

SAFE PLACE POLICY

Guidelines and procedures concerning physical abuse, sexual abuse,
and mental injury.

Salem Covenant Church

Providing a Safe Environment for Children, Youth & Vulnerable Adults

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Introduction

While safety for all people at Salem Covenant Church is partly a matter of liability, our primary concern is for each person and their wellbeing. Our intention is that Salem, for all ages, be a safe environment. This booklet explains the reporting procedures, personnel guidelines, and congregational education necessary to make Salem such a “Safe Place.” If suspected or actual physical abuse, sexual abuse, or mental injury occurs at Salem, we wish to act quickly, but with compassion and care for all persons involved. Our hope is to cultivate an environment of safety for all people who come our way.

Safe Place Intervention Team & Committee

Intervention Team: To report an incident of suspected abuse, contact any member of this team which includes Salem’s Lead Pastor, Youth & Worship Director, the Church Chairperson, CE Commission Chair and one member from the congregation.

Safe Place Committee: If you have questions about any information in this policy or need a Safe Place application, contact any member of this committee.

Current members on the Safe Place Committee and Intervention Team are listed at the end of this policy.

Definitions

In this document, the following definitions are presented not as legal definitions, but rather descriptive statements.

Minors: Children or youth who are under the age of 18 years.

Vulnerable adults: Individuals aged 18 years or older who are under the guardianship of another adult or entity.

Physical Abuse: Any physical injury, other than by accidental means, inflicted by a person responsible for care of another person, or any physical injury that cannot reasonably be explained by a person's history of injuries.

Sexual Abuse: Any interpersonal contact or interaction in which one that is in the care of another is being used for the sexual stimulation of the caregiver. Prohibited activities include physical contact of a sexual nature; pressure for sexual activity, such as suggested or demanded sexual involvement accompanied by implied or explicit threats; and verbal remarks with sexual or demeaning implications.

Mental Injury: Any chronic and repeated act by an individual that endangers the mental health or emotional development of a person in their care. It is a series of acts, or lack of action, that deprives the person being cared for of needed support and encouragement. Mental injury does not include reasonable training or discipline administered by the person responsible for the individual's care or the reasonable exercise of authority by that person.

Reporting Procedures

The reporting of an incident, whether alleged or actual, is critical. For reasons of liability it is important that the entire flow of reporting responsibilities be followed. No one in the chain of reporting should decide to stop the process from being completed. It is not the responsibility of the reporter to decide whether to begin the reporting process. The individual should not question if the matter is worth reporting or if reporting can wait. All incidents of abuse, as defined on page two, alleged or otherwise, no matter how trivial they might seem, should be reported.

Anyone (paid staff or volunteer) working with minors or vulnerable adults is considered a court-mandated reporter, required by statute to call regulatory agencies. This means that all suspected abuse, including second-hand reports, will be reported at once using the following procedure:

- A. When any volunteer or paid staff member suspects or hears of suspected physical or sexual abuse or mental injury involving Salem, they should report it immediately to one of the following agencies and to any member of Salem's Intervention Team. Call agency #1 first, if no answer, continue down the list.
1. St. Louis County Initial Intervention Unit (218) 726-2012
 2. Duluth Police Customer Service, M-F 8am-6pm (218) 730-5400
 3. St. Louis County Sheriff (218) 727-8770
- B. The Intervention Team member who receives the initial report should contact and convene all members of Salem's Intervention Team within 24 hours, if it is against a Salem Staff/Volunteer.
- C. Salem's Lead Pastor should keep confidential records of each alleged incident and the process of reporting it. The Lead Pastor should maintain custody of this confidential incident file. Public law should determine the length of time these records should be retained. (Note: If the Lead Pastor is a part of the allegation, another member of the Intervention Team should be designated to report and keep proper records.)
- D. After the initial report has been made to a Safe Place Intervention Team member, that team member will make an oral report to the Safe Place Intervention Team within 24 hours. The team will follow up with a written report within 72 hours. During the reporting process, it is critical that discretion be maintained. A respectful and discreet process is fundamental to the emotional safety of all concerned, as well as for the building of trust within the community.
- E. The Lead Pastor or Church Chairperson should report to Salem's insurance carrier if it is on church property or a church sponsored event, or if it involves a Salem Staff person or Volunteer.
- F. The Chairperson should also report to the Superintendent of the Northwest Conference if the allegation involves pastoral staff.

