

Abuse Policy - Condensed

H2O Church

As a community of disciples, H2O Church is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores the cry of the abused (Psalm 9:9,12). Our community seeks to make disciples who embody God's concern for justice and the protection of the vulnerable.

Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Sadly, abuse is a common reality in this world and in Christian communities. As Christians, we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents." (Matthew 10:16) We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy.

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what we all must take ownership of as disciples seeking to walk with God who loves justice and hates oppression.

Definitions

In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, partner, etc.) uses that position to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.

For more thorough definitions see our full policy: h2okzoo.com/policies.

Administrative Policy

The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping the community of H2O Church for effective prevention and response. Our Safeguarding Team is comprised of a group of 4-6 members and includes women and men (and at least 50% women). Our current Safeguarding Team is Abby Waynick, Ben Brand, Sara Brand, and Troy Wallace.

For details about the role of the Safeguarding Team and how we screen and train at H2O Church, see our full policy at h2okzoo.com/policies.

Healthy Boundaries

At all times our community upholds the following standards of respect and safety. These standards apply during any time of ministry or gathering related to the ministry of our church, both formal and informal.

Show respect in physical touch, space, and visibility:

- Appropriate touch, whether an adult or child, must always be welcomed by the person and accountable to others. This is especially important with any power differential. (If you are not sure, just ask - e.g. Can I give you a hug?)
- Children who need assistance in the restroom outside of the children's ministry must be helped by their own parent or guardian. Within the children's ministry, all diapering or assistance must be done by a parent or guardian or by two screened adults to provide transparency.
- Be considerate and respectful of others and give them appropriate space: Notice the body language of others and be aware of your impact on others.
- Stay in visible and accountable spaces with children and vulnerable adults: No one should be alone with a child who is not their own child (including giving rides).
- No one should engage in the physical discipline of a child who is not their own child.
- No one is to provide alcoholic beverages, tobacco, drugs, contraband or anything that is prohibited by law to minors.

Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others.
- Avoid any language that belittles or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a person's body or sexual attractiveness).
- Avoid sexualized comments including inappropriate jokes or stories.

Show respect in agency and personal boundaries:

- Healthy people do not seek to control others, but rather encourage and empower others to take healthy agency in their own life (e.g. making decisions for someone or taking control of an aspect of their life such as directing their finances or career or social life).
- Avoid volunteering inappropriately intimate information or asking someone to reveal intimate details or personal information when the person is not ready or comfortable doing so.
- Give agency to others. (e.g. "Where would you be comfortable meeting up?")
- Always respect the "no" of others in setting personal boundaries.

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others. The following behaviors are unacceptable by any pastors, elders, officers, or staff at H2O Church:

- Any abuse of power as defined by this policy
- Sexual harassment of any kind, including unwanted sexual attention, comments, or unwanted physical touch
- Behavior or words that harass or discriminate against anyone based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, parental status.¹

¹ H2O Church is exempt from certain claims of unlawful employment practices because of its status as a religious organization and/or other type of entity recognized as being provided such an exemption by various federal laws, state laws, county codes and/or ordinances. To the fullest extent permitted, H2O expressly claims any and all exemptions available to it under applicable laws regarding

- Any words that belittle or threaten.

Abusers often use charm and other tactics to manipulate others. Targets of abuse often report feeling flattered and then later confused, upset, guilty, ashamed, and like it is all their fault. Victims should know that although it is normal to feel this way, abuse is never their fault. Those in positions of power and trust are responsible and able to respect appropriate boundaries.

Abusers are often skilled at explaining away concerning behavior. Anyone who experiences or has information regarding concerning behavior or a policy violation should document it and speak up as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team. All of us should be mindful of what is happening around us and speak up to the Safeguarding Team if anyone is demonstrating concerning behavior, crossing boundaries, or violating this policy in any way.

Responding to Boundary Violations

H2O Church takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety. Any person who witnesses or learns of a violation of this policy is encouraged to inform a member of the Safeguarding Team as soon as possible. Furthermore, any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of a member of the Safeguarding Team.

The Safeguarding Team members are:

- Abby Waynick, Volunteer (313-806-0892, waynicka@umich.edu)
- Ben Brand, Pastor (734-845-6032, ben.brand@h2okzoo.com)
- Sara Brand, Staff (734-576-5795, sara.brand@h2okzoo.com)
- Troy Wallace, Staff (989-859-8778, troy.wallace@h2okzoo.com)

The Safeguarding Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability. If a member of the Safeguarding Team is involved, the person involved will be recused from any deliberations or response. If you would be more comfortable talking to another leader about the situation, this is always acceptable.

Responding to Abuse and Harassment

H2O Church is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any reports or evidence of abuse or harassment within our church. We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to abuse, H2O Church will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons. It is hard for victims to come forward in most circumstances. H2O Church will not blame victims or others for struggling to come forward, delaying disclosure, or other common disclosure behavior.

and/or related to unlawful employment practices. Exemptions claimed by H2O include, but are not limited to, those exemptions available to it under: (1) the First Amendment to the United States Constitution; (2) the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, 42 U.S.C. §2000bb et seq.; (3) Section 702 of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-1(a); (4) applicable state constitutional provisions regarding religious freedom; (5) applicable state statutes regarding religious freedom; (6) any successor provisions to any of the foregoing laws; and (7) any and all other applicable federal and state laws, county and local codes and ordinances. Nothing contained in this policy is intended to, nor should it be interpreted as, waiving any exemption(s) or defense(s) that H2O may have, claim, and/or be entitled to claim either now or in the future.

