

GRACE Training Packet

Church of God in Michigan

2/1/25

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The Importance of Self Care

At the outset, it is good to acknowledge that this training will weigh upon you, even if you are not personally a survivor of abuse. Please consider for a few moments how you might care for yourself well in the next hours and after the training. Pay attention to what you need and take a break if needed (even if we are not on a break). No one will be put on the spot in terms of your personal story of abuse (and please use discretion when sharing to avoid identifying or graphic details for the sake of all). Effective strategies for self care are often personal, but some of these may help you stay calm and focus if you feel anxious:

- Utilize the box breathing technique:
 - Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four
 - Hold your breath for a count of four
 - Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of four
 - Hold your exhalation for a count of four
 - Repeat
- Hold a hot or cold beverage in your hands
- Take a sip of a beverage; swish it around in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing
- Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and your back flat against the back of the chair; take a minute and focus on feeling the weight of your feet on the floor and your back against the back of your chair
- Take a break from sitting; stand and stretch some while you listen
- Take a break, even if we are not on a break

If this training brings up things that you want to talk about with someone you trust in your support system, please consider reaching out to them - a friend, family member, or other person. You might also reach out to a professional mental health services provider. In the US, you might use the SAMHSA Helpline (1-800-662-HELP), which provides 24-hour free and confidential treatment referral and information. If you have been impacted by abuse or other common forms of trauma, it is important when seeking out professional help to find someone who has focused their practice helping individuals with that type of experience.

Scenario 1: *A man starts given lots of attention to a middle school girl after church each Sunday. He finds a place to interact with her in the hallway and eventually gets her cell phone number. He is observed interacting with this girl in a fixated way including physical contact that is inappropriate. Multiple adults see this happening at different times and are concerned, however, none of them serve with minors in the church and thus do not have any training on child protection, and they have not been briefed on the church policy. The church has a policy for structured ministry with students, but nothing for unstructured times such as this. This man begins texting with the girl and eventually texts sexually explicit communication and content.*

This child abuse was preventable. What could church leaders have done? What would need to be in place for effective prevention to occur?

Scenario 2: *A pastor gets the parents' permission to spend extra time with a vulnerable middle school boy who is struggling with depression. The parents are concerned about their son and they trust the pastor. The pastor begins to meet regularly with the boy in public places and sometimes he takes the boy to his apartment. At the apartment, the pastor shares pornographic material with the boy and then slowly introduces the boy to sexual contact. The policy of the church does not forbid all one-on-one mentoring, but it does forbid one-on-one mentoring in an isolated and intimate setting like an apartment or home with no further accountability. The parents did not know that policy stated this. The church did not inform the students, the parents, or the congregation at large regarding this boundary of the policy.*

This child abuse was preventable. What could church leaders have done? What would need to be in place for effective prevention to occur?

What common dynamics of abuse do you notice in this situation?

Interactive Exercise: Where are the gaps in policy?

1. *A teen watches kids alone at a church small group that meets weekly at the home of a church member. There are three children under four in the families in the group and the teen abuses all of them before any of them disclose. The church policy has no standards for this setting even though it is an official ministry of the church. Where are the gaps? [policy for all settings; safe boundaries for high risk settings; policies that apply to minors as well as adults]*

2. *A teacher tells a class of 4 and 5 year olds that “We never hit, we use our words.” A 5 year old says, “My daddy hits me at night.” The teacher says, “Does your daddy spank you?” The boy says yes. The teacher says, “Well parents have to spank you to help you learn what is right.” This boy is physically abused by his father on a regular basis. The church policy does not define physical abuse or address it in any way or distinguish it from spanking that is not illegal under the law. The physical abuse continues. Where are the gaps? [No policy on physical abuse; reporting policy on physical abuse; training on abuse disclosures in children]*
3. *A pastor walks around a corner and sees Amy. She is in tears and the pastor hears verbal abuse coming through her phone from her husband Johnny. Amy is embarrassed and ends the call quickly. The pastor does not know what to do and makes a comment that “we all have days where we lose control. God will help you bear up in those difficult days.” The pastor does not ask if she feels safe or if he can connect her to resources on IPV. Unbeknownst to the pastor, Johnny not only verbally abuses his wife, but also sexually and physically abuses their two daughters. This church has a policy against sexual abuse of children, but this church has no training or policy or resources that would help the pastoral staff understand and respond to the reality of intimate partner violence. Where are the gaps?*
4. *An offender uses the pretense of “assisting kids in the restroom” as a cover to molest kids in the church bathroom when they leave the service to go to the restroom on their own. This offender is not on staff at the church and does not serve as a volunteer. Where are the gaps?*
5. *A minor discloses to her pastor that her mother engages in a pattern of cruel behaviors, threats, shaming, and belittling. There is no church policy that addresses emotional abuse and the pastor is a mandated reporter in his state yet has had no training on emotional abuse or reporting. The pastor prays for her, but takes no other action. The girl dies by suicide about a year later. Where are the gaps?*
6. *A mom sees a teenager interacting with three 6 and 7 year olds in a concerning way with lots of physically intimate touch. She also observes them taking the kids into the woods behind the church. This church has training for all staff and volunteers who work with kids, but this mom does not fall into those categories. Where are the gaps?*

