

Child Protection Policy

Lincoln Heights Evangelical Lutheran Church

1217 Watrous Ave
Des Moines, IA 50315

Adopted at the January 27, 2019 Annual Meeting

Child Protection Policy for Lincoln Heights Evangelical Lutheran Church

Introduction

Jesus instructed His followers to welcome children as we would welcome God (Mark 9:36-37) and commanded us not to hurt children (Mark 9:42). As followers of Christ, Lincoln Heights Evangelical Lutheran Church is committed to witnessing our faith through our protection of children from abuse. This policy is one part of this witness.

Lincoln Heights Evangelical Lutheran Church takes all indicators and suspicions of child maltreatment seriously. We are aware of the research on polyvictimization, which tells us that children who are maltreated in one way are at significantly increased risk of being maltreated in multiple ways. Therefore, as our church becomes aware of an indicator or report of a child being maltreated in one way, we will be alert to the possibility that this child might also be maltreated in another way, and we will take steps to protect the child from known risks and be extra attentive to and supportive of the child.

Defining Abuse

Throughout this policy the terms below will be used as defined here.

Child: "Child" means any person under the age of eighteen years ([Iowa Code 232.68](#))

Child Sexual Abuse: The policy defines sexual abuse as physical contact with a sexual or intimate part of the body of the child or perpetrator, or other forms of sexual activity engaged in for the purpose of sexual gratification or to degrade or abuse a child.

Physical contact includes:

- Touching, grabbing, patting, slapping, pinching, rubbing, fondling, groping, poking, or other forms of contact, whether over or under clothing.
- Rubbing one's genital area up against another person or touching another person with one's genitals, whether over or under clothing. This includes instances when an individual acts as though the rubbing was inadvertent but was in fact intentional.
- Sexual penetration of any kind.

Sexual or intimate body parts include, but are not limited to:

- Breasts
- Buttocks
- Genitals
- Groin area
- Upper thighs

Other forms of sexual activity include:

- Photographing, video recording, or making any other visual, descriptive, or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body.
- Displaying to another any writings, photograph, video, or other visual or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body.

Child Physical Abuse: Any non-accidental physical injury, or injury which is at variance with the history given of it, suffered by a child as the result of the acts or omissions of a person responsible for the care of the child. ([Iowa Code 232.68](#))

The policy defines physical abuse as a non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting, (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child.

Child Emotional Abuse: Any mental injury to a child's intellectual or psychological capacity as evidenced by an observable and substantial impairment in the child's ability to function within the child's normal range of performance and behavior as the result of the acts or omissions of a person responsible for the care of the child, if the impairment is diagnosed and confirmed by a licensed physician or qualified mental health professional as defined in section [622.10](#). (Iowa Code [232.68](#))

The policy defines emotional abuse as acts toward a child that cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to the child's physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development. Emotional abuse might include, but is not limited to, patterns of:

- Restricting a child's movement
- Discrimination (e.g., serving snack to all the children in a youth group except for one child or one group of children)
- Blaming
- Belittling, denigrating, ridiculing, or humiliating
- Threatening or scaring
- Unrealistic expectations and demands
- Other non-physical forms of hostility or bullying

Neglect: (4) (a) The failure on the part of a person responsible for the care of a child to provide for the adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical or mental health treatment, supervision, or other care necessary for the child's health and welfare when financially able to do so or when offered financial or other reasonable means to do so. (b) For the purposes of subparagraph division (a), failure to provide for the adequate supervision of a child means the person failed to provide proper supervision of a child that a reasonable and prudent person would exercise under similar facts and circumstances and the failure resulted in direct harm or created a risk of harm to the child. ([Iowa Code 232.68](#))

The policy defines neglect in these areas:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Child Spiritual Abuse: Abuse administered under the guise of religion can leave children angry with God, have a fear of dying, leave their house of worship, or even abandon their faith tradition altogether. It includes harassment, humiliation, or misuse of religion for selfish, secular, or ideological ends. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 18:6, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Indicators

Because “the majority of children who are sexually abused will be moderately to severely symptomatic at some point in their life,”¹ Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church is familiar with and attentive to potential indicators of child sexual abuse. As the church’s front-line for children’s and youth programming and pastoral counseling, church professionals and volunteers have regular opportunities to observe children’s behavior, family dynamics, and caregiving styles. They are often privy to the intimate details of congregants’ lives. Unlike formal educators, church professionals have ongoing contact with the entire family unit and its acquaintances, and as such may be in the unique position to detect child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment. The training module at the end of this policy explains possible indicators of abuse.

