



## **Safe Sanctuary Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy of New Creation Fellowship Church Training via Zoom on Nov 19, 2023 updated Dec 2023**

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, youth and vulnerable adults. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children. We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families.

The document has been created with guidance from Dove's Nest. "Dove's Nest began as a grassroots movement among concerned Mennonites at the 2009 Mennonite Church USA Convention. This group consisted of volunteers that included pastors, social workers, therapists, and other professionals concerned about the issue of child and youth protection in Mennonite churches. In early 2012, the Dove's Nest Board made the decision to incorporate as an independent 501(c)(3) organization. This decision enabled Dove's Nest to pursue grants and solicit charitable donations. While remaining committed to its core Mennonite constituency, the Board also made a strategic decision to begin the process of expanding beyond Mennonite Church USA and to offer resources and services to other denominations." -from [www.dovesnest.net](http://www.dovesnest.net)

We may never know what has been experienced before arrival or during attendance at New Creation Fellowship Church. We're not always privy to past or current hurts and trauma. We may not see the scars. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, as a church we can work to create an atmosphere that communicates "sanctuary" for everyone. We can work to create an environment that feels safe, welcoming, accepting, and secure. A place where the many who have experienced trauma can find respite and solely focus on their relationship with God.

### **Covenant**

With the hope of providing a safe, secure and healthy environment and in line with the biblical values of healing, hospitality and equality, New Creation Fellowship Church (NCFC) commits to the following guidelines concerning safe and healthy ministry. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday School, youth group activities, mentoring and childcare during worship and Congregational Meetings. Youth and young adults working with children will be at least five years older than the oldest child in the group. All youth and young adults working with children/youth/vulnerable adults are to be regular, known attendees for at least 6 months.

We commit to:

**1. Training:** NCFC offers annual training to the congregation.

- This training is required for all church pastors, teachers, youth group sponsors, mentors and caregivers before they can begin working with children/youth/vulnerable adults. For those who

do not attend the annual training, the Congregational Care Team will provide alternative training opportunities.

- The Congregational Care Team will inform and supervise:
  - Sunday School teachers/helpers
  - Congregational Meeting childcare providers
  - Mentors
  - Youth Group sponsors
- The Administrative Team will inform and supervise:
  - Worship childcare providers
- A list of those who have completed annual Safe Sanctuary training is kept on file electronically to be accessed by leadership teams.

**2. Background checks:** All church pastors, teachers, youth group sponsors, mentors and caregivers must pass a Background Check through the State of Kansas before they can begin working with children/youth/vulnerable adults.

- Information for background checks will be submitted by Kristin Neufeld Epp, NCFC preschool director. A list of submitted background checks is kept on file electronically to be accessed by leadership teams.
- In addition to all employees of NCFC, background checks are required for:
  - Youth group sponsors or volunteers
  - Mentors
  - Childcare providers
  - Sunday School teachers and helpers

**3. Registered offenders:** In the event that a registered or known offender begins attending NCFC, the church community will be notified at the time this information becomes known. New families to the church will be notified of this information within 2 months of attending.

If anyone in the congregation recognizes an offender in church, they are encouraged to notify the pastor or a member of a leadership team immediately. The offender will be asked to leave by the pastor or leadership team members. If the congregation decides through consensus that an offender should remain or join in fellowship at NCFC, we will follow the guidelines as prescribed in the "Providing Community for Known Sexual Offenders" document. The pastor and leadership teams will regularly check the sexual offender registry.

**4. Facility:** NCFC is committed to the following practices:

- Indoor activities onsite will occur in rooms that have windows or openings for monitoring; in the event that this is not possible (e.g., a young child needs help in the bathroom), the door to the room will remain open.
- Activities outdoors or offsite (e.g. mentoring or youth group) will be in public and in open view.

- Areas where children/youth/vulnerable adults or adults with children/youth/vulnerable adults could easily be alone together unsupervised will be locked or restricted.
- A fully stocked first-aid kit is available in the church building.
- Guardians are asked to share any medical/dietary needs with care providers and those leading activities. Alternatives and ingredient lists are available for communion and shared meals.

**5. Supervision:** NCFC is committed to providing safe and adequate supervision to children/youth/vulnerable adults. It is the understanding that we function as a community to ensure the safety of our children/youth/vulnerable adults. Emergency Plans (fire, injury, etc) are posted in the kitchen.