Personnel Guidelines

Salem is responsible for using discretion in hiring professional staff as well as in the use of volunteers. This does not imply mistrust, but rather concern for the safety and wellbeing of all people in this congregation. For this reason, the following guidelines should be followed:

- A. All paid staff hired by the Salem's congregation after June 12, 2003, should complete an application which includes the following: a minimum of two

references, complete educational and work histories, current and previous addresses, and a signed statement indicating that there have been no convictions or pleas regarding any criminal charge in their background (e.g., criminal sexual conduct, physical assault, battery, etc.). Salem requires a copy of the applicant's driver's license (or other similar photo identification if applicant does not have a driver's license), and a criminal record/background check of each potential employee. If any criminal record is discovered, the applicant may be disqualified for employment. If hired, fingerprints are required.

- B. Volunteers should be a minimum of 18 years old to be Safe Place approved. Any adult wanting to serve with minors and vulnerable adults needs to have attended Salem for a minimum of 6 months. Salem's Church Council may waive this six-month period if an appropriate recommendation or reference is provided by the volunteer's former church. All volunteer staff should complete a Safe Place application that includes the following: a minimum of two references, work and educational histories, current and previous addresses and permission for a background check to be processed. Salem also requires a signed statement indicating that there have been no convictions or pleas regarding any criminal charge in their background (e.g., criminal sexual conduct, physical assault, battery, etc.). If a criminal record is discovered, the application may be denied. This includes Sunday School teachers and assistants, children and youth ministry volunteers, persons working in nursery or childcare, and any other volunteer worker in an unsupervised capacity with minors or vulnerable adults in church related activities.
- C. Junior Helpers (under 18) should have written parental consent and should work with children younger than themselves. They will complete Safe Place training, excluding the background check. No junior helpers are allowed to change diapers, accompany children to the bathroom, or be alone with children. They will be within sight of the adults at all times. Junior helpers are included in the number of children for the adult-to-children ratio. They are not considered adults.
- D. Safe place applications will be reviewed then approved or declined by the Safe Place committee.
- E. Any Safe Place approved person (paid staff or volunteer) who is charged with an allegation of any criminal conduct should immediately report that charge to a member of the Safe Place Intervention Team.
- F. Upon hearing of an allegation of criminal conduct, the Lead Pastor or his/her designee should suspend that person's participation in Salem sponsored activities involving minors or vulnerable youth until such

allegations are dismissed. In the case of paid staff, suspension should be with pay. The suspension of activity does not indicate the acceptance of the truth of the allegation, but is an effort to protect all parties during the investigation.

Safe Place Ministry Guidelines

The following guidelines should be implemented and enforced by the Church Council and the Pastoral Staff:

A. Supervising Staff for Ministries & Events

- Adult-to-child ratio is 1:10 for all programming facilitated by Salem, whether on-site or off, and for any 3rd parties utilizing Salem's building.
- Two Safe Place approved adults are required in any ministry involving minors or vulnerable adults which is facilitated by Salem, whether on-site or not, as well as 3rd parties who are utilizing Salem's physical building or church van. The one exception is if a parent/legal guardian is present with the Safe Place approved adult, and their own minor or vulnerable adult is the sole person(s) needing Safe Place approved chaperones. In that situation, that parent/legal guardian is considered the second approved adult. This includes, but is not limited to, situations such as: pastoral counseling, transportation, etc.

B. Overnight Events

For overnight events sponsored by the church, separate sleeping quarters for males and females with same-gender counselors will be provided. A minimum of two "Safe Place approved" persons should be present at all overnight activities.

C. Transportation

Salem will utilize adult drivers for all church sponsored activities for minors and vulnerable adults. At least two Safe Place approved adults must be in the vehicle, one of which may be the driver. All drivers will be licensed and insured. All drivers will require their passengers to wear seat belts whenever the vehicle is in motion. Drivers need to be added to the approved list, which includes an orientation.

