



CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

A Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Updated Edition: September 2026
Shalom Christian Reformed Church, South Dakota

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
1. General Information	3
Purpose and Theological Foundation	3
Scope and Definitions	3
Volunteer Application & Screening Process	3
Training and Education	4
2. Prevention & Supervision Guidelines	5
Guidelines for Working with Children and Youth	5
Appropriate Interactions	5
Appropriate Discipline	5
Inappropriate Interactions (Strictly Prohibited)	6
Nursery Guidelines	6
Supervision Policies for Sunday Programs (Children & Worship & Kid Zone)	6
Supervision Policies for Youth Programs	7
Guidelines for Working with Vulnerable Adults (Friendship Ministry)	8
Prevention Guidelines for Pastoral Care	8
3. Indicators of Abuse	9
Indicators of a Child's Potential Need for Protection	9
Recognizing Adult-Adult Abuse by a Church Leader	9
Warning Signs of Leader Boundary Failures	10
4. Response & Reporting Procedures	11
How to Respond to Disclosure of Abuse (Child or Adult)	11
Procedures for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse	11
Procedures for Reporting Suspected Adult & Vulnerable Adult Abuse	12
5. Response by Shalom CRC	13
Shalom CRC's Response to Allegations	13
Council's Response to Allegations by Adult Victims	13
Shalom CRC's Response to the Sexual Offender	14
Registered Sexual Offenders	14
Unsubstantiated Sexual Offenders	14
Sexual Offenses by Minors	14
Shalom CRC Safe Church Team Role	15
6. Appendix & Companion Forms	16

1. General Information

Purpose and Theological Foundation

Providing a safe and secure environment is vital to a healthy, functioning church. Shalom Christian Reformed Church (CRC) recognizes that sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and neglect do occur in our culture. With the implementation of this policy, we seek to reduce the potential for abuse and to outline procedures to be followed if abuse is alleged or suspected. We also seek to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as protect volunteers and employees of this congregation from false accusations.

Shalom CRC affirms that all people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. In alignment with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) Safe Church Ministry, this policy exists to prevent abuse, provide care for those who have been harmed, and establish clear procedures for maintaining safety within our congregation.

Theological Foundation: Shalom CRC believes abuse in any form is a violation of God's intent for human relationships. We commit ourselves to justice, compassion, accountability, and healing, seeking to be a community where truth is spoken, victims are supported, and harmful behavior is confronted.

Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to all ministries of Shalom CRC, with particular attention to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This explicitly includes Friendship (our ministry for adults age 18 and older with mental or physical disabilities) and all programs serving minors, including those with mental or physical disabilities. It governs all staff, council members, ministry leaders, volunteers, and anyone acting on behalf of Shalom CRC in programs, events, or activities.

- **Minor, Child or Youth:** Any person under the age of 18.
- **Vulnerable Adult:** An adult age 18 or older who may require additional care or supervision due to physical, mental, emotional, or developmental limitations (e.g., participants in our Friendship Ministry).
- **Abuse:** Physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, or neglectful behavior that harms or exploits another person.
- **Volunteer:** Any individual serving in an unpaid role in a church-sponsored activity.

Volunteer Application & Screening Process

New leaders must complete the online Volunteer Code of Ethics & Application Form and, if they are 18 and older and will be working with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults, agree to and complete a background check, which will be emailed to them. Volunteers under 18 only need to fill out the Code of Ethics (Appendix A) and have their parent/guardian sign it, as well.

The applicant may be interviewed by a church staff member if they have not been involved in Shalom's programs in the previous five years. The church reserves the right to deny any applicant a volunteer position for any reason. Any written information or record of a conversation will be kept confidential and stored in a locked file. The file will be accessed only by the Pastor and/or Director of Church Operations.

Training and Education

Shalom CRC will provide Safe Church training consistent with CRCNA Safe Church Ministry guidelines. All teachers, leaders, and discipleship volunteers will be given the safe church policy and will be expected to read and adhere to it. All teachers and assistants are required to attend the training session that includes Safe Church Policy protocol offered at the beginning of each school/ministry year. Training will cover:

- **Abuse Prevention:** Awareness of risk factors, environmental safety, and structural safeguards.
- **Appropriate Boundaries:** Defining and adhering to healthy guidelines for leader/participant interactions and physical conduct.
- **Recognizing & Responding:** How to identify behavioral and physical warning signs and handle disclosures compassionately and appropriately.
- **Reporting Guidelines:** Clear training on mandatory reporting responsibilities, civil requirements, and church pathways.

2. Prevention & Supervision Guidelines

Guidelines for Working with Children and Youth

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to represent Jesus and teach children to behave in a Christ-like manner. As leaders, we may need to discipline children in our care in order to promote acceptable behavior. In all of our relationships with children, we need to envision a line and define what interventions can be on the appropriate side of the line and what are inappropriate. The following guidelines govern leader/child relationships:

Appropriate Interactions

- **Spiritual Growth:** Encourage the child to learn and grow in faith. Respect each child's learning style as he/she responds to the information you are giving them.
- **Equality:** Treat each child under your care equally, giving equal opportunities for special favors and responsibilities.
- **Respect:** Respect each individual child. Maintain an orderly classroom without controlling it. Lead the child into cooperation and respect for authority for the benefit of all to learn.
- **Protection:** Protect each child from shame or humiliation from either adults or other children.
- **Physical Boundaries:** If a hug seems appropriate, give a brief side-by-side hug at the child's level. Avoid kisses, massages, bear hugs, allowing children to sit in your lap, and contact with private body parts. Unless the child objects to touch, a pat on the shoulder or forearm or a light squeeze of the hand is acceptable.
- **Visibility:** Any physical contact with a child should be done with doors open and/or in front of others.

Remember: Words of praise and encouragement are the best way to communicate God's love, and your support and respect for a child.

