



# DECORAH COVENANT CHURCH

115 Washington Street

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## **Child Safety Guidelines Letter of Introduction**

### **Introduction**

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

### **Our Response**

We desire to respond in earnest to make our facilities and programming at Decorah Covenant Church a safe place for all children's, youth and church workers and volunteers through implementation of Child Safety Guidelines. The physical condition of our facilities must be evaluated on a continual basis for safety and effectiveness in ministry. Where necessary, remodeling or updating may be required. Steps must be taken proactively to screen and to train children's and youth workers. Our insurance policy requires that we do 'background checks.' If there was an incident of sexual misconduct, it is unlikely that the insurance company would provide coverage if we had failed to do a background check. Precautionary measures must be communicated by providing guidelines and procedures that offer assistance to parents and workers. 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 Child Safety Guidelines is to protect children and youth.

This purpose is accomplished in part by educating and training child care workers, both members and friends, on issues which may contribute to dangerous and unsafe conditions affecting children and youth. These issues include how best to avoid neglect and abuse. Individual members and friends of the church are encouraged to act responsibly not only in caring for children and youth, but also in caring for each other. (Matthew 19:13-15; John 15:9-17)

We will develop guidelines and procedures to address concerns and/or allegations concerning safety, wellness, and abuse. The church council will assume responsibility for evaluating the conditions under which the church ministries are carried out and for investigating charges and reporting misconduct.

If charges against a child-care worker/volunteer are substantiated, the goal of the church will include pursuing reconciliation and restoration to the fellowship of Christ. (Matthew 18:15-35; 1 Corinthians 6:1-11)

# **Child Safety Guidelines**

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

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

#### **A. Qualifications:**

Every volunteer & staff person 18 yrs and older who works with children and/or youth shall:

1. Confess Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior
2. Either be a member in good standing or a regular attendee for at least six months
3. Have no history of being an abuser

#### **B. Procedures:**

Every volunteer & staff person who works with children and/or youth shall:

1. Complete a confidential application using form *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-01 Application Form*.
2. Agree to a confidential check of public records using form *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-02 Background Check*.
3. Meet with a person(s) designated by the church council to discuss and pray about his/her role in the ministry of the church. (*Interviews effective Fall 2010*). Use form *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-03 Interview Questions*.

#### **C. Application Form:**

The application for volunteers and staff shall be maintained in a confidential file and include:

1. Personal information: Name, address, etc.
2. Ministry information: Area of interest, gifts, talents, etc.
3. Procedures: Concerning the care and guidelines for ministering to children and youth.
4. References: Names of at least two church members who know the volunteer or staff (*Effective Fall 2010*) using form *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-04 Reference Contact Form*.
5. A place for volunteers and staff to sign stating that they have read the procedures and agree to observe the safeguards.
6. Church History information: a five year church, volunteer, and ministry history for staff and volunteer, leaders and supervisors.

#### **D. Public Records Release Form:**

A brief form to be completed by volunteers and staff which will be used for a background check using Group Publishing's independent contractor, LexisNexis, The form is called *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-02 Background Check*.

#### **E. Education:**

A person(s) designated by the church council will be responsible to educate volunteers and staff on the abuse prevention policy.

### **II. Procedures**

#### **A. Avoid Isolation:**

Adult volunteers and staff are to observe the two-adult rule. This requires that adults are never in an isolated setting with children or youth without an adult partner, except for situations addressed by number 4 and 5 below (i.e. mentoring youth situations).

1. Classroom and building:
  - a. There must always be two or more adults in each location where children or youth are present. This includes such settings as after-school programs, evening programs, and children's church.
  - b. Settings in which there are multiple adults nearby, in line of sight (for example, in DCC Sunday School classrooms in the lower level, persons are clearly visible from

the hallway and classrooms; therefore, it is allowed to have only one adult in each classroom, as long as all other procedures are followed).

- c. Classrooms and child-care rooms must have windows that are not covered or the door must be left open.
2. Transporting children and youth:
  - a. When transporting a group of children/youth (two or more), it is acceptable to have one adult volunteer driver.
  - b. When transporting only one child/youth, two volunteer and/or staff persons should be in the vehicle. When it is not possible to have two adults transporting one child, a phone call to the parent/guardian of the child is required to get their verbal approval on transporting their child.
  - c. Church volunteers and staff are to be diligent in planning ahead whenever possible to avoid the situation of transporting one child or youth to/from a church sponsored activity, and/or be agreeable to obtain verbal approval via a phone call to the parent/guardian.
3. Events: When away from the church on an outing (daytime and/or overnight) volunteers and staff are to work together as a team and never be isolated with a child or youth.
4. If it is necessary for a volunteer or staff member to meet individually with a child or youth, it should be done so in a public setting or where they are clearly visible by others.
5. Volunteers and Staff should not spend time alone with a child or adolescent without the awareness and consent of that individual's parents or legal guardian.

