

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH SAFE CHILD BEST PRACTICES

MANDATE

As Christians, we live our lives in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We also rely on the traditions and legacy left us by our Hebrew ancestors. Themes of hospitality, generosity and justice prevail and provide the fundamental building blocks in our understanding of the community of faith. And as these communities have come together to worship, designated holy places have emerged – places where, to the original foundation, an overriding theme of safety is added. Today, we must remember that our churches are those holy places and that they must provide safe sanctuary for all members. Jesus clearly tells us that children and youth are not only to be included, but assured of this safety. Matthew 18:5 reminds us that “anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me.” Matthew goes on with a stern admonition that “if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believes in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea”. It is with the congregational promise, proclaimed at the time of baptism, that “we welcome (children) into the body of Christ and into the mission we share...” We must now move, to the next step, in assuring that our welcome also provides safety.

It is with these dual calls - to provide a place for the community to gather and worship safely and to assure, with emphasis that this is provided to the children of the congregation - that the Safe Child Policy is being enacted.

The mission statement of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church is “To help people of all ages become active and engaged followers of Christ.”

DEFINITIONS

It is not always possible to precisely describe or define abuse or neglect. Determining whether or not an act or behavior is abusive or neglectful is often a matter of discretion, although Wisconsin Statutes will be complied with. Accordingly, the Safe Child Committee and the Congregation Council will exercise their discretion in identifying and acting upon acts of abuse or neglect. The following descriptions are intended to serve as a guide to parents, volunteers, and full and part-time staff in implementing this policy or in identifying or acting upon violations thereof: ...

A) Physical Abuse—Actions involving physical contact with a child that cause physical insult or injury by other than accidental means. Physical injuries include, but are not limited to, bruises, human bites, bone fractures, burns, abrasions and welts. Physical insult includes striking, pushing, shoving, or unnecessarily restraining a child, whether or not physical injury occurs. Physical abuse also includes intentionally subjecting a child to inclement or environmentally offensive conditions, or placing a child in an environment or subjecting the child to circumstances with the intent of causing the child to experience anxiety or fear, even where no physical contact was made with the child.

B) Sexual Abuse—Sexual abuse occurs when any contact of a sexual nature occurs between an adult and a child. For purposes of this policy, no such contact shall be deemed to be consensual on the part of the child. Sexual abuse includes penetration, exploitation, molestation, incest, the dissemination or display of pornographic materials, or any other conduct or communication which is intended to arouse sexual desire in the child or seduce the child to participate in sexual activities with others.

C) Neglect—Neglect occurs when a person fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or necessary medical attention to a child. Neglect also occurs when a child is placed in circumstances where necessary supervision is not provided or is left in the care of persons not qualified to provide necessary supervision.

D) Child—For purposes of this policy, a child shall mean any person who participates in activities sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church who has not reached 18 years of age.

E) Safe Child Committee - The Safe Child Committee will be comprised of a designated Congregation member, a pastor, and a Congregation Council representative. A Trinity pastor will be available to the committee for guidance. Each member of committee will have a background check performed and be checked against the National Sex Offender Registry. Each member will also sign and agree to a confidentiality contract with regards to the committee's meetings and business.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING

(Includes all staff members and volunteers in all programs that involve children/youth)