Impact

Though a child’s injuries may be hidden from the untrained eye, child sexual abuse and other forms of child maltreatment can result in immediate and/or lasting impact in all realms of the person’s well-being. Understanding how child sexual abuse can traumatize the child and have lasting impact in the life of a surviving adult is a critical first step in preventing abuse and responding compassionately. Not every child will display the impact of their maltreatment and not every adult will experience the long-term consequences of their traumatic childhood experiences, but all are at increased risk.

People Who Sexually Abuse Children

People who sexually abuse children utilize authority, trust, or physical force/threats to gain access and control over children so they can perpetrate the abuse.

Screening

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will require the following screening procedures:

- 1) Policy signing by WELS called workers, hired employees, volunteer teachers, VBS volunteers, youth group leaders, elders, and church council members
- 2) Background checks will be done for hired employees, volunteer teachers, VBS volunteers, youth group leaders, and elders.
- 3) Written application, internet searches, reference checks and interviews will be required for hired employees.
- 4) An abridged version of the policy (Appendix A) will be signed by one time volunteers and teen volunteers.

A background check will include the following information:

- Local and state criminal record
- State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check
- State sex offender registry check
- Motor vehicle record check (dependent on volunteer activity)

If the screening process yields information that an individual is found to be accused of abuse, or abused a child in any way, or convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will contact its Freedom for the Captives representative (or a similar child protection expert) about how to proceed, and reserves the right to reject a volunteer to work with children.

Safe Behaviors

Because most child abuse happens in isolated situations and because most adults seeking to harm a child prefer to do so in private, our church requires an interruptible and observable setting for all church activities. The

¹ S.R. Dube, R.F. Anda, C.L. Whitfield, D.W. Brown, V.J. Felitti, M. Dong, and W.H. Giles, “Child Sexual Abuse: Consequences and Implications,” *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 24 (2005): 358-64.

preferred method is to have two unrelated adults supervise youth events. When adults spend time with a child, the adults will inform both the child's caregiver and their supervisor of each meeting. The adult and child will meet at a time and place where the caregiver and supervisor can interrupt the time or observe the time from a distance. Furthermore, the meeting will take place at a place with high visibility.

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church desires to show healthy affections to its children through the following:

- Displays of affection that are observable and interruptible
- Kind words
- High fives
- Pats on the shoulder
- Side hugs
- Positive verbal interactions:
 - Encouragement
 - Kind words
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Appropriate jokes

And we prohibit the following at church activities:

- Sexually or physically abusive touch
- Touching a child's thighs, stomach, or back
- Corporal punishment
- Any touch that is unwanted by a child
- Lap sitting
- Tickling
- Playing with hair
- Full frontal hugs
- Staff displaying favoritism toward a child or group of children
- Sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits
- Uploading, downloading, or viewing of pornography
- Music, video games, and movies with sexual themes