Appropriate Discipline

- **Expectations:** Have realistic expectations that reflect the child's/youth's age and comprehension.
- **Least Intervention:** Use the least amount of intervention necessary. Make eye contact with the child who is misbehaving.
- **Distraction & Presence:** Use distraction away from the cause of the problem, perhaps by making him/her a special helper. Change seat assignments or place yourself or a helper between misbehaving children.
- **Calm Redirection:** If able, remove the child from the others and calmly explain the expected behavior. If speaking directly to the child does not cause the disrespectful behavior to stop, then have the assistant bring the child to the Children's or Youth Director or their parents.
- **Timeouts:** If a timeout is needed, the general rule is one minute in timeout for each year of the child's age. Follow up with reason and reassurance.

- **Parental Involvement:** If a child's behavior warrants more than minor correction or is an ongoing problem, then the parents should be involved. Write down the misbehavior and the steps taken, give a verbal and written report (yellow incident report) to the Youth or Children's Ministry Director, and form an agreement with the parents to work on appropriate group behavior.

Inappropriate Interactions (Strictly Prohibited)

These abusive ways of relating to youth are not acceptable under any circumstances and can have long-lasting implications for both you and the child. In a tough situation: Step back, evaluate, be smart, and don't lose control of yourself.

- **Physical Discipline:** Any physical control or act causing pain, injury, and/or humiliation.
- **Emotional Manipulation:** Verbal or emotional manipulation, silent treatment, withholding bathroom privileges, causing shame, embarrassment, and/or humiliation.
- **Sexual Manipulation:** Sexualized hugs, strokes, and/or kisses for good behavior, or any touch of private areas.
- **Blaming/Threats:** An adult blaming a child to justify the adult's inappropriate behavior, singling out a child for excessive discipline, or threatening a child not to cry or tell anyone.

Nursery Guidelines

These guidelines apply to any program using the Shalom CRC nursery:

- **Supervision:** No child is to be left unattended in the nursery at any time.
- **Two-Adult Rule:** A minimum of two adult attendants must be present. If the two adults are related or married, then a third attendant not related needs to be present.
- **Toilet & Diapers:** Only adult attendants are permitted to assist children in the bathroom. Only an adult may change diapers. Diaper changes must be done with doors open and if possible with other staff available.
- **Check-out:** No child is to be removed from the nursery by anyone except the family that has signed the child in. Two adult attendants should stay in the nursery until all children have been picked up.
- **Accident Reports:** A 'Shalom CRC Nursery Accident Report' (Appendix B) must be completed for any accident or injury, with copies given to the parents and the Children's Ministry Director.

These guidelines are designed to protect children in our congregation from harm and to protect persons involved in the nursery from false or mistaken accusations. If any type of child abuse is suspected (physical, emotional or sexual), it is the nursery attendant's responsibility to report it immediately as described on page 9 of this document under "The Child Abuse Reporting Process".

Supervision Policies for Sunday Programs (Children & Worship & Kid Zone)

To maintain safety during the Sunday morning church school period, Shalom CRC will provide security to monitor halls, check classrooms, and check bathrooms. The following program guidelines apply:

- **Staffing:** The Children & Worship classroom will be staffed by a teacher and at least one assistant 12 years old (6th grade) or older. Kid Zone will have 1 adult teacher for every 15 students.
- **Restroom Escort:** Parents should be encouraged to take children to the bathroom before programs start. If needed, children 1st grade and younger must be escorted to and from the bathroom by an assistant (with the door left open, waiting outside). Older elementary-aged children will use a buddy system (two children together) with a reminder to return in 2 minutes. If they do not return within 5 minutes, an assistant will retrieve them.
- **Classroom Visibility:** When children's programs are in session, the meeting room doors should allow for an unobstructed view of the room (windows in classroom doors must not be covered).
- **One-on-One Rule:** Volunteers and staff should not meet alone with a child, unless the permission of the child's parent/guardian has been given and with the knowledge of the Children's Ministry Director.
- **Registration:** Parent contact information must be on file for a child to attend. Visitors and new families must fill out a card with basic contact information upon arrival.

Any teacher with questions or concerns about the safety, welfare or health of any student should contact the Children's Ministry Director who will confer, if necessary, with a member of the Safe Church Team.

Supervision Policies for Youth Programs

For GEMS, Cadets, Middle School, and High School Youth, parents/guardians must complete the Activity Participation Agreement online annually. Students in grades 6-12 attending Shalom Youth group and parents must sign and return the 'Code of Conduct Policy' (Appendix C).

- **Off-Site Events:** Parents must be notified of all events held away from the normal meeting place. Notification includes dates, times, transportation, pickup arrangements, event location, and cell phone of the leader. Ordinarily, at least two adults must be present at group activities and in any vehicle. The standard ratio is one leader to ten youth.
- **Accountability:** Group leaders must know where youth are at all times. If a young person leaves an event without permission, parents will be called immediately.
- **One-on-One Meetings:** One-on-one meetings should be held in public places. Youth leaders should avoid sitting and talking in stationary vehicles with a youth one-on-one. Interactions should preferably be of the same gender. When meeting in a youth's home, a parent or another adult must be home or know about the visit. Coordinating directors must be informed in advance.

- **Approved Drivers:** Drivers transporting minors must be 25 years or older (unless otherwise approved by Council), licensed in SD (or comparable entity), pass a background check, and complete the Approved Volunteer Driver form (Appendix D). Seat belts must be used by all passengers (passengers must not exceed the number of belts). When traveling from the church, if an adult is the driver, at least two unrelated youth should be present in the vehicle.
- **Overnights:** At least two leaders must always be present. Separate male and female sleeping areas will be provided, with at least one designated adult present in the areas for the entire duration. Male and female adults must be present for coed overnights.
- **Social Media & Digital Communication:** Shalom CRC recognizes that texting and digital messaging are primary ways youth connect and seek support. Our goal is to encourage healthy, supportive mentoring relationships while maintaining safety, emotional health, and legal compliance.
- **General Communication Guidelines for Leaders**
 - **Foster Open, Supportive Communication:** Leaders are encouraged to be a safe, listening ear for students who wish to share their struggles, questions, or prayer requests. Digital communication should always be encouraging, uplifting, and transparent.
 - **Maintain Professional Boundaries:** Leaders must remember that they are adult mentors, not peers. All digital communication must be appropriate in tone, language, and content. Avoid exclusive, secretive, or overly familiar digital relationships.
 - **The Principle of Transparency:** While individual pastoral care via text is permitted, it should never be secretive. If a student is regularly reaching out to a leader for deep emotional or spiritual support, the leader should inform their Ministry Director to ensure accountability and support for both the leader and the student.
 - **Respect Rest Times (Temporal Boundaries):** Except for emergencies, logistical planning during active trips, or time-sensitive event updates, leaders and students should respect late-night hours and avoid texting between 10:00 PM and 7:00 AM.
- **Process for Managing Boundary-Pushing Behavior**

