

Trinity Lutheran Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Child and Youth Protection Policy

Last update - March 2026

Policy Statement

Trinity Lutheran Church is a dynamic family called by God to nurture each other in our daily journeys of faith and to joyfully increase our response to all people in need, sharing God's gifts of love and grace.

Trinity's children, youth, and family ministries intend to provide events, activities, and opportunities consistent with this mission.

While pursuing its mission, Trinity is committed to providing a safe environment for children, youth and other vulnerable individuals. This Child and Youth Protection Policy and accompanying procedures are established to provide guidance for this protection.

This policy is applicable to all Trinity employees, Sunday school teachers and assistants, nursery workers, confirmation mentors, high school event chaperones, and any other individual directing, leading or assisting with child or youth programming.

Goals

Trinity's goals for its child, youth, and family ministries include the following:

- To provide a welcoming, safe, comfortable, and inclusive environment for all children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals.
- To communicate strongly that Trinity is serious about providing protection from and assistance in the event of child abuse or child neglect.
- To protect employees and volunteers from the appearance of impropriety or false allegations.
- To ensure proper training of all individuals who teach, lead or otherwise interact with children and youth under the age of 18 and other vulnerable individuals.
- To provide guidance and procedures for reporting any actual or suspicions of child abuse or child neglect in compliance with Michigan law.
- To be prepared, if needed, to extend ministry to a victim, victim's family and others affected, with the intention of providing Christ's love and support, as well as healing and emotional restoration, in the event that an incident occurs, under advisement by and with the involvement of Trinity's Senior Pastor, Children's Protective Services and/or law enforcement.
- To be prepared, if needed, to extend ministry to the perpetrator and/or perpetrator's family, with the intention of providing Christ's love, in the event that an incident occurs, under advisement by and with the involvement of Trinity's Senior Pastor, Children's Protective Services and/or law enforcement.

Definitions

Minor: a child or youth less than 18 years of age and as defined by state law (including legally incompetent persons, special needs adults, and other vulnerable individuals regardless of age whenever minor, child, or youth is used in this policy)

Child: Birth through 5th grade (includes nursery, preschool and K-5)

Youth: Middle School Youth - 6 to 8 grade; High School Youth - entering 9th grade through summer following high school graduation

Adult: an individual 18 years or older. At times Trinity's Pastor may determine a specific minimum adult age such as 21 or 25 based on the nature of the event or activity. It is suggested that the Primary Leader is a minimum of four years older than the participating children or youth.

Worker:

- (1) all Trinity employees
- (2) adult volunteers who have direct contact with minors
- (3) a confirmed minor under the supervision of an adult (for onsite events and activities only)

Primary Leader: The adult designated as the primarily responsible person in charge of the activity or event. Generally, this will be a pastor, director, or coordinator of children, youth, and / or family ministry.

Parent: Where "parent" is used in this policy, it also includes legal guardians or other documented individuals authorized by the parent or legal guardian.

Child Abuse: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, legal guardian, any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare a teacher, a teacher's aide, a member of the clergy, or an individual 18 years of age or older who is involved with a youth program.

Child Neglect: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following

- Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, though financially able to do so, or by the failure to seek financial or other reasonable means to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
- Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

Screening Procedures

- All workers must complete a *Child and Youth Ministry Application* (initially) or *Child and Youth Ministry Renewal Application* (annually).
- All workers must be a member of Trinity in good standing for at least six (6) months (the “six month” rule) unless the individual is (1) an employee; (2) a transfer of membership from another church where they met the six month rule with a reference provided from that church’s pastor or youth director; (3) approved by a Pastor when the individual’s children are participating (however, the individual may not be the Primary Leader); (4) approved by a Pastor in his or her sole discretion where the intent of this policy to protect minors and the overall goals of this policy are met (written documentation justifying the exception shall be retained with the individual’s Ministry Application)
- Criminal History Background check
- A minimum of two references must be provided
- Must sign an acknowledgment that the individual has received a copy of Trinity’s Child and Youth Protection Policy, understands it, and will comply with its terms.
- Must participate in an initial and an annual orientation and training regarding child abuse, including its recognition, prevention, and reporting, as well as the provisions addressed in this policy.

