

## **I. Philosophy**

At Pascack Reformed Church, we covenant to put God's love in human hearts. This means we commit to love one another radically, nourish and serve each other, and respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We understand that this means we have a particular responsibility to the most vulnerable among us. To this end, we recognize that it is essential for us to maintain a safe environment that protects children and adults from harm while fostering their spiritual growth. The policies described below are designed to ensure that all who enter our doors feel safe and free to follow their spiritual path in an atmosphere of reciprocal respect and support.

We also seek to protect members, staff, and ministers of Pascack Reformed Church from false accusations.

Granted that these policies will evolve over time as we respond to new challenges, and learn how to more effectively refine our safety procedures, we consider this to be a living document. All are welcome to give input through the Safety Team of elected, active elders. The Safety Team shall be chosen by the Board of Elders with each new Consistory, and comprise of at least three and no more than half of the Board of Elders, as well as any ministers on staff. Those elders chosen must be active on the Consistory and unrelated to one another. If someone on the Safety Team has a conflict of interest or may potentially be triggered by participating in a particular process, they will be relieved from participation, and another elder shall replace them. All matters brought before the Safety Team will remain as confidential as possible.

## **II. Definitions**

The terms used in this document will have the following meanings:

Abuse includes non-accidental conduct that involves bodily injury or impairment; offensive physical or sexual contact, including physical or sexual abuse; physical or sexual harassment; physical or sexual molestation; or physical or sexual exploitation. Abuse also includes non-accidental conduct that involves treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth; emotional abuse, including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, stalking, and other forms of intimidation.

Emotional Abuse means any chronic verbal aggression or dominance that cause fear and diminishes a sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth, through acts of yelling or swearing, name calling and insults, mocking, threats and intimidation, intentionally ignoring or excluding, isolating, humiliating, demeaning an individual because of the language they speak, intentionally misinterpreting traditional practices, being over-familiar, treating an individual as a personal servant, making slanderous statements about an individual to others, failing to check allegations of abuse against them, denial of abuse and blaming the victim or similar repeated conduct.

Physical Abuse includes physical contact that is offensive and/or unwanted, as well as physical contact that can or does cause bodily injury.

Sexual Abuse means any sexual touching of a child or any activity that causes a person to engage in any sexual act or conduct without that person's consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

Harassment means any activity that places a person in fear by such acts as threatening or tormenting behavior, compelling a person by force or threat of force to engage in conduct from which the person has a right to abstain, knowingly restricting substantially the movements of another person without that other person's consent, communicating to a person a threat to commit an act against that person or another person or entity where the natural consequence of the threat is to place that person in fear or cause that person to engage in conduct in which that person otherwise would not engage, or similar repeated offensive physical, verbal, or written conduct, or similar repeated offensive communication, including but not limited to texting, emailing, and social media networking.

Sexual molestation and sexual exploitation means activity that places another person in a situation where that person feels compelled to engage in sexual conduct to which that person would not otherwise voluntarily consent, or in circumstances where that person is unable to refrain from consenting due to age or mental capacity or unusual vulnerability derived from the person's mental health or from the existence of a relationship of significant dependency or trust.

Sexual harassment means making sexual advances or requests for sexual favors to another person, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where the other person by words or conduct has indicated that such words or conduct are not desired, or where a reasonable person would expect that such words or conduct would not be desired.

Microaggression means any brief, commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignity, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial or other slights and insults to the target person or group. There are three forms of microaggressions: (1) microassaults, which are explicit verbal or physical attacks to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or discriminatory actions; (2) microinsults or communications that are rude and convey insensitivity to a person's racial heritage or identity; and (3) microinvalidations that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological reality of a person of a specific ethnicity, background, gender, sexuality, or other identity. In these instances we are committed to a culture of gently "calling in" one another, to discourage defensiveness, encourage accountability, and promote the continued learning of compassion in Christ.

Confidentiality means that information concerning a complaint will be received in confidence. The Safety Team and other members of staff will discuss a complaint only with those individuals who are involved in the investigation and resolution of the complaint. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances to protect the privacy of persons involved.

### **III. Relationship of Ministers and Staff to the Congregation**

#### **A. General Policies**

We place great trust in our minister and staff to use their positions and powers only for the best interest of all congregants, and never to take advantage of others for their personal gratification. Clergy misconduct, be it sexual, physical, or emotional, harms both the individuals involved and the church as a whole, because it breaches the minister's covenant with the entire congregation. Ministers and staff are held to a high standard of maintaining healthy boundaries to ensure effective ministry that includes self-reflection and accountability.

Ministers and staff will be informed about the Safety Policy and made to sign a *Safety Policy Awareness and Agreement* form upon their hiring to uphold its standards. They shall be annually updated thereafter about changes made to the Safety Policy.

## B. Screening

All ministers and staff are to be vetted by the Consistory and have a thorough background check. Pascack Reformed Church is authorized to obtain background information from former employers, personal references, educational institutions, credit agencies, reporting services, and governmental agencies. Different levels of background checks will be conducted depending on the responsibilities of the relevant paid position. There will be annual checks on the sex offender registry made for all ministers and staff. All information received from a background check will be confidential and only known to members of the Safety Team.