Sometimes, a student may look to a leader as their primary emotional support, leading to constant texting, late-night messages, or high-intensity emotional disclosures that exceed a volunteer's role. If a leader feels a student is pushing boundaries, they must follow this process:

 - **Step 1: Set Gentle, Clear Limits Early** Address the behavior directly but kindly. Remind the student of your role and availability. (e.g., *"I care about you and want to support you, but I don't check my phone after 10:00 PM. Let's make a plan to sit down and chat about this for 15 minutes before youth group on Wednesday."*)
 - **Step 2: Transition to In-Person Support** Avoid trying to counsel a student through long, highly emotional text threads. Texting lacks tone and can lead to

misunderstandings. Redirect the conversation to an in-person, visible setting at church, or a public space. (e.g., *"This sounds like a lot to carry, and text isn't the best place for us to walk through this. Let's talk about this in person this week."*)

- **Step 3: Partner with a Co-Leader and Inform the Director** If high-frequency texting continues or the leader feels overwhelmed, they must inform their Ministry Director. The leader should transition the digital communication into a group chat that includes a parent, the Ministry Director, or another screened adult leader to create a shared circle of care.
- **Step 4: Professional Referrals & Parent Involvement** If a student discloses self-harm, suicidal thoughts, abuse, neglect, or severe mental health crises, the leader must not keep this secret. The leader must immediately contact the Ministry Director or Senior Pastor to coordinate involving the student's parents and connecting the family with professional counseling resources.

Guidelines for Working with Vulnerable Adults (Friendship Ministry)

To ensure adults with physical, mental, emotional, or developmental disabilities are served with dignity, safety, and respect, all staff and volunteers in the Friendship Ministry or other disabilities ministries must adhere to the following standards:

- **Two-Adult Rule:** Whenever possible, a minimum of two screened, unrelated adults will be present during activities involving vulnerable adults. One-on-one interactions must take place in visible, interruptible spaces.
- **Visibility & Sightlines:** Ministry spaces will maintain visibility through open doors, windows, or clear, unobstructed sightlines.
- **Appropriate Conduct & Boundaries:** Interactions must be respectful, appropriate, and highly supportive. Physical contact must be appropriate, welcomed, and never coercive or secretive. Digital and written communication with vulnerable adults must follow church-approved guidelines.
- **Constructive Discipline:** Redirection or discipline must be non-physical, constructive, and highly appropriate to the individual's specific needs, limitations, and comprehension levels.

Prevention Guidelines for Pastoral Care

Pastors and church leaders hold powerful and trustworthy positions and must be held to a high standard. To protect both leaders and those receiving care, the following boundaries must be maintained:

- **Consistency:** Practice job-related duties consistently with all parishioners, volunteers, staff, and visitors.
- **Boundary Training:** Participate regularly in training regarding healthy professional boundaries.
- **Meeting Locations:** Avoid one-on-one meetings with youth or parishioners in homes, cars, or private offices where you cannot be observed. Public settings (like restaurants) are preferred.

- **Same-Gender Assignments:** Consider requesting a same-sex parish care elder/deacon be assigned to individuals requiring frequent pastoral visits.
- **Appropriate Touch:** Limit physical contact to a brief side-by-side hug or pat on the shoulder, hand, or forearm. Note that hugs can be unwelcome or misconstrued. Err on the side of over-caution and think defensively.
- **Reporting & Referrals:** Report all pastoral care visits to coordinating leaders. Limit office meetings with an individual adult to once per week (45-60 minutes) in an office with a door window. Refer the individual to a professional counselor after three visits if intensive care is still required.

3. Indicators of Abuse

Indicators of a Child's Potential Need for Protection

Below are commonly accepted physical and behavioral warning signs associated with various forms of child abuse and neglect. These indicators, in themselves, are not definitive proof and do not always mean a child is being abused, but they warrant attention:

Category	Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
Physical Abuse	Unexplained/excessive bruises in various stages of healing, welts, loop marks, human bite marks, bald spots/missing hair, swollen lips, chipped teeth, unexplained fractures, lacerations or abrasions, pinch marks, linear/parallel marks on cheeks and/or temple area, crescent-shaped bruising caused by pinching, puncture wounds, bruising behind the ears, distended stomach, emaciated.	Self-destructive/mutilation behavior, extreme withdrawal or aggression, fear of physical contact, fear of going home, chronic runaway, wearing weather-inappropriate clothing to hide bruises, lacks impulse control, complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably, regularly shows fatigue or listlessness
Neglect	Unattended medical needs, lack of supervision, consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene, sudden weight change, emaciated appearance.	Listlessness/falling asleep, stealing/hoarding/begging for food, reporting that no caretaker is at home.
Sexual Abuse	Pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding in the genital area; frequent urinary/yeast infections; sexually transmitted diseases; pregnancy (especially 12 years or under); sudden or unexplained weight change.	Withdrawal, chronic depression, age-inappropriate sexual knowledge or behaviors, seductive/promiscuous behavior, poor self-esteem, suicide attempts, sudden school difficulties, habit disorders (sucking, rocking).

Recognizing Adult-Adult Abuse by a Church Leader

Abuse involves the misuse of power and control. It occurs when one person controls another in a way that diminishes and destroys their sense of self, making mutual consent impossible. Church leaders must be held to a high standard, as unaddressed boundary issues can escalate into severe abuse:

- **Verbal & Emotional Abuse:** Abusive anger, outbursts, constant criticism, belittling, name-calling, intimidation, stalking, threats, or blaming. This creates deep doubt, confusion, and stress.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Unwelcome sexual advances, coercion, implied or overt requests or threats for sexual favors, verbal assaults, inappropriate jokes, innuendoes, or physical contact of a sexual nature. This creates a hostile environment and isolates the victim.
- **Trauma Reactions:** Victims may show silent abuse reactions, acting out trauma through severe depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, or withdrawing from physical touch (even simple hugs).