- Minimum supervisory standards will include the “two adult rule.” The two adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults from different households supervising; one adult may be a “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms. Worship and Congregational Meeting childcare will have three unrelated caregivers, a minimum of one adult (teens permitted once 13 years of age) in addition to the “roamer.” Children who are older than childcare age but are interested in helping can request to be a Helper. Specific training will be done by childcare staff and leadership teams.
- Transportation of children/youth/vulnerable adults must meet the same standards.
- No children/youth/vulnerable adults will be left intentionally unsupervised.
- Supervision during unstructured events (e.g., potlucks), and during transition times before and after Sunday School, is the responsibility of the individual child/youth/vulnerable adult’s guardian.
- Children in childcare during Worship will be brought back to the sanctuary so that the children are with their own guardians by the end of the worship service.
- Following youth group events, it is possible that a youth’s transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. Our current youth group practice is that all sponsors stay until all youth are picked up. Communication with guardians is maintained.
- Caregivers who assist children in the bathroom are asked to complete one of the forms posted in the basement bathroom which in part states that “We know that some will require more bathroom help than others. At NCFC, there is no shaming or disappointment expressed, as we recognize the normalcy of them. This note is to share with you how your child was assisted with their ‘bathroom work’ today. Caregivers do not enter the bathroom unless a child has requested help and the caregiver will alert another caregiver when entering the bathroom to help a child. The door remains open when any caregiver is assisting a child.” Tips on helping a young child in the restroom are posted in all church restrooms.

## **6. Media use**

- No photos or videos will be taken for private distribution of children under the age of 18 without explicit permission from the child and their guardian.

- NCFC has a website and Facebook page that includes photos of church life. Names (other than church staff) will not be used. We will not post videos or photos of those who have denied permission to do so. Individuals and caregivers can notify the pastor or a leadership team member anytime they want to deny such permission or have specific photos/videos removed.
- Adults will limit one-on-one electronic communications with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Guardians will be copied on emails, kept apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations and communication will be traceable.

**7. Appropriate touch and healthy boundaries:** All (adults/children/youth/vulnerable adults) are expected to behave in respectful and nurturing ways, honoring privacy.

- Appropriate touch should be a response to a need for comforting, encouragement, or affection and not be based on the adult's emotional need.
- Adults should not force affection on any children/youth/vulnerable adults. Physical contact should always be with the child/youth/vulnerable adult's consent.
- Physical touch should generally be limited to contact with the child/youth/vulnerable adult's hand, shoulder or upper back (high-five, hand shake, pat on back, etc).
- A child/youth/vulnerable adults verbal or nonverbal "no" or "stop" should always be respected. If a child/youth/vulnerable adult pulls away, even with another adult present, respect the child/youth/vulnerable adult's wishes at all times.
- Physical touch should be appropriate for the age of the child/youth/vulnerable adult. For example, while it is often appropriate to hold a toddler on your lap, it is inappropriate for a teenager to sit on the lap of an adult. For older youth, opt for a fist bump or other forms of affection that do not involve excessive body contact for extended periods of time.
- Guidelines for child-to-child/youth-to-youth contact will be communicated to the congregation.
  - We will expect respectful behavior at all times.
  - Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.
  - There will be no inappropriate wrestling or roughhousing.
  - Only one child or youth may use the bathroom at a time.

**8. Discipline:** While children and youth are made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all church classes and events, physical discipline (e.g., hitting, slapping) will not ever be used.

- Gentle reminders are necessary when dealing with child/youth/vulnerable adults.
- If redirection does not work, the child or youth will be taken to their parent.
- A third caregiver can be utilized or the "roamer" can be accessed by cell phone to help so that safe sanctuary guidelines can be maintained.

**9. Responding to allegations of abuse:** Any incident or suspicion of abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, or another type) can be reported to the pastor, a member of the Leadership or Congregation Relations Team or directly to legal authorities.

- The state hotline phone number (1-800-922-5330) is posted in the church kitchen, bathrooms and the office. A concerned person can also report suspicion, the incident or suspension directly to legal authorities by calling 911.
- We will immediately attend to the victim and their family's safety and needs through church leadership, keeping the victim's needs at the center of any process.
- Teachers or church staff who have been accused of abuse will be suspended from their duties immediately. Suspensions are precautionary and are not designed to be punitive.
- We will inform Western District Conference.
- Within 48 hours, all parents whose children or youth may have encountered the alleged offender will be notified. They will know that allegations have been made and reported. Leadership will consider the likelihood that more than one individual has been harmed.
- During the investigation, communication between the accuser and the accused will be managed by legal authorities.
- Within the congregation, if one congregant is accusing another of misconduct, the accused will not attend worship or any church activities, including small group, for the duration of the investigation.
- The Leadership and Congregation Relations Team, along with representatives from the other leadership teams, will meet to decide further action once the investigation is complete knowing the accused may need help in finding another place to worship. Even if the abuse is not confirmed, we will attend to the dynamics that prompted the allegations and carefully consider the degree to which individuals involved need to remain separated.
- After the investigation, we will follow all legal implications for the offender. The entire church will be informed, as secrecy not only makes children unsafe, it also does not help offenders.
- We recognize that there may need to be adjustments to this plan in the case of an accused youth or if the victim and accused are in the same family.