## C. Supervision

All ministers are subject to the care of the Classis of Greater Palisades, however the elders of the Consistory are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the congregation, and so must hold the minister accountable to any infractions that they observe. When there is a serious allegation brought by or before the Safety Team, the Safety Team must respond as outlined in Sec. E.

## D. Reporting

If a person is suspecting or has knowledge of clergy abuse, they must complete a Pascack Reformed Church *Report of Possible Clergy Maltreatment* (the green forms), available in the envelope above the office mailboxes, enclose it in an envelope, and place it in the mailbox of the Vice President of the Consistory. This information is confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential so far as possible. Upon receiving the report, the Vice President will report the suspected abuse or incident and call a meeting of the Safety Team.

## E. Responding to Alleged Incidents

Ministers are subject to the care of the Classis of Greater Palisades. Upon an allegation, a member of the Safety Team is to alert the classis. The Safety Team must bring the report to the Consistory. "The Consistory has the right to close the pulpit to a minister who has been accused of a notorious or scandalous offense that would render appearance in the pulpit inappropriate." (BCO 2.1.3.4b)

Due to conflict of interest, the minister will not be a member of the Safety Team at this time. The minister assigned to the church by the classis will fill the minister's role on the Safety Team.

All other staff members may be asked to remove themselves from their duties until the Safety Team has come up with an appropriate plan which may include but is not limited to, an admonishment or rebuke, a Limited Access Agreement, severance from the position.

## IV. Child Safety

### A. General Policies

It is important for anyone working with children to be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. All teachers, assistants, and members of the Education team will be expected to attend the training session each year that includes the church's Safety Policy. All children will be asked to adhere to a covenant of care for each other at the beginning of each year. The below guidelines are meant to promote a safe and healthy environment for our young people to grow and flourish in their faith.

## B. Volunteers/Staff Positions

Any event with children, including Sunday School classes, must be staffed by at least 1 adult and 1 assistant (ages 12 or older) unrelated to one another for every 10 children. Unless the child objects to touch, volunteers and staff may not touch children uninitiated except to pat on the shoulder, a light squeeze of the hand, or brief side by side hug when attempting to alleviate distress.

## C. Screening

All volunteers and staff, including non-members, who work with children are required to sign the *Code of Ethics for Volunteers and Staff in Child and Youth Programs*, provided in the Appendix of this document. Different levels of background checks will be conducted depending on the responsibilities of volunteer or staff position.

## D. Supervision

All activities with children must have the door open or a window that looks into the room. All one-on-one meetings must be held in public places. If a young person leaves without permission, parents will be called immediately.

No child is to be left unattended in the nursery at any time. Only adult attendants may assist children to the bathroom, and only the nursery supervisor or parent may change diapers. If the supervisor or parent is not available, then an adult attendant may change the diaper following posted diaper changing procedures.

Parents or guardians must fill out a registration form for each child enrolled in Sunday School, Confirmation Class, or the Youth Action Team that includes emergency contact information, allergies, and any other information deemed by the Safety Team necessary to prevent or respond appropriately to an emergency situation.

During overnight events, at least two unrelated adult leaders must be present at all times. There will be separate sleeping areas designated with sensitivity to gender identity provided at all overnight events. At least one adult, preferably two adults, will be designated to the areas and will be present for the entire overnight event. Male and female adults must be present for all coed overnights. All youth on an overnight visit must agree and sign a *Youth Participation Code of Ethics*, also attached in the Appendix below. All chaperones must fill out an *Adult Chaperone Release* form, in the Appendix below.

## E. Transportation

Children 1st grade and younger should be escorted to and from the bathroom. Older elementary-aged children can use the buddy system where two children go together to the bathroom with a reminder to return in two minutes. If they have not returned after 5 minutes, the assistant will retrieve them.

Parents will be notified of all events that are held in places other than the normal meeting area of the program. The notification will include date, times, transportation arrangements, the location of the event, and the cell phone number of the event leaders. Permission slips for events that take place off church property are to be signed by a parent or guardian and will be collected before the youth is allowed to participate in that event.

All drivers transporting minors on behalf of Pascack Reformed Church must be 25 years of age or older and licensed to operate a vehicle, shall comply with the laws and limitations that apply to their operator's license, and shall complete the *Request to be a Volunteer Driver* form in the Appendix of this document.

Transportation to and from meetings is not a part of church activities, and parents/guardians are responsible for providing or arranging this transportation. If a volunteer/staff person transports a minor at the parent/guardian's request, this should be recognized as informal contact and not part of the church program.

Parents or guardians and family members are the only ones allowed to pick up their children from events.

#### F. Reporting

If the victim is a child, the suspected abuse or incident must be reported directly and immediately to Children's Protective Services. If a person is suspecting or has knowledge of child abuse, they must complete a Pascack Reformed Church *Report of Possible Child Maltreatment* (the blue forms), available in the envelope above the office mailboxes, enclose it in an envelope, and place it in the mailbox of the minister. This information is confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential so far as possible. Upon receiving the report, the minister will report the suspected abuse or incident and call a meeting of the Safety Team.

