

Creating a Safe Church for Our Children and Youth

Policies and Practices

December 2015

And an argument arose among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. But when Jesus perceived the thought of their hearts, he took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me; for he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”

Luke 9:46-48

Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church
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I. Preamble

The policies and procedures that follow have been created to ensure, as far as possible, that all children and youth who are at any time the responsibility of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church are safe from abuse or exploitation from anyone designated to interact with children and youth on behalf of the church.

The policies and procedures delineated in this document are intended to apply to anyone, including church staff and volunteers, who have been authorized to interact with children and youth while carrying out responsibilities assigned to them by Our Saviour's Lutheran Church.

These policies and procedures also serve to:

- Assist in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth;
- Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of sexual abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator;
- Reduce the possibility of false accusations of sexual abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

II. Definitions

"Children" and "youth" refer to all persons 18 years of age or younger, as well as high school students over 18. These policies and procedures also apply to any vulnerable adult who has been so designated to a church staff member by a parent or guardian, or as defined by Minnesota Statutes Section 626.5572 or its successors.

"Parent" refers to a legal custodial parent or legal guardian.

"Staff" refers to (1) rostered clergy and rostered lay professionals on call to serve Our Saviour's Lutheran Church; (2) all other paid employees of Our Saviour's; and (3) interns and field education students who have been assigned to serve at Our Saviour's to meet a requirement of their academic program.

"Volunteer" refers to anyone other than staff who actively serves the ministry of Our Saviour's and whose assigned responsibilities include interactions with children and/or youth.

III. Policies Governing Interactions With Children and Youth

A. Supervisory Responsibility

1. Our Saviour's operates under the principle that all activities, classes, small groups, etc., involving children or youth, as well as child-care situations, that take place within the church building should involve at least two non-related adult staff members or trained volunteers.

When children or youth are separated into classrooms or different areas of the church, there will be two non-related adults for each group. When it isn't feasible for more than one adult to be present with each group, an adult will be responsible for being in the vicinity of the activity, or travel from activity area to activity area so as to be able to monitor it.

2. Private meetings within the church building between a staff member or volunteer and a youth or child shall take place in an open area, or in an office with an open door or with a window in the door. If at all possible, such a meeting should take place only when another staff member or a volunteer is in the building, preferably in an adjacent area. Staff members and volunteers may meet alone with a young person in a public place, but should avoid any meetings in places in which public oversight would not exist.
3. Parents assume responsibility for their children when the child is on the premises of Our Saviour's and not involved in an activity for which a staff member or volunteer has been assigned responsibility for supervision.
4. Parents will be advised to accompany their child until they can leave them with the activity leader(s).

B. Overnight Events

1. Overnight events are subject to the same supervisory policies as any other church-sponsored activities, and shall include at least two non-related adults in attendance at all times.
2. Same-sex rooms, cabins, or tents will be provided for male and female youth and their chaperones at overnight events. Participants will respect the time limits placed on these rooms by chaperones or individuals who desire the privacy of their rooms.
3. Sleeping accommodations may not always permit an adult chaperone in every room, cabin, or tent. Adults remain in close proximity to sleeping areas to monitor what is happening. Youth/children are instructed in how to contact adults when needed. Youth/Children are given clear guidelines as to where they can and cannot travel within the program or facility space and are instructed to always travel in pairs.
4. For each overnight event, parents/guardians are to complete **Overnight Event Permission** and submit to the church prior to their children/youth being permitted to participate.

C. Transportation for Church-Sponsored Events

1. Anyone assigned responsibility by the church for transporting youth or children from one place to another in the course of an event must be at least 21 years of age, have a valid driver's license. Drivers must observe all driving laws and are also prohibited from using cell phones or engaging in other distracting behaviors while the car is in motion.