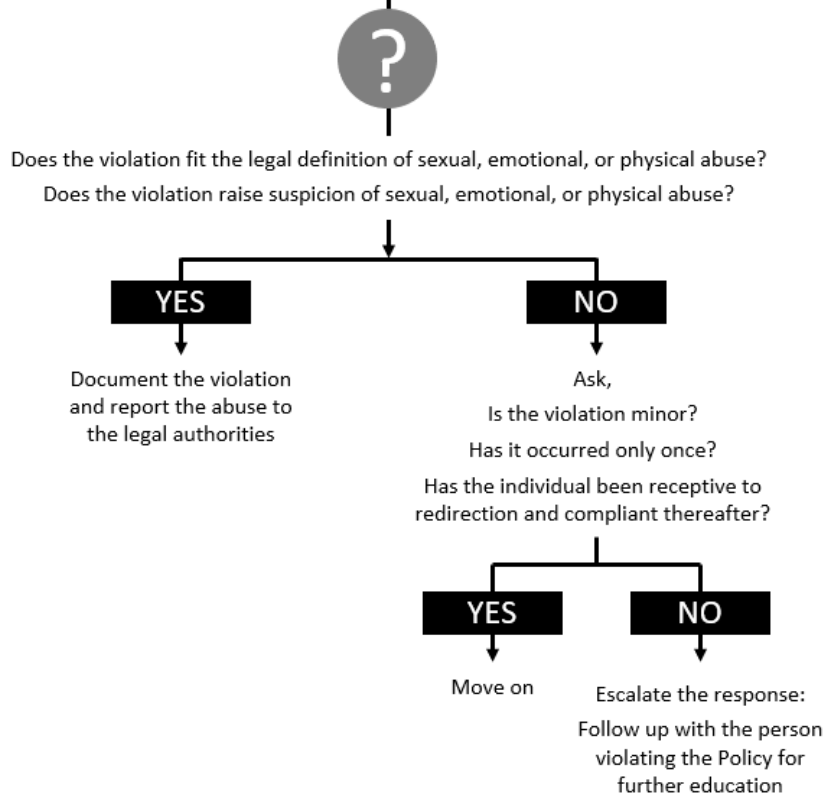
Routine Protective Measures

At the beginning of each ministry year, Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will create a registration for any child who attends activities and programs. The registration will record who may safely pick-up a child from an event and other helpful information about the child. Attendance will be taken at all events. Once a child's attendance is recorded for an event, it is the church's responsibility to supervise those children from the time they are dropped off until the time they are picked up by a caregiver. The classrooms and areas will be spot checked by an adult member of the congregation.

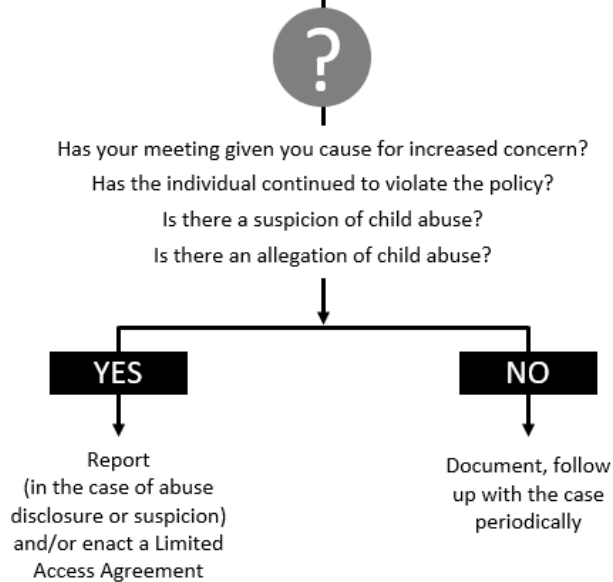
Policy Violations

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church takes Policy violations seriously. Any staff, volunteer, parent, or church member who witnesses a violation is expected to respond in an appropriate way. Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church expects all adults to practice bystander intervention when they see a Policy violation. Church leaders will respond according to the following:

LOOKING AT THE DOCUMENTATION, FIRST ASK



FOLLOWING THE MEETING, ASK



Policy exceptions should be rare. Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church allows Policy exceptions that are preapproved or for emergencies. All exceptions should be documented.

Limited Access Agreements

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church utilizes Limited Access Agreements to clarify safe behavior around children for community members who have:

- Engaged in concerning or risky behavior
- Violated the Policy repeatedly
- Offenses that are not related to children (e.g., stealing, drug use, DUI, etc.)

A Limited Access Agreement is a written and agreed-upon boundary between an individual and Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church wherein we outline specific concerns about an individual's behavior, detail appropriate behavior toward children, and plan ongoing accountability for the individual. Limited Access Agreements apply to members of our church and will be reviewed annually by church leadership. They do not apply to known offenders or church staff members.

If a convicted offender wants to join Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church, we will contact our Freedom for the Captives representative (or equivalent child protection expert) on how to best interact with a known sex offender. Similarly, if an individual has been credibly accused of child sexual abuse or any form of child maltreatment but has not yet or was not convicted, we will contact our Freedom for the Captives representative (or equivalent child protection expert) on how to best proceed.