Common Gaps in “Risk-Management” Focused Policies

1. All forms of child abuse, not just sexual abuse
2. Expectations for conduct at any time, not just structured ministry
3. Behavior off property, not just on church property
4. Basic conduct expectations for all in the faith community, not just staff and volunteers (including minors!)
5. Adult abuse as well as child abuse
6. Training for the whole community, not just staff and official volunteers
7. Ethical obligation to report not just a legal mandate

Essential Policy Sections

1. Introduction that connects your faith to prevention and response and defines broad applicability
2. Key Definitions of Abuse
3. Administrative Policy - Safeguarding Team, Screening Practices, Training Plan
4. Key Boundaries for the Whole Community
5. Response to Boundary Violations
6. Reporting Protocols
7. Further Response Protocols
8. Trauma-Informed Care
9. Known Offender Policy

Getting Started on Effective Policy

1. Develop a Team
2. Consult with Experts
3. Work on Accessibility
4. Remember Incremental Progress is Essential
5. Identify 1-2 Main Goals

What does our policy say about our faith and our values?

Abuse Policy Summary Example

As a community, _____ Church is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. These commitments are a reflection of God's priority to be a place of safety for the abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), when someone holding power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Abuse is a common reality in this world. Sadly, many within the church have acted in predatory ways toward vulnerable people and bad actors will often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. All of us have a responsibility to uphold this policy as an expression of living out our Christian faith.

Every person in our community is expected to be a safe person and treat others with respect at all times. This means respect in physical touch, words, and other ways. The most important boundaries for everyone in our community to respect are:

- 1. All touch should be welcomed by the other person.*
- 2. Touch with children and vulnerable adults should be observable to others.*
- 3. No one should be alone with a child or vulnerable adult when they are not the parent or guardian (including giving rides).*
- 4. Outside of the kid's ministry procedure, only a parent or guardian should assist a child or vulnerable adult in the restroom.*
- 5. Use words that show respect, never words that threaten, belittle, shame, or sexualize (including sharing sexual stories, jokes, or sexual content).*

Our policy outlines more specific expectations in these and other areas. All of us are responsible to promote healthy and safe interactions. Unfortunately, bad actors often seek to test boundaries and push past safe and appropriate behavior. The boundaries of our policy will help us deter unhealthy behavior and interrupt this type of tactic that seeks to test boundaries.

When there is a concern about a person, interaction, or situation, please reach out to our safeguarding team. The simple goal of our safeguarding team is to help us live out our policy and be the community that God calls us to be.

Our policy is that all adults report any disclosure or reasonable suspicion of child abuse/neglect and vulnerable adult abuse/neglect to both appropriate Child/Adult Protective Services (CPS/APS) and local law enforcement [insert specific local numbers here]. We are not trained to investigate. Our role is to report potential abuse against vulnerable people. Our safeguarding team can support you if a report needs to be made. After a report, any person should then reach out to our safeguarding team (excluding any person or family member involved in the allegation). Our safeguarding team will work with the Parish Council to address any critical response areas including safety, accountability/boundaries, care, and coordination with other resources and organizations.

Abuse often impacts survivors in significant and ongoing ways. Jesus calls our community to do all we can to prevent abuse and care well for those impacted by it. By establishing clear expectations, our goal as a community is that we have freedom to care for each other well, within healthy and safe boundaries. This takes all of us working together and being conscientious about how we treat one another as Jesus commanded. Please reach out to our safeguarding team or Parish Council if you have any questions or concerns. [Insert names and contact information of the Safeguarding team here.] Our policy has resources for anyone who has experienced intimate partner violence, sexual assault, or child abuse and the full policy is available here: [_____].

Scenario 3: *Mark is a good pastor. He does not abuse his power. Pastor Mark graduated seminary with honors. He is pursuing a PhD. He is beloved in his church for his sense of humor, his kindness, and willingness to help. He gives skillful sermons that challenge and encourage his flock. He is average height, but his personality and presence can fill up a room. He is not afraid to speak about his own humanity and share about his own faith struggles. Many in the church view him as an extension of their family.*

What types of power does Mark hold? What forms of power do you see here?

