

Safe Church Policies and Procedures for the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church



Set forth by the members of the Safe Church Committee on January 22, 2009
Wellesley Hills Congregational Church Safe Church Policies and Procedures

Introduction to Safe Church

It is our mission to provide a safe and positive environment for the members of the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church. As people of faith all church members have an obligation to respect the dignity of every human being. Where the young members of our church are involved, who may be particularly vulnerable, we expect the adults of the church community to consider the health and well being of these children and youth at all times. It is with that idea that we have set forth these policies and procedures.

Children and youth, as Jesus has reminded us time and time again, should be included and provided for within every community of faith. We take this lesson very seriously and consider it the responsibility of the Hills Church members, employees, and adult volunteers to exercise good judgment when working with the children and youth. Every effort will be made to ensure that a secure environment will be provided for all who participate in Church life so that they may be able to explore their relationship with God and develop their faith.

The Safe Church Policy reflects this doctrine of faith, responsibility, and judgment as it applies to all our parishioners, both child and adult, Church employees, adult volunteers and Ministers as well as visitors in our Church. This is a policy that translates these doctrines into functional practices to protect the people of our community as well as our physical building and grounds.

The policies and procedures that follow apply to all activities which take place within the building and property of WHCC as well as to programs and events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church which take place elsewhere. These policies and procedures apply to all members, friends, volunteers, and/or employees of this church, and are put forth for the Hills Church to follow so as to assure appropriate care for the children and youth of the Church.

Formation of WHCC Safe Church Committee

Committee Purpose:

The WHCC Safe Church Committee will be responsible for ensuring that all Church members, Staff, volunteers, and outside organizations utilizing the Church facility are instructed to follow the practices and guidelines of the WHCC Safe Church Policy.

Committee Composition and Membership Terms:

The WHCC Safe Church Committee shall have 5 members including:

- The Chairperson who will serve as Safe Church Advocate.
- The Senior Minister
- The Moderator
- The Senior Deacon
- One member-at-large recommended by the Nominating Committee and approved at the annual meeting.

There shall be two members at-large from the congregation. The first committee shall consist of one member who shall be appointed for two years and one for four years. All subsequent members at-large shall be appointed for four years. The one appointed for two years shall act as the first Chairperson. All subsequent Chairpersons shall be the one with a four-year appointment who has already served two years. If for some reason

this succession is not possible the Church Council shall appoint the appropriate members at-large from the congregation. An at-large member can serve a total of two terms, but they cannot be held consecutively.

At the first meeting, the Committee shall choose a Recording Secretary who will keep accurate and complete minutes of meetings submitted for review and approval by the Committee. This can be any member of the committee.

Frequency of Meetings:

The Safe Church Committee shall meet at least once every 6 months and on other occasions deemed necessary by the Safe Church Advocate.

Incident Report Triage Subcommittee:

The Moderator and Chairperson of the Safe Church Committee shall serve as the Incident Report Triage Subcommittee (hereinafter "Subcommittee"). Upon receipt of an Incident Report, the Subcommittee shall review the matter reported to determine whether there is a reasonable basis to believe that the allegations set forth, if proven, constitute an immediate and serious threat to an individual, group, or the WHCC congregation as a whole. When and if the Subcommittee determines that the allegations, if proven constitute an immediate and serious threat, the Chairperson shall schedule a Safe Church Committee Meeting within a reasonable period of time to review the Incident Report.

Safe Church Committee Functions:

