



EPIC VINEYARD CHURCH
ABUSE PREVENTION AND SAFETY POLICIES
FOR EPIC KIDS

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW

A) INTRODUCTION

At Epic Vineyard Church we value the children in our community very highly, and we strive to create a safe environment that welcomes them to grow in their faith and in their individual relationships with God. However, we acknowledge that we do not live in a perfect world, and that there still is potential for abuse to occur within our community. Therefore, it is necessary that we follow the policies outlined in this document, in order to minimize the risk for potential abuse and optimize the safety of the children in our community.

B) WORD CLARIFICATION

The following list of words and their distinct applications within Epic Vineyard have been provided to enhance the readers understanding of the document.

- **“Epic Kids”** refers to the scheduled learning time that is provided for the children at Epic Vineyard Church during each Sunday gathering. We prefer the term Epic Kids to Sunday School because school is not necessarily a positive experience for children. Each Epic Kids learning session begins after the time of communal worship, and concludes when the adult teaching time is complete.
- **“Team Leader”** refers to the individual in charge of the Epic Kids session on any given Sunday. Their responsibilities include teaching and planning the activities for the children’s learning time, as well as delegating tasks to Epic Kids’ Volunteers. On a typical Sunday there are two team leaders, one for each age group, with the exception of the Babes and Tots.
- **“Epic Kids’ Volunteers”** refers to all individuals who have been approved by Epic Vineyard to participate in Epic Kids sessions. For the remainder of this document, Epic Kids Volunteers will be referred to simply as ‘volunteers’.

SECTION II – ABUSE PREVENTION

A) POLICY STATEMENT

At Epic Vineyard Church we have a zero tolerance policy for abuse. This section outlines a variety of risk management guidelines that have been developed to prevent abuse of children within the church.

B) DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

For the purpose of this document, the following potential forms of abuse are to be considered within the context of child abuse. Child abuse refers to an abusive act committed by an individual such as a caregiver, parent or person in a position of trust that harms a child's physical, emotional or mental wellbeing.

- a) Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is the use of physical force that causes physical pain, injury or impairment. Physical abuse may include, but is not limited to: punching, kicking, shaking, choking, burning and slapping.
- b) Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse refers to any sexual act or behaviour that is directed at, or inflicted upon, an individual without his or her consent. It may include, but is not limited to: suggestive remarks, voyeurism, exposure, inappropriate touch, and rape.
- c) Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse refers to a pattern of behaviour that one individual directs towards another, which results in psychological trauma or a decline in self-worth. Examples of emotional abuse include, but are not limited to: criticizing, discriminating, insulting, rejecting, ignoring, belittling or isolating.
- d) Spiritual Abuse: Emotional abuse can also include spiritual abuse, which refers to emotional abusive behaviour that negatively impacts or distorts the victim's spiritual understanding or expression.
- e) Neglect: Neglect is characterized by the failure to meet a child's basic needs, including their need for food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education, and protection from harm.

C) RISK MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Everyone in our church community shares the responsibility of keeping our children safe, however, we recognize that the volunteers and the team leaders who look after the children on a regular basis play a substantial role in this. Therefore, it is imperative that volunteers and team leaders adhere to a set of policies that keep the kids in our program safe and create consistency for everyone involved. The following list contains the guidelines that Epic Vineyard volunteers are required to follow when helping with Epic Kids:

1. All volunteers are required to present a current criminal record check upon request.
2. If an individual has a criminal history, the church elders will determine whether it is appropriate or inappropriate for that individual to serve in Epic Kids. If an individual's criminal history prohibits them from participating in Epic Kids, there are other volunteer opportunities within the church that may be suitable alternatives.
3. All volunteers must review the Abuse Prevention and Safety Policies document and are required to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined within it. If the policies are not adhered to, the individual will be dismissed from serving on the Epic Kids team.
4. All volunteers will be held accountable for their actions. In the event that a volunteer's behaviour or conduct is in question, he or she must be open to hearing the concerns and must respond accordingly.
5. All volunteers have a responsibility to report any unacceptable behaviour, seen in fellow volunteers or the children in Epic Kids, to the Team Leader, Children's Ministry Coordinator, or church Elders.

D) BATHROOM POLICY

Due to the fact that we have no washrooms located within or near the classrooms, it is imperative that we adhere to the following set of guidelines to ensure the safety of the children in our community:

- Parents are encouraged to accompany their children to the washroom before the Epic Kids learning time starts.
- Children are not permitted to use the washroom alone during an Epic Kids' session. Children will be accompanied by 2 adult volunteers.

- Team leaders must note when a child takes a washroom break on the Sign-in/Sign-out system.
- Team leaders/volunteers must leave the outside door to the washroom open when accompanying children.
- If a young child requires assistance in a washroom stall, the washroom stall door must remain open.
- One of the two volunteers escorting a child should be the same gender as the child.
- If these conditions cannot be met, the child's parent will be contacted to take their son/daughter to the washroom.

E) APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE TOUCH

The following list of appropriate and inappropriate touch is not exhaustive. If a team leader or volunteer has any doubt regarding the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate touch, they should speak one of the pastors or church elders.

All displays of physical touch between volunteers/team leaders and children must be restricted to public view. We always want to make sure that the children are comfortable with the level of physical touch they receive. Some children may be okay with hugs and other forms of appropriate physical touch, while others are not as comfortable. Volunteers need to be observant and sensitive to each child's preferences so that the child feels comfortable and respected.

Examples of appropriate touch and behaviour:

- Holding a child's hand to guide them.
- Putting an arm around a child's shoulders.
- Patting a child on the back, hand or shoulder to show support.
- Holding a young child who is upset or crying.
- Hand shakes and high fives.
- Hugging a child in public view.

Examples of inappropriate touch and behaviour:

- Prolonged hugging, wrestling, or tickling.
- Kissing a child on the mouth.
- Kissing a child above the age of two on the cheek.
- Allowing older children to sit on lap.
- Using physical means of punishment (see section II.G for specific details).
- Being alone with a child.

F) LEARNING TIME GUIDELINES

The following list of guidelines has been developed for the sake of maintaining consistent expectations for the behaviour of children in the classroom.

- Listen to the teacher and to others when they are talking
- Put your hand up if you want to speak/answer
- Take care of the classroom and the equipment in it
- Be kind and polite
- Always tell the truth
- Treat others the way that you would like to be treated
- Share with others
- Help clean up when the learning time is done
- Don't go to the bathroom or leave the room without asking for permission

G) PLAN FOR ADDRESSING CHILD MISBEHAVIOUR

A child is considered to be misbehaving if they do not follow the classroom guidelines (as outlined above) within reasonable parameters. In the event that a child misbehaves or causes considerable disruption within the classroom, the following set of policies must be followed:

1. Volunteers and Team Leaders must remain patient and calm when dealing with a misbehaving child.
2. Volunteers and Team Leaders **are not** permitted to punish the child. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of isolation, time-outs and physical force. Instead, strategies such as speaking with the child separate from the group about the classroom expectations and root of the misbehaviour should be used.
3. A volunteer who witnesses a child's misconduct must report it to their team leader.
4. Team Leaders are permitted to send a misbehaving child back to their parent/guardian at their discretion. A volunteer must accompany the child back to their parent/guardian. When the child returns to their parent/guardian they must give them a yellow circle, which serves as a non-verbal cue, signifying the reason for their return, and alerting the parents to the need to follow up with the Team Leader.

H) PROTOCOL FOR ADDRESSING ABUSIVE INCIDENTS

In Alberta, any individual who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is being abused, or is in danger of being harmed has an obligation under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to report it.

We not only have a duty to report witnessed or suspected abuse that occurs within our church community, but also that which occurs outside of our community as well. If a child discloses information that raises concern regarding their safety and wellbeing outside of our church gathering time, it must be reported.

All allegations of abuse are to be taken seriously and necessitate immediate investigation. If abuse is suspected, or is confirmed, a number of steps must be taken.

- If danger is imminent and requires an immediate response, the volunteer must contact the police by dialling 911.
- If abuse is suspected call 310-0000 to get the telephone number of the local office, or call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-KIDS (5437), to speak with a caseworker.
- Speak to an elder or pastor of the church.
- Complete an incident report provided by the church.

In every case of suspected or confirmed abuse, the child's wellbeing is the first priority. Every situation should be handled in a loving manner, and the safety of the child must be ensured. If a volunteer is accused of abuse, they must be barred from working with or having contact with the children while the investigation is carried out. If the investigation proves that the allegations are correct, the individual will be permanently prohibited from working with the children.

Full cooperation will be given when working with the police.

The victim(s) shall receive the appropriate care following the incident. Including support, counselling and prayer.

Further resources regarding the reporting of abuse within Alberta can be accessed via the following links:

- <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page3939.aspx>
- <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/c12.pdf>
- <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/15393.html>

SECTION III – SAFETY POLICIES

A) SIGN-IN/SIGN-OUT PROCEDURE

- Children are to be signed in by a team leader or volunteer at the beginning of every Epic Kids' learning session.
- When a child leaves the room to use the bathroom, it is to be noted on the sign-out system.
- If a child wishes to return to their parent/guardian, or is excused from Epic Kids due to misbehaviour, they are to be signed-out after they are returned to their parent.
- All children are to be signed out of Epic Kids at the end of the learning session when they are:
 - a) Picked up by their parent/guardian.
 - b) Returned by a volunteer to their parent/guardian.
- A child is not to be returned to an individual who is not their parent/guardian, without verbal consent from their parent/guardian.

B) SUPERVISION EXPECTATIONS

All children and fellow volunteers are to be treated with love and respect.

