



SAFE CHURCH
POLICIES AND GUIDELINES
(CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY)

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INTRODUCTION

This document is to be read by all ministry workers and applicants of Children and Youth Ministry.

Crosslands Church's mission is: "To help people experience the life with God they've been missing." Our commitment to caring for children is something we take very seriously. The policies and guidelines we follow are designed to create a safe and loving environment where children and youth can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. We are dedicated to protecting children and youth and have no intention of causing harm or forming inappropriate connections. This document will outline preventative measures that we have put in place.

Children and youth are particularly at risk when it comes to the misuse of power, authority, and position. It's our duty to safeguard children and youth in this church from any form of physical, emotional, or sexual harm. Additionally, we must work to minimize the chances of our ministry workers facing false accusations of abusive behaviour. We declare zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect committed by **any** ministry worker.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this policy is to create a solid framework that helps cultivate a safe and secure environment for those who attend Crosslands Church. It provides guidelines for the screening of staff and volunteers working with children and youth aiming to prevent harmful actions and behaviours, and outlines the proper procedures for reporting and responding to incidents. We believe that by following these guidelines, we can do our best to protect our church community from abuse and liability.

STATEMENT OF SCOPE

The policies in this document will apply to all events or activities hosted by Crosslands Church that include children and/or youth, even if they take place at sites other than Crosslands Church. This includes all ministry workers who engage with these individuals.

Definitions

For the purposes of this document:

- A child is defined as a person from birth to age 10 or 11 (Grade 5).
- A baby is defined as a child too young to walk.
- A toddler is defined as a child who can walk, up to 3 years of age.
- A preschooler is defined as a child 3 to 6 years of age (JK and SK).
- A youth is defined as a person from age 11 (Grade 6) to the end of the age of 17 (Grade 12).
- A ministry worker is defined as anyone, volunteer or paid, who is working with children and/or youth.
- A Director/Pastor is defined as an individual church staff member who oversees a specific ministry.

ABUSE

Crosslands Church firmly believes that all children and youth should be protected from any form of abuse—whether physical, sexual, emotional, or spiritual—and that they deserve safe and healthy environments to grow, learn, and play. It is the responsibility of every ministry worker to

ensure that they receive the necessary care and protection when there are concerns about abuse.

Definitions

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies provides the following definitions for different types of abuse:

Child abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect. It also addresses a pattern of abuse and risks of harm.

Physical abuse is any deliberate physical force or action, by a parent or caregiver, which results, or could result, in injury to a child. It can include, but is not limited to, bruising, cuts, punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. Using belts, sticks or other objects to punish a child can cause serious harm and is also considered abuse.

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity. Emotional abuse includes constantly criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child. It may also include exposure to domestic violence.

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used for the sexual gratification of an adult or an older child. The child may cooperate out of fear or because they want to please the adult. Sexual abuse does not need to include physical contact between the perpetrator and the child. It may include activities such as sexual intercourse, exposing a child's genitals, obscene phone calls, text messages, or digital interaction, fondling for sexual purposes, watching a child undress for sexual pleasure, encouraging/forcing a child to look at or perform in adult pictures or videos, and child sex trafficking.

Neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to provide basic needs such as adequate food, sleep, safety, education, clothing or medical treatment. It also includes leaving a child alone or failing to provide adequate supervision. If the caregiver is unable to provide the child with basic needs due to financial inability, it is not considered neglect, unless relief has been offered and refused.

Warning Signs

A single sign from the list below doesn't definitively point to abuse or neglect, but it can signal that there might be an issue. However, if you notice multiple signs, it could mean the child is in danger of abuse or neglect. The *Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies* provides the following signs for different types of abuse:

Physical Abuse

- Child wears long sleeves/long pants even in warm weather
- Excessive crying
- Child seems anxious when other children cry
- Avoidance of physical contact with others
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns
- Behaviour extremes—aggressiveness or withdrawal

- Poor self-concept
- Whispered speech
- Loss of appetite for no apparent reason, or excessive appetite
- Child is wary of adults

- Re-enactment of abuse using dolls, drawings or friends
- Clinging
- Delinquent behaviour
- Abrupt decline in school performance

Emotional Abuse

- Sudden change in self-confidence
- Headaches or stomach aches with no medical cause
- Destructive behaviour
- Abnormal fears, increased nightmares
- Failure to gain weight (especially in infants)
- Desperately affectionate behaviour
- Speech disorders (stuttering, stammering)
- Habit disorders (biting, rocking, head-banging)
- Argumentative or consistent temper tantrums
- Bullying tactics
- Being easily frustrated
- Behaviour extremes—disobedient or overly compliant