- Manage the WHCC Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks. The Committee shall confirm that a CORI check has been completed for any individual, who has the potential for unaccountable unsupervised time with a child or youth, prior to the individual's commencing service as WHCC employee, volunteer or occupant/user of the WHCC building and grounds. At least once every six months, the Committee shall review the CORI log maintained by the Church Administrator to confirm that the log is accurate and complete.
- Review each Incident Report submitted and determine necessary and appropriate follow-up. Follow-up may include, but not be limited to: i) consulting parties with knowledge of the incident reported; ii) offering any individual who is the subject of an Incident Report an opportunity to respond, in writing, to any allegations; iii) consulting individuals and/or groups with relevant expertise; and iv) ameliorating any known threat or condition to prevent recurrence.
- The Committee shall provide a Closure Report with a summary of the required follow-up, combined with action taken or recommended actions, when the review is complete.
- The WHCC Key Policy will be reviewed at least once every 6 months for compliance, with follow-up on any reported technical difficulties with or violations of said policy.
- Periodically audit WHCC church school, youth fellowship and adult service trip practices concerning medical form completion, chaperone and driver practices to confirm compliance with the WHCC Safe Church policy.
- Provide an annual orientation of the WHCC Safe Church policy for WHCC Committee chairpersons and other interested parties.
- Review and confirm that any individual or group utilizing the WHCC building or grounds has received

and reviewed the WHCC Safe Church Policy and signed a Statement of Compliance prior to using the building or grounds.

Record Maintenance:

Safe Church Committee records shall include, but are not limited to:

- CORI check application forms and associated documents;
- Completed medical forms;
- Completed driver forms;
- Incident Reports, associated follow-up records and Closure Reports;
- Minutes of the Committee and Subcommittee;
- Written confirmation of receipt of the WHCC Safe Church Policy by building and grounds users.

Safe Church Committee records shall be kept in a locked file in a locked office within the church or an approved off site location. Access to these records will be limited to the Committee except as the Committee may provide.

Safe Church Guidelines

Building Access:

During the hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, the Church facility will be locked except for the west and east entrances, which will remain unlocked allowing access to the building. After 5:00 pm, these doors will be locked except for at the start of planned meetings, which will be on the Church calendar in advance.

The building will be open on Saturdays only as specific events are planned that require either east or west doorway to be unlocked. Activities will need to be planned through the Church Administrator to allow for access to the building.

On Sundays, the entire Church facility will be open to allow access before, during, and after the Church services. This is the only time of the week that the south and north entrances to the Sanctuary will be open. The Church will be locked after Community Hour has been completed except in the case of prearranged activities requiring the Church to be open.

The Church can be open whenever necessary, but will be locked when the Church is not in use. The Sexton has the responsibility for ensuring the Church is locked after normal operating hours.

The Church Administrator will post a list of nightly committee/group use on her office door. As each group leaves the church, the committee chair/group leader must update the board of their departure so that the last remaining chair/leader can verify all entrances are locked when they leave.

At the Leader's Retreat following the Annual Meeting, the Church Administrator will communicate the building use procedures to incoming Committee Chairs, as knowledge of the key policy is an essential part of the transition process. Any outside groups that utilize the Church, should also have the building use/key policy reviewed at this time to reinforce the Church's policies on an annual basis.

Key Control Policy:

Key control is an important aspect of our Safe Church Program. It is essential that the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church regulate the issuance, accounting, control and return of all keys/entry cards used to access the church.

Key Distribution:

Anyone who requires possession of a key to the Church is required to:

1. Complete a Key Application/Receipt Form
2. Complete a Statement of Compliance Form
3. Have documented reason for possession of a key. Certain church members by virtue of their positions may be authorized to hold keys. This may include: staff members, officers of the church, committee or ministry chairpersons, and youth group leaders. Those beyond this scope need approval of the Safe Church Advocate.
4. Abide by all policies and procedures regarding building use and the WHCC Safe Church Policies.
5. Understand that by virtue of holding a key to the Church, they are a steward of the Church and all its concurrent liabilities.
6. Each individual who is issued a key/entry card to the Church must first complete a Key Holder Acknowledgement
7. Be responsible for the security of the key
8. Prohibit use of key by an unauthorized individual.
9. Prohibit duplication of a key
10. Control access to the Church when using it after normal operating hours
11. Check that all doors to the church are locked if they are the last key holder in the building for that day. Refer to the building use board at the church Administrator's door to monitor who remains in the building. The last group must ensure that all entrances are locked before they leave.
12. Return the key when it is no longer needed or its return is requested.

Failure to comply with any of the provisions set forth in this document may result in the loss of the privilege to be a key holder. The church administrator will manage key distribution, Key Application/Receipt Forms, and maintain records of key holder names, including issue date and return on keys.

