treatment if necessary. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

These rules are for the protection of the church as it proves that parents were informed of the event or warned of the situation. It gives the parents the opportunity to agree to have their child receive necessary medical treatment in the event of an accident or injury and also prevents the child from being alone with a worker without the parents' knowledge.

Guidelines for Appropriate Affection

Hosanna Lutheran Church is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for our child and youth ministries that protects our children and youth from abuse and our staff and volunteers from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate; otherwise that decision is left to each individual. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows staff and volunteers to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth. These guidelines are based, in large part, on avoiding behaviors known to be used by child molesters to groom children or youth and their parents for future abuse. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all staff and volunteers working around or with children and youth.

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes

- “High-fives”
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on the head

The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children and youth in a ministry setting:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over five years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff only areas or other private rooms
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans.”
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing
- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth

Transportation Policy

This policy applies to adults while serving in ministry to children or youth who may transport non-family related children or youth in church-sponsored ministries. The following procedures must be in place:

- A. Ordinarily, when transporting children or youth in a vehicle, two non-related adults are required.
- B. Children or youth (12 and under) are seated in the back seats of the vehicle.
- C. Permission (normally a signed permission slip) for transporting has been received from the parent (guardian).
- D. Adults must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance before transporting children or youth.
- E. Drivers need to abide by state requirements for seat belt use, air bag safety, and car seat use.
 - Passengers are to wear seat belts whenever the vehicle is in service.
 - Drivers may not transport more passengers than available seat belts.
 - As required by law, car seats will be used for younger children.

Appendix D - Discipline Policy

- A. Corporal punishment is not permitted. Corporal punishment includes, but is not limited to, slapping, hitting, and pushing in an aggressive manner.
- B. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes, but is not limited to, yelling, hurling insults, or threatening a child.
- C. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child or youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
- D. Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the ministry team lead or Pastor.
- E. A parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.

- F. Expectations of a child's or youth's behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
- G. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
- H. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with staff and volunteers before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
- I. Use positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior from children.
- J. Behavior expectations for the children must be stated and not assumed:
- Children must refrain from hitting, kicking, or injuring anyone in the classroom.
 - Children must be obedient and follow the teacher's instructions.
- K. Whenever possible, try to avoid having to discipline a child by choosing one or more of the following options:
- Distract the child with another activity
 - Help the child focus on another more acceptable behavior
 - Isolate the child from others if another volunteer is available to assist.
- L. When nothing seems to be working, volunteers should get help.

Appendix E - Monitoring and Supervision of Programs

The monitoring and supervision of programs and activities involving children or youth is important for safeguarding children and youth and involves several aspects.

There should be structural guidelines or standards for the programs and activities for children and youth. These include such things as who approves new programs, how many adults need to be present and the like. Also, church leaders must ensure that the structural safeguards are followed. This is done by monitoring and supervising the church programs and activities.

Supervisory personnel and others monitor and supervise the behavior of adults, youth and other children with children and youth so that inappropriate behaviors and interac-

tions can be detected and stopped. Some behaviors and interactions are potentially harmful to children or youth in and of themselves. Examples include providing alcohol or drugs to children or youth or actually having sexual contact with a child or youth. Other behaviors and interactions are not necessarily harmful in and of themselves but are the same behaviors and interactions known to be used by those who abuse children or youth to “groom” them or their parents for eventual abuse or which provide the privacy child molesters need in order to abuse children or youth.

These are example monitoring guidelines:

- A. At least two staff and volunteers should supervise activities. If at all possible, those supervising should not be related. When both boys and girls are participating, male and female adults should be present. Every program for children and youth should have established ratios for adults and children.
- B. Staff and volunteers are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth or multiple children or youth where other adults cannot easily observe them.
- C. Staff or volunteers under the age of 18 must be supervised by staff or volunteers over the age of 21.

The structural guidelines and standards are covered in both this Monitoring and Supervision of Programs appendix and in Appendix C, General Policies. The behaviors and interactions of persons with children and youth that need to be monitored and supervised are covered in the Guidelines for Appropriate Affection section in Appendix C.

Appendix F - Screening Procedure

- A. Screening of staff and volunteers is a necessary and valuable tool which:
 - Communicates the church’s serious intention about preventing child abuse
 - Assists the church by providing important information regarding an applicant’s interest and skills
 - Reduces incidents of child abuse by deterring offenders from applying
 - Helps ensure that staff and volunteers are persons of integrity
- B. Any and all staff and volunteers who regularly work with or around children or youth shall be screened and selected utilizing the following screening procedure, which usually will consist of the steps as described below.