2. Persons assigned to drive vehicles rented by Our Saviour's to provide transportation to events sponsored by Our Saviour's must be approved by the owner of the vehicle and must follow the owner's policies governing its operation.
3. Families are responsible for how their child travels to and from a church event. Our Saviour's assumes no responsibility for persons being transported by someone not assigned that role by Our Saviour's.
4. Staff and volunteers have permission to drive a child or youth home with written permission from the parent.
5. Carpool groups set up by Our Saviour's for an event must include the driver and at least two children/youth. Each passenger in a vehicle must have their own safety-belt.
6. Parents are expected to notify adult leaders if their child will be leaving an event at a time other than the event's designated ending time.

D. Miscellaneous Guidelines for Church-Sponsored Events

1. Both youth and adult volunteers are prohibited from using any controlled substance, including alcohol and tobacco products, at all youth events. The misuse of any prescription or over-the-counter medication is likewise prohibited. Exceptions are made for sacramental elements and for prescribed use of medications listed on parental permission slips.
2. As a general rule, movies rated "R" will not be shown to anyone in grades 9-12 or younger at a church-sponsored event, and movies rated "PG-13" will not be shown to anyone in grades 6-8 or younger. An exception may be made by a member of the pastoral or program staff when the staff member judges the movie to be relevant and appropriate, with the requirement that the showing will be followed by a discussion of the movie under the supervision of that staff member. Any such exceptions must be publicized in advance of the showing.
3. Music and video games with parental warnings describing violent or offensive content may not be used during church-sponsored events.
4. Wearing life jackets is required of everyone, including adults, participating in a boating activity. Chaperones may require anyone under the age of 18 to wear a life jacket while swimming when deemed necessary.
5. Fireworks, firecrackers, guns, other explosive devices, knives, or other weapons shall not be brought, purchased, or used in any activity.

E. Discipline and Expectations

1. Children and youth are expected to be considerate of, and courteous toward, all adult leaders and peers. Everyone is expected to treat other people, all physical property, and themselves appropriately and respectfully.
2. Our Saviour's tries to keep children and youth fully interested and involved in activities, which generally minimizes discipline problems. When negative behavior does occur, these steps are to be followed:
 - a. Staff and volunteers should first use verbal reminders to encourage appropriate behavior. At no time is physical punishment or abusive language permitted or condoned.
 - b. If verbal warnings are not heeded, staff or volunteers may choose to separate a child briefly from an activity and offer the child an opportunity to modify his or her behavior.
 - c. If behavioral problems continue, the leaders should contact the child's parent or guardian so that the parent, leader and child can together discuss the behavior and make appropriate plans for further interactions.
 - d. If a child or youth cannot participate in an event or activity appropriately, a parent will be contacted and will be responsible for transporting the child home.
3. Parents as well as youth in 7th grade and older are required to sign, at the beginning of each school year, the form: **Children & Youth Ministry Permission and Release**, which contains warnings prohibiting the possession or intentional misuse of controlled substances (including, but not limited to, tobacco and alcohol, prescription and non-prescription medications).

IV. **Initial Screening of Persons Working With Children and Youth**

A. Staff

1. It is the position of the Minnesota synods of the ELCA that all clergy and rostered lay professionals are subject to the provisions of Minnesota Statute 148A, which deals with sexual exploitation by certain professionals, including clergy. This law mandates certain compliance procedures, including criminal background checks, as a requirement for the calling of any clergy and/or the hiring of rostered lay professionals. (The compliance procedures recommended by the synods are attached as **Appendix A** to this document.)
2. All other staff, as defined on page one, will undergo a criminal background check prior to beginning employment at Our Saviour's.