Screening of Volunteers and Staff:

All paid full and part time staff, all volunteers, and all adults who utilize WHCC facilities must consent to and comply with any CORI check conducted by the Church Administrator. All volunteers must also complete a Volunteer Disclosure Form.

Church School Safety and Procedures

Definitions:

Children - those participating in church school activities from infancy through grade 5.

Youth - those who participate in activities from grade 6 through grade 12, including Church School, Confirmation, Junior Fellowship Youth Group, and Senior Fellowship Group.

Assistant teachers – Assistant teachers in Church School must be a minimum of 14 years of age and have the 5-year difference in age over the students for which they are assisting.

The Two Adult Rule for Church School:

All children in the Church School shall be under the care and supervision of two (2) adults.

Sign-in and Sign-out:

Crib through Preschool students will not be released to anyone other than the child's parents/guardian without presentation of the safe-child ID number that teachers hand out when the child is signed into class or the crib room. Release of grades K through 8 church school students will occur at the end of the worship service, and not before. Children in grades K through 3 will only be released to their parent or guardian authorized to receive them.

Restroom Supervision:

The Church School Superintendent should be contacted and accompany the child to the restroom and remain outside while the child is using the toilet, assisting only as needed.

At least 2 adults should remain in the classroom while 1 adult brings a child or children to the restroom.

Diapering procedures will be posted in the appropriate classrooms.

Discipline:

The purpose of discipline with children and youth is to maintain order in a manner consistent with the teaching of Christian responsibility, respect, and cooperation.

Positive reinforcement is the most appropriate form of discipline. Teachers, advisors, aides, and others helping in the classroom are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate positive and reasonable expectations of appropriate behavior, offer choices, use time-outs or redirect the child with alternative choices; encourage children to verbalize their feelings.

If a child is repeatedly displaying inappropriate behavior, the teacher will contact the Church School Superintendent for assistance.

No spanking or other corporal punishment of any kind shall be used.

Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insult, profanity, or shouting.

Injury/Accident Report:

These forms are found in each classroom and should be filled out anytime a child is hurt, falls, or becomes ill. Parents should be notified as soon as possible of any injury and any first aid administered. There is a separate form for reporting neglect or sexual abuse, which may be obtained by contacting a member of the clergy, the Moderator, or the Church Administrator.

First aid supplies are available to each classroom and the exact location is posted in each classroom. A procedure for identifying children with allergies and protecting children from exposure to foods, chemicals, or other materials to which they are allergic will be posted in each classroom. Hand washing is the first line of defense against infectious disease. Always wash hands before handling food the children will eat. It is equally important to wash after diapering and using the toilet, and after handling or cleaning blood, mucus, or vomit.

Emergency Procedures:

Fire safety, emergency evacuation plans and meeting place are posted in each classroom. A Fire Drill will be conducted periodically. If there is a medical emergency, teachers should contact parents if they have been issued a beeper, contact the Church School Superintendent to find parents in church and call 911 if appropriate.

CPR Certification:

A list of people, including cell phone numbers, with CPR training will be posted in each classroom and throughout the Church.

Youth Group Safety and Procedures

Youth Supervision (grades 6 -12):

There should be two adults for the first five youths and a ratio of one adult for every seven additional youths at all youth programs or activities. If these ratios are unable to be met, the youth activity may be cancelled at the discretion of the Youth Minister in an effort to adhere to the Safety Policy and substantiate the safety of the youth present.

Adult advisors should generally be at least **five years** older than the youth, and have been part of the church community, subject to the discretion of the Youth Committee.

The adult advisors must report all infractions of the youth rules to the pastor or the adult leading the group.

The adult advisors and staff are to observe prohibitions on smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use while participating in any youth group function.

Procedures for Youth Participants Grades 6 through 12:

All youth are expected to act in a respectful manner toward all others participating in a youth group function.

Sexual activity, smoking, possession of drugs or alcohol, violent behavior, harassment, and bullying are strictly prohibited during any youth group meeting.