If a staff member violates the Policy, they will be formally warned and then fired if the violation occurs again.

Reporting

The abuse of children is not only a sin, but it is a serious crime. When adults report suspected child abuse to the legal authorities, their report could save a child's life. In contrast, silence about suspected abuse brings incredible harm to victims and emboldens offenders. Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church requires the Pastor, staff, volunteers, and church leadership and encourages its members, both mandated reporters and not, to contact the authorities (Iowa Department of Human Services via the Child Abuse Hotline) immediately when a child discloses abuse, when they witness child abuse, or when they observe signs of abuse. In addition to notifying the authorities, the reporter is to notify the Elders and/or Pastor. If the alleged offender is a pastor or elder, the reporter is not obligated to tell the alleged offender that a report has been made but can instead can notify the chair of the child protection team.

After receiving a report of abuse, the identity of the reporter(s) will remain confidential within the church.

Independent Reviews

Under the following circumstances, Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will consult with Freedom for the Captives (or equivalent child protection expert) to determine if an independent review should be pursued:

1. When a suspicion of child maltreatment is reported to the civil authorities and they decline to investigate or prosecute the alleged abuses.
2. A district attorney has not pursued legal prosecution because no suspected criminal behavior is reported; however, the Child Safeguarding Committee believes the individual's behavior might still violate the church policy, be immoral, be inappropriate, or be unsafe.

If an investigation is deemed necessary, Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will retain an organization that meets the following criteria:

1. Completely independent of Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
2. Experienced in proper investigation techniques
3. Up-to-date on child maltreatment research

Abuse Disclosures

Because children and adult survivors are reluctant to disclose abuse, Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church acknowledges that survivors who choose to do so need our community’s utmost support.

When children disclose, they almost always do so tentatively or by accident, and may later recant even when there is proof that the abuse occurred. If questioned directly, many child victims may deny the abuse. When children disclose intentionally, children may first test the adult’s reaction by pretending that the abuse happened to a friend or by supplying only a small bit of information. If a child discloses abuse to you, the following are helpful tips on how to respond in the moment:

- Stay calm.
- Show love and respect for the child.
- Thank the child for telling you and acknowledge how difficult it must be to disclose this experience.
- If the child expresses guilt or concerns about getting in trouble, reassure the child that no matter what happened he or she is not to blame.
- If the child expresses concerns about not being believed, reassure the child that you believe him/her.
- Allow the child to talk freely; do not interrupt, ask the child to repeat words, or probe for details. Remember, you are not an investigator. You simply need enough information to make a report or take other appropriate action.
- Do not offer false assurances, such as promising to keep the child’s disclosure a secret.
- Let the child know what to expect next and incorporate their input where possible.
- Protect the child immediately from the suspected offender.
- Report the abuse to authorities and your supervisors/church leaders.
- Document the disclosure and your report.
- Protect the child’s right to privacy and avoid the urge to turn indiscriminately to colleagues, friends, or family for advice. Instead turn to professionals experienced in handling cases of child sexual abuse and to carefully selected individuals who can provide assistance and support to the child and you.

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

DO Say	DON’T Say
Thank you for telling me.	Why are you telling me this?
I’m glad you’re safe now.	Why didn’t you _____(scream/stop him etc.)?
You did the right thing _____ (asking for help/telling me/reporting the abuse etc.)	What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?
I’m glad you’re talking with me.	Tell me more details about what happened.
I’m sorry this happened to you. How can I help?	Why did he do that to you? Had you done something to make him think that was okay?
Take as much time as you need.	You need to forgive and move on.

Things may never be the same, but they can get better.	Don't worry, it's going to be alright.
I am here.	It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.
I stand with you. This congregation stands with you.	Calm down and try to relax.
	Try to be strong.
<i>The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.</i>	It was so long ago, why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.
It is okay to be angry.	You should get on with your life.
It is okay to still love your abuser.	Time heals all wounds.
It's understandable you're feeling that way.	Out of tragedies good things happen.
Your reaction is not an uncommon response.	You're lucky that _____ didn't happen.
You're not going crazy. These are normal reactions following an assault.	It was God's will. I know how you feel.
I believe you.	Perhaps you misunderstood....
It wasn't your fault.	Better to receive punishment in this world than the next.