Reflection 1: All of us hold some form of power, though some hold much more power than others. Set aside some time to reflect on the power you hold:

- What types of power do you hold?
- Is it more formal, informal, or both?
- What does it look like when you use your power for others?
- What could it look like for you to use your power in a more self-centered way?
- What are some ways you are accountable for your use of power? (e.g. self-awareness, relationships with others, institutional, etc.)
- Upon reflection, are there any ways that you might strengthen these or add other avenues for accountability?

Scenario 4: *A registered sex offender meets with a pastor because he wants to attend the church. He shares, "Pastor, I know I made a mistake. I was at a party at my boss's house and this teenager was there, but she looked like she was 25. I had taken the wrong dose of my medication and I was kind of out of it. She started giving me a massage and it just kept going from there. We didn't have intercourse. At the time my wife had completely withdrawn from me and I was in a lonely place. I am just so glad I know Jesus has forgiven me."*

What distortions do you see?

What might responsible pastoral care look like given such distortions?

Scenario 5: *You are a leader in a local church. Susan (23F), a staff person who works with college students, discloses that Tim (41M), the Young Adults Pastor and her supervisor, touched her sexually and she froze. She says she is beginning to understand how Tim groomed her over time. At the same time, she feels tremendous amounts of shame and guilt, like it is all her fault. Susan, with the help of another staff person, comes to you to disclose this. They show you texts where Tim has communicated sexually with her.*

What are some things to say in this initial conversation? What are some things to not say?

As a safety team, what responsible actions might you consider in these essential response areas in the next few weeks:

1. What actions might you consider in this situation to impact safety?
2. What actions and issues might you consider related to boundaries and accountability?
3. What are some essential aspects of care for Susan in the next few weeks?
4. What resources or outside organizations might it makes sense to utilize?

GRACE Safeguarding Initiative Cohort Process Summary

The goal of the GRACE Safeguarding Initiative is to support parishes in implementing safeguarding best practices and furthering a strong culture of protection for the vulnerable. A Safeguarding Initiative Cohort is 3-6 Parishes who agree to go through the Safeguarding Initiative together. This allows the Cohort to do some elements of the Safeguarding Initiative together and save costs, while drawing support and insight from working on these issues in a Cohort. Some elements are still done as an individual parish. Fees are dependent on the size of the church. With a few questions, GRACE can put together a formal proposal with costs and further details.

First Steps

- GRACE Meets with Cohort Church Liaisons to Share Key Documents and Clarify Process
- GRACE: Sends Books to Each Cohort Church
- Each Cohort Church Forms Policy Team
- GRACE: Sends Each Cohort Church Written Policy Review
- Each Cohort Church: Leaders Read Mini Books (Ministry Staff, Officers, and Policy Team)

Major Milestone: Policy Review and Development

- GRACE and All Cohort Church Policy Teams: First Policy Team Meeting led by GRACE (typically on Zoom)
- Each Cohort Church: Policy Team Meets (likely 4-5 meetings at least) to Produce a Revised Policy with GRACE resources and feedback.
- GRACE Supports Each Policy Team as Needed
- GRACE Reviews Policy Revisions and Each Cohort Church Makes Further Revisions
- Each Cohort Church Leadership Approve Revised Policy
- Cohort Church Policy Team Finalizes Plans for Implementation

Major Milestone: GRACE Leadership Training

This is a four hour interactive training for ministry staff, church officers, and the policy team. This is typically conducted jointly with all Cohort of Churches. It will be recorded so any person can view it after if they cannot attend on the day.

Major Milestone: Building Safety Consultation

This is an interactive safety consultation specific to your ministry space, and is conducted individually for each Cohort Church.

Major Milestone: GRACE Safeguarding Training for the Congregation

This is a four hour interactive training for volunteers and all adults in the church. The simple goal is to give every adult practical education and skills to contribute to both prevention and response in the church. This is recommended for each church, but some churches in a close geographical area may host training together if that is both practical and desired.

Major Milestone: Kid/Youth Safety Talks

This meeting is typically done online, usually once the policy work is finished. GRACE will meet together with the Liaisons and other key church leaders to review GRACE materials and approaches to safety talks for elementary age kids and middle/high school students. The safety talks will be implemented by each Cohort Church in some form over the next year.

Final Milestone: GRACE Sends Letter of Completion to Each Cohort Church