In the event of bullying between two youth, the event must be brought to the attention of the minister and/or the elder of education.

#### G. Responding to Alleged Incidents

When the Safety Team is called to meeting around a current incident or past history of child abuse, the wellbeing of the child or children in question is first and foremost important. The Safety Team is empowered to take such intermediary steps as deemed necessary to ensure the child's safety until the facts have been thoroughly investigated. This may include but is not limited to the use of a *Limited Access Agreement*, also included in the Appendix. While information gathering is important for the Safety Team to engage in, they are not to make fast assumptions until Child Protective Services makes its report. The Safety Team may not contact the alleged perpetrator in regards to this incident, as this may compromise the safety and result in further abuse of the child. If the alleged abuser is a member of the church body, the Safety Team reserves the right to prioritize the needs of the child, while protecting the dignity and encouraging accountability of the alleged abuser.

In the event of bullying between two youth, the minister and/or elder of education will then share concern with all involved parties, hear each response, evaluate need and degree of concern, ask the youth in question to revisit and recommit to the care covenant, and remove the child from the group for a specified time and must make amends or reconcile with the affected party before rejoining the group.

## V. Adult Safety

### A. General Policies

First Aid kits will be available in the Church Office, the back of the Sanctuary, and in the kitchen of the Parish House. In case of a serious injury, 911 will be called for emergency assistance. Should injury or a serious disruption, including violent behavior, occur during worship or a church event, getting proper assistance for the injury or handling the disruption will be the first priority. This may include but is not limited to halting or

rescheduling the event until the injury or disruption has been properly assisted or resolved.

#### B. Volunteers in Positions of Power

All members of the Consistory, Deacons and Elders, will be expected to attend a training session during the annual Consistory retreat to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others. The training session will include a review of the Safety Policy and election of the Safety Team from the Board of Elders.

#### C. Screening

Church members with a history of perpetrating sexual, physical, or emotional abuse may not serve as volunteers in positions of power, including but not limited to the Consistory.

#### D. Supervision

The whole of the church body, including the Consistory, are under the supervision of the Board of Elders. When an elder's conduct is in question, be they active or inactive, the Safety Team (being comprised of unrelated, active elders) shall still have the supervisory responsibility and hold the elder to the high standard their office demands.

#### E. Reporting

If a person is suspecting or has knowledge of abuse that occurs on church property or between members of the church body, they must complete a Pascack Reformed Church *Report of Possible Adult Maltreatment* (the pink forms), available in the envelope above the office mailboxes, enclose it in an envelope, and place it in the mailbox of the minister. This information is confidential; the identity of the reporter will also be kept confidential so far as possible. Upon receiving the report, the minister will report the suspected abuse or incident and call a meeting of the Safety Team.

#### F. Responding to Alleged Incidents

When the Safety Team is called to meeting around a current incident or past history of abuse, the wellbeing of the abused party in question is first and foremost important. The Safety Team is empowered to take such intermediary steps as deemed necessary to ensure the safety of the abused party until the facts have been thoroughly investigated. This may include but is not limited to the use of a *Limited Access Agreement*, also included in the Appendix. Information gathering is important for the Safety Team to engage in. In regards to domestic violence and abuse, the Safety Team may not contact the alleged perpetrator in regards to this incident, as this may compromise the safety and result in further abuse of the abused party. If the alleged abuser is a member of the church body, the Safety Team reserves the right to prioritize the needs of the abused party, while protecting the dignity and encouraging accountability of the alleged abuser. The Safety Team shall follow the procedure as laid out in the Book of Church Order (2.1.4).

If the alleged abuser can not agree to the terms of the Safety Team, then a trial shall be held by members of the Board of Elders not on the Safety Team. The members of the Board of Elders shall follow the procedure as laid out in the Book of Church Order (2.1.5).

## VI. Privacy Protection

The church takes seriously its role as a caretaker of the identities and dignity of those in its care. Therefore, no pictures will be posted, nor any personal information divulged, on the internet or through any kind of social media without permission. Children's names will never accompany a photograph in any of the church's publications, online or otherwise, unless express permission is granted.

## **VII. Discipline Policies**

The whole of this Safety Policy was drawn up to lie in accordance with the Book of Church Order's Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, as used by the Reformed Church in America. The ways in which this document succeeds is to be continually inspected and updated.

## **VIII. Appendix**

- A. *Code of Ethics for Volunteers and Staff in Child and Youth Programs*
- B. *Youth Participation Code of Ethics*
- C. *Request to be a Volunteer Driver*
- D. *Limited Access Agreement*
- E. *Adult Chaperone Release Form*
- F. *Safety Policy Awareness and Agreement*
- G. *Report of Possible Clergy Maltreatment*
- H. *Report of Possible Child Maltreatment*
- I. *Report of Possible Adult Maltreatment*