



Relate Church-General Policy | Policy #: RC-GP-004

Child & Safety & Protection Policy

The following document includes the procedures and the **safety and protection of children and youth** and the **staff and volunteers** of **Relate Church**.

The purpose of this document is to set out the procedures to:

1. Ensure the protection, safety and well-being of all the children and youth in the care of staff and volunteers of Relate Church.
2. Safeguard the children and youth from any danger of abuse.
3. Safeguard the staff and volunteers from allegations that can arise from careless and unwise behaviour.
4. Ensure the understanding that Relate Church has zero tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect towards children and young people.

Safety and Protection Mission Statement

Relate Church is committed to the protection, safety, health and well-being of all children and youth in its care. Relate Church endeavours to do everything possible to prevent child abuse and to be an agent of love, encouragement, care, healing and justice.

The staff and volunteers will therefore ensure that the children and youth are:

1. Nurtured
2. Treated with respect
3. Protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse
4. Subject to thorough security procedures

Definitions

- **Children** 19 and under are entitled to protection under the law.
- **Abuse**, in relation to a child or young person, means physical, mental, emotional or sexual exploitation, mistreatment or injury of the child.
- **Neglect** means failure to provide a child with adequate care and guidance, or other acts of omission by a parent respecting a child, that are inappropriate for the child or likely to be harmful to the child.

- **Harassment** refers to tormenting by continued persistent attacks and criticism
- **Inappropriate touching** refers to touch that could in any way be understood as sexual.
- **Improper discipline** is inappropriate, indecent and unsuitable behaviour that devalues a child or young person in any way.

Procedures

Procedure: Recruitment/Volunteers

People joining the children's ministry and youth ministry as staff or as a volunteer must have undergone a screening process.

A condition of recruitment will be that:

They comply with the following screening process.

1. Be attending Relate Church for 6 months prior to applying unless otherwise approved by a Relate Pastor.
2. Signed employee/volunteer application (including release for references and criminal record checks).
3. Criminal record checks
4. 2 Background reference checks
5. Personal Interview or phone call with Youth or Child's Ministry staff member
6. Training completed
7. Signed Dream Team Honour Code
8. Signed off by Legal Overseer
9. All information will be kept on file for as long as the staff or volunteer is in contact with children or youth.

Note: In Canada, all people who work in child-related employment are required to fulfill the above points. Child-related employment is any paid or unpaid work that primarily involves direct contact with children, where that contact is not directly supervised.

Procedures: Physical Contact and Abuse

At no time and under no circumstances is any staff or volunteer permitted to use:

- Physical discipline/abuse: deliberate physical force or action that results or could result in injury to a child. This may include: punching, slapping, beating, shaking, biting, or throwing a child
- Sexual abuse: sexual intercourse, exposing of private areas, allowing a child to look at or perform pornographic pictures or videos, indecent phone calls, watching the individual undress for sexual pleasure.
- Emotional abuse: teasing, belittling, insulting rejecting, ignoring, isolating, constant criticizing
- Inappropriate touch: tickling, wrestling, piggyback rides, back rubs, lap sitting, touching of thighs, knees, or inappropriate spots of the body
- Inappropriate affection: kissing, extended hugging

Failure to comply may result in immediate dismissal. All claims will result in immediate suspension pending further investigation.

Appropriate touch constitutes as: One arm or shoulder to shoulder hugs, touch on upper back or shoulder.

Procedures: Protection

Staff and volunteers are not permitted to:

- Take children or youth out alone without parental consent and without being accompanied by another unrelated adult if applicable.
- Visit a child or youth at home while the child/youth is alone.
- Take children to the washroom unless it is in an open way, with another staff person or volunteer within sight and hearing.
- Take children or youth off-premises for overnight or field trip purposes without prior written parental consent and without being accompanied by another unrelated adult.
- Release a child into the care of an individual other than who has the security tag and pager if applicable.

Extra notes:

- All children require proper identification to enter and exit the classroom ensuring that parental permission is given before releasing the child to any individual other than the parent.
- While Relate Church endeavours to be an allergy-friendly environment all children with allergies will be readily identified.

Procedure: Teaching Environment

Teaching will be done in a healthy and safe environment. Visitors are not permitted in classrooms unless they are registered and under the full supervision of a Relate Church staff member or volunteer.

To provide adequate supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults, one of the following must be in place:

- A minimum of two (2) unrelated Ministry Personnel are present for supervision, except in the event of an emergency OR
- One (1) Ministry Personnel is present with the door open with hall monitors circulating periodically from room to room

Procedure: Bathroom Policy

Parents are to be encouraged to deal with their child's toileting needs prior to the start of each program or worship service.

- Only Adult Female Ministry Personnel are permitted to assist both girls and boys in the Girls washroom.
- Ministry Personnel are never to be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom and they are never to go into a cubicle with a child and shut the door.

