

# Abuse Policy - Full

## 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

**Abuse:** 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. Child abuse is a specific form of abuse against a child. (Potential indicators of child abuse can be found in Appendix I below.)

**Sexual Abuse:** When a person in a place of power and/or trust, engages in behavior of a sexual nature with a child or an adult under their supervision, authority, mentoring, or spiritual care, including:

**Sexual Penetration:** Any act or attempted act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a person's penis, finger, other body part, or an object, and/or any oral-genital contact.

**Sexual Contact:** Any intentional touching of a person's breasts, buttocks, groin, genitals, or other intimate parts. Touching may be over or under clothing and may include the touching or making the person touch, or making the person touch their own body. This also includes contact with non-sexual areas of the body for the sexual gratification of the offender (such as with certain paraphilic disorders).

**Non-Contact Sexual Acts:**

- observing a person's nudity or sexual activity or allowing a person to observe sexual activity;

- recording, photographing, transmitting, showing, viewing, streaming, or distributing intimate or sexual images, audio recordings, or sexual information of persons;
- exposing one's genitals or inducing a person to expose their own genitals;
- within a power dynamic (boss-employee, doctor-patient, teacher-student, pastor-congregant, adult-child) communicating romantic or sexual desire, interest, or sexually stimulating content toward a person.

A child cannot consent to any sexual behavior with an adult or older child. An adult under the authority, care, or mentorship of a leader cannot consent to sexual activity. Even when both people are adults and the contact is not forcible, H2O Church considers any crossing of sexual boundaries within a power structure is not an “affair” or a “relationship” but an egregious abuse of power. Adult sexual abusers often develop an emotional and spiritual connection and then exploit it. While not always recognized as a crime according to state laws, this is a serious violation and H2O Church will treat it as such.

If any staff person or volunteer leader wishes to pursue a consensual relationship with someone under their spiritual care or a power hierarchy within H2O Church, they must contact any member of the Board of Elders for the sake of transparency and to discuss any appropriate boundaries and solutions to remove the power hierarchy. Furthermore, per Reliant’s policies, “Any Reliant employee must disclose the existence of a romantic relationship with any other Reliant employee or any individual within the sphere of Reliant’s ministry (e.g., college student, congregant, ministry client, ministry volunteer). Disclosure may be made to the individual’s immediate supervisor, or to the HR Compliance Officer” (Reliant’s Dating Policy, 2.4).

The Board of Elders are:

- Ben Brand, Pastor (734-845-6032, ben.brand@h2okzoo.com)
- Chris Gentz, Pastor (586-764-3100, daniel.hamilton@h2okzoo.com)
- Daniel Hamilton, Pastor (616-430-0642, chris.gentz@h2okzoo.com)

**Sexual Assault:** Sexual contact or other physical behavior of a sexual nature, that occurs without the consent of the victim. Sexual harassment generally violates civil laws—all have a right to work or learn without being harassed—but in many cases is not a criminal act (see more on harassment below). Sexual assault refers to acts that are criminal.

Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Penetration of the victim’s body, also known as rape;
- Attempted rape;
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetration of the offender’s body; or
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching.

Consent is words or overt actions indicating a freely given, voluntary agreement to the sexual act or contact. Further, consent may be withdrawn at any time. Silence or the absence of an explicit “no” does not equal consent. Physical submission by the victim - such as “freezing” or “fawning” - does not equal consent. Consent also implies the ability to say no in a mutual relationship: Children, adults with certain developmental disabilities, certain vulnerable adults (e.g. elderly or ill), or those within a power differential (e.g. with a religious leader, mentor, teacher, or supervisor) are unable to consent to sexual activity. An individual who is incapacitated (because they are intoxicated, unconscious, etc.) can never provide consent. Deception or manipulation of a person also render that person unable to consent.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more discussion on consent including state laws see <https://www.rainn.org/articles/legal-role-consent> and [https://apps.rainn.org/policy/?\\_ga=2.24798265.200928410.1590493313-413255437.1539433206](https://apps.rainn.org/policy/?_ga=2.24798265.200928410.1590493313-413255437.1539433206)

**Sexual Harassment:** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

1. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; or
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working (or church) environment.

In accord with our values, sexual harassment is not restricted to what is defined as sexual harassment under the law. H2O Church considers any unwanted sexualized behavior or sexualized behavior within a power differential to be a serious form of harassment (including unwanted touch or communication, other unwanted sexual attention, or any behavior that objectifies or degrades.) Other common forms of harassment include bullying and acts of discrimination, even when there is no distinct power differential between the individuals. Harassment can include actions by individuals who are not employees of the church, that occur during church events.

Harassment is not always sexual. Harassment can also include discrimination or the creation of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or church environment against a specific person based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status. Harassment of any type is prohibited at H2O Church.

**Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence):** Where a person in or who has been in an intimate relationship uses behaviors and tactics of control, belittling, isolation, fear, stalking, and/or intimidation to dominate, harm, degrade, or otherwise undermine the worth and agency of the other person in the relationship. Intimate partner violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, social, or financial.<sup>2</sup>

**Emotional Abuse:** Controlling behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering. Bullying is a common term for acts that typically constitute emotional abuse.

**Financial Abuse:** The illegal or improper use of a vulnerable person or his/her financial resources for another's profit or advantage. Some examples of financial abuse may include: the taking of money or property; forging a signature; getting a person to sign a deed, will or power of attorney through deception; coercion or undue influence; or, illegally or improperly adding names to bank accounts or safety deposit boxes. The elderly in particular are often targeted for financial abuse.

**Physical Abuse:** Non-accidental physical injury by way of bodily contact (such as slapping, punching, pushing, beating, kicking, shaking or striking with an object) or non-injurious contact with the goal or effect of intimidating, threatening, or controlling.

**Spiritual Abuse:** a form of emotional abuse using religion. Many acts of abuse in a religious environment will have a spiritual dimension. Examples include:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm;
- Compelling a person to engage in religious acts against his or her will;

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<sup>2</sup> For more information and examples an excellent resource is The Duluth Model at <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

- Abuse that occurs in a religious context or by a religious leader;
- Invoking of divine authority to manipulate a person into meeting the needs of the abuser;
- Using spirituality or spiritual authority to dismiss a person's perspective, agency, or value;
- Attempts to use the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality to put their leadership or decisions beyond questioning or accountability; or
- Attempts to spiritualize or justify harm using the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality.

**Stalking:** Unwanted, fixated and obsessive behavior which is intrusive and causes fear of violence, alarm, or distress. Stalking is recognized as a crime in all fifty states.

Examples of stalking include:

- Making unwanted phone calls/texts or sending unwanted messages or emails;
- Following or spying on the victim;
- Showing up or waiting at places without a legitimate reason;
- Leaving unwanted items, presents, or flowers; or
- Posting information or spreading false or confidential information about a person or victim on the internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.

## Administrative Policy

### *Note About Reliant Policy*

Reliant Mission, which currently employs all H2O Church staff, has its own Code of Conduct. This policy is not meant to supersede Reliant's policies. All Reliant policies and procedures must be followed, when relevant and applicable, in addition to those in this document.

### *Safeguarding Team*

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.

Duties of the Safeguarding Team:

- Implement and oversee compliance with the H2O Church Abuse Policy;
- Maintain rigorous familiarity with the H2O Church Abuse Policy;
- Brief all staff, volunteers, and members on the application of the policy on a regular basis;
- Receive, Document, and Respond to any policy violations or concerning behavior;
- Lead in responding to any report of abuse (see below);
- Conduct or coordinate screening of pastors, officers, staff, and volunteer leaders; and
- Complete continuing education from a qualified organization on a regular basis.

### *Screening of Pastors, Officers, Staff, and Volunteer Leaders*

H2O Church shall utilize the following screening tools for all pastors, officers, staff, and volunteer leaders (unless they are screened as Reliant employees):

- The completion of a written application including questions related to abuse and protecting the vulnerable, and including whether they have ever abused or been accused of abuse;
- At least three references to be contacted (two for volunteer leaders);
  - These references should include previous employers (if applicable) and any work with survivors or vulnerable persons (such as children, elderly adults, people who are ill or developmentally disabled, etc.);

- If the applicant doesn't include a reference regarding their previous work with vulnerable persons and/or a reference that is able to give specific positive details about their previous work or volunteer experience, an effort can be made to ask the applicant to supply one or both. If the applicant is unable to, this should be strongly weighed in determining whether or not to accept the applicant. If the applicant refuses to, this will result in an immediate rejection of the application;
- A background check that includes the following information:
  - Confirmation of education and employment;
  - Local criminal record check;
  - State criminal record check;
  - FBI criminal record check;
  - State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check; and
  - State sex offender registry check
- An internet and social media search
- An interview that explores a candidate's written application and includes questions related to abuse, protecting the vulnerable, and the H2O Church Abuse Policy

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child or others in any way, or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may not work with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity. If any potentially concerning information comes to light OR if the screening process shows that a candidate has been accused or convicted of any type of crime, H2O Church will consult with an expert to help assess the situation.

#### *Regarding Overnight Event Participants*

H2O Church shall utilize the following tools for all participants of H2O events that involve overnight lodging (e.g., fall retreats, spring break trips, Leadership Training programs, etc.):

- A commitment to the H2O Church Retreat Abuse Policy; and
- State sex offender registry check

#### *Training*

Staff, officers, and volunteer leaders shall receive annual continuing education on abuse and harassment issues informed by outside experts and regular internal briefings on our Policy. All participants of H2O will be invited and encouraged to receive the same continuing education and briefings on our policy.

## **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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 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.

# 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.

## *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)<sup>4</sup>, 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

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<sup>4</sup> Visit [https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971\\_7119---,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-73971_7119---,00.html) for more details.