Minimum ratio of volunteers to children, in order to effectively run Epic Kids learning sessions, (*volunteer to children*):

- Babes' and tots 1:2
- Ages 3-5 years 1:4
- Ages 6-12 years 1:8

At minimum there should always be two volunteers (i.e. one teacher and one volunteer) in a classroom at a time. No volunteer (regardless of position) should ever be left with a classroom alone, regardless of the number of children present.

C) DOOR SAFETY

- For the Safety of all the children, the door at the bottom of the stairwell immediately to the right of the main entrance of the church, is to remain locked at all times. Children and parents must access the Epic Kids classrooms using the back stairwell, located through the door to the right of the stage.
- The top portion of the doors to the Babes and Tots room and craft room must remain open when in use.

D) EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

This section outlines the basic procedures to follow in the event of an emergency. Although the following scenarios are unlikely, it is necessary to have a response plan in place to ensure the safety of the children. After any emergency, an incident report must be filled out promptly.

i. MISSING CHILD

- Communicate with the other volunteers/team leader present to confirm that the whereabouts of the child are unknown.
- Notify the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) immediately.
- Send a responsible adult to each exit of the building. They are to remain posted there until the child is found.
- Search the entire building.
- If the child is still missing, conduct a search of the outside of the building and the immediate area surrounding.
- If the child has still not been found, conduct a search within a one block radius of the church.
- If the child is still missing after 10 minutes of searching, call 911.
- Provide assistance to emergency responders.

ii. FIRE/EVACUATION

It is important that Team Leaders and Volunteers familiarize themselves with the location of the fire extinguishers in the building. There are 9 fire extinguishers in the following locations (See appendix A for a visual diagram of exits and fire extinguishers):

Upstairs

- front door top of stairs
- main hall (sanctuary) by back stairs
- water fountain in back hall

Downstairs

- outside of kids nursery room
- moms room
- in the dining area beside coffee station
- kitchen (large extinguisher)
- food room
- boiler room

In the event of a small fire, children are to be removed from the room and kept under supervision as two volunteers are designated to put out the fire using a fire extinguisher.

If a fire cannot be controlled, the following evacuation procedure is to be followed:

- The first person to witness the fire must immediately pull the fire alarm and call 911, or designate someone to do so.
- When a fire is spotted, or the fire alarm is heard, the team leaders and volunteers must remain calm and supervise a safe and timely exit from the building to the parking lot.
- There are four exits within the building, Volunteers and Team leaders must use their discretion in determining which exit is safest, depending on the location of the fire. The four exits are:
 - 1) Main Entrance
(Front doors towards the west end of the church opening on 15th Avenue).
 - 2) Side Entrance by back stairs
(Back door towards the east end of the church opening on 15th Avenue).
 - 3) Upstairs Main Hall side doors
(Door in the sanctuary, leading to the balcony and patio area behind the church).
 - 4) Kitchen
(The door in the kitchen which leads onto the patio behind the church).
- There should be two volunteers at the front of the group of children and two volunteers at the rear of the group of children.
- Once the children have been gathered outside, attendance must be taken to ensure that all children are accounted for.

- Children are only to be released back to their parents once everyone is in the parking lot and accounted for
- Assist the emergency responders by providing them with as much information as possible.
- No one is to re-enter the building until it is deemed safe to do so by an emergency responder.

iii. MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Team Leaders/Volunteers should familiarize themselves with the locations of first aid kits in the building. There are three first aid kits that can be found:

- Duane's office (behind the photocopier) on the shelf.
- On wall beside photocopy machine (small travel first aid kit).
- Kitchen cupboard.

In the event of a medical emergency:

- Call 911 if necessary.
- Communicate with Team Leader/Volunteers.
- Communicate with child's parent(s)/guardian(s).
- One volunteer must remain with the child until the situation precipitates or help arrives in order to monitor them and to provide support.
- Ensure the privacy and safety of the child with the injury/illness by designating a few volunteers to move all of the other children to an appropriate distance from the child.
- When possible, give the child the appropriate medical attention needed, using the appropriate materials.
- If the medical emergency is an allergic reaction refer to the child's Allergy Response Plan, which will be located in the team leader's classroom binder.

iv. LOCKDOWN

A lockdown is to be carried out in the event that a hostile intruder enters the building.

- Communicate with volunteers/team leaders.
- Call 911.
- Calmly gather the children in the 'Moms Room' (3-5 year old classroom) as well as the Babes and Tots in the storage room located at the end of the hallway, opposite to the garbage room. Once gathered in this room, lock the doors and turn off the lights.
- Calmly gather the children located in the dining room (6-12 year old classroom) in the food storage room, which can be accessed from the dining room. Once gathered in this room, lock the doors and turn off the lights.
- Keep everyone away from the door.
- Refer to the attendance list to ensure all children are accounted for.
- No one may leave the room until it is deemed safe to do so by an emergency responder.
- Assist emergency responders as needed.

APPENDIX A