B. Volunteers

1. Volunteers assigned to leadership and/or supervisory responsibilities with children and youth include Sunday School teachers; confirmation, small-group and retreat leaders; nursery volunteers; directors of music groups; coaches of athletic teams; and any others involved in ongoing, active ministry programs. Also included are those who volunteer for occasional events, such as overnight chaperones.
2. To be eligible to volunteer for an activity involving youth or children at Our Saviour's, a person should ordinarily have attended worship regularly for at least six months and be known to a member of the pastoral or program staff. Exceptions may be made only by a pastoral staff member. For example, exceptions may be made for Lutheran Volunteer Corps volunteers who are part of the Our Saviour's community for a relatively short time.
3. Before being accepted as a volunteer to work with children or youth, a person must have read and accepted the church's policies and have undergone a screening process, including background checks. Persons may become volunteers as a result of (a) seeking out opportunities for volunteering, or (b) being recruited by a staff member or another volunteer. In either case, a staff member should be responsible for insuring that the above requirements are met and for approving the individual as a volunteer.
4. All prospective and current volunteers are required to read, complete, and sign **two forms: Application to Volunteer with Children and Youth, and Authorization to Conduct a Child Protection Background Check**. In the case of a new volunteer, a member of the pastoral or program staff may call any or all listed references and check with police departments where the potential volunteer has lived. Information received through background and reference checks may be used to determine a potential volunteer's approval to participate in ministries with youth and children. Youth under the age of 18 will ordinarily be subject to reference checks only.
5. All volunteers are screened every three years,
6. Staff and volunteers from other congregations who supervise activities in which Our Saviour's children or youth participate with the endorsement of Our Saviour's will be expected to be governed by policies comparable to those presented in this document, including having been subject to appropriate background checks by their home congregation.

V. **Training of Persons Working With Children and Youth**

- A. All volunteers who will be working with children or youth are required to attend a training session that will familiarize the new volunteers with Our Saviour's safe church policies. The training session will be the responsibility of the pastor, who may make use of professionals with expertise in child abuse as well as of Our Saviour's staff and/or volunteers.

- B. Included in the training will be resources to help staff and volunteers recognize and respond to symptoms of child abuse and the process for mandatory reporting.
- C. Consistent with the philosophy that all members of Our Saviour's share with the staff and volunteers the responsibility for maintaining a safe environment for its children and youth, ongoing education will be offered periodically to provide members of the congregation with information and guidance in ways they can help the church maintain a safe environment.

VI. Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Abuse

- A. Should a parent, volunteer or staff person observe, suspect or receive a report of any behavior or activity that conflicts with the policies of this handbook, or that otherwise seems abusive or destructive to a child or youth, the following procedures shall be followed:
 1. Step in and **STOP** the behavior or activity. Call 911 for help if needed.
 2. Contact a member of the Our Saviour's pastoral or program staff promptly for consultation, including a decision as to any additional action that should be taken immediately to ensure the safety of the child or youth.
 3. In consultation with an appropriate member of the pastoral or program staff, create a plan to confront the individual with his or her behavior and take steps to remedy the situation. The pastoral or program staff member has the authority to involve legal counsel and/or law enforcement personnel in the planning.
 4. Should the behavior or activity involve a member of the pastoral or program staff, or should you for any reason not feel comfortable speaking with a member of the pastoral or program staff, you may instead consult with a member of the Safe Church Monitoring Team.
 5. Be sure to document all reports, conversations, and steps taken regarding an allegation of abuse, with due respect for confidentiality and privacy for both the alleged victim and the alleged offender.
- B. If the behavior involves physical or criminal abuse, a pastoral or program staff member will inform the following persons promptly:
 - ◆ the Minneapolis Police Department (by calling 911 if it is an emergency) or Hennepin County Child Protection at 612-348-3552. An intake worker is available 24 hours a day.
 - ◆ the child's parents (unless to do so might put the child at greater risk)

- ◆ the church's insurance carrier and its legal counsel
- ◆ the office of the Bishop of the Minneapolis Area Synod.

For more information about reporting child abuse, see **Appendix B**, taken from the Minneapolis Police Department website:

http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/police/report/police_crime-reporting_childabuse

- C. Only the pastor or the president of the congregation may publicly represent the congregation regarding an allegation of abuse.

Overnight Event Permission
OUR SAVIOUR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Name of activity:

during the period of _____ to _____.
month/day/year month/day/year

To be completed by the staff person in charge of the event:

1. Description of the accommodations, including adult supervision of accommodations:

2. Description of the travel arrangements to and from the event.

3. Description of any high-risk activities that are included in this event.

To be signed by any parent/guardian and submitted to the church prior to their child/ren being permitted to participate.

I hereby give my permission for my child(ren) listed below:

to participate in the activity described above.