Youths attending a youth meeting may not leave early without the express consent of the youth's parent or guardian, which consent must be conveyed to one of the adult leaders.

Firearms or weapons of any kind are prohibited in the church building and at all church activities regardless of location.

Procedures for Youth Trips Grades 6 through 12:

Youth may not participate on youth trips unless they have turned in a signed Field Trip-Overnight-Special Activity Consent Form, a medical information sheet (kept on file for the year with the church), and a Church-Sponsored Trip Rule Form. (See Field Trip-Overnight-Special Activity Consent Form, Medical Release Form and Church-Sponsored Trip Rule Form.)

All youth are expected to act in a respectful manner toward all others participating in a youth trip.

Sexual activity, smoking, possession of drugs or alcohol, violent behavior, harassment, and bullying are strictly

prohibited during any youth trip.

If Advisors suspect a youth of possessing cigarettes, drugs, alcohol or a weapon they will ask for permission to search the youth's belongings. If permission is denied, parents will be called and the youth will be sent home.

Parents must inform the adult leader of any medications their child is taking including dosage and timing of the medication, and turn those medications in to the adult leader in their original container. Special circumstances need to be discussed with the Minister in charge.

Under no circumstances are girls or boys to enter the bedroom or bathroom areas of the opposite sex.

Under no circumstances are youth allowed to wander away from the group.

Youth attending a youth trip may not leave early without the express consent of the youth's parent or guardian, which consent must be conveyed to one of the adult leaders.

Youth are expected to adhere to the rules established by the adult leaders including but not limited to lights out and wake up times, use of electronic devices, and boundaries.

Transportation Rules:

All drivers and passengers of private vehicles being used to transport persons on church activities will wear an individual seat belt (no multiple belting) at all times during operation of the vehicle.

Prior to using a private vehicle to transport persons on church activities, the driver will complete and provide to the adult church staff in charge of the activity (or his or her designee) a Hills Church Driver Information Form providing:

1. Name
2. Address
3. Telephone number
4. Driver's license number
5. Insurance company insuring the vehicle
6. Name and address of vehicle owner if not the driver
7. Vehicle description
8. Vehicle license plate number
9. Current inspection sticker.

Any driver who has had any at-fault accidents, repeated moving traffic violations, or license suspension within the last three years is ineligible to transport persons on church activities. Any driver who has been charged with reckless driving or driving while intoxicated or under the influence may be ineligible.

The operator of a vehicle that will transport persons on church activities shall not use alcohol or drugs that may impair his or her ability to operate the vehicle.

The operator of any vehicle being used to transport any other person not related to the driver on church activities must be a duly licensed person at least 21 years of age, except as otherwise allowed at the discretion of the parent of the youth involved as well as the adult church staff member.

Senior Fellowship members are prohibited from driving passengers without the express written permission of the

passenger's parents during any Church-sponsored activity.

Under no circumstances will a 15-18-person van be leased or used to transport persons on church activities, as these sized vans are subject to rolling over.

The driver of the Church-owned van must meet all the above requirements as well. A list of pre-approved van drivers will be established by the Youth Minister, and maintained by the Church Administrator.

A vehicle leased for transportation of persons on church activities will only be operated by the person listed as the operator or the additional driver on the vehicle lease contract.

Vehicles will be leased for transportation of persons on church activities where the one-way destination distance exceeds 50 miles, except as otherwise determined at the discretion of adult church staff.

Buses shall be chartered only from companies fully insured and certified to operate in all states between the church and the destination of the planned trip. The WHCC person planning the trip shall request the charter company to show on the printed charter order that the coach operator will be required to show his or her:

1. Valid Commercial Driver's License
2. Medical Certificate (also known as the "DOT" card.)
3. Driver's Log.

Reputable charter companies dispatch operators who are qualified. However, only the operator can show qualification at any given time. Telling the charter company that the operator will be required to show the documents above will serve as a useful reminder. No responsible operator will refuse.

There are two additional recommendations:

1. Trips will be planned to avoid travel between 11:00 pm and 6:00 am the next day.
2. Charter bus trips will not carry a second driver on board to avoid being tempted to drive through the night.