Ongoing Survivor Support

The purpose of this policy is to prevent occurrences of child abuse. Yet we understand that no matter how hard we try to protect children, there will always be some individuals seeking to harm them. If Lincoln Heights Lutheran becomes aware that a child has been, or is suspected to have been, abused, they will take the following steps to clearly communicate support for the child and the child's family:

Terminate/Suspend. Immediately suspend or terminate the alleged perpetrator of abuse from any church positions s/he may hold, pending the results of an investigation. Assign a liaison to maintain contact with the alleged perpetrator.

Support Person. A member of the church's leadership (Pastor, Elder, or Child Protection Committee member) will reach out to the child and the child's family to express the church's unequivocal support. Understanding that abuse can have ongoing impact on a child and a child's family, the Support Person will seek permission from the child and the child's family to continue offering support on an ongoing basis. This support will include:

- Showing up
- Listening
- Affirming
- Offering to accompany the child/family in filing a police report, meeting with Child Protective Services, to court hearings or trial and other related meetings, interviews, or hearings.
- Asking the child and the child's family how else the church can offer support

Support People will understand the limitations of their role and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other expert advice, but will instead function as members of a multidisciplinary team, working when possible to support and complement the efforts of involved professionals to support the child and family. For instance, a child who has been abused may have theological questions or experience spiritual injuries, but at the same time, may find

comfort in spirituality, prayer, and other forms of religious engagement. The pastor has a unique role to fill here and will make himself available to provide regular ongoing pastoral support to the child and the child's family.

Support People will be careful to avoid causing further harm. Under no circumstances will Support Individuals:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the child or the child's family
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief of the child
- Attempt to silence the child or the child's family in any way or for any reason
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support of the perpetrator
- Urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator

Mental Health Treatment. The church will offer to help the family find a qualified mental health practitioner with expertise treating victims of abuse and their family members. If the family requires assistance paying for mental health treatment the church will offer to subsidize such treatment or connect the family to resources that may be able to assist in this regard. In the event that the child is found to have been abused by a church employee, volunteer, or other individual serving in an official capacity, or that the church was negligent or otherwise complicit in allowing the abuse to happen, the church will reimburse the entire cost of treatment for the child and the child's family members.

Public Support. The church commits to protecting the privacy of all victims of child abuse. We also understand that all too often child victims of abuse are publicly marginalized while communities rally to protect abusers. In the event that a victim of abuse is publicly attacked or disparaged for the abuse or their response to the abuse, the church leadership will - with the victim's permission - make a public statement denouncing and prohibiting such treatment of the victim and urge the community to offer support instead. If the disparagement occurs privately, the church leadership will communicate the same message privately to the relevant individuals.

Training and Dissemination

This policy shall be disseminated widely to the church community through publications, public discussion, educational opportunities, sermons, training programs, and other appropriate means of communication that will raise awareness and create a safe environment for our children. Specifically, the most current version of our Policy shall be

- Posted on the church website
- Readily available in the church office
- Communicated to every member annually via email
- Included in new-member packets

The following individuals within the church will need to attend annual training and sign an affirmation indicating that they have read, understand, and commit to abide by the terms of the policy:

- Called Workers
- Staff
- Council
- Volunteers

Affirmations (Appendix B) will be stored in the church's office files.

Evaluating and Updating the Policy

The Council of Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church will appoint a Child Protection Committee (Committee) consisting of one Pastor, one Elder, and a minimum of two other members. This Committee will annually review any applicable:

- Incident Reports
- Parental Feedback
- Staff Feedback
- Children's Feedback
- Limited Access Agreements
- Expert Review

This policy is adopted by the action of the
Voters of Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church at the Annual Meeting on this 27th day of January, 2019.

This policy was last reviewed by:
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy Creators: Pastor Mathew Pfeifer, James Norton, Jr., Sheri Pender, and Abbey Norton on 1/6/2019.

Outside Expert Reviewer: Victor Vieth on 11/21/2018.