

If you are a **child** or **youth** and would like to talk to someone, phone the Helpline for Children at **310-1234**. You can call at any time of the day or night, and you do not have to give your name.

If you see a **child** or **youth** under 19 years of age being abused or neglected by anyone of any age, you have the legal duty to report your concern to the police. Phone **9-1-1** at any time of the day or night.

If you suspect or hear of a **child** or **youth** under 19 years of age is being abused or neglected by anyone of any age, you have the legal duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker. Phone **1 800 663-9122** at any time of the day or night.

Child Protection Services BC - social workers: 1-800-663-9122.

Policy Statement

This policy outlines actions to be taken related to communication, reporting, response, and prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) involving children up to 19 years of age. All children have the right to be protected from harm, abuse, and exploitation. Child protection is everyone's moral, legal, and spiritual responsibility. All elders, friends, and ministers are dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of children. When meeting with families and their children, the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of children rests with the parents and legal guardians.

"The safest protection for our children is when everyone has an awareness and understanding of CSA issues"

Child abuse is defined as physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect, all of which are unacceptable. This Policy is designed to address issues related primarily to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). It was developed with the help of USA CSA professionals and further adapted for our British Columbian families to establish a safe and healthy environment that reduces the risk of abuse. All persons involved with CSA issues are expected to refer to the provincially approved public "CSA Information" document found at this link.: [The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: For Service Providers \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/socdev/childabuse/handbook/) The handbook provides essential information that has been used as a foundation for this Child Safe Policy for elders, friends, and ministers living in BC.

This policy will be updated as necessary.

Safe and Confidential Reporting of Abuse

Anyone with reasonable belief that child abuse is occurring or has occurred must promptly report it to the authorities for the safety of vulnerable children. If someone is in immediate danger call **911** or call Child Protection Services BC, **1-800-663-9122** at any time day or night. Reporting needs only to be based on “reasonable belief” and there is legal protection for reports made in good faith.

Failure to report or intentionally false reporting is punishable by law. All elders, friends, and the ministry are mandated reporters of child maltreatment and will report any form of child abuse to the authorities as required by law. Liability and responsibility of an investigation then rest on child service professionals. All pertinent details can be found on the BC Government website called **Child Protection Services in BC** and can be accessed through the following link: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children>. Examples on “How to Report” can be found on page 43 of [The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and : For Neglect Service Providers \(gov.ca\)](#). This handbook provides essential information used as a foundation for this Child safe policy for elders, friends and ministers living in B.C.

The duty to report child abuse is a serious matter and anyone who reports abuse should keep their own confidential, contemporaneous notes of details of the who, why, when, and where of the incident that gave rise to the report.

Safe Response to Alleged Incidents

Once a report has been filed with the authorities, elders, friends, and the ministry will respond to situations of abuse under the law, prioritizing victims, and their families. Should you file a report, notify a local elder and minister so that proper meeting strategies can be made in consultation with Child Protection Services BC social workers: 1-800-663-9122. Appropriate arrangements will be made to protect children from further harm. Your identity will remain confidential if desired. If you do not receive a satisfactory response, please report to other ministers and/or elders you trust. Although false accusations of CSA rarely occur, the local elder and minister will seek professional assistance to substantiate the allegations sufficiently. If law enforcement decides not to investigate a CSA report, the elder and minister will consult with BC Child Protection Services who are CSA professionals to seek out the best advice.

Safe Communications

Abuse flourishes in silence and secrecy. Transparent and open communication is important and is encouraged. The victim's voice must be acknowledged and trusted. Feel free to discuss abuse, threats, questions, suggestions, or any concerning or suspicious behavior displayed by a friend, elder, or minister (men or women) with a Child Protection Service BC social worker. Problematic behavioral patterns should be reported before they escalate into incidents of abuse that leave a child profoundly affected. When you report to the authorities, then communicate with your local elders and ministers. If you do not receive a satisfactory response, please reach out to another responsible elder/minister. Open communication is highly appreciated and essential for establishing clarity, providing factual evidence, and creating constructive strategies.

Safe Policies for Elders, Friends, and Ministers

The primary policy focus for elders, friends, and ministers is the safety of all children. Elders, friends, and the ministry hold positions of trust and responsibility. We pledge to always do our best to be true to this trust by addressing behavioral issues before they become abuse incidents.

- ✓ We acknowledge the responsibility to ensure that all friends, elders, and ministers (within our regional fellowship) are made aware of, and are required to, adhere to all aspects of safety for children.
- ✓ We have a zero-tolerance policy for substantiated CSA risk (as evaluated by qualified BC professionals) among elders, friends, and ministers, and will abide by the law to protect children and their families.

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- ✓ All ministers are required, and elders are strongly urged, to complete a Provincially recognized CSA training program and to take current training programs as required.
- ✓ All ministers including visiting ministers will be provided with the **BC Child Safe Policy** and the **Ministers' Code of Conduct**. It is a requirement that each minister agrees to adhere to the Ministers' Code of Conduct.
- ✓ Ministers are not trained investigators or counsellors. CSA investigations, victim counselling, and therapy must be undertaken by professionals. We will aid victims and families in every way possible to find needed help.
- ✓ Elders and friends are also expected to abide by the behavioral norms outlined in the Ministers' Code of Conduct.