Immediate Response Protocols

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911.
2. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (younger than 18) or vulnerable adult (e.g. elder abuse, or abuse against an adult with developmental disabilities)², all adults within H2O Church must immediately report to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services by calling 855-444-3911 and local law enforcement. DO NOT try to investigate the matter. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team. If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. Exceptions include if the abuse occurred within H2O Church or where the name of the offender is known.
3. If there is a disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse or harassment against an adult, all persons within H2O Church are encouraged to report as soon as possible to a member of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team member shall immediately inform the entire team (except a member or partner of a member involved in any report of misconduct). If the misconduct reported involves any member of the Safeguarding Team, the report may go to any member of the Board of Elders.
4. The Safeguarding Team shall respect the agency of the adult victim(s) in reporting any and all suspected crimes to the appropriate authorities. The decision to report adult abuse is ultimately up to the adult victim(s). However, the Safeguarding Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way. There may be situations where the Safeguarding Team feels conscience bound to report information pertaining to a potential crime against an adult. When reporting seems in the best interest of the safety of the community, the Safeguarding Team shall also consult with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others at H2O Church may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault, or threats). If the victim is a Reliant employee, and the reported misconduct happened in the workplace, the Safeguarding Team will contact Reliant HR (notifyHR@reliant.org or 407-490-0141). The Safeguarding Team will also seek to communicate as sensitively as possible the reason for reporting to the victim.
5. If the reported offender is within H2O Church, upon notification from the Safeguarding Team, the Board of Elders shall immediately place the reported offender on administrative leave (if it makes sense) and remove them from interaction with the H2O community until the completion of any investigation and/or H2O Church has sufficient information to make a determination concerning any personnel decisions and/or other accountability. The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate any immediate steps required for the protection of the vulnerable and the community and inform the Board of Elders. If the report involves a pastor or staff member of H2O Church, the Board of Elders will inform Reliant HR (notifyHR@reliant.org or 407-490-0141).

Further Response Protocols

Whenever possible, the Safeguarding Team should offer victim(s) resources to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations such as The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE), The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673), or SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP). For students of WMU, the following resources are also available: Health

² Visit https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971_7119---,00.html for more details.

Promotion and Education (269-387-3263), Sindecuse Health Center (269-387-3287), Counseling Services (269-387-1850), and Department of Public Safety (269-387-5555).

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for H2O Church to share certain information in order to safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate further appropriate response including but not limited to:

- Ensuring all potential crimes against children have been reported to appropriate authorities according to the policy above;
- Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons;
- Facilitating cooperation with any investigations including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the church or with others;
- Ongoing, appropriate care for the victim(s) including helping them connect with professional trauma informed care if desired;
- When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward victims;
- Maintaining contact with the reported offender during any investigations or administrative leave to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially with regard to controlling the narrative, retaliation, and access to other vulnerable people;
- Caring for others in the church and coordinating with outside resources as needed;
- Documenting relevant actions and information related to the case; and
- Reaching out to qualified experts when independent consultation or investigation is appropriate.

Independent Consultation and Investigation

There are several scenarios when it is strongly advisable that H2O Church pursue independent consultation or investigation in response to reports of abuse or harassment, such as:

1. Authorities decline to investigate a report of abuse even though there is evidence of wrongdoing.
2. The reported offender is not charged with criminal wrongdoing by the authorities, but sufficient concerns remain whether the reported offender engaged in wrongful conduct that may disqualify him/her from continued participation in leadership or the church.
3. There is a serious pattern of misconduct denied by the reported offender.
4. The reported offender is either a pastor, officer, or member of the Safeguarding Team.
5. The reported offender is a Reliant employee. (This will require involvement from Reliant HR.)
6. The reported victim(s) requests an investigation.
7. The church wants to investigate and assess how it responded to the report of abuse in order to better understand how it could have responded more effectively and to improve for the future.

When the Board of Elders decides to engage an independent investigation, the independent investigation must be conducted by an organization or persons completely independent of H2O Church and must be experienced in investigating cases of the specific form(s) of abuse or misconduct in view. The organization or persons should utilize a multidisciplinary team of trained investigators (examples can include current or past law enforcement officers, attorneys, prosecutors, and/or mental health experts) who are trained in best practice investigative standards, have significant experience investigating a wide range of misconduct and/or abuse cases, and utilize trauma-informed practices in their investigations.

Upon completion of each investigation, the independent investigator will deliver to the Board of Elders a report that will consist of its investigative findings, analysis, and recommendations. Any personnel decisions will be

made in view of the recommendations by the Board of Elders according to the values and employment practices of our church.

The Safeguarding Team will make a recommendation to the Board of Elders regarding the need for an independent consultation or investigation. When the Board of Elders declines to engage an independent consultation or investigation, the Board of Elders and the Safeguarding Team shall document all related information along with their reasons. The documentation shall be delivered to the Board of Elders and made known and available to the members for the sake of transparency.

Those who are found to have used any position of power to abuse anyone who is vulnerable will never again serve in any leadership capacity with H2O Church.

Retaliation

H2O Church prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Board of Elders. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.

Caring for Survivors

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support.

This support will include:

- Listening and staying calm
- Affirming without judgment
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging and empowering their agency
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate.

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other professional advice, but will focus on personal support and empowerment.

We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances - even when the abuse is reported and not proven - will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief
- Attempt to silence the victim
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the offender

- Urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the offender.

For more information pertaining to Caring for Survivors, Policy on Known Sex Offenders, and Potential Indicators of Child Abuse, please see our full policy at h2okzoo.com/policies.