_____ (signature of parent/guardian) _____ (date)

Children & Youth Ministry Permission and Release
OUR SAVIOUR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

To be completed by parents/guardians of youth attending all Our Saviour's ministries. Valid for the program year in which it is signed.

Child's Name (please print) _____

Address _____

Date of Birth _____ Sex (M or F) _____ Current Grade/age* ____/____

Parent(s) Name** (please print) _____

Home Phone _____ Emergency Phone _____

Health Insurance Co. & Policy or group number _____

In the event that a legal guardian is not available please contact:

Name _____ Relationship _____ Phone _____

Please tell us about any medical conditions (medications, surgeries, serious illness, disease, activity limitations, etc.) or allergies (medicinal, dietary, environmental, etc.) Our Saviour's needs to be aware of. Attach additional paper if necessary.

Please provide the name, relationship, or any other necessary information for those people to whom Our Saviour's is allowed to release your children.

* For preschoolers, list year in which child will begin Kindergarten.

** Parent(s) denotes legal custodial parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

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PERMISSION & RELEASE FORM

Child/Youth Name _____

I give permission for this youth to attend all education and youth functions of Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church beginning **September 1,** _____ **through August 31,** _____, and to receive emergency medical treatment as needed. I understand the staff will try to contact me as soon as possible in the event of an emergency.

It is expected that youth will be respectful and courteous to all adult leaders and his or her (the youth's) peers. I also understand that if there is a conflict between my child and the staff that cannot be satisfactorily resolved, I will be required to have my child transported home at my expense. This could include but is not limited to my child's possession or intentional misuse of any controlled substances (including tobacco and alcohol, prescription and non-prescription medication).

Fireworks, firecrackers, guns, explosive devices, knives, or other weapons shall not be brought, purchased or used in any activity.

I have read the above requirements and agree to follow them and to provide Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church with any changes in any information listed above as soon as it is available:

Signature of Child (if in 7th grade or older) _____

Signature of Parent _____ Date: _____

Application to Volunteer with Children and Youth
OUR SAVIOUR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

To be completed by all volunteers who wish to work with children or youth at Our Saviour's.

Name _____ **Date** _____

Thank you for expressing interest in serving our youth and children at Our Saviour's. *Creating a Safe Church for Our Children and Youth* offers many descriptions of safeguards we hope will protect you and the children you serve.

A. Please provide the names and phone numbers of three personal, congregational, or work references and how they know you.

1.

2.

3.

B. List names, addresses, and dates of membership of the last three churches you have regularly attended.

1.

2.

3.

C. List gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for work with youth and children.

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(continued from previous side)

As the subject of a child protection reference check, your rights include:

- B. to be informed that Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Minneapolis may request this check for becoming or continuing as an employee or volunteer, and
- C. to be informed (at your request) of any responses received from these references, and to obtain a copy of them from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, and
- D. to challenge the accuracy and completeness of any information contained in any report, and
- E. to be informed whether Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Minneapolis has denied your application because of the responses from any references.

By signing below, I indicate that:

- I have been actively involved at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church for a minimum of six months.
- I have read and agree to observe the Our Saviour's Lutheran Church *Creating a Safe Church for Our Children and Youth* policies and practices regarding working with youth and children.
- I agree to report to a member of the pastoral or program staff, or to the president of the congregation council, any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate, and to follow the procedures for responding to abuse as described in section VI of the Safe Church Policy.

The information contained on this form is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, churches or organizations listed above to give you any information (including opinions) they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with youth and children.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Witness's Signature

Date

Authorization to Conduct a Background Check

*To be completed by all paid staff and all volunteers in ministries with youth or children.
Valid for any volunteer position with children throughout the program year in which this
is signed.*

Use the form provided by the company which is conducting the background check.