Application - staff and volunteers

Those serving in youth or children's ministries must complete an application which will be kept in a confidential personnel file maintained by the Senior Pastor and the Safety Team.

Reference Check - staff and volunteers if references provided

The Senior Pastor or his designee will perform reference checks for staff and ministry leaders. Reference checks need not be done on anyone who has served in Hosanna's children or youth ministries within the last five years. Responses to reference checks must be attached to the Application and remain confidential.

Background Check Information - staff and volunteers

The check will be required of staff, ministry leaders and volunteers who are in a position of caregiver to children and youth. The check is also required for those leading a team that includes children or youth.

Interview - staff

New staff must follow the process for hiring, which includes an interview.

Appendix G - Reporting

Signs and symptoms of abuse and reports of abuse of a minor need to be taken seriously. A staff or volunteer should not conduct an investigation of the matter. They should follow the established reporting procedure.

Hosanna Lutheran Church will only assume responsibility for responding to abuse that occurs on church leased or owned facilities or at church functions. This does not mean that those people required to report abuse pursuant to state statute no longer have an obligation to do so, but that the church will not be involved in the reporting process.

If any church member or non-member can provide information verifying that a staff or volunteer has had formal charges filed against them for child abuse, the Senior Pastor or one of his designees should be informed immediately.

Responding to a Report of Abuse

A. Take the child seriously when he or she tells the story. Write down as much of the account as you are able to do as soon as you are able.

- B. Reassure the child. Remind the child that you care about him or her.
- C. Remain emotionally calm in the presence of the child.
- D. Make no promises to the child that you will not tell what has been shared. Do not offer a reward for telling their story. Do not tell the child he or she has been abused. Do not mention the police. Do not investigate the story. Repeat the story only to the Senior Pastor.
- E. Remind the child that it was good to tell someone and that it was not his or her fault.
- F. If applicable, observe whatever is accessible without removing clothing.

Responding to Parents Who Are Notified of an Abuse Report

- A. Remain calm and nonjudgmental.
- B. Anyone who makes a report to the police or child protection services authorities is usually granted anonymity; do not identify the reporter unless you are given permission to do so.
- C. Do not share any statements made by the child with a parent or relative who is implicated by the child as an abuser. Do not share the child's statements with anyone other than the authorities until the identity of the abuser can be determined and authorities have determined whether or not the child can be protected from contact with that person.
- D. Do not investigate with a parent what may be happening in the home; and do not share information with a parent that has not been shared with the authorities.
- E. Do not make promises to a parent about the outcome of the investigation.
- F. Offer parents spiritual and emotional and prayer support.
- G. Do not minimize the type of abuse or embellish the abuse, its impact on the child, or its harm to the child.
- H. Assure parents of the confidential nature of the report and the need to maintain confidentiality unless disclosure is necessary to protect the well being of other children.

Policy for Reporting Suspected or Alleged Abuse.

- A. All staff or volunteers are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the Senior Pastor as soon as possible, but within 24 hours. In the pastor's absence (or if he is the accused), the report is to be made to a member of the Mutual Ministry Committee or another member of the Executive Committee. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person to substantiate or investigate the alleged or suspected abuse.
- B. The parent(s) or guardian of the victim must be informed immediately (without delay) by the Senior Pastor or his designee of the information that has come to light about their child(ren) in a face-to-face meeting.
- C. The Senior Pastor or his designee should handle matters such as filing a report with authorities, establishing a care plan for the child and family, preparing for disclosure to the church if deemed necessary, informing the liability carrier, etc.
- D. When the alleged or suspected victim is a minor child, the person receiving the report will be mandated to report this to local law enforcement. It is our responsibility to comply with Minnesota child protection laws.
- E. All staff and volunteers should be aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse, whether abuse is emotional, physical, or sexual.
- F. When a child reports an incident of abuse or a staff or volunteer observes signs or symptoms of abuse, the staff or volunteer must write a report as soon as possible indicating the specifics of the child's report, the specifics of the abuse, and the date when signs, symptoms were observed.
- G. The Senior Pastor shall maintain the records of reported incidents and will keep such records confidential, accurately and completely documenting all efforts at handling the incident.
- H. The church will provide appropriate and necessary assistance to the victim, the offender, Child Protective Services, and local law enforcement agencies.
- I. So far as it is consistent with our legal duties as well as our spiritual concern for all involved, we will work to maintain confidentiality.