Private vehicles: Drivers should be age 18 years or older.

Church vehicles: Non-staff drivers should be age 25 years or older. Staff drivers should be age 21 years or older.

D. Non-church sponsored activities

All third parties utilizing Salem's building will be required to complete Safe Place Training and pay for Salem's Background Checks for all adults 18+

working with minors. If a third party approaches us in regards to utilizing their own background check, it can be looked into, but Safe Place training will still be required. If the background check is on par with or exceeds the level of Salem's background check process, it can be deemed acceptable. A report for each adult showing they have completed and passed the check will be required to be held on file with Salem.

Intervention Team

Salem has established an Intervention Team that is able to move quickly on behalf of both the victim and the alleged abuser. Such action follows our belief that grace, compassion, and support should be ministered to all persons involved in these matters.

- A. The Intervention Team should include all Pastors, Church Chairperson, CE Commission Chair, and one member at large from the congregation chosen by the Lead Pastor and the Church Council. The Church Council should attempt to achieve a gender balance and should determine their length of service.
- B. The Intervention Team will meet annually each year to review and discuss its operating procedures. This meeting should also assess how changes to child protection laws might be addressed by the church.
- C. The Intervention Team will meet as quickly as possible following a reported allegation of abuse.
- D. The Intervention Team should work under a covenant of discretion with all involved individuals.
- E. The Intervention Team will document all steps taken in each alleged case of abuse.
- F. Pastoral care should be offered during and after the reporting of alleged abuse for all parties involved, since these allegations, whether substantiated or not, have lingering and traumatic effects.

Education and Training

Abuse occurs most readily in an atmosphere of silence and denial. Educating the congregation about abuse issues and the guidelines we adopt to govern our church in these matters, is crucial for providing a safe place for all persons of the church family. Talking freely and openly about these matters and making the ongoing implementation of the Safe Place Policy clearly evident

are important parts of abuse prevention. We must counter the belief that such things could not happen at Salem. In addition, since the field of abuse law is changing continually, it is important that our understanding be regularly updated. The more we remain aware as a congregation, the safer Salem will be. Therefore, the following guidelines and procedures should be followed:

- A. Salem's Safe Place Policy should be published and discussed openly within the congregation.
- B. The congregation should be educated about abuse issues and their effects in the lives of victims. The Church Council should make this information available as a part of Salem's educational ministries.
- C. Salem's minors and vulnerable adults should be educated about abuse and thereby be given the tools and knowledge to report abuse. The Church Council is responsible for facilitating age-appropriate training.
- D. All professional and volunteer staff, including members of the Intervention Team, should be offered periodic in-service training opportunities on the issues addressed in this policy. Volunteers and paid staff should be trained to recognize signs of abuse and the procedures for reporting it. The Church Council should oversee this training and provide the funding necessary for educational resources.
- E. Each Safe Place approved person (staff and volunteer) in the active file should submit signed statements to the Safe Place Committee each ministry year that he/she has read and reviewed the Safe Place Policy and that there have been no convictions or pleas regarding any criminal charge in their background (e.g. criminal sexual conduct, physical assault, battery, etc.).
- F. A Safe Place Committee should be appointed by the Church Council to administer and document the Safe Place application process and annual signed statements (Item E above) by ministry personnel. The Church Council should determine their length of service and provide funding for miscellaneous office supplies and background checks.
- G. All documentation and records pertaining to the Intervention Team and the Safe Place Committee should be kept in a locked file in the church offices. The Intervention Team's allegation/incident file should be kept secure in the Lead Pastor's office.

**Adopted By the Church Council of Salem Covenant Church
of Duluth, Minnesota on August 18, 1994.**

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This Safe Place Policy is for the use of the congregation of Salem Covenant Church, Duluth, MN. Salem is not responsible for the use of any part of this policy by any other organization or person.

Current Members for 2023-24

Safe Place Intervention Team:

Chair – Jordan Urshan
Lead Pastor - Pastor Steven Osborne
Youth & Worship Director - Christo Möller
CE Chair – Kelsey Baker
At-Large – Theresa Burke

Safe Place Committee:

CE Chair – Kelsey Baker
Youth & Worship Director - Christo Möller