Safe Meetings and Conventions

The primary policy focus for meetings and conventions is to provide robust safety for the children. All meetings are a privilege and are only open to those who are safe for children to be around. Elders and convention hosts have the right to consider and make safety decisions about their own meetings and premises. We strongly urge all elders and parents (and anyone else who is interested) to take one of the free online CSA training courses. They can request the link to the workshop by filling out this form: [Little Warriors Prevent It! Online Workshop](#)

Any person under police investigation or convicted of a CSA offence against a child will not attend in-person meetings and conventions that provide access to children. Once restrictions have been lifted by professionals or the courts involved in the investigation and therapy is in place, the local elder and minister will make appropriate arrangements. If thus allowed, and if a previous offender desires to attend meetings, then with the help of Child Protection Services BC, 1-800-663-9122, the elder and minister will investigate if any restrictions apply, (e.g., Parole Documents). In-person meeting arrangements will be made if it is safe and appropriate.

Note: *Any offender who shows a disregard for arrangements made or begins to exhibit misbehavior will have their attendance privileges revoked.*

- **Fellowship meetings:**

All Sunday morning and Bible study meetings on private property are by invitation only. Due to the more personal format and closer interaction in fellowship meeting settings, greater consideration must be given to the risk of unsafe connections developing with any person of concern.

If it is safe and advisable to plan for a previous offender to attend, the local elder and minister collectively will:

- Discuss the details with BC Child Protection Services Social Workers who are trained in CSA matters (and other professional entities involved in the case) to get their advice.
- The victim or the victim's family may be offered the opportunity to provide an impact statement. Additionally, any known victims of abuse in the meeting may be consulted to provide further information for fellowship meeting arrangements.
- Recommend that the individuals try to engage in the Restorative Justice process.
- Include elders and ministers in the decision-making process who are most familiar with the offender.
- Restrict any offender judged by Child Protection Services BC professionals to be a continued risk from attending any fellowship meeting where children are/will be present.
- Verify that all people in a meeting have freely and willingly agreed to host an offender desiring

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fellowship.

- Work together with Child Protection Services BC professionals and the offender to validate a travel plan when travelling away from home to attend meetings.
- Inform the previous offender she/he may be required to comply with any additional conditions that are advisable based on the specific circumstances.

- **Special meetings:**

Special meetings are by invitation only. If it is safe and advisable to plan for a previous offender to attend, the local elder and minister will collectively:

- Discuss the details with BC Child Protection Services Social Workers who are trained in CSA matters (and other professional entities involved in the case) to get their advice.
- The victim or the victim's family may be offered the opportunity to provide an impact statement.
- Recommend that the individuals try to engage in the Restorative Justice process.
- Include other elders and ministers in the decision-making process who are most familiar with the offender.
- Require the offender to *actively avoid* contact with children (the responsibility is on the offender)-privileges can be revoked.
- Inform the previous offender that she/he may be required to comply with any additional conditions that are advisable based on the specific circumstances.

- **Conventions:**

Conventions are held on private property and are only open to invited, safe guests. All guests must follow the Convention Owners' instructions regarding CSA prevention on their property. Please make sure to report to the owners or minister/s if you notice someone of questionable behavior. While efforts are made to mitigate risks that could affect child safety, there is also the need to be aware and alert towards *unexpected unknown* people who may not be safe. If you have children, please practice your CSA parenting training to add another layer of safety to their welfare.

- **Public meetings:**

Gospel meetings are open to all who want to hear the gospel and who behave appropriately and safely. However, if it is advisable and safe to plan for a previous offender to attend, we will:

- Discuss the details with BC Child Protection Services Social Workers who are trained in CSA matters (and/or other professional entities involved in the case) to get their advice.
- The victim or the victim's family may be offered the opportunity to provide an impact statement. Additionally, any known victims of abuse in the meeting may be consulted to provide further information for public meeting arrangements.
- Recommend that the individuals try to engage in the Restorative Justice process.
- Involve elders in the decisions that are made who best know the offender.
- Require the offender to *actively avoid* contact with children (the responsibility is on the offender)-privileges can be revoked.
- Consider if necessary for additional safety that a chaperone/monitor accompany the individual.

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Note: It is possible for previous offenders to have their spiritual needs met through the electronic transmission of the meeting until when/if their physical presence and integration into the meeting setting is considered safe, and unoffending.

Safe Extracurricular Activities

Elders, friends, and ministers do not have policies on extracurricular activities that are outside of normal meetings and fellowship since these are undertaken on a voluntary personal level. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that approximately 93% of child sexual abuse victims *know and trust* their abuser. It is important to realize that most reported cases of child abuse among us have *not* taken place in meeting environments, but rather during extracurricular activities such as sleepovers, overnight camping, late-night activities, sports, swimming, online/text communications etc. Remember that the organizers of these activities need to be alert and aware and provide proper supervision. Only people who are *assumed to be trustworthy* should be invited. Be wary as offenders often seek to *isolate and abuse*. This does not mean we need constant suspicion but let us be sensible about situations and use every advantage - following professionally recommended strategies. Have honest conversations with children and make sure they are appropriately accompanied by more than one trusted person in all situations.

Any person under active investigation for alleged child sexual abuse or who have previously offended, may be required to voluntarily, comply with additional conditions related to extracurricular activities, such as are advisable under the specific circumstances, as requirements for attending fellowship, special meetings, and conventions. Failure to comply may result in in-person meeting privileges being revoked.

Policy Goal

It is impossible to guarantee that in any given situation, that abuse will not happen. Having policies in place, together with general education and awareness of CSA facts can well prepared each to provide safe environments. Going forward, it is the responsibility of all to both minimize the likelihood of abuse and to identify, report and stop it, if it does occur.

Thank you for being educated and aware thereby being a part of the solution for the safety of our children. Let us all work together to be wise, trained through professionally recommended prevention strategies, and develop effective ways to implement these strategies to protect the children among us.

*The BC Child Safe Policy is recommended to be reviewed annually at a minimum.