1. Volunteer staff members are preferred to be active worshiping participants for six (6) months prior to volunteering for any church sponsored activity or program for children or youth. For members transferring from other congregations, the six-month rule may be reduced or waived following verification of attendance and/or volunteer activity in their previous congregation and a review by members of the Safe Child Committee. If volunteers have been attending less than six (6) months, they will have a supervisory period of six (6) months. This will include a seasoned volunteer mentoring them and regular check-ins with the pastor.
2. All volunteers will be required to complete an application, provide references and sign an acknowledgement of Trinity's Safe Child Policy.
3. Trinity Lutheran Church will perform a criminal background check on all of its paid employees and volunteer staff members. Proper consent will be obtained from each employee/volunteer staff member. Results of this background check will be stored in a secure location and will only be accessible to members of the Safe Child Committee and any individual identified by that committee as "need to know."
4. Criminal Background checks will be run throughout the year for new volunteers and annually for anyone whose last background check date is three or more years ago.
5. A volunteer or paid staff member who has been charged with or convicted of either sexual or physical abuse is not permitted to serve in any church sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
6. All volunteer and staff members' names will be checked against the National Sex Offender Registry prior to involvement and each January yearly thereafter.
7. Anyone working with children or youth will participate in Safe Child training and adhere to the Trinity Child Protection Policy. Training will be required to be updated yearly.
8. Youth volunteers (under the age of 18) can be utilized, but will always be supervised with adult personnel. Most often, they may be used to shepherd children to and from activities or assist teachers in classrooms. Background checks will not be required; however, youth volunteers will complete a separate Student Volunteer application and, depending on their role, provide references and verification of childcare education and/or experience.

Parents of youth volunteers will also be required to sign the Student Volunteer application.

9. A personal interview, with a potential volunteer, will occur when additional information is needed or when clarification of provided information is needed. Interviews will be conducted by at least two people from the Safe Child Committee and will be utilized to gain understanding and form a firsthand impression of the volunteer. The results of the interview will be reviewed by the entire Safe Child Committee.
10. Occasional volunteers may be teamed with veteran volunteers if: a) they have a completed initial application and background check on file and b) have read and signed an acknowledgement of the Safe Child Policy. To assure adequate numbers of volunteers, parents will be provided this initial application and a copy of the highlights of the Safe Child Policy at the time they register their children for any of the child/youth programs offered at Trinity.

PROCEDURES

1. Written consent must be given by parents for youth to participate in a program and must include emergency medical and contact information.
2. Trinity Lutheran Church adopts a “two deep” policy in which at least two (2) adults must be on location for any activities involving minors sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church. Whenever possible, Trinity will work toward the best practice of also having two adults in every classroom. At a minimum, children’s and youth programming will have 1) classrooms that are visible through glass or open doors or 2) adults. Family members may work together when one other adult volunteer is also present.
3. Parents are always welcome to observe their children’s classroom or activities.
4. No minor may be disciplined by use of physical action or through the use of abusive or inappropriate language. When discipline is necessary, it will be carried out through instruction, training and correction always taking into consideration a child’s age and preserving the child’s dignity and self-esteem.
5. E-mail will be utilized only to communicate information about youth ministries and general announcements. Leaders that need to use electronic communication will be provided with a Trinity email address whenever possible. Communications to volunteers are not confidential and may be read by any member of church staff.

6. The parents of senior high youth (grade 9-12) will receive an Electronic Media Release form each year with options regarding how their child may be contacted. No minor may be contacted individually using electronic media without the parents' consent. The form will include choices such as but not limited to: e-mail, messaging, texting, Facebook and other social media outlets but excluding personal social media accounts. While it is recognized that electronic media may be utilized by youth as a means of individual contact with a volunteer, it is imperative that the volunteer alert a member of the Safe Child Committee to assure that this communication is open and documented for any necessary review.
7. If photos are utilized on Trinity Lutheran Church website and other social media, parental consent will be required and no names will be utilized to identify the children/youth in the photos.
8. Minors will be afforded privacy when using the bathrooms.
9. Volunteers should be cautious when displaying physical affection to minors and should always do this in an open area or in the presence of another adult.
10. When a private meeting/counseling is requested by a minor, at least two adults should be aware of the request and/or the door should remain open during any conversation.
11. Minors may not travel alone in a car with an adult unless it is a caravan. When 2 or more vehicles, each with an adult caravan on a trip, it is sufficient to have only one adult in each vehicle. In cases of emergency, a single adult may travel alone with a child to the hospital or to return the child home if, and only if, another adult is notified and that adult agrees to notify the parent/guardian of the child. When the church provides transportation for church sponsored activities or programs the driver must:
 - a) have a valid Wisconsin driver's license that has not been revoked or suspended for any reason within the past 5 years
 - b) be 25 years of age or older if driving a church van, or be at least 21 years of age or older if driving their personal vehicle
 - c) have proof of car insurance (including liability coverage) that meets the State of Wisconsin requirements
 - d) carry their drivers' license and proof of insurance with them, at each event where they are providing transportation and know that these documents may be checked prior to departure.
 - e) not have any pending driving under the influence or moving vehicular charges. Any charge shall be considered pending until all conditions of any disposition ordered by the court have been fulfilled.
12. On overnight trips, same sex supervision by adults will be provided in sleeping areas. Isolation from the group of two youth or an adult/youth