Appendix A: Minnesota Statute §148A

In 1986, the Minnesota Legislature enacted a statute entitled "Action for Sexual Exploitation: Psychotherapists." The statute – known as "§148A" – was passed in response to public concern about the sexual exploitation of patients by professional therapists. (Note: In a separate section headed Definitions, “psychotherapist” is defined to mean a physician, psychologist, nurse, chemical dependency counselor, social worker, member of the clergy, marriage and family therapist, mental health service provider, licensed professional counselor, or other person, whether or not licensed by the state, who performs or purports to perform psychotherapy.)

Under §148A, a person who has had sexual contact with a therapist may sue that therapist and, under certain circumstances, that therapist's employer. If an employer of a therapist wishes to avoid liability under §148A, it must, among other things, conduct "background checks" on the therapist before he or she is hired. In particular, it must ask all those who employed the therapist in the past five years if they have any knowledge of sexual contact between the therapist and any person whom he or she counseled.

§148A's Application to Lutheran Pastors

Subd. 5. Psychotherapist.

"Psychotherapist" means a physician, psychologist, nurse, chemical dependency counselor, social worker, member of the clergy, marriage and family therapist, mental health service provider, licensed professional counselor, or other person, whether or not licensed by the state, who performs or purports to perform psychotherapy.

Section 148A applies not only to those commonly regarded as professional therapists, such as psychiatrists and psychologists, but also to members of the clergy. Thus every employer of a Lutheran pastor – including every ELCA congregation in Minnesota – must comply with the statute. Yet, because §148A is written in the language of the medical profession, it is often difficult to discern how the statute is meant to apply to clergy. For example, under the statute, a former employer of a pastor is required to disclose to a prospective employer any knowledge it has about sexual contact between the pastor and one of his or her “patients”. But who are the “patients” of pastors? And how are members of a pastor's former congregation supposed to know who were his or her “patients”? And when will a congregation be considered to have “knowledge” of sexual contact between its pastor and a “patient”? When a single member of the congregation knows? A member of the congregation council? The president of the congregation?

These and many other difficult questions are likely to remain unanswered for several years. In the meantime, though, §148A continues in force and must be heeded. In order to assist Lutheran congregations in meeting their obligations under §148A, each of the ELCA's six

Minnesota synods has implemented common §148A compliance procedures. No synod can force its congregations to use the procedure, of course, just as no synod can guarantee that use of the procedure will shield congregations from all liability. However, the synods encourage congregations to make reasonable efforts to comply with §148A by availing themselves of the synods' assistance.

By establishing a §148A compliance procedure, the synods do not concede that the statute applies to their activities or to the activities of their congregations. Very few Lutheran pastors are "psychotherapists" who provide "professional treatment" to "patients". To the contrary, Lutheran pastors are instructed that they are qualified only to provide pastoral care and that they should refer those who need professional treatment of emotional illness to psychotherapists. However, until this matter is clarified by the courts, it is prudent for employers of Lutheran pastors to assume that those pastors could engage in at least some counseling that a court might later conclude was "psychotherapy". Thus, it is prudent for Lutheran congregations to comply with §148A in calling pastors, even though, in the opinion of the synods, §148A does not apply to most Lutheran clergy.

The Synods' §148A Compliance Procedure

The synods' compliance procedure is designed to assist congregations in conducting the "background checks" required by §148A before calling a pastor. The procedure is also intended to protect the rights of the pastors who will be the subject of those inquiries. Section §148A does more than require background checks, however. It also requires congregations to take "reasonable action" when they "know" or have "reason to know" that their pastor has engaged in sexual contact with a counselee. This latter requirement raises many difficult questions that will have to be addressed by congregations on a case-by-case basis. The synods' compliance procedure addresses only §148A's requirement for background checks.

Under the synods' compliance procedure, a congregation that is about to call a pastor may ask its synod to assist it in conducting the necessary background checks. Each Minnesota synod has appointed a "§148A compliance administrator" who will be responsible for conducting those inquiries. When a congregation chooses to accept the administrator's assistance, the call process will go forth essentially as follows:

1. The call committee will ask the compliance administrator to have every candidate for call at its congregation to identify all those by whom he or she has been employed during the previous five years and to sign a release giving the synod permission to ask those employers about possible sexual misconduct. The call committee will not interview any candidate who does not comply.
2. After the call committee has narrowed its list of candidates to the finalist, the administrator will write to the employers of the finalist and ask them to report any knowledge of sexual contact between the finalist and a counselee.