Criminal History Background

Trinity conducts a criminal history background check for all workers initially and every two years thereafter. An individual who has a history of inappropriate conduct with minors OR a conviction of (or a currently pending proceeding related to an allegation of) child abuse or neglect MAY NOT work with minors at Trinity.

A conviction for any of the following offenses in Michigan, or any violation of another state, municipality, or federal offense, that by its nature constitutes a sexual offense or violent offense against a minor, will disqualify an individual from working with children or youth. Those offenses are:

Any conviction for Child Sexually Abusive Material, Indecent Exposure or Aggravated Indecent Exposure, Engaging Services of a Prostitute, Criminal Sexual Conduct 1st Degree, 2nd Degree, 3rd Degree, 4th Degree, Assault with Intent to Commit CSC, Surveillance of an Unclothed Person, Sexual contact or penetration with a dead human body, any conviction for Gross Indecency, Inducing a Minor for Immoral Purposes, Enticing a Child With Intent to Conceal them from Parent or Legal Guardian, Kidnapping, Unlawful Imprisonment, Pandering, Child Abuse 1st , 2nd , 3rd , or 4th , and Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor, or an attempt conviction of any of these offenses.

Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth or vulnerable individuals will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving children, youth, or other vulnerable individuals.

Rule of Two / Rule of Three

At least two workers are required to be present to supervise a group of children or youth at all times, whether in a room, a vehicle, or any other enclosed space (referred to as “the Rule of Two”). Whenever possible, the two workers should be unrelated. An adult plus at least two others may be utilized in some circumstances based on the age of the minors and the overall situation with the Pastor’s or the Primary Leader’s approval (referred to as “the Rule of Three”).

In the event that two workers cannot be present in the room, so that one worker is alone in a room with one or more children or youth, a door or half-door from the room must be left open. The worker should attempt to position himself or herself in the room so that other individuals passing the room can see him or her. A worker should not be alone with a single child or youth where he or she cannot be observed by others.

One-on-one counseling, prayer or other ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two workers. In this case, the door or half-door of the room used must remain open or a window uncovered. The session should be conducted at a time when another individual is aware of the one-on-one session and is nearby, even if not within listening distance.

Recommended ratios for activities and events are:

Worker to Child: 2:6

Worker to Youth: 2:8 onsite activity or event; 2:6 offsite and/or overnight

These ratios may be modified in the Pastor's or Primary Leader's sole discretion based on the overall circumstances of the event or activity and consistent with the goals of this policy.

Bathroom Procedures

Parents are encouraged to take children to the bathroom or to change diapers prior to drop off.

Diapering: must be changed by an adult with at least one other worker in the area (as an alternative, the parent or designee may be summoned).

Through Grade 1: a worker must accompany (using the rule of two or three); the worker should check the restroom for safety before sending a child in.

Grades 2 - 5: the buddy system or adult accompanying (using the rule of two or three).

If assistance is requested by a minor, the stall door must be left open and a second worker must be present to monitor; as an alternative, the parent or designee may be summoned.

Discipline of Minors

A positive approach to discipline is to be practiced. Clear, consistent, and age-appropriate limits shall be used taking into consideration attention span, activity and comprehension levels. Positive reinforcement can include verbal praise, special privileges, or small items like stickers.

If a minor misbehaves, he/she should be gently and quietly reminded of appropriate behavior; if the behavior continues, the minor may be separated from others within the classroom but within visual range of a worker.

If the minor becomes abusive or out of control, the worker should protect the safety of all and contact the Primary Leader. The Primary Leader will be responsible for the minor, will notify the parents, and will discuss a remedy to resolve the situation in the manner deemed best for all.

Behavioral needs of special needs individuals will be addressed individually with the Primary Leader, ideally prior to the individual being included in the activity or event to maximize successful participation.

Corporal punishment and verbal abuse are not permitted; no worker may inflict or threaten to inflict, force upon a minor (such as slapping, hitting, spanking, etc., even if the parent gives permission).

Whenever disciplinary action occurs, the worker should let the minor know that he/she is loved and that Jesus continues to love him/her.

Guidelines and procedures for reporting suspected or actual abuse are included in **Appendix A**.

Physical Contact

Physical contact is important to each of us. Jesus knew this and often laid his hands on people to comfort and heal them. Similarly, we can express ourselves through handshakes, hugs, and other forms of touching to communicate the love of Christ to others. As a church, we strive to create a safe environment for our children in which all physical contact reflects a proper display of affection and is healthy, edifying and loving. Hugs should be used with caution and ideally are one-arm side hugs or hand-to-arm hugs only when initiated by a child. Trinity prohibits unwanted touching (sensual, exploitative or otherwise uncomfortable in nature).