Warning Signs of Leader Boundary Failures

Be alert to these indicators that a leader's boundaries are at risk of failing:

- **Arrangements:** Making special or secret arrangements to be alone with someone; changing normal routines to spend time with them.
- **Secrets:** Confiding professional or highly personal secrets with a counselee, minor, or program participant.
- **Intimacy:** Creating physical or emotional intimacy through whispering, flirting, hovering, or frequent touching.
- **Manipulation & Rationalization:** Using emotional threats or spiritual language to justify a relationship (e.g., 'God brought us together' or 'If no one knows, we aren't hurting anyone').

4. Response & Reporting Procedures

How to Respond to Disclosure of Abuse (Child or Adult)

If a person (child, youth, or adult) discloses abuse to you, handle the disclosure with extreme care and compassion:

- **Private but Visible:** Offer a private conversation in public view (e.g., a quiet corner of a hallway or an office with an open door or door window).
- **Listen & Support:** Listen carefully and respond in a supportive, calm, non-judgmental manner. Do not appear frightened, angry, or disgusted, as this may cause the person to shut down.
- **Avoid Leading Questions:** Do not ask leading questions or try to investigate. Use open prompts like 'Can you tell me more?' or 'Is there anything you need to add?' Do not suggest that they have been abused or try to convince them it is untrue.
- **Assure & Reassure:** Tell the person you believe them, that you care about them, that what happened was not their fault, and that they did the right thing by telling you.
- **Do Not Promise Secrecy:** Never promise to keep the abuse a secret. Explain gently that help is needed so the incident can be reported, investigated, and prevented from happening to anyone else.
- **Minimize Fright:** Do not frighten them with talk of police, court, or medical exams. Simply let them know other caring people will talk to them later. Do not ask to see physical bruises under clothing.

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

South Dakota law requires certain professionals (clergy, teachers, social workers, doctors) as mandated reporters to report suspected abuse or neglect to the state. At Shalom CRC, ALL staff and volunteers are required to report suspected abuse. If you have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, follow this immediate reporting pathway:

Step 1: Internal Notification (Immediate)

Immediately contact the Children's Ministry Director, Youth Director, Director of Church Operations, and/or the Senior Pastor, who will consult with the Safe Church Team co-chairs.

Step 2: Expert Advice (Within 24 Hours)

Call the Child Protection National Hotline (1-800-4CHILD) for helpful advice and guidance before reporting to the state. Review South Dakota's Department of Social Services website (<https://dss.sd.gov>) for specific guidance.

Step 3: Verbal Civil Report (Within 24 Hours)

Call the South Dakota Department of Social Services, Child Protection Services (CPS) at 877-244-0864. Intake specialists are available Mon-Fri, 8 AM to 5 PM. If reporting an emergency situation after hours, on weekends, or during a holiday, contact local law enforcement immediately.

Step 4: Written Documentation & Record-Keeping (Within 72 Hours)

Complete the written Department of Social Services DHS-3200 form ('Report of Suspected or Actual Child Abuse or Neglect'). Forms are kept in the Safe Church Policy binders found in the Fellowship Hall, Nursery, and Basement Kitchen. Provide the completed form to the Children or Youth Director or Senior Pastor, who will store it in a locked confidential file drawer. Access to this folder is restricted to the Pastor, Operations Director, and coordinating Ministry Directors.

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Adult & Vulnerable Adult Abuse

For suspicions, disclosures, or allegations of abuse involving adults, or vulnerable adults (such as Friendship Ministry participants):

- **Vulnerable Adult Abuse Reporting:** If a vulnerable adult (with mental or physical disabilities) is suspected of being abused, use the South Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS) guidelines and online reporting tools (<https://dhs.sd.gov>). If an adult is in immediate danger of harm, call 911 immediately.
- **Adult-Adult Incident Reporting:** If a Council member, volunteer, or staff member misuses their authority or is accused of abuse, report it to the Senior Pastor or Council President immediately. Document the occurrences, dates, and times using the Shalom Adult-Adult Abuse Incident Report Form (Appendix G). The Pastor/DCO will consult with the Safe Church Team co-chairs.
- **Ecclesiastical Support:** Walk with the victim in reporting to civil/legal authorities if appropriate. If severe, a listening circle can be established in the church to restore justice and support reform. Help the individual find trained emotional support.

5. Response by Shalom CRC

Shalom CRC's Response to Allegations

Allegations of abuse against a staff member, volunteer, teacher, or council member are treated with the utmost seriousness, confidentiality, and care:

- **Consultation & Legal:** If a civil report is made, the Pastor and Council Chairperson will determine if legal counsel, the church insurance provider, and/or the CRCNA Director of Abuse Prevention should be contacted.
- **Immediate Suspension:** Any paid staff member suspected of abuse will be suspended with pay (up to 90 days) during the investigation. Any volunteer or leader suspected of abuse will be immediately suspended from all duties and roles pending investigation.
- **Dismissal:** If the volunteer, leader, or staff member confesses or is found guilty, they will be permanently removed/dismissed from their position or office.
- **Public Relations:** If media or community interest arises, a single spokesperson will be designated to make public statements (consulting with the CRCNA Director of Abuse Prevention) to communicate accurately but with limited info to protect confidentiality.
- **Pastoral Care:** Confidential pastoral care, financial assistance (as able), and professional counseling referrals will be offered to victims, perpetrators, and secondary victims (family, friends, and relatives).