3. If all employers respond to the administrator's inquiry and none reports any knowledge of sexual misconduct, the administrator will inform the call committee that the §148A inquiry is concluded and the congregation is free to call the finalist.
4. If all employers who respond to the administrator report no knowledge of sexual misconduct, but at least one employer does not respond, the administrator will inform the call committee that the §148A inquiry is concluded and the congregation is free to call the finalist. However, the administrator will also advise the committee that it should consider carefully how it wishes to respond to the fact that at least one of the finalist's employers failed to contact the administrator.
5. If an employer reports knowledge of sexual misconduct, the finalist's bishop will meet with the finalist privately and discuss that report with him or her. The finalist will be given an opportunity to respond in writing to the report and to withdraw from consideration for call. If the finalist withdraws, the report will not be passed on to the call committee. If the finalist does not withdraw, the report will be passed on, along with the finalist's written response. It will be up to the call committee to evaluate the report and decide whether to recommend that the finalist be called.

Limitations of the Synods' Compliance Procedure

The synods' compliance procedure is designed only to assist congregations in complying with §148A and not in any way to replace the traditional responsibilities of the congregational call committee. Call committees must bear in mind that §148A is, in some respects, quite narrow: It requires only that some (not all) of the candidates' current and former employers (not acquaintances or bishops or even the candidates themselves) be contacted and that they be asked only about sexual misconduct (not other types of misconduct), and then only about sexual misconduct with counselees (not sexual misconduct generally). Call committees should continue to inquire into the wide range of professional and personal qualities that bear upon whether a particular candidate can provide the pastoral leadership sought by a particular congregation.

Moreover, nothing in §148A or in any part of the synods' §148A compliance procedure alters the responsibilities or authority of Lutheran bishops. Bishops must decide, pursuant to the constitutions and bylaws of their synods and the ELCA, if and when disciplinary proceedings should be initiated against a pastor based upon information that comes to light during a §148A inquiry.

Questions About §148A

General questions about the synods' compliance procedure should be addressed to the Minneapolis Area Synod's 148A Administrator.

Questions about how congregations should respond to particular inquiries or to particular

information should be addressed to an attorney, and not the administrator. The administrator acts solely as a collector and transmitter of information. While the administrator can advise congregations generally about how the synods' procedure works, he or she cannot advise congregations about their legal obligations or how particular problems should be resolved.

The synods understand that Lutheran congregations may, on occasion, need to consult with an attorney regarding problems that arise under §148A. For example, the president of a congregation may want advice on whether a particular rumor should be reported in response to a §148A inquiry. Or a congregation council that learns of sexual contact between its pastor and a counselee may need advice on what will be considered "reasonable action" under §148A.

Appendix B: Information about Child Abuse Reporting

Taken from http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/police/report/police_crime-reporting_childabuse

Child Abuse

Definitions of Child Abuse

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[Where can I learn more about child abuse?](#)

Definitions of Child Abuse

Minnesota state statutes describe physical and sexual abuse, neglect and endangerment. In general, they can be described this way:

Physical abuse is any act(s) which results in non-accidental injuries to a child including patterns of unexplained injuries and injuries that appear to have been caused in a manner inconsistent with the explanation. Physical abuse includes unreasonably restraining a child with tying, caging or chaining and excessive or unreasonably forceful discipline that leave injuries or marks on a child. Physical abuse is also defined as assaultive behavior not usually associated with discipline such as shaking, kicking, cutting and burning.

Sexual abuse is any act(s) of sexual assault or sexual exploitation of a child including intentional touching of the child's intimate parts; causing the child to touch the abuser's intimate parts; sexual intercourse, anal intercourse, fellatio and cunnilingus; any intrusion into the genital or anal opening of the child; or causing any intrusion into the genital or anal opening of the abuser by the child.