Sexual Abuse

- Frequent sore throats or urinary infections
- Constant sadness
- Re-enactment of abuse using dolls, drawings or friends
- Clinging
- Thumb-sucking
- Sudden fear of the dark
- Behaviour extremism—aggressiveness or withdrawal
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns
- Loss of appetite for no apparent reason, or excessive appetite
- Bedwetting
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes
- Abrupt decline in school performance

Neglect

- Missing key articles of clothing
- Over- or under-dressed for weather conditions
- Height and weight significantly below age level
- Consistent school absenteeism
- Persistent hunger
- Trouble concentrating
- Low self-esteem
- Body odour
- Child assumes adult responsibilities
- Always being dirty and severely unkempt
- Sleepiness/always tired
- Child steals food or money from others

Guidelines for Handling and Reporting

We all share the responsibility of safeguarding the most vulnerable individuals in our community. If you think a child or youth might be at risk or is in need of protection, you are required to let the Director/Pastor of the respective ministry know. You are not required to investigate or gather evidence; your role is to simply report your concerns.

In the event an allegation of abuse is made:

- a. It must be reported immediately to the Director/Pastor of the ministry in which the alleged abuse took place;
- b. The process will be carefully documented, including dates, times, names of witnesses, and content of all conversations and actions pertaining to the alleged abuse;
- c. In cases where the Director/Pastor is not aware of the underlying issues indicated by the warning signs, they will take the step of contacting Children's Aid.
- d. The Director/Pastor will maintain confidentiality for the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator;
- e. If the allegations of abuse are against any credentialed pastor, the Western Ontario District Office of the PAOC will be contacted and its procedures for dealing with abuse will be followed;
 - To avoid any actual or perceived conflict on the part of the church, the church leadership shall make appropriate arrangements for pastoral care from outside the local congregation to all parties involved until the investigation and court proceedings are concluded;
- f. If a ministry worker is accused of abuse, Crosslands Church will immediately suspend the alleged perpetrator from his/her ministry duties relating to children or youth pending outcome of the investigation.

Issues of Confidentiality

If ministry workers are meeting with a child/youth for a sensitive topic, they should notify the child/youth at the beginning of the conversation that they cannot keep secrets and that any information shared that indicates that someone is at risk of harm (either themselves or someone else) must be reported to the appropriate authorities as the ministry worker is legally bound to do so.

After any meeting, ministry workers are not to share details with any person other than a Director or Pastor of Crosslands Church for the purpose of seeking wisdom on how to best handle a situation. If there is an emergency that requires immediate police or child welfare assistance, the ministry worker must call 911, then inform the Director/Pastor to seek further assistance/direction, and fill out an Incident Form (available in Theatres 2, 4, and 5).

Reasonable Ground to Suspect

If a ministry worker has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child or youth is in danger or may be in need of protection, the person must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to the Director/Pastor of the respective ministry. Ministry workers must also fill out an Abuse Form which can be found in Theatres 2, 4 and 5. Ministry workers must notify the Director/Pastor if any of the following situations occur, regardless of whether the alleged situation happened during a church event or not:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse of any child or youth

- Intimations of suicide
- Life-threatening situation
- Confessed pregnancy (by a youth under the age of 16)
- Running away from home
- Confession of a felony (even one from years past)
- Reasonable suspicion that a child and/or youth will be involved in committing a crime

Incident and Abuse Reports

All incidents, whether they involve policy violations, physical injuries, or harassment, are to be properly documented and reported. All ministry workers involved should complete an incident report and submit it to the Director/Pastor of the respective ministry, regardless of the incident's severity. This includes minor injuries like vomiting, cuts, bruises, and scrapes, as well as any situation that could raise questions about our conduct. To ensure transparency, parents of those involved will be notified and will be requested to sign the incident report to indicate that they have been properly informed.

