

1. Introduction

Classis Eastern Canada (CEC), as one part of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and God's broader church family, strives to act in accordance with the central belief that every person is created in the image of God, and therefore should be treated with respect, dignity, and love, regardless of age, race, gender, or socio-economic status.

At the same time, we confess that the sin of abuse still occurs and needs focused attention. We recognize that the spiritual root of all forms of abuse is the irresponsible use of power and the betrayal of trust within the body of Christ. We give thanks that Christ died to set us free from the bondage of sin and that the Holy Spirit continues to work within the body of Christ to restore broken relationships. In gratitude we will do our part by taking intentional measures to guard against and prevent the sin of abuse in all activities that fall under CEC.

II. Guiding Principles

1. All people, as image bearers of God, are worthy of respect, and will be treated in a manner that upholds their dignity and does not demean them in their own eyes or in the eyes of others. Human sexuality is also a gift of God to be respected, valued and celebrated.
2. Abuse of any person is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. We will strive to foster the development of healthy relationships and prevent abuse in our ministries. To the best of our ability, we will avoid situations that may give rise to abuse, unfounded allegations of abuse, or the appearance of impropriety.
3. All participants in activities of CEC are urged to be vigilant against abuse and will be held accountable for their words and actions. Those who violate the standards of conduct expected of them will be subject to disciplinary measures.
4. By the grace of God, healing is possible for victims of abuse. Healing is assisted through the ministries of churches in CEC and wise counselling, which should be offered as early as possible. Forgiveness and restoration of relationships broken by incidents of abuse of power may be possible, but cannot be forced. They can be assisted by provision of support for those affected by abuse and wise counselling. In some cases, however, full restoration of relationships may not be appropriate and restrictions may be necessary.
5. Leaders of CEC activities are expected to exercise their duties with the highest ethical standards, recognizing that leaders have a special responsibility to take preventive and corrective measures. When disclosure of suspected abuse occurs, appropriate investigative and corrective actions will begin without delay. All actions will support healing, repentance, and restoration of the abused, the abuser, and other broken relationships. For abusers, these actions may include disciplinary measures, up to and including denial of volunteer or paid positions and other privileges of participation in

activities of the CEC. After satisfactory resolution, suitability for return to a volunteer or paid position will be reviewed.

6. Abuse is also a crime punishable under federal and provincial laws in Canada. The Bible teaches respect for the mandate of civil authorities to maintain justice; we pledge to cooperate with them in the implementation of laws prohibiting abuse. We will not, however, leave the matter of abuse and its impacts to the law courts and social services alone, because abuse and healing also have a spiritual dimension. The church has its own calling, as Christ's ambassadors, to prevent abuse, warn against the abuse of authority, and provide a healing ministry for those whose lives have been affected by the sin of abuse.
7. All participants in CEC activities will practice confidentiality. Any information received and any record maintained regarding allegations of misconduct or abuse will be kept confidential. Only those who need to know will have access to such information and only to the records for a specific case in question, as specified in the protocol for reporting and response.

III. Definitions of Abuse

CEC activities will be guided by the following definitions of abuse:

- **Physical Abuse:** any non-accidental act that violates the dignity of the image of God in another person, inflicting dehumanizing pain or injury. Physically abusive behaviour also includes physical neglect, which means not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care.
- **Emotional Abuse:** any attempt to control another person's life through words, threats, fears, and/or deprivation in such a way that it impairs a person's God-given sense of self-worth.
- **Sexual Abuse:** any sexual experience forced on one person by another, which may or may not involve physical contact. Sexual abuse also includes any form of sexual misconduct by a leader in a position of spiritual authority or counselling capacity, even if there was consent at the time.
- **Harassment:** engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against another person that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.
- **Sexual Harassment:** engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against another person because of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, where the course of comment or conduct is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome. It also includes any form of sexual solicitation or advance where the person making the solicitation or advance is in a position to confer, grant or deny a benefit or advancement to the other party and the person knows or ought reasonably to know that the solicitation or advance is unwelcome.
- **Child Neglect:** failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm.
- **Inappropriate/Appropriate Touch: While physical expressions of friendship and care are a valued part of ministry, physical touches that are sexual in nature,**

unwanted, or make the recipient feel uncomfortable are prohibited. Appropriate touches show respect for the dignity of the recipient and do not demean them in their own eyes or the eyes of others, while showing care and affection. Examples of appropriate touch include side hugs, gentle touches on shoulder or back, high-fives, holding hands during escort or prayer. Examples of inappropriate touch include full, frontal hugs; kisses; massages; touching bottoms, breasts, or genital areas; and touches that are known to be or reasonably expected to be unwanted by the recipient.

IV. Intentional Measures to Prevent Abuse

CEC will strive to create a safe environment for all participants in all CEC activities through general measures that foster respectful relationships. This includes on-going implementation of the following suite of specific abuse prevention measures. The details for each component are listed below.