Neglect is the failure of a parent to provide for the child's physical, emotional, medical and educational well being. Minnesota law states that a parent or caretaker who willfully deprives a child of necessary food, clothing, shelter, health care, or supervision

appropriate to the child's age, when the parent is reasonably able to make the necessary provisions and the deprivation harms or is likely to substantially harm the child's physical, mental, or emotional health is guilty of neglect of a child. A parent who knowingly fails to protect a child from continuing physical or sexual abuse is also guilty of neglect.

Endangerment is when a parent or caretaker intentionally or recklessly causes or permits a child to be placed in a situation likely to substantially harm the child's physical, mental, or emotional health or cause the child's death including allowing a child to be present where illegal drugs are being made, kept, sold or used and recklessly allowing a child under 14 years of age access to a loaded firearm.

How do I recognize child abuse:

Signs of physical abuse include unexplained or unreasonable bruises, burns, cuts, abrasions and broken bones. Patterned marks made by objects like belts, cords, teeth, handprints, and clothes or curling irons can be strongly indicative of physical abuse especially when combined with a child's description of how the injury was inflicted. Another strong indicator of child abuse is an explanation for injuries that would be unusual in a given age group. For example, a broken arm or leg in a four-month old child is blamed on a fall down the stairs.

The best indicator of sexual abuse is a disclosure by the child regarding the sexual activity. Other indicators may be a detailed, age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual acts, changes in established behaviors like sleeping, eating and toileting, complaints of genital pain or irritation, and infection with a sexually transmitted disease.

Neglect can be indicated by a child who is chronically dirty or dressed inappropriately for the weather, a child who is frequently hungry or sleepy and reports being unable to eat or sleep regularly at home, a child who does not attend school regularly or one who has not been enrolled in school, a child who remains untreated or is treated inappropriately for a medical problem or a child who describes being left alone and unable to care for himself.

A good indicator of endangerment is a description by a child of events that may place him in danger such as being involved in a physical, domestic fight between adults in the home, seeing illegal drugs being used or sold or having access to loaded guns kept in the home.

Why should I report child abuse?

The most important reason to report child abuse is to protect the child from further abuse. Children have few resources for changing the circumstances of their lives and children who are being hurt by their caretakers rely on the intervention of others to protect them.

Reporting abuse is also a way to ensure that parents who need help but are not able to ask for it are offered parenting resources.

I'm not sure if the situation is serious enough to report.

Describe the situation to child protection or the police. Remember that often the most serious abuse occurs in private and away from anyone but the children involved. What you have seen or heard may be only the tip of the iceberg.

How do I report suspected child abuse?

The Minneapolis Police Department and Hennepin County Child Protection are the two agencies charged with receiving reports of child abuse occurring in Minneapolis. These agencies are also responsible for the joint investigation of child abuse allegations. You may report suspicions of child abuse to the Minneapolis Police Department 24 hours a day by calling 911. The operator will ask you to describe the circumstances and then dispatch a squad to take a report. You may also call [Hennepin County Child Protection](#) at 612-348-3552. An intake worker is available 24 hours a day to take reports.

When reporting suspicions of child abuse, be prepared to provide information as much information as you have including the names and addresses of the child and parents and specific data about what happened, who was involved, and when and where the events took place. Other helpful information is what school the child attends, who else might have information about the child's situation, where the child is now and the names of siblings or other members of the household.

Any report made to the Minneapolis Police Department will automatically be reported to Hennepin County Child Protection, as any report made to HC Child Protection will be sent to the Minneapolis Police Department. This is included in the Minnesota State Statutes outlining requirements for child abuse investigations. However, there are often times when it is most appropriate to call the police to make the initial report.

- If you believe a child is in imminent danger of injury, death or sexual abuse, call 911 and describe the situation to the operator with as much detail as you can. The police have the ability to remove a child from a dangerous situation while a child protection investigation is completed.
- If you believe that a child has injuries that need medical attention, call 911 and provide as much information as possible. The operator may dispatch paramedics and the police to insure that the child receives needed medical care.