INTENTIONAL MEASURES TO PREVENT ABUSE

Volunteer Screening

Anyone looking to work with children and/or youth in a ministry setting, whether as a paid employee or a volunteer, must first complete the following requirements:

i. Attendance

Any individual must have attended Crosslands Church for a minimum of six (6) months. Exceptions might be made for someone who has recently started attending Crosslands Church from another church, is studying at a Bible College/University, is hired as an intern, or is a new staff member. They must complete all necessary screening steps and obtain a positive reference from a pastor or ministry supervisor from their former church.

ii. Application

Adult individuals must complete and sign the Adult Ministry Worker Application form along with character and professional references. For those under 18 years old, they must complete the Junior Ministry Worker Application.

iii. Interview

After the individual has submitted the application, the Director/Pastor or other appointed ministry worker will schedule a time to meet for an interview-style conversation. This will be a valuable time for the applicant to discuss their application and references, enabling the Director/Pastor to see if the applicant is a suitable addition to the ministry.

iv. Reference Checks

If the applicant seems suitable for the ministry, the ministry leader will reach out to at least two references. These references may be contacted by meeting in person, via phone, or email.

Vulnerable Sector Check

Conducting background checks is an important process for exploring an adult's history to determine their suitability for particular roles, especially those that deal with children and youth. These checks play a crucial role in confirming the identities and backgrounds of volunteers and staff, helping to protect the congregation and visitors. Every applicant age 18 and above that wishes to serve in Children and/or Youth ministry must obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check from the police department in which the applicant resides. Additionally, those working with children and/or youth need to sign a waiver form each year to confirm that there have been no changes to their criminal status.

According to the York Regional Police website, the Vulnerable Sector Check will provide the following information:

- Criminal convictions from CPIC and/or local databases
- Summary of convictions for five years
- Outstanding entries, such as charges and warrants, judicial orders, peace bonds, probation and prohibition order
- Absolute and conditional discharges
- Every criminal offence of which an individual has been charged that resulted in a finding of Not Criminal Responsible on account of mental disorder
- A conviction which a pardon has been granted, only if the disclosure is authorized under the Criminal Records Act; and
- Any non-conviction information authorized for exceptional disclosure under the authority of the Police Record Checks Reform Act.

After the applicant has submitted the application and has completed the interview, the Director/Pastor of the ministry will give the applicant an instruction letter on how to obtain a Vulnerable Sector Check.

The applicant will not be able to begin their duties until the results of the Vulnerable Sector Check have been returned to the Director/Pastor of the respective ministry. Should the results show a history of criminal activity that is unrelated to potential relationships with children and/or youth, the Director/Pastor could choose to authorize that person to participate in activities with children and/or youth. If the results show a history of criminal activity that is related to children or youth, the application process will be halted and the applicant will not be able to participate in ministry involving children and youth.

For ministry workers who continue to work with children and/or youth on a yearly basis, Crosslands Church will use a third-party company to perform a background check every three years to uphold safety standards. If any new information comes to light during this verification that is unacceptable, the ministry worker will be suspended from their role until the Director/Pastor of the ministry can decide on the appropriate action.

The Director/Pastor of the ministry also will store all application materials—the application form, background checks, reference check, notes from interviews, etc.— in a locked file cabinet and online.

Training and General Ministry Worker Expectations

a. Training

Anyone who will be working with children and/or youth are required to complete annual training in person given by their ministry Director/Pastor in order to continue serving as a ministry worker. If the scheduled in-person training dates don't align with the ministry worker's availability, the Director/Pastor of the respective ministry will arrange a time to go over the training materials together at a later date.

The training will include:

- A review of this document;
- A review of the emergency plan and procedures;
- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and the Ontario Human Rights Code;
- Vision for the coming school-year;
- Any other pertinent information, decided by the director/pastor of the ministry.

b. General Ministry Worker Expectations

- 1) Must attend Crosslands Church on a regular basis;
- 2) Must follow all policies and procedures set in place by Crosslands Church;
- 3) Must speak well about any church, ministry worker, or any parents/guardians/families;
- 4) Must never use illegal drugs or abuse alcohol or cannabis;
- 5) Must never serve under the influence of alcohol or cannabis;
- 6) Must obey all laws and use safe driving habits when driving any child and/or youth;
- 7) Must wear clothing free of inappropriate images or slogans.

PROTECTION AND SUPERVISION

For the safety of everyone, a child or youth should never be alone with a ministry worker who is not an immediate family member in any room or building. If an individual finds themselves alone with a child or youth, they should quickly move to a location where others are present or to an area that can be easily seen by others.

Any ministry worker scheduled to be in Children's Ministry during a weekend service or event will be given a "LEADER" t-shirt and lanyard with their name on it to make them easily identifiable by others. Ministry workers must always wear their "LEADER" top and lanyard when serving in Children's Ministry.

Protection of Information

Any personal information about other individuals must be protected.