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](mailto: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](mailto: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 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.

Receiving an adult's abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. H2O Church encourages anyone receiving an adult's abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

## **DO Say**

Thank you for telling me.

I believe you.

I'm so sorry this happened to you.  
How can I help?

Take as much time as you need.

I am here.

*The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.*

It is okay to be angry.

It's understandable you're feeling that way.

Your reaction is not an uncommon response.

You're not going crazy. These are normal responses following abuse.

## **DON'T Say**

Why are you telling me this?

Why didn't you \_\_\_\_\_? (run/scream/stop him etc.)

What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?

You need to forgive and move on.

It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.

It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.

Try to be strong.

Out of tragedies good things happen.

You're lucky that \_\_\_\_\_ didn't happen.

I know how you feel.

It wasn't your fault.

Perhaps you misunderstood...

## Policy on Known Sex Offenders

H2O Church is committed to holding admitted or convicted offenders we believe are repentant to a high standard of accountability. Known offenders who demonstrate evidence that they are not repentant are extremely dangerous and are not welcome in our church. Jesus welcomed sinners, but he did not command us to welcome wolves among the sheep. Known offenders who wish to have any connection to our church must be willing to undergo a process designed to assess their individual situation, ongoing repentance, and what safeguards are appropriate. Offenders must agree to accept whatever accountability and safeguards our leadership, in consultation with experts<sup>5</sup>, deem appropriate. Offenders must be willing to agree to this before the process of assessment begins. No assessment will begin if the victim(s) of the offender is still in our church, as any victim should be free to worship without their offender present.

If a convicted offender asks to join our community, we will contact experts<sup>5</sup> to assist with the assessment of the situation. Similarly, if an individual was in the past credibly accused of abuse, the Safeguarding Team will contact an outside expert on how to best proceed.

The Board of Elders (or Safeguarding Team, if the Board of Elders request their help) will use the following process:

1. Interview with the Known Offender
2. Interview with other Relevant Parties (e.g. family, treatment provider, counselor, parole officer, etc.)
3. Acquiring Records relating to the Offender
4. Assessing Repentance in Consultation with Experts
5. [If applicable]: Setting Level of Participation, Accountability, and Safeguarding Requirements (Including listening to any known survivors about the impact in their life, and accountability on and off church property).

They will consult with experts as needed throughout this process to ask appropriate questions and assess them.

No one who is convicted of or who has admitted to abusing a child may work with children or vulnerable persons in the ministry of our church, have any access to children in our church (on or off church property), or hold any position of power or trust, even if it is not directly connected to ministry to children. Any offender who evidences deception, minimization, excuses, victim blaming, or other indicators that show they are not repentant shall not be allowed any connection to our church. Unrepentant offenders are not welcome.

Any adult who is a convicted or admitted sex offender who attends group activities shall agree to have their name known to the congregation and shall abide by all accountability and safeguards. Any adult offender who is known or believed to be attracted to children or fantasizes about children will not attend in any settings with children.

The safeguards shall address accountability on and off church property and will involve communication with appropriate persons such as family, friends, employers, counselors, and parole/probation officers. The safeguards shall be reviewed as needed, and at a minimum every year by leadership and the Safety Team, and in consultation with child protection experts.

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the offender's parole officer, a local child advocacy center, GRACE, etc.

When a known offender is judged to be repentant and has some connection to the church, those who have responsibility to minister to him or her will have specific training.

# Appendix I - Potential Indicators of Child Abuse

Trigger Warning: The following details, describing potential indicators of child abuse to be aware of and look out for, could be triggering for survivors and/or difficult to read in general. It is meant to help and inform, but is not necessary to be read. Please take care of yourself and seek support from trusted individuals should it become helpful to you.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse if a child has:

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Difficulty, pain or blood in the genital area when walking, sitting, or using the bathroom
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Injuries (e.g., bruises, tearing, bleeding), itching, or swelling in the genital, vaginal, or anal area
- Urinary tract infections, yeast infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy.

It is atypical for children to engage in the following sexual behaviors:

- Placing mouth on sex part
- Asking others to engage in sexual acts
- Trying to have intercourse or imitating intercourse
- Undressing others, especially if done forcefully
- Imitating sexual positions with dolls
- Inserting an object into vagina or anus, especially if child continues to do so despite pain
- Manually stimulating or having oral or genital contact with pets
- Making sexual sounds
- Inserting tongue in mouth when kissing.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, burns)
- Especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of injury
- These injuries may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments
- Pay particular attention to injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body.

Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- Is obviously malnourished, listless, or fatigued
- Begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger
- Is consistently dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Untreated illness, injuries, health (e.g., unfilled cavities) or serious educational needs
- Broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aid, or other necessary aids or equipment
- Has an untreated need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Stays at school outside of school hours
- Frequently absent or significant academic struggles
- Is inappropriately left unsupervised
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs