



Child Protection Overview

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Purpose

All of us contribute to the safety of our community. The most effective way to prevent or reduce abuse and neglect among children is to be vigilant and to ensure all of our conduct is observable and accountable. As a community, Redeemer Downtown is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding abusers accountable. These commitments are how we live out our Christian Faith. God is a refuge for the abused and never ignores their cry (Psalm 9:9, 12). A key aspect of following Christ is learning to use power as Jesus does - to serve, bless, and protect - never to exploit or serve ourselves.

The goals of this policy are to protect children and youth from abuse and neglect and promote a safe and respectful environment for all. All adults are expected to interact with minors in a safe and respectful manner. All staff and volunteers are required to interact with children in a mature, capable, safe, caring, and responsible manner, with a high level of accountability. This policy is in agreement with and in support of Overture 6 – Child Protection in the PCA, approved during the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America.

This Child Protection Policy applies to all people who interact with minors in the Redeemer Downtown ministry environment and provides best practices outside the ministry environment.

A Biblical Understanding of Safeguarding

Safeguarding our children is vital for ensuring our entire congregation is well cared for and those who are vulnerable are protected from abuse or neglect. For the Christian, child protection ought to be more than just a matter of legal and governance compliance, but a matter of faithfulness to Jesus Christ and loving others as an outworking of the Gospel. In light of the God-given dignity of all people, the reality of sin and abuse, God's commands to care, steward, obey the law, and be a witness for God's glory, all Christians have a moral and ethical obligation to refrain from and prevent child abuse and neglect by whatever means they are able.

1. The Dignity of All People: Genesis 1

God created the world and humanity as the pinnacle of creation, uniquely made in his image (Gen 1:26-27). All human beings, male or female, adult or child, whatever ethnicity, nationality, background, whether able-bodied or a person with disabilities, are in God's image and of inestimable worth. This is a foundational motivation for human rights and safeguarding. In light of this, Jesus demonstrates the value of children by urging his disciples, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.' (Mark 10:14, Matthew 19:14). Therefore, all Christians have an ethical obligation never to abuse or neglect a child. Specifically, church members are prohibited from all forms of child abuse or neglect in Redeemer Downtown's community as an obligation of their membership vow to 'resolve and

promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ.'

2. Abuse is Real: Genesis 3

Scripture teaches plainly the consequences and implications of sin; how it causes damage between people and cuts us off from our Creator. Abuse is one outworking of sin. Christians should therefore not ignore or downplay the reality of abuse and the pain, trauma, and hurt that victims of abuse experience.

Being a Christian does not render someone immune to the problem of sin either. Romans 7 explains how the "law" of sin still lives inside us, and we find it constantly at work to cause us to disobey God, even when we want to do good. It is, therefore, naïve to think that abuse could not happen in a Christian context. Sadly, distorted religion can provide some of the worst contexts for sin and abuse to be perpetrated. Therefore, sober vigilance and realism are important in a safeguarding response.

3. Care Matters: Luke 10:25-37

At the heart of the Christian faith is a call to love others as we love ourselves. Ensuring we protect others from abuse by implementing compassionate and robust safeguarding practices is a natural outworking of this command.

God commands his people to have a particular concern for the vulnerable in society (Micah 6:8, James 1:27), as we are all made in His image (Genesis 1:27) and so have an inherent worth and value. Sadly, because of sin, children are often the most vulnerable to abuse, even in church settings. Therefore, robust and compassionate policies and practices, allied with sober vigilance, are vital to ensure Redeemer Downtown is a safe and nurturing community for children. This means real and immediate attention must be given to recognizing and responding well if abuse is suspected. Christians are warned to not 'walk on by', rather, be like the Samaritan man and care for the needs of others, even if it is inconvenient or difficult. It also means it is important to put preventative measures in place to protect abuse from happening in the first place.

All Christians have an ethical obligation to speak up for the vulnerable, and even many adults are mandated reporters in New York. Therefore, all congregants in the Redeemer Downtown community are strongly encouraged to report instances of possible abuse or neglect. Specifically, church members are expected to report instances of potential child abuse or neglect as an obligation of their membership vow to 'submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church and promise to study its purity and peace.'

4. Obey the Law: Romans 13:1-5

Christians are commanded to comply with legal requirements for safeguarding and child protection. Across the USA and state by state, laws are in place to prevent the abuse of

vulnerable people. Christians are commanded to obey the governing rulers and authorities, including laws on harassment, safeguarding, and child protection.

5. Be a Witness: 1 Peter 2:12

By working for the good of others, Christians can bring glory to God. Those who follow Christ ought to approach safeguarding with a desire to implement it in a way that brings God glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). Delivering excellent care and protection for others will bring honour to Him as a key way that we care for the vulnerable in our midst.

Who Is Protected? Who Has Responsibilities?

Everyone in the Redeemer Downtown ministry environment is expected to report any concerns of troubling behavior, crossing boundaries, or possible child abuse or neglect. The Safeguarding Team will take steps to find out what is happening and to determine which next steps are appropriate to ensure everyone's safety and care. Therefore,

- **Everyone** in the Redeemer Downtown ministry environment is expected to report potential instances of child abuse or neglect.
- **Church members** are expected to report potential instances of child abuse and neglect as soon as possible as an obligation of their membership vow to 'submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church and promise to study its purity and peace.'
- **Church staff, officers, and Family Ministries volunteers** are required to report potential instances of child abuse and neglect.
 - Book of Church Order (BCO) 8.3. states, *'It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto.'*
 - Similarly, for deacons and deaconesses, BCO 9.2. states, *'It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress.'* Therefore, both elders by virtue of their responsibility to watch over the flock, and deacons/deaconesses by virtue of their call to compassion and care for the needy, have a duty to exercise vigilance, and report actual or potential instances of child abuse or neglect.

Behaviors To Report

Potential child abuse or neglect that involve a child or youth congregant.

Redeemer Downtown, as a mirror of God's concern for justice and protection of the vulnerable, seeks to prevent harassment or abuse of power in the church and ministry environment. The definitions and examples of forms of child abuse and neglect indicated below are intended to show the range of behavior, but do not include every possible instance of behavior that is considered child abuse or neglect.

RDT expects its officers and members to interact with others, including people outside the RDT ministry environment, in a respectful, honoring and lawful manner. Any reports of inappropriate behavior, including reports of past action, will be reviewed and addressed.

Please note: *you do not need to establish if a boundary has been crossed or an incident of child abuse or neglect has taken place to escalate; this is for the Safeguarding Team and other appropriate parties to determine. If in doubt, escalate it to the Safeguarding Team. This includes but is not limited to: If you witness or have evidence of suspicious behavior; if someone discloses to you an incident of abuse or neglect (e.g. by a child or a perpetrator); or if you see any patterns that raise suspicions of abuse or neglect taking place. It is important to realise that when you report abuse, you are not personally accusing someone of abuse, you are giving the information that may prove vital to the protection of children to professionals who are trained to evaluate and respond in a variety of appropriate ways.*

Abuse

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

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

- **Sexual Penetration:** Any act or attempted act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a person's penis, finger, other body part, or an object, and/or any oral-genital contact.
- **Sexual Contact:** Any intentional touching of a person's breasts, buttocks, groin, genitals, or other intimate parts. Touching may be over or under clothing and may include the touching or making the person touch, or making the person touch their own body. This also includes contact with non-sexual areas of the body for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator (such as with certain paraphilic disorders).
- **Non-Contact Sexual Acts:** For example, sending or receiving nude photos, sexual communication, exposing oneself, recording a child changing, etc.

Physical Abuse: Non-accidental injury as a result of physically harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver, or other person who has responsibility for or power over the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is never appropriate in the ministry environment. However, it is not necessarily considered abuse in the home, as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Emotional Abuse: When a person holding power and trust uses a pattern of controlling and domineering behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering. Such a pattern has a substantial likelihood of causing harm to the child's development. Bullying is a common term for a pattern of emotional abuse.

Spiritual Abuse: A form of emotional abuse, meaning a pattern of coercive or domineering behaviors using religion, usually by a person who holds power and trust within the ministry environment. Many acts of abuse in a religious environment will have a spiritual dimension. Examples include:

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

Neglect

Neglect: Neglect can take different forms:

- Physical: failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision
- Medical: failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment
- Educational: failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
- Emotional: inattention to a child's emotional needs including giving love and affection, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs

Self-Harm / Self-Injury occurs when a child or youth chooses to inflict wounds or harm upon themselves.