This may include, but is not limited to:

1. Name
2. Address
3. Email address
4. Phone number
5. Medical conditions

6. Family situations
7. Information that should not belong to the public domain

Ministry workers are expected not to share any information with other individuals unless you have explicit permission from a guardian, parent, or Director/Pastor. Ministry workers must stay alert to their surroundings by always keeping names, contact details, and other sensitive information hidden to prevent them from being easily seen, heard, or taken by those passing by. This includes items like registration forms, sign-in/out sheets, and health forms.

Events

Event Release forms will be used for all events, which take place off the church property (no matter how short), and for any event that requires an overnight stay.

Child and Youth Ratios

For any activity or program that engages children and/or youth, there should always be at least two screened ministry workers present. One of these ministry workers must be an adult aged 21 or older.

Ratio Guidelines for Children's Ministry are below:

- Children 5 and under – 2 ministry workers for every 8 children
- Children 6-11 years of age – 2 ministry workers for every 40 children

**Ratios are similar to those of daycares and schools in Ontario*

Ratio Guidelines for Youth Ministry are below:

- Grades 6-12 – 2 ministry workers for every 46 youth

**Ratios are similar to teacher-student ratios in schools in Ontario*

Crosslands Church is dedicated to making every possible effort to enhance these ratios; nonetheless, we will ensure that we meet the minimum standards outlined above. Once the necessary ratios are reached, the respective ministry will halt the intake of more children or youth to maintain the safety of all participants.

Occasional Observers

Occasional Observers could be:

- 1) prospective ministry workers that have not completed the application process,
- 2) an adult or other family member of children who may need to stay with them for a period of time during the service to adjust to their surroundings.

Crosslands Church allows a maximum of three (3) visits in Nano, and one (1) visit in Turbo for each child. For the Occasional Observer role to be effective, visits should take place within the first six months of attending Crosslands Church.

The Occasional Observer will receive a special identification tag that sets them apart from the ministry workers so the children and ministry workers will be able to identify who the observers are. Crosslands Church will keep a record of the names, addresses and phone numbers of each Occasional Observer.

Things to note about this position:

- 1) Ministry workers are to stay close to the Occasional Observer(s), ensuring safety for everyone.
- 2) Occasional Observers will not be permitted to physically interact with any children other than their own.
- 3) Occasional Observers will not be permitted or requested to escort children to the restroom or other parts of the church.
- 4) When leaving the room after the service, Occasional Observers will need to sign their child out with the help of a ministry worker.

Check-In/Check-Out/Attendance

Each ministry has a safety protocol for drop-off and pick-up. This will include a way to guarantee that a child/youth is only collected by the individual who dropped them off or by someone who has been authorized by the parent/guardian.

For Children's Ministry:

Adults with children who wish to be a part of Children's Ministry for the first time must seek a ministry worker to register their child the day of service. Exceptions to this would be children who would be attending the FLOW ministry – they may pre-register online. After registration is complete, the parent/guardian can drop-off the child starting at 9:45am for the duration of the service. They must pick up their child at the desk of their respective theatres immediately after service with their parent/guardian tag. A child in grade 3, 4, or 5 can be dismissed on their own with written pre-authorization by the parent/guardian that dropped them off.

For Youth Ministry:

Ministry workers will ensure that attendance has been taken of all youth as they arrive for a youth event. Youth are to go home in the same way they arrived, unless otherwise stated by a parent/guardian.

Washroom Guidelines

- A ministry worker is never to be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom
- A ministry worker must never go into a washroom with a child and/or youth and shut the door.

For Children's Ministry:

1) Birth - SK:

- Ministry leaders are not involved in diaper changes. When a child needs a diaper change, the parent/guardian will be contacted to handle the situation.
- A toddler or preschooler should not be sent to the washroom alone but should be accompanied by a leader to the outside of the washroom door in Theatre 4. Before leaving the room, the ministry worker should let another ministry worker know that they will be escorting the child to the bathroom. The ministry leader should then remain outside the washroom door and wait for the child before escorting him/her back.
- When preschool children need assistance in the washroom (button pants, pulling up pants/tights, etc.), a ministry worker may enter the washroom to assist only when another ministry worker is within visual contact and the door is left partially open. Ministry workers are not permitted to help with wiping after a bowel movement.

- Ministry workers are responsible for making sure that kids wash their hands before they leave the washroom.