Illness / Accident / Injury

If a minor becomes ill, has an accident, or is in any way injured while participating in a church event or activity, the worker must immediately assist or summon help, as circumstances require, must immediately notify the Primary Leader, and must complete any necessary paperwork including but not limited to the Accident/Injury Report as soon as possible with a copy given to the Senior Pastor.

Workers will be instructed through initial orientation and training regarding first aid and other emergency medical treatment procedures. Only workers certified in first aid, CPR, or other medical treatment should provide necessary care. Parents are to be notified as soon as possible after an illness, accident, or injury occurs, or when any medical treatment is administered.

Workers should inform the Primary Leader immediately of any conditions which may be a safety or health hazard, including faulty or defective equipment or supplies, so that the issue may be addressed.

Emergency Situations

Trinity has standard procedures in place for emergency situations, severe weather, fire safety, and other disasters. Safety & Security binders are located at the Centennial Hall welcome center, in the Usher's Closet in the Narthex, in the Children's Ministry Office, and the Main Office.

Workers will be instructed through initial orientation and training regarding emergency procedures and are expected to know this information. Workers should learn the location and how to use the nearest fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment as well as the location of severe weather shelters and fire/emergency exits

Events and Activities on Trinity Premises

Events and activities on Trinity premises include Sunday School, VBS, confirmation, lock-ins, etc. The Primary Leader will determine which events and activities require a Youth Participant Consent and Release form for a minor to participate.

Trinity has an established claim check procedure so that children may be released only to an authorized parent, guardian, or other authorized person; under no circumstances should workers release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other individual authorized by the parent or guardian. In an unclear situation, refer the individual to the Primary Leader of the activity or event.

The Rule of Two (or Rule of Three) should be followed at all times.

Offsite Events, Activities, and Overnight Trips

The Youth Participant Consent and Release form must be completed for any child or youth to participate in an offsite or overnight activity or event. The total number, ages, and gender of adults will be adjusted within the Pastor's or Primary Leader's discretion according to the composition of the participants, any requirements of a sponsoring organization, and consistent with the goals of this policy. One of the adult workers must be of at least 25 years of age. A minimum of two adults generally are required to take or accompany minors on an overnight outing. Overnight events that are attended by youth of both genders must be chaperoned by workers of both genders.

The Primary Leader will have a copy of all forms for overnight or off-site activities or events for the duration of the event. First Aid supplies will be available; all workers will be informed of the location of First Aid supplies/equipment and shall have access on a need-to-know basis to information concerning specific medical conditions and concerns of participants.

The Rule of Two (or Rule of Three) should be followed at all times.

Transportation

Workers who are the driver for an offsite activity or event or who transport a minor home after an event or activity (with parent's permission):

- must be 25 years of age or older;
- must have a valid operator's license acceptable in the State of Michigan (CDL may be required based on the vehicle being operated) and proof of insurance when driving their own automobile;
- must maintain a driving record acceptable to Trinity's insurance company;
- are expected to operate the vehicle in accordance with common standards of safe driving and courtesy (any traffic tickets, citations, or other violation notices received as a result of improperly driving or improperly operating a vehicle is the responsibility of, and must be paid by, the worker);
- must report an incident or accident immediately to the police and to the Pastor or the Primary Leader (and must provide any requested documentation);

- must NOT consume, be under or appear to be under the influence of, or have in the driver's system, alcohol, marijuana, a prescription drug which may impact driving, and/or illegal drugs;
- must NOT use any handheld devices, a cell phone (talking, texting, or using any other apps), smoke, eat, or engage in other distracting behaviors while driving; and
- must require all passengers to wear a seat belt before putting the vehicle in drive.

The Rule of Two (or Rule of Three) applies when transporting minors.

Code of Conduct

Workers are expected to demonstrate and exemplify Christ's love and Trinity's mission when interacting with our children and youth. The following are not permitted when interacting with children and youth as Trinity worker: divulging or misusing confidential information; possessing firearms, concealed weapons, other dangerous or hazardous weapons, devices, or material(s) (this prohibition includes visible and/or concealed weapons, even those for which the owner has a valid license or permit); using inappropriate language, including inappropriate jokes and obscene or foul language or behavior; consuming, possessing, being under or appearing to be under the influence of, or having in the worker's system, any alcohol, marijuana, and/or illegal drugs; and harassment of any kind.