- **Mandatory screening:** All employees will be screened, as part of the hiring process, including vulnerable sector police checks for any staff who will be engaged in ministries involving young people or vulnerable groups.
- **Code of Conduct:** All employees and members of the Classis Interim Committee will be asked to sign the CRCNA Code of Conduct (in formation.) It includes obligations with regard to confidentiality, speech, bullying, etc.
- **Training:** All employees and members of the Classis Interim Committee will participate in appropriate training on abuse prevention for their roles within CEC. Records of training will be kept by the CEC administrator and employees will be encouraged to take additional or refresher courses.
- **Safe premises:** Locations where meetings are held will have windows, open doors, adequate lighting, and adequate washrooms. If staff are meeting with individuals on classis business, such meetings will take place in public spaces or where they are clearly visible by others.
- **Transportation:** Trips from home to regularly scheduled meetings will be considered private arrangements, outside of CEC. When travelling long-distance or overnight on CEC business, arrangements will be made to use public transportation or, if travelling as a group, include more than two persons in a private vehicle.
- **Reporting and Response to Allegations:** A written protocol for reporting suspected abuse and responding to allegations of abuse will be followed for any incidents relating to activities under CEC.

IV. A. Additional Details on Specific Measures

Screening:

For all employed positions, screening will include:

1. Written applications, kept on file by the Classis administrator.
2. Reference checks, noted on file by the Classis administrator.

For employed staff or volunteers involved in classis-sponsored activities for young

people under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults, screening will also include:

- 3. Submission of vulnerable sector police check completed within the last two years.**

Code of Conduct: CEC will use the code of conduct approved by Synod 2021 for use by all CRC affiliated bodies. Records of signatures will be kept on file with the CEC Administrator for 50 years.

Training: Classis Interim Committee will ensure that:

1. The mandatory training for all new pastoral staff is completed, in accordance with decisions made by Synod in 2019.
2. A plan for on-going safe church training within CEC is developed and implemented.
3. All employees and the Chairperson of the classis interim committee have basic training that includes how to respond to allegations of abusive behaviours of various types.
4. Focused training is completed by persons hired to lead ministries with youth or vulnerable groups.

Safe Church Policy and Training by CEC members: Classis Interim Committee will take all reasonable measures to ensure that all member churches within CEC implement safe church policies, including training of persons who are delegated or participate in CEC activities, through:

1. Including implementation of Safe Church policies in the list of expectations in the CEC credentialing process; and
2. Including regular promotion and review of Safe Church practices on the learning agenda for CEC meetings of member churches.

Safe Premises: Windows in meeting rooms will not be covered or obstructed during meetings, except as necessary for film presentations. If persons are hired to perform pastoral care duties, appropriate logs of meetings will be maintained and made available for review only by the supervision.

Youth Activities: The following policies will apply to any youth activities sponsored by CEC or involving CEC staff or volunteers.

- a. **Supervision: At least two adult leaders, who have been screened, including vulnerable sector police checks, and trained, must be present at any CEC sponsored function. For co-ed events, supervisors will include male and female adults. Volunteers involved in youth events are required to submit copies of vulnerable sector police checks obtained in the last two years and sign a form indicating they have read and will implement CEC Safe Church policy.**
- b. In general, CEC follows the two adult rule: one adult should never be alone with one youth in non-public spaces during CEC activities.
- c. Youth under age 18 must have written permission from parents or guardians to participate in youth group activities. Rare exceptions may be made for youth living without parents or guardian, such as street youth, when obtaining permission would prohibit attendance in activities that are in the best interests of the young person.
- d. **Signed permission forms will include a statement that explicitly recognizes that parents/guardians are responsible for transportation to and from CEC youth events. If travel is an integral part of a CEC youth event, explicit permission for such travel will be part of the written permission form.**

- e. Displays of affection between a youth leader and a youth participant in a CEC-sponsored activity will be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm, to avoid misunderstanding the intent of the leader. A youth participant's right to refuse such displays of affection will be respected.
- f. Youth leaders of CEC sponsored activities will not engage in repeated gift giving, phone calls, or communications of a personal nature with any youth participant.
- g. Discipline policy: All discipline is to be carried out in love, not anger. All leaders will read and follow the following guidelines.
 - 1. If a youth participant misbehaves, supervisors will use redirection and/or verbal means to guide a youth's behaviour. If that does not work, the youth will be removed from the activities to minimize disruption and taken to a parent or guardian. If a parent or guardian is not immediately available, the safety of the young person will be ensured until return to participation or parents or guardians.
 - 2. Corporal punishment is not permitted. Corporal punishment includes, but is not limited to, slapping, hitting, pushing and touching in an aggressive manner.
 - 3. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes, but is not limited to, yelling, insults, bullying, verbally embarrassing or threatening a young person expressly or by implication.
 - 4. Concerns about a youth's behaviour should be reported to the supervisor of the program or event.
 - 5. Parent(s) or guardian(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.
 - 6. Expectations of behaviour must reflect the age and level of comprehension of the participants. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
 - 7. Young persons are to be reminded of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting in a positive and constructive way.
- h. Transportation:
 - 1. **Transportation to and from home to CEC events will be the responsibility of parents/guardians, as stated in permission forms. Any arrangements to transport minors between home and sponsored activities by someone other than the parent or guardian are considered private arrangements, not under CEC responsibility.**
 - 2. Transportation of youth that is part of a classis-sponsored event, e.g. off-site retreat, will be arranged in advance, with written permission forms signed by a parent or guardian, and will avoid one adult transporting one youth in a private vehicle.
 - 3. A leader may deny someone permission to serve as a chauffeur for others during activities that are under CEC and the leader's decision will be final.
- i. Communication and social media: All communications between adult leaders and youth participants of CEC sponsored events must be traceable.
 - 1. Communication between youth leaders and youth participants at CEC sponsored events will usually be in group formats. Youth leaders will limit one-to-one electronic communications with a young person under the age of

