

## Sunnyside Child Safety Policy

Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children and vulnerable adults. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Sadly, abuse is prevalent in the world. It is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. Even more sadly, we acknowledge that churches are at increased risk of abuse. We believe that church should be a refuge for all, not an area of risk for children.

As presented at the *Safe Church* workshop in fall of 2024,

There are four types of abuse:

1. *Neglect*: Failure of caregiver to provide for basic needs when that failure causes significant harm or risk of significant harm to a child.
  1. This includes failure to provide food, supervision, shelter, clothing, medical and mental health care and/or education.
  2. Poverty itself is not neglect.
2. *Physical abuse*: any act or omission by a caregiver that causes or creates substantial risk of bodily injury. Bodily injury is any physical pain, illness or impairment of child's physical condition.
  1. This can include bites, injurious spanking, burns, cuts, bruises or welts, strangulation or shaken baby syndrome.
  2. Corporal punishment is legal in Indiana but should not leave marks or cause injury.
3. *Emotional abuse*: Behavior that seriously interferes with child's cognitive, emotional, psychological or social development.
4. *Sexual abuse*: Any sexual act with child who cannot or does not give consent.
  1. Children under 16, unconscious or impaired person or person with limited mental capacity cannot give consent.
  2. This can include sexual touching, child pornography or sextortion, activities that give vicarious sexual gratification or exposing child to harmful sexual material.

We acknowledge that we must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. The purpose of this document is to ensure that our gathering spaces are safe, to foster positive intergenerational relationships, and to standardize response processes in the unfortunate event that abuse or injury occurs. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday School, children and youth activities, mentoring relationships, and nursery care.

**In order that Sunnyside may nourish and protect the children with whom God has blessed us, we commit to:**

**1. Offer trainings**

- a. Annually, training and materials will be offered to all adults in the congregation and especially to teachers and leaders of children. Training may be specific to cognitive development of children, teaching strategies, healthy family relationships, or topics such as child abuse, child safety, or protective/risk factors for neglect or abuse.
- b. Annually, all children will participate in 1-2 Sunday School sessions taught from the Circles of Grace curriculum. This is a curriculum previously published by Dove's Nest that addresses topics for children and youth ages 6-18 such as personal space and safe touch (for elementary-aged children), safe use of technology (for junior high-aged youth), or dating violence (for teenagers.)

**2. Make our church facility safe for children**

- a. In rooms where children or youth ministry is conducted, such as Sunday School rooms and pastors' offices, all doors should have windows. Windowless doors will be left open.
- b. When one adult is alone with one child, doors will be left open.
- c. Fully stocked first-aid kits will be visible and available throughout the building.
- d. Cleaning supplies will be kept out of the reach of children.
- e. Outlets will be covered in spaces where preschool-aged children and younger meet (i.e. the nursery and preschool children's Sunday School classrooms.)
- f. When only children and youth are meeting for programs in the church building, only the main entrance doors will be unlocked. Other entrances will be kept locked to ensure that adult leaders know who is coming and going in the building.

**3. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children**

- a. Follow a two-adult rule at overnight, church-sponsored activities involving children, and when activities are being conducted in homes or other private locations. Rare exceptions would be allowed after conversations with parents and pastor (ex. convention hotel stay.)
- b. A parent or responsible caregiver must always be notified ahead of time and give consent for their child to be transported away from church facilities.
- c. A youth (eighteen years or younger) may care for children alone when a supervising adult is available on the property.
- d. No physical discipline may be used. When a child misbehaves, an adult may use redirection, verbal means, and/or positive reinforcement to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child's parents will be notified.

- e. Volunteers will express affirmative affection in appropriate ways, such as side hugs, high fives, or handshakes.
- f. So that children are not at risk on the church property, supervision will be provided 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled children's activities, such as Wednesday night programming.
- g. In nursery care, parents leaving their children will communicate their preferences regarding diaper changes and restroom visits.

#### **4. Social media/internet safety**

- a. No pictures that include the faces of children will be put on social media or in any public venue.
- b. Children will not be given unsupervised access to the internet on any church owned devices.
  - i. Use of any personal device by children will be discouraged during any church sponsored activity.
  - ii. If personal devices are used, leaders will be encouraged to monitor the use frequently.

#### **5. Attend to personnel issues**

- a. Annually, each teacher and leader of children will be presented a copy of this document, asked to acknowledge that they have read it, and commit to abide by the policy.
- b. A background check will be conducted on final candidates for all pastoral positions. These background checks must be conducted in all the states the individual has lived in the previous twenty years.

#### **6. Deal appropriately with offenders and allegations of abuse.**

- a. When a child discloses abuse or child abuse is alleged, it is the responsibility of the individual who receives or observes the alleged abuse/neglect to report the information directly to the Indiana Department of Child Services' (DCS) via the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (**1-800-800-5556**)
- b. If there is imminent danger to the child (ex. the child is being picked up/going home with the person under suspicion), **911** should be called.
- c. An advocate from Sunnyside will be available to empower and support the individual in the reporting of the abuse/neglect. Advocates who may be contacted are: Congregation Representative (Kelly Neff, 2025), Formation Department Chair (Mary Graber, 2025), and Elder Chair (Sandra Yoder, 2025). A record of a call to DCS will be made for internal purposes. **No reports, however, should be delayed waiting to hear back from the advocates if the child is in danger.**

- d. It is not the job of a reporter to investigate or decide if the situation/allegation is serious or true. **It is the responsibility of the reporter to report ANY suspicion.**
- e. **Reports can be made anonymously.**
- f. When a report is made, the DCS personnel will take the information and be responsible for doing any investigation. Even if the suspicion is not strong enough to trigger a full investigation, the report will be kept in case more reports are made in the future.
- g. The advocates will discern whether to notify additional households whose child(ren) may have come in contact with the alleged offender. Additionally, the alleged offender will be removed immediately from all responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation.
- h. When child abuse allegations have been made, pastoral care will be offered by the pastors to all involved. Appropriate referrals to outside counselors/professionals will be made by Sunnyside's mandatory reporters.
- i. Any individual who is known to have been convicted of a child sexual offense must not be allowed any unsupervised contact with children and may not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal).
- j. All parents of children and youth must be notified if there is a registered sex offender attending church at the time this information becomes known. New families to the church must be notified in the context of a pastoral visit within two months of beginning to attend church.

This policy will be implemented, facilitated, and reviewed by the Formation Department.

As Jesus loved the children, so may it be here at Sunnyside.

#### Resources

[Link](#) to Indiana DCS hotline process.