**B. Nursery and Pre-K Bathroom Procedures:**

1. Children are taken only upon their request or if the child shows obvious signs of needing to go. A child can be encouraged to have another child accompany him/her along with an adult.
2. When taking children to the bathroom, keep the main door open while the child is in the room. Remain outside the bathroom where you can hear the child. If the child needs assistance with his/her clothes, have the child come out of the bathroom for assistance.
3. If the child requests a teacher's help in the bathroom, try to teach the child how to help himself/herself as much as possible. (Use the hand-over-hand method. This technique enables you to place your hands over the child's hands in helping with fastening clothes, wiping skin, and the like.) Spend as little time in the bathroom as possible. Use proper language but language the child can understand.
4. The staff should rotate this responsibility so the same person is not taking the children all of the time.

**C. Reporting Procedures:**

1. Reporting Obligations: Volunteers or staff are to immediately report any behavior which seems abusive or inappropriate, or any incident reported by a child or youth.
2. Line of Reporting:
  - a. Volunteers shall report directly to a program coordinator, CE committee member, or staff person.
  - b. Program coordinators, committee members, or staff shall report directly to the Pastor or acting church chair.
  - c. If the allegation is directed toward the pastor or church chair, reporting may be made to another member of staff or church council.
  - d. Reporting form to be used is the *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-05 Incident Report Form*

**D. Response plan:**

The response plan is outlined in a separate document and should be referred to for DCC's protocol for responding to an incident. That document is the ***RESPONDING TO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH protocol document.***

E. Disclosure:

Church leadership should consult the church attorney before disclosing any information.

F. Class Release:

Justification: A class release policy for children from church programs will help to reduce the opportunities for both abuse and abduction.

1. Nursery:

- a. Each parent /guardian will sign children in and out of the nursery using form *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-07 Child Sign In-Out Sheet*.
- b. No child will be released from the nursery except into the care of the child’s parent/guardian or the person who signed them in, unless noted at the time the child is signed in, that another (named) person will be picking the child up.
- c. The children are not to be picked up by siblings younger than 14 years old.

2. Children:

- a. Sunday School: Each parent or guardian will sign children in Pre-School and younger in and out of class and note where parent or guardian will be in case of emergency, or provide a cell phone number. No child will be released except into the care of the parent/guardian or person who signed them in, unless noted at the time the child is signed in that another (named) person will be picking the child up.
- b. Weekday Programs: Children under 12 years of age will only be released into the care of their parent/guardian, other adult who dropped them off, or sibling 12 yrs or older. If no one comes to pick up a child the teacher or volunteer will take the child to the open hallway of the church where he/she will stay with the child until the child is picked up.

G. Parent Consent & Medical Auth

1. The parent or legal guardian will fill out a parental consent certification and medical authorization form for each child who will be participating in the ministries of the church. This form is called *Child Safety Policy – Form 2009-06 Parental Consent and Medical Authorization Form*.
2. Forms will be kept in a portable file for each ministry and available in the church office.
3. A photocopied set of the forms will be made for the few Volunteers who regularly take groups to outings outside of the church facilities. The set of photocopied forms should accompany any activity which takes place outside the church facilities.
4. A new form will be filled out by parents or legal guardians at the start of each school year (September).

**III. Training and Educating**

- A. Once each year all volunteers who work with children and youth will attend training to educate them on the policies and procedures for reducing the risk of abuse.
- B. All church staff members will review together the policies and procedure for reducing the risk of abuse on an annual basis.
- C. All church staff will have a copy of this “Child Safety Policy & Guidelines” in print form.
- D. Copies of the policy will be available for any church member through the church office.

**IV. Facilities**

- A. All classrooms will have windows in either walls or doors
- B. In any rooms that do not yet have windows, the doors must be kept open during class times.
- C. There are bathroom facilities that will accommodate small children in the nursery.

**V. Forms** The forms and files accompanying this policy, and mentioned in paragraphs above may be found through the church office or at

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/i22sogdso3162py/AAApk7X82ziWtAvFiarKHrd9a?dl=0>