- If you believe that the child would not be safe returning or remaining at home, call 911. The police can make arrangements for the temporary care of a child when his home is unsafe.
- If a child has disclosed a sexual assault incident that occurred within the last 72 hours, call 911 for the police to respond. The officers will make a report and arrange for a medical exam to collect any physical evidence of the assault. It is very important to alert the police promptly because as time passes, the chance of obtaining physical evidence diminishes. In the case of a sexual assault that occurred outside of the 72-hour window, calling 911 for a police response is still appropriate as the officers will take the report to begin an investigation.

Who must report child abuse?

Minnesota law requires that any person whose job involves working professionally with children and who knows or has reason to believe that a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused *shall*

Are there penalties for a mandated reporter who fails to report child abuse?

Yes. Minnesota law requires reporting by mandated reporters who know or have reason to believe that a child is being abused or has been abused within the past three years. A mandated reporter who fails to make a report under those circumstances is guilty of a misdemeanor.

If the allegation of child abuse cannot be proven, will I get into trouble for making the report?

No, you will not. Anyone reporting in good faith (with a reasonable belief) may not be criminally prosecuted or sued in civil court for libel, slander, defamation, invasion of privacy, or breach of confidentiality. A person who knowingly or recklessly makes a false report is not protected from prosecution or civil suit.

What should I do if a child tells me about abuse?

- Be calm. If you appear to be angry, upset or very emotional, the child will be frightened.

- Let the child tell you about that happened in his own words and then reassure him that you believe him.
- Tell the child that he is not in trouble and that he did the right thing to tell you about what happened.
- Tell the child that you want to make sure that he will be safe. Let him know that you are going to get help so that this doesn't happen again.
- Report what the child told you to the police or child protection.

As a parent, what can I do to prevent child abuse?

- Practice disciplining your children in a calm, thoughtful way. Give yourself time to cool off rather than punishing in anger. Show your children ways that conflicts can be resolved with words rather than hitting or hurting.
- Talk with your children everyday and listen carefully to what they say about their lives. Be alert to changes in their behavior or emotions and talk calmly with them if you are concerned.
- Teach your children that their bodies are their own and that they can say no to touches that feel bad or confusing. Talk with them about privacy to help them learn good boundaries and reassure them that it is ok to say no to things that violate their privacy – even if they are saying no to an adult.
- Teach your children to tell you if they are approached, talked to or touched in a way that hurts, scares or confuses them. Reassure them that you will not be angry with them, but want to help them stay safe.
- Help your children think about what they would do if something confusing or scary happened to them. Talk about different scenarios or play the "what if" game. This will help them identify ways to help themselves be safe and to think about the adults they can turn to for help in different places such as school, the park, the library, and church.

I don't want to make my children fearful by talking about sexual abuse or I don't want to talk to my children about sexual abuse because they are too young. Is it really necessary?

Unfortunately, sexual abuse is not as uncommon as we would like to think it is. It affects both girls and boys of all ages, from every kind of neighborhood and of all races. Studies have found that about one of every four girls and one of every eight boys has reported incidents of sexual abuse. In 85% of reported sexual abuse cases, the offender is known to the child as a friend, relative or neighbor.

Talking with children about the privacy of their bodies and what are appropriate kinds of touching is a precaution like teaching them to cross the street safely, wear seatbelts and not play with matches. Teaching kids good boundaries helps to keep them safe. Not talking about these issues, won't make them go away.

Teaching young children that their bodies are private doesn't have to be about sex. It can be as simple as reminding children that the parts of their bodies covered by a swimsuit are private.

Where can I learn more about child abuse?

If you would like more information about recognizing and reporting child abuse, please call the Minneapolis Police Department, Central Investigations Department at (612) 673-2941 between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:00 p.m. The receptionist will connect you with a child abuse investigator.

For more information on the web, here are links to several sites with resources for parents, teachers and anyone interested in preventing child abuse.

[Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota](#)

[Childhelp USA](#)

[Stop It Now \(Preventing Child Sexual Abuse\)](#)

[MN Law regarding reporting of maltreatment of minors](#)

[Hennepin County Child Protection](#)

Last updated Sep 27, 2011