

Modesto CRC

Safe Church Policy

Col 3: 12-14 *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*

Matthew 19:14 *"Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

Introduction

As gracious recipients of God's overwhelming love, we as members of Modesto Christian Reformed Church desire to be a community of worshipers who bring glory to God by working together as a body of Christ to fulfill the great commission through acts of fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, and service.. We believe growth in these areas will best flourish in the context of a safe and secure environment.

This policy is intended to serve as a general framework for creating that safe and secure environment for all those entrusted to our teaching and care. By setting up clear guidelines for the acceptable practices in our ministries, as well as for the screening of staff and volunteers, and for properly reporting and responding to such incidents, we hope to safeguard our church family from the kinds of hurtful abuse that severely damage our witness. We pray that this policy will allow us to remain a wholesome context of God's loving care for His people.

Standards of Conduct

Permitted Conduct

It is natural, appropriate, and desirable for Christians to express and share their love and affection for each other as brothers & sisters in Christ. This sharing enhances the healthy emotional and spiritual well-being of individuals, and it fosters the natural growth of a loving and caring Christian community at MCRC. This sharing of love is especially important to children for their normal, healthy, and happy growth and development. The appropriate expressing and sharing of one's Christian love to a child or another adult member shall not be prohibited or restricted by this policy.

Physical displays of affection must be carried out in the presence of others and may include brief hugs, an arm around the shoulder, a pat on the back, or a light touch on the arm.

Steps of discipline that are considered appropriate are the following:

- **Inform** all children of behavioral expectations at each activity.
- **Redirect** and refocus by using another activity or changing seating.
- **Refocus** with specific expectations for acceptable behavior. .
- **Use a time-out strategy.** The child may be placed in a time-out chair or area. This is an age appropriate activity for younger children and the length of the time-out in minutes should not exceed their chronological age, such as 3 minutes for a three-year-old.
- **Relocate** the child to another space when another leader is available to supervise.
- **Solicit the help of the behavior manager whenever a situation feels beyond a manageable level.** Document steps taken and then inform parents of incident and intervention. We will provide a restorative meeting with the child and parents before the child returns to the next meeting.

Staff/Volunteer Guidelines

1. Never be alone with a child. Always surround yourself with a group. Try to have adults near and always have other children in the room with you. All children's ministry classes and activities will be conducted with at least two volunteers, and at least one of whom is an adult.

2. Volunteers/staff should not physically restrain a child in their care. Children's ministry leaders should ask for assistance if a child behaves in a manner that seems to require restraint. If the leader determines that restraint is needed, the child's parent will be notified immediately and the child may be removed from the "crew" until the parent arrives.

3. Children should not leave their assigned activity area except for illness, to use the bathroom or other emergent reasons. A volunteer will escort him/her to the next activity unless they can be seen at all times.

4. Children should have an escort to the bathroom.

- Children in Pre-K and above should not need restroom assistance. A volunteer will escort him/her to the restroom and will wait outside the door. Children with special needs will be assisted as pre-arranged with the parent (guardian).

5. Keep in mind some simple "good touch/bad touch" rules:

- Never hug a child "front on." Instead, turn the child to the side and hug around the shoulders.
- High-fives, knuckles, or cool handshakes are good alternatives.

6. At least two adults will remain until all children have been claimed.

Children must be signed in and delivered to your station or gathering area by their adult AND signed out when reclaimed by the same or other designated adult.

Prohibited Conduct:

Abuse - To achieve the goal of preventing any forms of abuse or the potential of false allegations of abuse, staff members, program leaders, and anyone providing care for children at MCRC-whether paid or volunteer will not engage in any kind of abusive behavior. While it is difficult to define precisely all of the forms of behavior that could be abuse prohibited by this policy, such conduct would include:

1. Any of the following conduct with program participants:

- abuse of any kind, including verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse;
- sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and nontouching
- hitting, kicking, slapping, or shoving;
- selling, giving, or furnishing any child with any tobacco substance, alcohol, or controlled drug;
- swearing or use of threatening, harsh, hurtful, obscene, foul, or sexually explicit language;
- discipline that humiliates, or refusing to speak to a child as a form of discipline;
- demonstrating any romantic or sexual interest in a child;
- removing any clothing from another person, except when appropriate under the circumstances;
- wearing anything but appropriate attire in the presence of others, especially children;
- kissing any child on the lips or in an otherwise intimate manner;
- extended or inappropriate hugging or embracing;
- assisting any child in the restroom, except as indicated in the appendices;
- denying anyone access to a room, vehicle, or other place that a child occupies, unless such access would result in an immediate danger to the child.
- one on one contact between an adult and child must conform to the conditions specified in the appendices.

2. Violence and Threats of Violence - No staff member, leader, church member, or visitor shall engage in verbal threats toward persons or property; the use of vulgar or profane language toward others disparaging or derogatory comments or slurs; or verbal intimidation.

- MCRC strictly prohibits any form of violence including, but not limited to hitting, pushing, kicking, holding, impeding, or blocking the movement of another person.

- MCRC strictly prohibits the use or possession of any objects carried for the purpose of injury or intimidation including, but not limited to firearms (except law enforcement officers), switchblade knives, dangerous chemicals, fireworks, explosives, chains, and other weapons.

3. Harassment - Modesto Christian Reformed Church is committed to providing staff, employees, and others an environment that is free of sexual and other improper or unlawful harassment. Therefore, the church prohibits harassment on the basis of gender, race, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law. MCRC will not tolerate sexual or other unlawful harassment in its workplace, whether the harasser is a minister, employee, church member, visitor, or a member of the public.

Definition of Harassment:

Harassment is a form of misconduct that is demeaning to another person and that undermines the integrity of the ministry environment. It is difficult to define precisely all of the forms of behavior that could constitute sexual or other harassment prohibited by this policy. Such conduct would include:

- ethnic slurs, epithets, threats, derogatory comments
- unwelcome or offensive types of jokes
- stereotyping of individuals
- teasing, and other conduct that denigrates or shows hostility.

Sexual harassment would include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. **EXAMPLES** of prohibited conduct would include:

- Sexually graphic or descriptive comments about an individual's body or physical appearance;
- Unwelcome flirting or suggestive compliments
- Use of degrading gender-related terms or jokes about sex;
- Referring to another person in a sexual manner;
- Prolonged staring, sexually suggestive whistling, and making sexually graphic comments or gestures;
- Unwelcome touching;

These examples are not meant to be complete, and conduct not described here might constitute harassment prohibited by this policy.

Applying this Policy to Conduct Outside of MCRC Ministries

The provisions of this policy apply to conduct occurring during the operations and ministries of the church. Friends and members of MCRC who have concerns about abusive behavior in homes or other environments may find it helpful to obtain counseling, advice, or assistance from the pastor, elders, church staff, or fellow church members. MCRC's response to such concerns will depend on the church's ministry, mandated reporting laws, and counseling resources, rather than on the provisions of this policy.

Anyone with concerns about behaviors that may constitute unlawful child abuse is encouraged to report any suspicions to law enforcement or Child Protective Agency (CPA). Modesto Christian Reformed Church follows mandated reporting laws and reserves its right to report suspected child abuse cases under state law-California Penal Code Section 11164 & 11174.3 et al whether or not such abuse occurs within church ministries.

Screening Policy

Screening is a necessary and valuable tool.

- It communicates the church's serious intention about preventing abuse
- It helps ensure that staff and volunteers are persons of integrity.

All applicants for staff and volunteer leadership positions should undergo a screening process that **may include** a written application, interview, background and reference checks.

Training

All volunteer and paid staff serving in ministry to children or youth should attend training sessions that **may include** a presentation of *MCRC* policies on preventing abuse, discussion about recognizing signs of abuse and inappropriate behavior, and positive discipline strategies.

1. **Two-Adult Rule** Two-deep leadership is desirable and our goal. This would prevent those circumstances when a child is alone with one leader. It is our goal to have two adult workers in attendance at all times when serving children.
2. **Teenage workers** must be at least 12 years of age, will be screened using the above screening policy, must be under the supervision of an adult, and must never be left alone with children (unless escorting them to & from supervised activities).

Recordkeeping - *All applications, references, reports, and releases will be kept in a locked file. Only the Pastor, one Council member, one Safe Church Team member, and one Law Enforcement Personnel should have access to these files.*