2) Grade 1-5:

- No child should be sent to the washroom alone but should be escorted by a ministry worker. The ministry worker should call inside the washroom to ensure there are no other people present before letting the child enter the washroom; the child may choose to use the single use washroom in the lobby instead. The ministry worker will wait in the lobby, with sightlines to the entrance of the washroom.
- The ministry worker should call the child's name if they are taking longer than seems necessary. If there is no response and the ministry worker deems it necessary, he/she must be accompanied by another worker before entering.
- Ministry workers are responsible for making sure that kids wash their hands before they leave the washroom.

Displays of Affection

Ministry workers have the important duty of ensuring the safety of children in their care, guarding them against any inappropriate touching. It's important that physical contact prioritizes the child/youth's well-being and is not influenced by the desires of ministry workers. Touching should be initiated by the child/youth and should never be forced. Additionally, every person has the right to refuse these gestures, and their preferences will be fully respected.

To maintain clarity in relationships, displays of affection between ministry workers and children/youth will be limited to simple gestures like a quick hug (*no more than 3 seconds*), an arm around the shoulder, a light pat on the back, a high-five, a handshake, or a tap on the shoulder. Affection and physical contact should be expressed only in areas where they can be easily seen in the company of other ministry workers/adults; this approach helps prevent any misunderstandings regarding the ministry workers' intentions.

Touching a child/youth in any area that would be covered by a one-piece bathing suit is not permitted. If any incidents or concerning behaviors take place, they should be reported immediately to the Director/Pastor of the respective Ministry.

Discipline

Corporal punishment is defined as any form of physical punishment, including but not limited to beating or hitting with objects. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.

As best as possible, discipline should be preventative. For example, creating a loving, caring atmosphere, having smooth transitions between activities, and communicating expectations to children and youth.

When remedial discipline is necessary, deal with each child/youth individually, explaining why the behaviour is unacceptable and how to correct it. Offer an appropriate choice between two acceptable behaviors (i.e., taking a minute to settle down, or participating in an activity with a better attitude).

Ministry workers must not:

- Use any form of physical punishment.

- Withhold basic necessities from a child/youth, including food, shelter, or access to a restroom.
- Lock a child or youth in any space.
- Restrain a child or youth unless it has been authorized by the parent or guardian for the safety of the child or the safety of others.
- Engage in any behavior or language that could humiliate or degrade a child or youth, undermining their self-worth (such as yelling, insulting, threatening, or belittling).

Any serious concerns about a child/youth's behavior should be communicated to the Director/Pastor of the Ministry. It is important to inform and involve parents/guardians whenever a child/youth misbehaves significantly or shows a pattern of misbehavior.

Social Media/Communication

Ministry workers within Crosslands Church are representatives of the ministry both on and off-line. Responsible use of the Internet and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and similar sites is mandatory.

- i. Internet, Media, Social Media, Phone
 - Contact between ministry workers and children or youth over social media or email is acceptable, however, content that is violent, sexual, or promotes drug and/or alcohol use, or is abusive or harassing in nature is inappropriate. Those found to have had inappropriate contact with children or youth outside of church over social media or email will be dismissed, and authorities may be contacted.
 - Ministry workers should ensure that they save the history of communication with children and youth, including online chats, phone log, and text messages. Nothing should ever be erased or hidden.
 - Ministry workers should never initiate or participate in video chats alone with children or youth.
 - All media, including YouTube content, TV programs, films, and video clips, intended for a group of children or youth must be approved by the Director/Pastor of the ministry before being shown.
- ii. Use of photography and/or videography

Photos and videos are only to be taken of any child/youth by a ministry worker at the direction of the Ministry Director or Pastor, only once parental consent has been obtained, and only for the purpose of internal promotion. Photos and videos of children or youth are not to be posted on any social media site, or anywhere else online without written parental consent.

YOUTH-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

- Male ministry workers are expected to spend time primarily with male youth, and female ministry workers with female youth.
- Leaders in the youth program are not to date youth that are part of the program.
- Ministry workers are not to initiate inappropriate touch with youth (back-rubs, tickling, poking or rubbing shoulders, etc.).
- All activities with youth must have parental approval. Church activities will not be planned without first communicating with church leadership.

- Youth are not to drive other youth during youth events
- Ministry workers are never to be alone in a vehicle with a youth. Ministry workers that drive youth in their own vehicle must carry personal auto insurance. It is highly recommended that any vehicle used to drive youth be covered by a minimum of \$1,000,000.00 liability insurance.

I have read, understood and am willing to comply with the Safe Church policies and procedures outlined in this document.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____