Council's Response to Allegations by Adult Victims

An adult victim seeking ecclesiastical restorative justice against a church leader is supported through the Classis Safe Church process:

- **Step 1: Record & Support:** The accuser documents the abuse and obtains an advocate (spouse, friend, or therapist) through the process. The Classis Safe Church Team can assist in finding an advocate.
- **Step 2: Council Contact:** The accuser/advocate contacts the chairperson of the Council of the accused's church. The Council then contacts the chairperson of the Classis Safe Church Team.
- **Step 3: Advisory Panel:** An advisory panel of 5 to 7 members from the Classis Safe Church Team is chosen (excluding the member from the accused's church) under a pledge of confidentiality.
- **Step 4: Testimony & Defense:** The panel meets with the accuser, advocate, and witnesses to hear testimony. The panel then notifies the accused in writing of the charges and invites them to present a defense and witnesses.
- **Step 5: Findings & Recommendations:** The panel determines the gravity and probability of ungodly conduct, misuse of authority, or abuse. It writes a report of findings for the accused's Council and notifies the accuser in writing.

- **Step 6: Council & Classis Action:** If Council finds the allegations probable, written charges are presented. If denied, a formal hearing is conducted. If guilty, disciplinary action and immediate removal are initiated. The accused can appeal the Council's decision to Classis.

Shalom CRC's Response to the Sexual Offender

Registered Sexual Offenders

If a registered or known sexual offender (public record or disclosed during screening) wants to participate in church life, Council may contact legal counsel. If approved to participate, the offender must sign a 'Shalom Covenant of Conduct' agreeing to:

- **Verification:** Verify the history of the offense, conviction, or adjudication.
- **Disclosure:** Consent to disclosing their history to the congregation (via a letter to all church parents so they can decide on precautions).
- **Ministry Restriction:** Refrain from participating in any child, youth, or vulnerable adult ministry or volunteer activities.
- **Supervision:** Consent to constant supervision throughout services, including restroom escorts. Refrain from private conversations with youth (hallways, parking lot, café, etc.).
- **Congregational Notification:** Agree to have a follow-up letter put in all church mailboxes outlining the boundaries and monitoring plan. These restrictions are imposed for a minimum of 3 years with periodic reviews.

Any violation of the Covenant of Conduct or court-imposed orders will result in steps of discipline, including immediate ban from the facility. If an offender fails to disclose their history and it is discovered later, they will be removed immediately and must sign a Covenant of Conduct to remain at Shalom CRC.

Unsubstantiated Sexual Offenders

If an individual has committed an offense but has no public conviction (and does not deny the offense), Council may deny their application to participate or serve if: the offense occurred within the past 10 years; they failed to disclose it; they minimize their actions; or they want to work in a position of trust or authority. After 10 years, they may be considered **ONLY** if: Council is fully aware of details; the applicant has been held accountable by the victim (including a victim interview); the position is not one of trust/authority; and they are restricted to programs with a co-leader aware of their history. Council must consult legal counsel first.

Sexual Offenses by Minors

If Council learns a minor has committed a sexual offense, they must prohibit the minor from volunteering in programs for children/youth, restrict access to younger minors, and supervise all on-site contact, parking lots, and transportation. Minor offenders may be reinstated to church programs only when their risk level is verified as reduced. Supervision rules are enforced to ensure no older minors are left alone with younger minors.

Shalom CRC Safe Church Team Role

Appointed by Council, the Safe Church Team is a vital support structure in the church. Their duties include:

- **Development:** Leading the development, implementation, and regular review of safe church policies.
- **Training:** Providing annual abuse awareness and boundary training for all volunteer teachers and leaders.
- **Consultation:** Providing guidance and oversight for staff and leaders when a civil report (CPS/DHS/police) is needed.
- **Resources:** Providing educational materials and parenting books for the church library and restrooms.
- **Denominational Link:** Distributing annual safe church reminders in worship services and collaborating with the Classis Safe Church Team.

6. Appendix & Companion Forms

The following companion forms are maintained as official appendices to the Shalom CRC Safe Church Policy. These forms must be utilized across all children, youth, and vulnerable adults ministries to ensure consistent documentation and screening:

- **Appendix A: Code of Ethics for Volunteers under 18 years old**
Required for all minor volunteers serving in children and youth programs. Must be signed by the minor and parent/guardian.
- **Appendix B: Shalom CRC Incident Report Form**
Used to document any accident, injury, or medical incident in the nursery, classrooms, or during church programs. Copies given to parents and Ministry Directors.
- **Appendix C: Code of Conduct Policy for Shalom Youth Ministries**
Required for all youth in grades 7-12 and their parents/guardians to outline Christian behavior, respect for property, PDA rules, anti-bullying guidelines, and discipline procedures within Shalom Youth group meetings and events.
- **Appendix D: Request to be an Approved Volunteer Driver**
Mandatory for all volunteer drivers transporting minors. Verifies age (25+), driver's license, background check completion, and auto insurance.
- **Appendix E: Media Outlet Guidelines for Privacy Protection**
Details ok-to-publish vs. do-not-publish online lists for staff, adults, children, and missionaries, alongside photographic guidelines and opt-out procedures.
- **Appendix F: DHS-3200 Report of Suspected or Actual Child Abuse or Neglect**
Official Department of Social Services reporting form. Maintained for church records in a locked, confidential file.
- **Appendix G: Shalom CRC Adult-Adult & Vulnerable Adult Abuse Incident Report Form**
Used to document occurrences, dates, and times of suspected adult or vulnerable adult abuse, including South Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS) notification tracking.

APPENDIX A: CODE OF ETHICS FOR VOLUNTEERS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD SERVING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAMS

I understand that as a child or youth program volunteer, I am a representative of Shalom Christian Reformed Church and the Kingdom of God. I agree to conduct myself in a manner that models for others an active and growing Christian Faith. I understand that the students I serve will look to me for direction and guidance that supports their growing faith in Jesus Christ.