18. Parents or guardian or another adult will be copied or apprised of any on-going text or telephone exchanges.
2. Photos of youth participants will only be shared in any form with explicit permission by the young person, and, in the case of young people under 18, with the permission of a parent or guardian.
3. Young persons under 18 will not be referenced by name and/or other identifying information on social media or websites without explicit permission of the youth participant and a parent or guardian.
4. Any requests by young persons or parents or guardians with regard to electronic communications and use of photos will be respected.

V. Reporting and response to allegations of abuse

A. General Policies

1. Evidence or suspicion of abuse by anyone in a leadership position or of a minor will be reported and handled with care. The purpose of reporting is to stop the abuse, to provide assistance for the victim, to hold the perpetrator accountable and to begin the process of correction and redemption.
2. Confidentiality will be respected. The name of a victim will not be made public without her or his consent. An alleged abuser will be assumed to be innocent until a conviction is registered or an admission is recorded and his or her confidentiality will be ensured during the investigation.
3. Evidence or disclosure of abuse of a person who is a minor will be reported to civil authorities, in keeping with the provisions of provincial law. Abuse of a person who is not/no longer a minor will be reported to outside authorities only with the consent of the victim, even if the abuse occurred while the person was a minor. In situations where the victim is a vulnerable person, it may be necessary to notify civil authorities.
4. All suspicion or disclosure of abuse will be brought to the attention of the Chair of the Safe Church Committee.
5. CEC recognizes and respects the right of a victim to pursue legal remedies through civil courts, independent of any action taken within the processes established by the CRC. Spiritual support, pastoral help, and other forms of appropriate engagement by the church will be provided, whether or not legal action is taken in a particular case.

10.2. Protocol for Reporting Abuse

1. Anyone who has evidence or disclosure of abuse should inform the chair of the Safe Church Committee.
 - Do **not** alert the accused person that an accusation has been made. Doing so could result in further harm to the victim, cause the accused person to destroy evidence, or cause the accused person unnecessary anxiety if the accusation, after investigation, is found to be neither serious nor probable.
 - Do **not** communicate further at this point. The smaller the circle is the better as confidentiality is key at every stage.
2. For the purposes of accuracy, the person reporting the abuse is asked to submit the

allegation in writing as soon as possible, including what was experienced, observed or heard and submit it to the Chair of the Safe Church Committee in confidence. If the person reporting the abuse requires a support person to help with this process, this can be arranged through the Chair of the Safe Church Committee.

3. The Safe Church Committee will, in consultation with the victim, as appropriate, determine what course of action will be taken, including:
 - Referral to the appropriate pastoral team member as a matter requiring pastoral counselling, and/or assistance through the Safe Church Counselling Fund if needed.
 - Recommendation that an advisory panel be established to engage in fact-finding and provide advice to the Executive of CEC.
 - Notification to civil authorities, when required under the provisions of provincial law.
4. The Safe Church Committee operates in an advisory capacity to the designated authorities in the church. Any pastoral and/or disciplinary action will be taken by the designated authorities, operating under the established rules of order of the CRCNA.
5. If the situation involves a minor, the incident will be reported to the appropriate civil authorities, under the provision of provincial law. If there is a question about the need to report, advice can be obtained by calling the Children's Aid Society.
6. If the situation involves a vulnerable adult who may be subject to provincial trusteeship, the Safe Church Committee will determine the need to notify civil authorities.
7. **If the situation involves a church leader acting under the authority of the CEC, the leader will be suspended, with pay for paid staff, and without prejudice as to final determination, until the allegation has been reviewed by the Chair of the Safe Church committee and the CEC Interim Committee has received and acted on advice on the process to be followed. In cases that require reporting under provincial or federal laws, suspension will be in place until completion of the required investigations by civil authorities. In cases where there is risk to others in church programs, suspension will be in place until the results of the abuse panel process, in accordance with established CRCNA policies. If the situation involves church leaders not acting under the direct authority of the CEC, notification, temporary suspension from office, and disciplinary measures will be handled in accordance with the policies and process established by the Synod of the CRCNA. Disciplinary measures will be in accordance with the established policies of the Synod of the CRC, including, when appropriate, a permanent ban on holding pastoral office in the CRC.**