combination will not occur. Whenever division occurs, groups of three or more will be utilized.

13. Trinity is dedicated to assuring that children are safely returned to their parents/guardians following completion of any youth activity including Sunday School, FDL, confirmation, etc. A sign in/sign out procedure will be in place at all youth activities. Parents must sign their children into the activity and must sign their children back out at the end of the activity. Siblings will not be able to sign each other out unless parents sign a waiver regarding this policy.

RESPONSE PLAN

In deciding the appropriate course of action, it is important to differentiate those actions that require a report and those that require a police report. Staff and volunteers are “Mandatory Reporters” as defined in Wisconsin Statutes, and therefore it is important to understand what offences must be reported to Law Enforcement Agencies which include:

- a. the Oneida County Sheriff’s Department.
- b. the Rhinelander Police Department.
- c. and any local Law Enforcement Agency if the offence is in a jurisdiction other than Oneida County.

1. If a volunteer, parent, or paid staff member witnesses or suspects situations of physical abuse, sexual abuse or child neglect, she/he shall report this to the pastoral staff, or any current member of the Congregation Council, or the Safe Child committee immediately
2. With the help of pastoral staff or the identified Council Member, a report to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Family Services will be made immediately and, if appropriate, police will be notified.
3. If in the judgment of the volunteer or paid staff member on the scene immediate medical attention is felt to be necessary, 911 will be called immediately.
4. The minor’s privacy will be respected and all information will be kept confidential.
5. Parents or legal guardians will be informed of all actions taken to assure the safety of their child/youth.
6. Trinity Lutheran Church will keep a written record of the steps taken in response to the allegation of abuse.

7. If a volunteer is suspected of mistreatment, abuse, inappropriate behavior with a child or youth, chapter 15 of the Trinity Lutheran church Constitution and By-laws, as amended 2016, will be followed.
8. Support will be offered to all parties, including the reporter, victim and their family and the alleged perpetrator and their family.
9. If any type of report is made (law enforcement agency), the Executive Committee will be apprised of this information. Further disclosure of this information, and to whom this disclosure will be made, is left to the discretion of this Committee.
10. Any documentation of response actions will be secured and accessible in a manner similar to what has been previously described for background checks.

TRAINING

1. Orientation underscoring the importance of maintaining and upholding our Safe Child Policies will be provided to all volunteers upon acceptance.
2. Trinity Lutheran Church will provide educational opportunities for staff, teachers and volunteers to learn more about child abuse, its prevention, and how to incorporate teaching child abuse prevention strategies in children and youth group activities.
3. Yearly trainings will be provided that may include, but not be limited to, safety issues, CPR-First Aid, setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries, mandated reporting, or other pertinent topics.
4. Paid staff members who work with children or youth shall participate in one of these educational events at least once every year.
5. Child and youth programs will seek to enhance self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, problem-solving skills, stress management skills and personal safety skills.

People who serve our children and youth are among the most valuable assets to our faith community. Along with parents, they contribute to the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical well-being of our young people. Trinity will be diligent in choosing those who are best suited to work with our children and youth.

This policy applies to all child/youth programs within Trinity Lutheran Church including nursery, Sunday School, Youth Group Activities and Gatherings, Day Camp, Child/Youth choirs, Wednesday Night Alive, etc.

Signature Volunteer/Staff

_____, 201__
Date

Signature of Representative TELC

_____, 201__
Date