For Nursery:

- If possible, it will be strongly encouraged that diaper changing be done by the child's parent.
- Diaper changing is to be done only by designated adult Ministry Personnel and must be conducted within view of other Ministry Personnel after the parent has given verbal or written consent.

For Preschool Children:

- Preschool children are not to go to the main washroom alone.

- Preschool children may use the class washroom as needed. If a child needs assistance in the washroom, the door must remain propped open but not to the extent that the child is exposed. Only in this case is a Ministry Personnel to enter the washroom with a preschool child.
- One of the following will be adhered to when accompanying preschool children to the main washroom
 - Two (2) Ministry Personnel will escort a group of children to the washroom OR
 - One (1) Ministry Personnel will escort a group of children to the washroom with one (1) hall monitor appointed to assist with washroom and security duties.
- If a child needs assistance in the washroom, the door must be propped open, and the adult Ministry Personnel must stand in an open cubicle.

For Elementary Children:

- Elementary boys and girls are not to be sent to the washroom alone but should be accompanied by a buddy or Ministry Personnel.
- The Ministry Personnel should remain outside the washroom door and wait for the children before escorting them back to the room.

Procedure: Social Media

Communication is to be handled in a safe, healthy and open environment. Social media is for the purpose of communicating information and not for relationship building.

- No private messaging on social media is permitted.
- No private texting children under 13 years of age.
- No ‘friending’ anyone 13 years and under on Facebook or other platforms where the legal age is 14 years old to acquire an account.
- In the rare case where a private message sent back to a child is required, an overseer must be included in the message.

Procedure: Policy Statement

We recognize the positive statutory duty that all people are subject to, with respect to a situation of suspected child abuse. Specifically, if a staff member or volunteer:

- suspects that a child has been abused; or
- suspects that a child is at risk to be abused; or
- receives a disclosure from a child alleging past abuse or fear of future abuse

Then the worker must report his/her suspicions to the proper authorities. Failure to do so constitutes an offense.

Procedure: Reporting Abuse

Required Procedure:

1. If a child speaks of past abuses or fear of possible abuse, the worker should assume the child is telling the truth. Listen carefully and calmly, without anger or horror. Reassure the child that he or she is not to blame for what happened but tell the child that you cannot keep what happened a secret. Tell the child that you are required by law to make a report to the proper authorities and that the child has done the right thing in telling you about the situation.

2. According to the Child and Family Services Act, any person with a reasonable suspicion of child abuse has a legal responsibility to immediately report the matter to child protection authorities, Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) or the police. Reporting must be done by telephone or in person promptly at the point of observing signs of abuse or receiving a report of abuse. The reporting must be immediate. The report may be done in conjunction with pastoral staff or your ministry overseer.
3. Relate Church requests that when a ministry volunteer or staff in the line of duty reports a suspicion of abuse or an allegation of abuse to authorities that they also notify the Lead Pastor that a report will be made. It is understood that the report is to be kept confidential.
4. The worker must write down his/her statement about the concerns for the child's safety. This statement should be in the worker's own words. This statement must be made available to the police and the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) for the investigation of the allegations.
5. The worker, overseer or Pastor should not intervene in the interview of the child about the details of the event. That is the responsibility of the MCFD, or for the police. However, they can provide spiritual help and support to the child during the process, as appropriate.
6. The worker, overseer or Pastor may offer to remain with the child or youth to offer support during the investigation if it is felt that it would be useful.
7. If the child or youth has been abused/neglected within the context of the Church ministries or was committed by a church member or attendee, the parents of the victim should be contacted immediately, preferably by the Lead Pastor or her designate.
8. Recognize that the child or youth's parent(s) or guardians will be in crisis, suffering from anger, a sense of blame, or other responses. Practical support such as arranging for care for the entire family, especially siblings, may be appropriate.
9. There must not be any undue interference when a report of child abuse has been filed with MCFD or the police. The Lead Pastor or her designate should ask the child protection authorities or police how they can assist in helping and supporting the investigation and the hurting child or youth and their family.
10. For further information consult the **BC Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect** available from the counselling department (or at the Child Protection Services website at: www.mfc.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/child_abuse_handbook/part2.htm)
11. Contact # for the Ministry of Children and Family Development for BC is 310.1234 (no area code).

Relate Church will seek legal counsel where necessary and report all incidents to our insurance company.

Procedure: Critical Incident Report

A Relate critical incident report must be completed by the supervisor and filed with the Relate Legal Overseer.

Procedure: The Necessity of Agreement

All people who work in the area of children or youth will be required to receive a copy of this policy manual and agree to abide by its procedures before they commence their work with children. Furthermore, should this policy be adjusted or changed, this information will be reviewed with staff and volunteers.