Believing that God is calling me to serve children or youth at Shalom CRC:

1. My first priority in supervising or volunteering with children or youth will be to seek their spiritual, psychological, and social welfare.
2. I will portray a positive role model for minors by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, and maturity.
3. I will respect each child or youth's cultural, religious, and ethnic background.
4. I will answer a child or youth's questions openly and honestly. I will not intentionally harm or betray a child or youth's trust.
5. I will not use alcohol, illegal or illicit drugs, or tobacco products in the presence of minors involved with Shalom CRC programs.
6. I will dress in a manner that is respectful of the ministry and the Kingdom of God. All clothing should be modest, appropriate, and set a positive example as determined by the ministry leaders.
7. I promise not to use profanity in the presence of minors.
8. I will contact the appropriate person in a timely manner if unable to fulfill my assigned/scheduled responsibilities.
9. I will give the parent(s) of the child or youth full information about the program I am supervising or volunteering in.
10. If I wish to speak to a child or youth alone, it will be within the sight and sound of one or more adults.
11. I will work with the children or youth to set guidelines for acceptable behavior within the group. I will expect children or youth to act based on those guidelines. If necessary, I will seek help from parents and others to assist me in responding to the child.
12. I will pray for the child or youth regularly and assure them that I care about them.
13. I will follow the policies and procedures in the congregation's Safe Church Policy. If I have a reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, I will report it to the Children's Ministry Director or Youth Director and Director of Church Operations or Senior Pastor within 24 hours of the incident.

I understand that learning the principles in the Bible and growing more like Jesus is important to my spiritual, emotional, and relational growth as a Christian. I understand that the best way to achieve this growth is through regular attendance of Church and personal Bible study.

I understand that any violation of this code may be grounds for removal as a volunteer with minors and that this policy is subject to change at any time.

Signature of Volunteer

Date

Volunteer or Staff Position

Supervisor's Name

Parent/Guardian Consent (Required for minors under 18 years old)

I understand the commitment that Shalom CRC expects of my son/daughter, and I accept the responsibility of keeping him/her accountable in fulfilling these expectations.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX B: SHALOM CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH INCIDENT REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS: This form must be completed in the case of any accident or injury occurring during nursery or church-sponsored children/youth programs. Fill out all sections in detail. Make a copy of this completed report: give one copy to the parents/guardians, and one copy to the Children's or Youth Director. Retain the original for church files.

Name of Person Making Report: _____

Date of Report: _____

Contact Number: _____

Volunteer Position / Role: _____

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE INCIDENT (Reported or Witnessed)

WHO (Name of injured individual/s): _____

WHAT (Brief summary of injury, accident): _____

WHEN (Day, Date, and Time of Day): _____

WHERE (Specific location): _____

Names of Witnesses (if any): _____

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Describe in detail what happened when the incident occurred, the exact location, other people present, any immediate care or first aid provided, and parent notification details:

3. PARENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT & SIGNATURE

With my signature, I acknowledge that I have been informed of this accident/injury and have received a copy of this report.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY FOR YOUTH MINISTRIES

We are pleased to have you as a participant in our ministry! Whether you are a member of Shalom CRC or a guest, our youth group Code of Conduct Policy is based on the expectation that all youth conduct ourselves in a Christian manner during all activities (including riding in vehicles, at restaurants, on retreats, on service projects, and at all church events). The following Code of Conduct Policy is to be agreed to by each participant. Parents are also to read and verify that they understand these policies of conduct.

Expectations and Guidelines of Conduct

1. **Respect Authority and Property:** Respect, listen to, and always cooperate with the youth leader(s) and all adult leaders or drivers. Respect the facility that we are using for the Ministry/Event. ALL students involved in the act of breaking something will be expected to repair/replace the damaged item(s) at their own expense, with no exceptions.
2. **Transportation Safety:** Wear a seatbelt when riding in vehicles for any church event.
3. **Peer Relationships and Conduct:** Reflect a Christian attitude in all personal relationships between peers during all youth activities. Inappropriate public displays of affection (PDA) such as kissing, cuddling, or any action sexual in nature are NOT permitted during any Shalom CRC Youth Ministry activity or event.
4. **Prohibited Items and Substances:** Refrain from using profanity, exhibiting improper behavior, using alcohol or illegal substances, and possessing drugs and/or weapons. (Note: If you need to take a medication, it must be brought in by a parent/guardian and given to the youth leader with a note of permission to dispense.)
5. **Modesty:** Wear modest, appropriate clothing at all times. Inappropriate words, symbols, or advertisements should not be displayed on clothing.
6. **Supervisory Boundaries:** Will not leave the supervisory presence of the youth ministry staff/volunteer leaders without permission—including leaving the youth group meeting, leaving the church, or leaving the group during off-site trips. Failure to comply can jeopardize your safety, the safety of others, leaders, and the group. This can result in you being sent home from an activity at your parent/guardian's expense.
7. **Mobile Phone Guidelines:** We encourage students to turn in their phones when they arrive at youth group to help minimize distractions and allow them to fully engage in the lesson, discussion, and time with one another. Turning in phones is not required, however, so if you may need to reach your student during youth group, please communicate that with them and have them keep their phone with them that evening.
8. **Texting & Digital Communication Boundaries:** Youth participants agree to communicate respectfully with leaders and peers in all digital formats (texts, group chats, social media).

9. Willing Participation: Students are expected to participate willingly in the planned activities and attend youth group to develop and explore a growing relationship with Christ. There will be times that are fun and crazy, and times that are structured learning environments. This is intentional and will not be disrupted by any student or group of students seeking attention.

Zero Tolerance Policy for Bullying

Respect each person and all property. Bullying will NOT be tolerated under any circumstances. We are committed to a safe and loving environment for ALL students, staff, volunteers, and visitors, free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying. This means any intentional written, digital, cyberbullying, texting, verbal, or physical act that:

- Physically harms a student or damages the student's property; or
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education; or
- Is severe, persistent, or pervasive so that it creates an intimidating or threatening environment; or
- Has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the ministry or event.

Harassment, intimidation, or bullying can take many forms including: slurs, rumors, jokes, innuendos, demeaning comments, cartoons, pranks, gestures, physical attacks, threats, or other written, verbal, or physical actions.

Failure to Comply with the Code of Conduct

STEP ONE: When behavior contrary to the Code of Conduct first occurs, the adult observing the behavior, or to whom the behavior is reported, shall address the person(s) responsible with a clear request that the behavior be stopped, changed, or avoided. The adult must use judgment as to whether or not the individual(s) knowingly behaved in a manner inconsistent with the youth Code of Conduct Policy. The severity of the problem behavior may require that this step be bypassed and the next step be applied.