Other Definitions Relevant to this Process

- "Child," "children," and "minor": In New York State, a minor is a person who is under 18 years old, or whose mental capacity is that of a minor. **Enrolled high school students who have turned 18 are still considered minors for the purposes of this policy.**
- "Adult": any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age (except those whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
- "Youth," "Teenage," or "Teenager": any individual at least thirteen (13) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18).
- "Staff": any person on Redeemer Downtown's payroll, including dependent contractors.
- "Church Officers": elders, deacons, deaconesses, trustees
- "Volunteer": any non-paid person given the responsibility for caring for, assisting with, or working with minors or youth.
- "Criminal Background Check": the procedure used to determine if a potential Adult Volunteer has a record of criminal activity.
- "Ministry Environment": any Redeemer Downtown sanctioned gathering of individuals, whether in a ministry location, offsite location, or congregant home, including but not limited to 1:1 mentorship meetings, youth retreats and events, VBS, children's ministry classes, local gatherings, and childcare offerings.

Screening for Children and Youth Staff and Volunteers

Redeemer Downtown operates a rigorous screening process for Staff and Volunteers who desire to work with minors in children's or youth ministry, which consists of the following:

1. Children or Youth Application
2. Annual Criminal Background Checks and Online Clearance System. *Note: Criminal Background Check not required for minors who volunteer in the ministry.*
3. Reference checks
4. Interviews
5. Internet and social media checks
6. Acknowledgement of having read and agreed to the Redeemer Downtown Children and Youth Policies and Procedures Handbook, including the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

Child Protection Code of Conduct

Our entire community must take collective responsibility to promote healthy interaction and boundaries with children, committing to keep our interactions with children observable and accountable. While Redeemer Downtown is responsible for ensuring robust prevention and response processes regarding potential instances of child abuse or neglect within the ministry

environment, the following protocols are protective best practices for all settings that involve children. Any violation of the following protocols or any other concern within the ministry environment related to child safety should be relayed to the Child Safety team as soon as possible by emailing childsafety@redeemerdt.com or by [completing this form](#).

General Protocols:

- **No one should be alone with a child who is not their own, especially in an isolated area.** Downtown prohibits its volunteers, staff, and officers (and discourages any adult) from spending time with children or youth alone without a parent or guardian's consent, including in a private home or any other setting. This includes times of structured ministry as well as unstructured times, whether on or off church property (including giving rides).
- **No one is permitted to assist a child in the restroom who is not their own child** (except two adults in a time of structured ministry as outlined below). If you enter a restroom and a child is present alone, please wait outside the restroom until they come out.
- **Appropriate touch must always be welcomed by the child, and all touch between an adult and a child must be observable and accountable to other adults.** Adults must always understand and respect that children do not always welcome touch and must also pay attention to the child's body language. If you are unsure if the child is consenting, just ask. Although most sexual offenses against children are committed in more isolated settings, some child sex offenders will seek to offend in the presence of other adults. Examples of inappropriate touch are listed under "Prohibited Behaviors" below.

Prohibited Behaviors:

- Sexually or physically abusive touch
- Any touch that is unwanted by a child or not observable by others
- Any intimate touch, such as massage, playing with hair, or any touch under clothing, including a child's thighs, stomach, or lower back (except when following appropriate diapering procedures)
- Tickling, Piggy Back Rides, or other games involving lots of touch with children
- Lap sitting (except for holding children in the nursery or to briefly comfort a child who is Pre-K or below)
- Full frontal hugs (except for holding children in the nursery or to briefly comfort a child who is Pre-K or below)
- Any form of physical punishment or correction, such as spanking, slapping, hitting, etc.
- Any form of sexual communication or sharing sexual content. This is a common grooming tactic by offenders. As such, our community prohibits the following, especially directed toward children:
 - Sexually suggestive language or slang, sexual jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits

- o Sharing or displaying of any sexual images, videos or other content
 - o Music, videos games, and movies with inappropriate sexual themes
- Displaying favoritism towards a child or group of children. Staff may not give gifts to individual children, unless the gifts are:
 - o Able to be given to other children at other times for similar reasons (e.g., gifts to graduating seniors; a new Bible for students entering middle school; end of the year thank you gifts to older teens who volunteered in a ministry)
 - o Signed from the church rather than the individual staff member
 - o Given together with another staff member

Encouraged Behaviors:

- We encourage healthy affection for children through the following as long as it is welcome by the child and accountable to other adults:
 - o High-fives
 - o Pats on the shoulder
 - o Side-hugs and shoulder-to-shoulder hugs

Communication Protocols:

Redeemer Downtown prohibits its volunteers, staff members, and officers (and discourages any adult) from communicating privately with children or youth, without a parent or guardian's consent. This includes interaction via text, social media, email, or other forms of electronic communication that are private. (Additionally, any staff member, volunteer, or officer who becomes aware of private communication between a child and an older child in a different stage of development is required to notify a member of the Child Safety team).

Therefore, all communication between a volunteer, staff member, or officer and a child or youth must include at least one other adult. If a youth or child messages a volunteer, staff member, or officer privately, the volunteer, staff member, or officer will direct the child or youth to an appropriate way to connect. If the outreach occurs a second time, the volunteer, staff member, or officer must alert the Child Safety team.

Correction Protocols:

When the correction of children is necessary, staff and volunteers will avoid any form of harsh language, including shaming, humiliation, or yelling. No physical punishment or correction (such as spanking, slapping, hitting, etc.) is permitted, period. Any serious issues of misconduct by children or youth must be brought to the attention of the parents or guardians as well as the Child Safety team representatives.. Our church encourages positive verbal interactions, including:

- Encouragement
- Kind words

- Positive reinforcement
- Appropriate jokes

Two Adult Protocol:

Because a large percentage of child abuse occurs in isolation from others, our church requires a minimum of two, unrelated adults to supervise all ministry involving children and youth, including, but not limited to, Sunday morning classes, mid-week events, and off-site official church events. All adults serving in our ministry with children and youth should set an example to bring transparency and accountability to any close interactions with children. As listed above, Redeemer Downtown prohibits its staff, volunteers and officers from spending time with children or youth alone, without a parent or guardian's consent, including in a private home or any other setting.

One-on-one conversations and mentoring can be an important part of ministry to minors. When these are done within our ministry, they will be done in an area where there is still visible accountability to others.

Diapering and Restroom Protocols:

All diapering and assistance in the restroom shall be done by the child's parent/guardian or by one staff member with one other staff or volunteer observing from close proximity. Redeemer Downtown only hires females for Nursery Staff positions. Only these staff shall change diapers and supervise bathroom visits in the Nursery. All diapering and assistance shall be conducted with disposable gloves to prevent any skin to skin contact and to promote good hygiene.

Field Trip or Retreat Protocols:

Staff or volunteers organizing any field trip or retreat are responsible for communicating and ensuring that the policies of the Redeemer Downtown Children and Youth Policies and Procedures Handbook, including the Child Protection Code of Conduct, apply for the duration of the trip. This must be made known to all participants (including parents or guardians of participants).

Self-Harm /Self-Injury Protocols:

If a child or youth is discovered to have committed or is suspected of committing self-harm, immediately alert the Child Safety Team. If the child or youth is in immediate danger, call 911, then alert the Child Safety team. The Child Safety Team will contact the parent and provide recommendations for a mental health professional. The Child Safety Team will help coordinate safety plans for the child between the parent, mental health professional and Redeemer Downtown staff and volunteers for use within the ministry environment.

Reporting Process

Reporting Channels

Redeemer Downtown takes all concerns related to child abuse or neglect seriously. **Everyone** who experiences, observes, or learns of potential instances of child abuse or neglect is **expected** to report the situation by using the following reporting channels:

1. Report to **Law Enforcement** or child advocacy (details below).
2. Use the [Child Protection Reporting Form](#). RDT has a Safeguarding Team with Child Safety representatives who are responsible for responding to any concerns or reports involving a minor.
3. Report to a Pastor, staff member, or officer as these individuals are required to report the incident to the Safeguarding Team.
4. Email childsafety@redeemerdt.com.