Policy Regarding Alleged Offenders

- A. If the child's parent or guardian is the suspected abuser, the Child Protective Services or police will be notified and they will in turn notify the parent or guardian of their investigation.
- B. If a staff or volunteer is the suspected abuser, the alleged offender must be informed of the allegations and must be suspended from participating in all service roles in the church until an investigation is done by the proper authorities.
- C. If the allegations are found to be false, the censure on service will be lifted. If the allegations are found to be true, the offender must continue under the censure on service and be dealt with by the Senior Pastor and Council.
- D. If a paid employee is the alleged offender, salary and other benefits will be continued during the period of suspension and investigation. If the allegations are found to be true, employment and all benefits will be discontinued immediately.

Policy Regarding Response to Media

- A. If an incident of abuse becomes a public matter such as at the time of arrest, the media has the right to report such incidents. This policy intends to assist Hosanna Lutheran Church's leadership to thoughtfully prepare for and respond to the media's awareness of an abusive event, while protecting the victims of such attacks and facilitating the legal process.
- B. The identity of the victims or survivors of such circumstances ought to be held confidential, especially minors. Only an adult victim or adult survivor can give consent to release his or her name for publication.
- C. Legal advisors, police department's media officer and other experts should be consulted before any statements are read or made.
- D. The Senior Pastor (or his designee) will be the official spokesperson for Hosanna Lutheran Church for any media responses. Statements to reporters or to the media may not be made by the church's staff or volunteers regarding any ongoing investigation of child abuse or neglect.

Reporting Abuse to Authorities

Below is a subset of the Minnesota state statutes concerning persons mandated to report (626.556 Reporting of Maltreatment of Minors, Subdivision 3):

A person who knows or has reason to believe a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, as defined in subdivision 2, or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused within the preceding three years, shall immediately report the information to the local welfare agency, agency responsible for assessing or investigating the report, police department, or the county sheriff if the person is:

- (1) a professional or professional's delegate who is engaged in the practice of the healing arts, social services, hospital administration, psychological or psychiatric treatment, child care, education, correctional supervision, probation and correctional services, or law enforcement, or*
- (2) employed as a member of the clergy and received the information while engaged in ministerial duties, provided that a member of the clergy is not required by this subdivision to report information that is otherwise privileged under section 595.02, subdivision 1, paragraph (c).*

If the victim is a minor child, the care-giver must notify local law enforcement themselves as a "mandated reporter".

Minnesota Department of Public Safety Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Criminal Justice Information Systems Section
1246 University Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104
(651) 642-0670
www.dps.state.mn.us

Criminal background records are obtained through name and date of birth checks.

Sex Offender Registry

The Sex Offender Registry phone number is (651) 603-6748.

The online Sex Offender Registry is available at www.doc.state.mn.us.

Olmsted County

The Olmsted County Child and Family services phone number: (507) 328-6400.

Olmsted County Child Protection phone numbers:

Day Crisis Phone: (507) 328-6400

After Hours Crisis Phone: (507) 281-6248

Appendix H - Staff / Volunteer Code of Ethics

Hosanna Lutheran Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

The following training, behavioral and reporting standards apply to Hosanna Lutheran Church and all programs thereof. Staff and volunteers agree:

1. to do their best to prevent abuse and neglect among children and youth involved in church activities and services.
2. to comply with the policies for general conduct with children and youth as defined in the *Hosanna Lutheran Church Children and Youth Ministry Safe Church Practices* document.
3. to acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children and youth and agree to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.
4. to not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
5. that they have not been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse). No person convicted of child abuse will be allowed to volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
6. that they will do everything in their power to avoid being put in a situation where they are alone with a minor other than their own child(ren).
7. that they shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
8. that they shall immediately report to the Senior Pastor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.
9. that smoking or using tobacco products in the presence of minors is strictly prohibited.
10. that using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal, or illicit drugs is strictly prohibited.

11. that the presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of Hosanna Lutheran Church is strictly prohibited.
12. to treat all people of all races, religions and cultures with respect.
13. to not use or tolerate the use of profanity in the presence of minors.
14. to portray a positive role model for minors by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy and maturity.
15. that they will be expected to act with Christian love and understanding in all situations.

I understand that as a worker or volunteer with minors for Hosanna Lutheran Church, I will be subject to a background check, including criminal history.

I understand that any violation of this code may be grounds for removal as a worker or volunteer with minors.

Please answer each of the following questions. As a staff or volunteer in Hosanna Lutheran Church, do you agree:

1. to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth? Yes ___ No ___
2. to observe the "Two-Adult Rule" whenever possible? Yes ___ No ___
3. to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment? Yes ___ No ___
4. to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor or ministry team leader? Yes ___ No ___
5. to inform a minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse? Yes ___ No ___

I have read the Hosanna Lutheran Church Code of Ethics and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Print Name _____ Date _____

Applicant's Signature _____