Youth Counseling

Parental permission is not required for an individual event of Youth and Child counseling. If clergy or staff needs to be alone in a closed room with a Youth or Child for ongoing counseling purposes, parents must give permission. However, in both cases, another staff member should be present in the building at the same time, and be informed of the session. Counseling sessions should be held in a room with an observation window in the door, or if there is no window, with the door ajar.

Generally speaking, adult advisors and staff should not be alone individually with a Youth or Child at any time. However, some Youth or Children may seek or benefit from private counseling with an adult. In such an event, the following steps must be taken:

1. If the meeting occurs at the church, it must take place in a room with an observation window or if there is no window, with the door ajar. Another adult in the church should know of the meeting in advance.

2. If the meeting occurs outside the church, it must take place in an easily observable public place, and another adult in the church should know of the meeting in advance.
3. If a need for a one-to-one meeting arises on a trip away from the church, the adult advisor must inform another adult advisor beforehand where they are going to converse, and how long the conversation is likely to last. The meeting must occur in a place visible to others (i.e., outside, within view of another adult leader; inside, at one end of a large room or in a room with an observation window, or in a room with the door ajar).
4. If clergy or staff needs to be alone in a closed room with a Youth or Child participant for ongoing counseling purposes, parents must give permission. Another staff member should be present in the building at the same time and be informed of the session. Counseling sessions should be held in a room with an observation window in the door, or if there is no window, with the door ajar.
5. The advisors and staff must adhere at all times to the reporting requirements and confidentiality policies of the church.

Regarding Suspected Child Abuse

Confidentiality:

All the actions and documentation described below must be held in strictest confidence and as such, as few people as possible are informed. It is the responsibility of all concerned to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

Reporting and Response Policy:

Allegations of child abuse should be promptly reported to the Safe Church Advocate and the Department of Social Services (DSS). Members of the church community, including volunteers working in youth ministry, are morally obligated to report reasonable suspicions of child abuse. Procedures used in the handling of complaints or incidents will be documented, and documents will be maintained in a secure location determined by the Safe Church Advocate. When necessary, at the direction of the WHCC legal representative, the WHCC will cooperate with the investigation of allegations of abuse.

Definitions:

Mandated Reporter: a person who by virtue of their profession or position is required by law to report all reasonable suspicions of child abuse. As of 5/3/2002, the law applies to three categories of church personnel:

1. Clergy (including licensed or commissioned ministers);
2. Anyone performing duties on behalf of the church in the role of a pastor (including possibly deacons who serve communion, lay ministers, etc.); and
3. A select group of church employees (not volunteers), such as those who supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel children on a regular basis.
4. Mandated reporters at WHCC are, the Senior Minister, the Associate Ministers, the Director of Music, and the Safe Church Advocate.

Incident Report: a written report that contains all the information necessary to complete a Mandated Report. The Incident Report must be submitted, within 24 hours of making an oral report to the Safe Church Advocate, by anyone with reasonable cause to suspect child abuse.

Mandated report: a written report that must be submitted to the Department of Social Services within 48 hours of making an oral report of abuse.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

Ensure the child's safety:

1. Call an ambulance if the injury is severe.
2. Make a reasonable attempt to inform the Safe Church Advocate who will inform the parent(s). If the Safe Church Advocate is not available, contact a Minister who will inform the parents.

Oral reports:

The Safe Church Advocate should be informed immediately, either by the person initially reporting the incident, or by their designee, such as the Pastor. The Safe Church Advocate will make an oral report to DSS by means of a phone call if there is reason to believe that child abuse has occurred.

Incident Report:

Submit an Incident Report within 24 hours of the oral report:

- The Safe Church Advocate will assist in the completion of the Incident Report.
- An Incident Report must be submitted even if it is determined that a mandated report is not necessary.
- Incident Reports are required for all unusual occurrences.