STEP TWO: If another occurrence of behavior contrary to our statement occurs involving the same person(s) above, especially when it is considered to be occurring in a destructive, attention-getting, or belligerent fashion, then a second warning will be given. The youth leader will bring the individual(s) name(s) to the attention of the Youth Ministry Director in written form. Parent(s) will be notified by phone, email, or mail if deemed appropriate at that time.

Note: Even if the youth(s) agree to change the behavior at this point, they may be given a cooling-off period from youth activities for up to two weeks. The youth leader has the discretion as to whether to proceed in this way or to move to the third step of action immediately.

STEP THREE: Should there be a third problem behavior identified contrary to our Code of Conduct Policy, the parent(s) will be called immediately and asked to come and get their youth. The youth will be suspended from all ministry activities for at least one month. A conference will be scheduled for the volunteer youth leader(s), the Youth Ministry Director, parent(s), and the youth(s) involved to resolve the conflict. The church leadership reserves the right to send home any person(s) who are intentionally oppositional or repeatedly refuse to follow the Code of Conduct Policy mentioned above for any Shalom CRC or youth event.

Contact Us: If there is a question or conflict with the implementation of the Code of Conduct Policy, please contact the Youth Ministry Director.

With my signature, I acknowledge that I have read these policies and agree to carefully abide by and follow all processes outlined above.

Printed Name of Youth Participant:

Signature of Youth Participant:

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian:

Date:

Contact Number for Parents:

APPENDIX D: REQUEST TO BE AN APPROVED VOLUNTEER DRIVER

CRITERIA & REQUIREMENT NOTICE: Drivers transporting minors on behalf of Shalom CRC must be 25 years or older (unless otherwise approved by Council), have passed a background check through Shalom CRC, and have a valid driver's license and proper insurance on the vehicle used to transport participants of Shalom CRC activities.

DRIVER INFORMATION

Full Name: _____

Birth Date: _____

Address: _____

Contact Number: _____

Driver's License Number: _____

State of Issue: _____

Auto Insurance Carrier: _____

Auto Insurance Policy Number: _____

DRIVING ATTESTATION

Is there any reason why you should not be driving a vehicle with passengers?

[] NO [] YES *(If yes, please attach an explanation to this form.)*

By signing below, I certify that the information provided on this form is correct, and I authorize Shalom CRC to verify my driving record and criminal background check status.

Signature of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

REQUIRED: Please attach a copy of your Driver's License and Auto Insurance card to this form.

APPENDIX E: MEDIA OUTLET GUIDELINES FOR PRIVACY PROTECTION

Introduction

As the owner of a public website, www.shalomcrc.org, Shalom Christian Reformed Church must be responsible stewards of the content it publishes online. This responsibility includes being careful about the personal information published on the site. The privacy guidelines below reflect the recommendations of an ad hoc communications committee regarding what is wise, safe and appropriate to include and not include on our church website.

1. Purpose and Background

Shalom CRC operated its website without formal content guidelines for years, until Internet-related risks and privacy concerns became too great to ignore. The guidelines that follow, while not exhaustive, are intended to help protect Shalom CRC members, staff, guests and other associates from problems such as:

- Email spam, which can result from publishing email addresses online.
- Identity theft, which can result from publishing personal information such as dates of birth.
- Personal harassment, including stalking, harassing phone calls, inappropriate advances, etc.
- Threats to the work of missionaries living in sensitive parts of the world.

2. Guidelines for Text

A. STAFF MEMBERS

OK to Publish Online	Do NOT Publish on Public Site
First and last names	Home address
Email address (usually church office email)	Home phone number
Church phone number	Children's names, ages, etc.
	Birth date

B. ADULTS (Members, Regular Attenders, and Guests)

OK to Publish Online	Do NOT Publish on Public Site
First and last names, when appropriate (such as when the adult is a leader/contact person for a group or committee)	Home address
	Email address
	Phone number (home or cell)

Children's names, ages, etc.

Birth date, date of death

** Note: Except with the person's explicit permission, do not publish "Do NOT Publish" items.*

C. CHILDREN AND YOUTH (Members and Guests ages 17 years and younger)

OK to Publish Online	Do NOT Publish on Public Site
First name only, or first name + initial of last name	Phone number (home or cell)
	Home address
	Email address
	Ages or birthdays

D. MISSIONARIES (Opt-In Policy)

Some of the missionaries Shalom CRC supports work in places where mission activity is not welcome, and where being identified as a missionary is potentially risky. These workers should not be listed as missionaries anywhere on the site. For those who do not work in sensitive areas AND who have given their explicit permission to be included on our website, the following guidelines apply:

OK to Publish Online (with missionary's permission)	Do NOT Publish on Public Site
First and last names of adults only	Phone number (home or cell)
Email address - only with the missionary's permission	Home address (in U.S. or elsewhere)
Organizational affiliation	Birthdays
City and country where working	Names, ages, birthdates of minor children
Nature of work	Prayer requests
	Names of colleagues, friends of those being ministered to

3. Guidelines for Photos

General Opt-Out Policy: Shalom CRC's website and social media may include photos of people participating in worship, fellowship, and other church-sponsored activities. Adults who do not want their photo used should notify the Communications Director. Parents who do not want their child's photo used should indicate this on the Activity Participation Agreement. The Youth and Children's Directors will provide those names to the Communications Director, who will

maintain an up-to-date opt-out list. We will gladly remove any existing photo from the website or social media outlets upon request.

Staff: Photos of staff members may be published, along with their names.

Adults (members, regular attendees, guests, neighbors): Names will generally not accompany photos of non-staff adults. No photos should have content that might be embarrassing, objectionable, or hurtful.

Children and Youth (members, guests, neighbors ages 17 and younger): Photos including children should be carefully chosen so that the focus is the group activity, not the individual. Ideally, children should not be individually identifiable in these photos. No names (first or last) may accompany photos of children.

Missionaries: Opt-in Policy: Because of the sensitive nature of some mission activity and the global reach of the Internet, we must have written permission from the missionaries we support before we may publish photos of them or their children, associates, etc. on our website. Names of missionaries' minor children may not accompany family photos.