Reports to Law Enforcement

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911. Otherwise,

- Call the New York State Central Register (SCR) at 1(800) 342-3720
- If you are a mandated reporter call the SCR's Mandated Reporter hotline at 1(800) 635-1522.¹ Mandated reporters must also follow these steps to complete the written report after making an oral report:
 - Submit a signed mandated reporter form within 48 hours of making an oral report.
 - Mail the completed form to the ACS Borough Office where the child resides.
 - Download the mandated reporter form (LDSS-2221A) or visit your local Child Protection Borough Office. Find your ACS Borough Office.
 - If you have questions about making a report or would like to follow-up with a report you made, visit the Mandated Reporter page.

DO NOT try to investigate the matter. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children or adults. **After a church member has reported abuse, Redeemer Downtown asks that they notify a member of the Safety Team as soon as possible.** Do not inform anyone who is suspected of abuse (or anyone else within the household, if the suspected abuser is within the household) that a report has been made.

The closest child advocacy center to Redeemer Downtown is:

¹ While not all adults are mandated reporters in New York, many professionals are legally mandated to report. Furthermore, all Christians have an ethical obligation to speak up for the vulnerable. For information see <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/child-welfare/how-to-make-report.page>

- Manhattan Child Advocacy Center (1-800-621-HOPE). You can chat with an advocate here: <https://www.safehorizon.org/location/manhattan-child-advocacy-center-cac/>.
- If anyone has questions concerning a child's safety or about indicators of abuse, reach out to the child advocacy center or the helpline of the Office of Advocacy of the New York State Central Register at (212) 676-9421.

Privacy

Those involved as a reporting person, reported victim, accused person, or witness are entitled to privacy, except to the extent information about the report or the involved parties must be shared with others, on a limited basis, to facilitate an effective investigation, provide care, or prevent harm to the reported victim or others.

No Retaliation

Redeemer Downtown does not tolerate acts of retaliation against anyone who reports a complaint of child abuse and neglect, cooperates in the investigation of a complaint, or serves as an investigator of a complaint. Retaliation includes any adverse action that someone takes against another person because he/she reported potential child abuse and neglect. Any negative action that would deter a reasonable individual in the same situation from making a complaint qualifies as retaliation.

Response Process

The Safeguarding Team with Child Safety representatives will process reports of potential child abuse and neglect that take place both within or outside of the Redeemer Downtown ministry environment. The process is designed to be Biblical, fair, and to provide care for all involved. As needed, RDT will also seek support from consultants, trained investigators, or others experienced in responding to concerns of harassment and abuse of power in the church environment.

Certain elements of this process reflect the guidance found in the Presbyterian Church of America [*Book of Church Order \(BCO\)*](#), Part II, *The Rules of Discipline*. and others reflect the Biblical mandate to seek the peace and purity of the Church, while also upholding justice and protecting the victims in our midst. (Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 82:3, 89:14, Eph. 1 - 2)

RDT is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any report of child abuse and neglect within our ministry environment as well as an environment in which anyone can feel comfortable raising questions and concerns, knowing that all situations will be taken seriously, and responded to professionally and with care.

Safeguarding and Child Safety Team

The Safeguarding Team with Child Safety representatives will **process** reports involving minors. Any concerns about the Safeguarding Team or Child Safety representatives should be directed to the [Session](#).

- a. The role of the Child Safety representatives on the Safeguarding Team is to receive and respond to any reported child abuse and neglect. The representatives have the primary responsibility for ensuring such reports are handled thoughtfully, timely, and with care.
- b. The Safeguarding Team consists of Megan Dishman (Executive Director), Ashley Spilker (Director of Women's and Family Ministries), and Reggie Kyle (Ruling Elder).
- c. The Child Safety representatives to the Safeguarding Team are Ashley Spilker (Director of Women's and Family Ministries), and Karen Girard (Director of Children's Ministry).
- d. The Child Safety representatives meet with the Safeguarding Team whenever there is a Child Safety report to discuss.
- e. The Safeguarding Team reports to the Redeemer Downtown session.
- f. The Safeguarding Team and Child Safety representatives receive annual training from outside consultants.