Mandated Report:

Submit a Mandated Report within 48 hours of the oral report:

- No one is PROHIBITED from making a report directly to the DSS, and may do so if they wish. An immediate report to the Safe Church Advocate is still required.
- However, in order to avoid duplicate reports and ensure that proper procedures are followed, it is recommended that official reporters, such as the Safe Church Advocate, Senior Minister, and all Associate Ministers, be designated within the church. The person originally reporting the incident will not be identified on the Mandated Report.
- After reviewing the Incident Report, it may be determined by the Safe Church Committee that there is not reasonable cause to contact DSS and file a Mandated Report. This determination must be documented in writing and filed with the Incident Report. If the original reporter disagrees, that person may contact DSS directly; they will be assisted as needed in completing the Mandated Report and will be identified as the reporter.

If an incident of child abuse is revealed during a counseling session then the incident must be reported by the counselor to the Safe Church Advocate. Confidentiality will be maintained (except for the necessary parties) with the discretion of the Safe Church Advocate, however, because of the vulnerability of children, their right to our protection supersedes a counselee's right to confidentiality.

Follow-up, Investigation, Documentation:

1. The Safe Church Advocate will inform the accused of the complaint against him or her once the child's safety is ensured.
2. There will be a meeting of a quorum (3 or more) of the Safe Church Committee with the accused to discuss the accusation. One party present will make and sign a record of the meeting, including date and time, location of the meeting, the parties present, and the disposition of the Youth or Child.
3. The accused will immediately be removed from all contact with Youth or Children. Paid employees will be suspended with pay or have their ministry restricted to exclude contact with children. Both volunteers and paid staff should be given the recommendation to obtain their own lawyer.
4. The Safe Church Advocate will inform the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) (if they were not the ones

- accused) of the concern, whether or not a report is filed with DSS.
5. The response following a report of alleged child abuse, including contact with the church's attorney, will be coordinated by the Safe Church Advocate. If there is an allegation against pastoral staff, the Senior Deacon, will contact the Area Minister and the Pastor/Parish Relations Committee. The church will seek the counsel of the Association Committee on Church and Ministry regarding action to be taken.
 6. The Moderator and the Senior Minister will determine the extent to which information will be shared with the congregation. The input of the Area Minister may be sought and, if pastoral staff is involved, the Association Committee on the Ministry may be consulted in making this decision.
 7. All necessary parties will cooperate with the investigations made by DSS and the police.
 8. If necessary, the Safe Church Committee will appoint a liaison to be the designated contact with the media.
 9. All information obtained during the investigation, all activities related to the issue being addressed, and all findings are to be carefully documented and signed, including dates, times and locations of all activities and meetings; the names of the parties present; any decisions or conclusions made; and any further action to be taken. This documentation is to be retained in a secure location determined by the Safe Church Advocate.

The above process is limited to allegations where the accused is WHCC staff, volunteer, or member of the congregation. Where the accused is a volunteer or staff member of an outside organization using church facilities and the alleged abuse may have occurred in the context of such use, the Safe Church Advocate will advise the outside organization and the accused of the complaint once the child's safety is assured. There will be a meeting of a quorum (3 or more) of the Safe Church Committee with representatives of the outside organization to discuss the accusation and the appropriate process. The accused will be immediately removed from all contact with youth and children at church facilities. The Safe Church Committee shall determine the process to be followed, guided by the above process for allegations against church staff, volunteers, and congregants.

Where the accused is neither a member of the WHCC community nor a leader for an outside organization using WHCC facilities, the Safe Church Committee shall determine the process to be followed, guided by the above process for allegations against church staff, volunteers, and members.

Continuing the ministry of the Church:

1. Pastoral support will be offered to all parties involved, including those who have made the complaint, the accused, the families of both, and the congregation. Pastoral staff and the Deaconate will make decisions about how this support will be given.
2. If the allegations involve pastoral staff, the ministry of the church will need to be maintained while the issue is being addressed. The Deaconate will make decisions regarding how this will be accomplished with assistance from the Massachusetts UCC Area Minister or Association Committee on Church and Ministry.

*Changes or Amendments: Any changes or amendments to this policy may be made through the Safe Church Committee and approved by the Church Council.