4. TELEPHONE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (TCPA) COMPLIANCE & TEXT MESSAGING

Shalom CRC is committed to respecting the privacy of our members, attendees, visitors, and youth. In compliance with federal TCPA regulations:

- **Distinction of Messaging Types:**
 - **Broadcast/Administrative Texts:** Any automated, bulk, or group text messages sent via church management software (e.g., Remind, Planning Center, or bulk SMS tools) for event reminders, prayer chains, or church announcements require prior express written/digital consent (opt-in).
 - **Relational/Individual Texts:** Personal, one-on-one texting between leaders, parents, and students for the purpose of relationship-building, coordination, or mentoring does not fall under automated TCPA rules, but must adhere strictly to the Safe Church digital communication boundaries outlined in Section 2 of this policy.
- **Verifiable Opt-In Process:** Shalom CRC will obtain explicit opt-in consent before enrolling any mobile number into an automated texting directory. For minors under 18, opt-in consent to receive administrative texts must be provided by a parent or legal guardian (collected annually via the Youth Activity Participation Agreement).
- **Right to Opt-Out:** Any individual may opt out of automated church text broadcasts at any time by replying "STOP" to any message received.
- **Data Security:** Shalom CRC will never share, rent, sell, or distribute mobile phone lists or contact directories to any third-party organizations.

APPENDIX F: SD DHS-3200 REPORTING INTAKE & INTERNAL RECORD

CRITICAL SAFETY & CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:

This form serves as Shalom CRC's internal record for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. South Dakota law requires a verbal report to Child Protection Services (CPS) within 24 hours of suspicion. Complete this form and hand-deliver the physical copy to the Senior Pastor within 72 hours of the verbal report. Store only in the locked confidential Safe Church file. Do NOT email or leave unattended.

1. REPORTING DIRECTORY & CIVIL AUTHORITIES

Agency / Authority	Contact Channels & Availability
SD Child Protection Services (CPS) Intake	Call 877.244.0864 (Mon-Fri, 8 AM - 5 PM)
Emergency / After-Hours Reporting	Call Local Law Enforcement or 911 immediately
National Child Abuse Hotline	Call or Text 1.800.4CHILD (1.800.424.4243) — 24/7 Support

2. REPORTER & VICTIM INFORMATION

Date of Report:	_____
Reporter Name & Title/Role:	_____
Reporter Phone / Contact:	_____
Child Name (Alleged Victim):	_____
Child's Age / Date of Birth:	_____

3. PARENT & ALLEGED OFFENDER DETAILS

Parent/Guardian Name(s):	_____
Parent Address & Phone:	_____
Name of Alleged Perpetrator:	_____
Relationship to Child / Church Role:	_____

4. DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT, CONCERNS, OR DISCLOSURE

Detail the physical or behavioral indicators observed (such as unexplained bruises, withdrawal, extreme behavior, or specific disclosures). Be objective, factual, and record exact quotes where possible. Do NOT investigate, ask leading questions, or attempt to verify truthfulness.

5. MANDATORY VERBAL REPORT LOG (WITHIN 24 HOURS)

Date & Time of Verbal Call to CPS:	_____ at _____ : _____ AM / PM
Name / ID of CPS Intake Specialist:	_____
Emergency Police Report (if applicable):	Agency: _____ Officer: _____ Badge #: _____
Shalom Internal Notification Log:	Notified: Staff Name: _____ [] Ops Dir [] Sr. Pastor

SD DHS / CPS INTAKE REFERENCE GUIDE

When making your verbal report to South Dakota Child Protection Services (877.244.0864), the Intake Specialist will ask structured questions to determine response priority. Use this guide to prepare your answers based on what you have observed or received. Do NOT delay making the call if you do not have all of this information.

Focus Area	Intake Questions / What to Prepare
Immediate Safety	Is the child in immediate physical danger? Are they afraid to go home? Is the suspected offender currently with or having access to the child?
Specific Harm	What physical signs of injury did you observe? What specific behavioral indicators (withdrawal, fear, sexualized actions) were displayed? What exact words did the child use to disclose the incident?
Context & Environment	When and where did the incident occur? Who else was present? Is there reason to suspect drug/alcohol misuse by caregivers or during church activities?
Access & Care	Who has custody of the child? Are parents aware of the allegation? What is the caregiver's response (protective, defensive, dismissive, or neglectful)?

REPORT SIGNATURES & DATES

Signature of Reporter: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Senior Pastor (Filing Receipt): _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G: ADULT & VULNERABLE ADULT ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This form must be completed immediately upon receiving a disclosure of or suspecting abuse or mistreatment involving any adult or vulnerable adult (including participants in the Friendship Ministry). Hand-deliver the completed form to the Senior Pastor. Do not leave this form unattended or send it via insecure digital channels.

1. Reporter Information

Name of Person Making Report:

Date of Report:

Volunteer Position / Role:

Contact Number:

2. Incident / Concern Details

Individuals Involved (Who):

Names of Witnesses (if any):

When (Day / Date / Time of Day):

Where (Specific Location):

Description of the Incident, Concern, or Disclosed Abuse (What):

(Describe the circumstances, what was witnessed/reported, location, other people present, etc. Be as objective and factual as possible. Do not interpret or speculate.)

3. Reporting & Notification Tracking (If suspicion of adult/vulnerable adult abuse exists)

When was the Senior Pastor notified?

Date: _____ Time: _____ By: _____

When was the SD Department of Human Services (DHS) notified? (Required for Vulnerable Adults)

Date: _____ Time: _____ By: _____
*Note: DHS portal at <https://dhs.sd.gov>

When were the Police / Law Enforcement notified?

Date: _____ Time: _____ By: _____
*Note: Mandatory immediately if individual is in imminent danger

When did the Shalom CRC Safe Church Team receive this report? Date: _____ Time: _____ By: _____

4. Actions Taken & Signatures

Other Action Taken (if any):

Signature of Reporter:

Signature of Senior Pastor / Lead Leader:

Date: _____

Date: _____

Form Status: Active / Filing Location: Locked Safe Church Confidential Drawer