Outside groups

Leaders of non-Trinity sponsored groups of children or youth who use Trinity's facilities are expected to adhere to these policies. Upon receipt from Trinity, the leaders must review the Child and Youth Protection Policy and sign a receipt and acknowledgment form confirming they have read the policy, understand it, and agree to follow it. Outside groups include, but are not limited to, groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, groups renting church space, and visiting youth groups. Given the nature of the outside groups that may use Trinity facilities, Trinity will not perform criminal history background checks, seek personal and professional references, review employment records, or obtain any other civil or criminal records for such groups, their leaders, supervisors, or participants. Leaders of outside groups will be invited to attend Trinity's orientation and are expected to conduct their own due diligence in this regard.

Supervision and Policy Oversight

All Trinity activities and events will have one designated Primary Leader responsible for overseeing and supervising an activity or event and compliance with this policy. Any exceptions to this policy should be approved by a Pastor or the Church Council Executive Committee in order to appropriately deal with and resolve specific situations consistent with the goals and intent of this policy.

If a worker, or anyone else, has any questions or concerns (including being in an uncomfortable situation), please see a Pastor or the Primary Leader.

Communication of Policy

This policy will be made available to the congregation in at least the following ways...

1. Published on the church website
2. Linked in the Messenger (as soon as approved or when subsequently revised)
3. Filed electronically in Trinity's shared Policies and Procedures drive that all staff can access.
4. A printed copy will be put in the Safety & Security Manuals.

Maintenance of Policy

This policy shall be reviewed by the Congregation Council a minimum of every two (2) years.

Appendix A

Child Abuse / Neglect Reporting Procedures

The Child Protection Law defines certain professionals who have regular contact with children as legally mandated to report immediately suspected child abuse and/or neglect to the authorities. Organizations such as Trinity Lutheran Church also have an obligation to report. However, anyone that has "reasonable cause" of suspected child abuse and/or neglect should report.

Trinity Lutheran Church requires that the appropriate individual in charge be contacted when suspected, reported or discovered child abuse and/or neglect or violation of the Child Protection Guidelines of Trinity Lutheran Church has occurred. Notification should be made to the Pastor and the supervisor for the ministry in which the staff or volunteer is involved that received the suspected, reported or discovered child abuse and/or neglect allegations or violation of the Trinity Lutheran Church Child Protection Guidelines. Notification will also be made immediately to the Michigan Centralized Intake and/or law enforcement.

Steps for reporting to CPS:

1. Call the Michigan Centralized Intake at 1-855-444-3911 24-hours / 7 days a week.
2. Complete and submit the written DHS-3200 form.
3. Mandated reporters can complete an online reporting form at www.michigan.gov/mandatedreporter and this will complete the reporting requirement for both the call and the written form.

Information needed for reporting to CPS or law enforcement:

1. Child's full name
2. Child's age and/or date of birth
3. Child's address
4. Parent and/or guardian's name
5. Parent and/or guardian's address
6. Description of suspected abuse and/or neglect
7. Any disabilities for the child
8. If the child is immediate danger or harm

Trinity Lutheran Church Reporting:

1. Immediately notify the Senior Pastor
2. Immediately notify the supervisor of the ministry or program for which they work
3. Document in writing the date of report, the time of report, to whom the report was made (CPS and/or which law enforcement agency) and a brief synopsis of the report. If there were any witnesses to the information gathered or reported that person's information should be documented.

Trinity Lutheran Church staff will receive annual training regarding the signs of child abuse, including child sexual abuse and steps to report any and all suspected child abuse. Mandated Reporter's Resources will also be available in the church office.

Child Protective Services Definitions

(Information was taken from the Michigan Department of the Health and Human Services)

Child: Under the age of 18 years old.

Child Abuse:

Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, legal guardian, any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare a teacher, a teacher's aide, a member of the clergy, or an individual 18 years of age or older who is involved with a youth program.

Child Neglect:

Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following

- Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, though financially able to do so, or by the failure to seek financial or other reasonable means to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
- Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.