**10. Pastoral Misconduct:** In the event of a complaint or allegation against the NCFC pastor,

- representatives of the three leadership teams shall jointly handle a complaint against the pastor with counsel from the leadership of Western District Conference and an outside agency; for example, Into Account.
- the pastor's duties shall be suspended for the duration of any investigation.
- the complainant's confidentiality will be protected as much as possible.
- the congregation will be kept informed by the Leadership and Congregation Relations Teams about the accusation and the investigation.

- the pastor will not use their power to influence the investigation.
- NCFC, in letters of reference, will note removal of a pastor due to abuse, misconduct and/or allegations.

**11. Mentoring:** New Creation Fellowship Church has in place “Safe Sanctuary” policies designed to reduce the risk of both accusations and abuse of those involved in ministry with children and youth. One of those procedures is that two (non-related) adults be present at every event where there is youth or children’s ministry. This becomes difficult in the mentor/mentee relationship. Mentors are encouraged to keep the following in mind.

- Mentors, just like youth pastors and youth sponsors need to undergo training on appropriate language, boundaries and touch issues. Those who are educated on these issues understand the risk factors and will make better decisions about what is appropriate.
- Relationships require the building of trust. There will be times when one-on-one time is needed to build relationships for spiritual guidance and developmental growth. It is realized that youth also need opportunities to learn how to set their own boundaries with the support and communication of congregation and family. This requires different things at different ages and emotional developmental levels.
- Mentor/Mentee Group Gatherings--Mentor pairs are invited to a time at the church or some other public locations where they will engage together in group activities. During this time they could break into pairs and discuss, pray, etc. while they are gathered at the public location. This also works well if only 2 mentor/mentee pairs do an activity together.
- Keep parents in the loop when you are with your mentee. Make sure the parents are informed about the activity, the pickup and drop off times, where you will be going and how you will get there. If you are running late on the way home-you or the youth should call parents. Don’t go by the phrase “better to ask forgiveness than permission” with regard to informing parents.
- One of the best ways to ensure safety while developing a relationship is to be in public places. Especially early on when your relationship is developing, avoid places where you are isolated. Planning activities that take place in public throughout the span of your relationship is highly encouraged.. Examples include coffee shops, restaurants, concerts, museums, school or community events.
- Overnights - Should follow the guidelines in which 2 non-related adults are present.. Examples of overnight situations might include a mentor/mentee retreat, mentor/mentees participating in a church related activity/conference. As always, have a clear plan for parents as to where, when, what, who.
- If you have your mentee to your home, another adult should also be in the house, ie.a spouse, or friend. Do not sequester yourself in a room and close the door.

\*Phone calls, texts, emails, and other messages should include parents/guardians. As the relationship develops, the family, mentor, and mentee can develop other communication guidelines.

- The mentor, mentee and family will be able to formulate an alternative safety plan for specific situations that come up during the course of the mentor/mentee relationship. Alternative safety plans should be written.

Remember, we are not trying to sabotage or shut down any effective ministry in the church. We are trying to keep all relationships healthy, protect you from accusations, and protect the youth from possible misconduct and abuse. (Info. from a 2004 Marlene Bogarde email, revised by JW 07/2015)

### **123. Other Commitments**

As a church we maintain commitment to being intentional in caring for our physical environment, language used and transparency with policies and procedures. In addition to policies outlined, we practice the following:

- Child activity area in the sanctuary
- Functioning elevator
- Separate nursery with rocking chair, changing table, dimmed lights available
- Developmentally appropriate books, toys and equipment for birth and up
- Separate seats (rather than all seating linked together are available), allowing every individual to maintain a sense of personal safety by being more in control of personal space
- Private bathrooms with locking doors are available
- A weekly bulletin is available ahead of time via email
- Smoke free within 50 feet of the building
- Photos and phone numbers of church leaders are posted
- A phone is available for private use at all times in the church office
- Guns are not permitted on church property
- Annual fire and child care licensing inspections are conducted by the State of Kansas
- Alliance with Breastfeeding Coalition of Kansas (information posted at entrance)
- Member of Supportive Communities Network
- Large print versions available
- Recorded worship services available for asynchronous viewing on YouTube
- Zoom congregational sharing during Sunday morning worship
- Security camera and doorbell are available at the North door

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The Safe Sanctuary guidelines are reviewed annually by the Congregational Care Team and updated with the input of the congregation as needed. It will be posted on the church website, posted in the building and distributed to guardians of children, youth and vulnerable adults.