



Episcopal Diocese

— OF CENTRAL FLORIDA —



Policies for Abuse Prevention & Response (Condensed)

A Guide for Clergy, Staff & Volunteers
Adopted: March 2026

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See our full policy here: <https://cfdiocese.info/abuse-prevention>

I. Foundation: Our Christian Faith

The Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors and holding abusers accountable. By virtue of baptism, all members of the Church are called to holiness of life and accountability to one another. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores their cry (Ps. 9:9, 12). Our community seeks to embody Jesus' priority of justice for the vulnerable, especially children.

Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime) that occurs when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Abuse is, sadly, a common reality in this world. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about its reality. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents" (Matt. 10:16). We all must become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy.

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice, one that is free from any form of abuse.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, many within the church have acted in predatory ways toward vulnerable people, and bad actors will often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what we all must take ownership of in our community as we together walk with God, who loves justice and defends the vulnerable.

II. Definitions of Abuse and Harassment

Abuse: In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g., bishop, priest, deacon, vestry member, 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; a student; employee; intern; immigrant, etc.). That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.

1. **Economic exploitation** is the deliberate misplacement, exploitation or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a minor or vulnerable adult's belongings or money. Economic exploitation is a common form of elder abuse.
2. **Emotional abuse** is a pattern of controlling and domineering behaviors and causes mental or emotional injury. In children, it may result in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
3. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a minor or vulnerable adult's basic needs (when caregivers have those means) or the failure to protect them from harm.
4. **Physical abuse** is non-accidental injury that is intentionally inflicted upon a person or persistent physical threats.
5. **Sexual abuse** is any sexual contact, penetration or non-contact sexual behavior that occurs within a significant power differential (adult-child, boss-employee, clergy-congregant, counselor-patient).
6. **Spiritual abuse** is a pattern of using God, the Bible, theology or spirituality in a pattern of controlling, domineering or exploitative behaviors.

For more detailed definitions, see our full policy.

III. Administrative Policy

Each rector shall establish a Parish Safe Church Team. The Parish Safe Church Team is responsible for equipping the parish to live out the policy of the diocese. The Parish Safe Church Team is typically three to six members and is recommended to be at least 50% women. The team may be comprised of a mix of clergy and laity at the discretion of the rector in consultation with the vestry. Each rector and vestry shall make the team known within the parish.

The Diocesan Safe Church Team is led by the canon to the ordinary. The Diocesan Safe Church Team is responsible for supporting each parish in living out the policies of the Diocese of Central Florida. The Diocesan Safe Church Team shall receive all reports of potential clergy misconduct (see more below).

For further information about the training and screening of clergy, employees and volunteers, see the full policy.

IV. Community Conduct Expectations

The Diocese of Central Florida is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for all. All in a parish have a responsibility to uphold safety and healthy boundaries in

the community. Jesus commanded us to treat others as we would want to be treated. The following are the safe and healthy boundaries that all within our diocese are responsible to uphold.

Community Expectations for All

- Appropriate touch, whether of an adult or child, is always welcomed by the person (if you are not sure, just ask – e.g., “May I give you a hug?”). See below for specific examples of appropriate touch when welcomed and inappropriate touch with children and students.
- Touch within a significant power difference should be observable to others (e.g., between an adult and a child, clergy and a vulnerable adult).
- Children who need a diaper change or assistance in the restroom outside of the children’s ministry procedure (see below) must be helped by their own parent or guardian.
- Stay in visible and accountable spaces: No one should be alone with a child who is not their own (including giving rides or messaging via text or social media).
- Use words that convey respect: Avoid any words that belittle or threaten, and in a power differential, avoid any sexualized comments, including jokes, stories, experiences or sharing sexualized content (such as images, video or other media) or engaging in any other sexualized communication.

For more specific information about expectations for interactions with minors, expectations within structured ministry with minors and expectations for those who have pastoral relations, see our full policy.

V. Responding to Policy Violations and Concerns

The Diocese of Central Florida takes seriously all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety. Any person – staff, volunteer, parent or church member – who witnesses a violation of this policy is expected to intervene if they feel safe to do so or to get someone who can. The witness should then speak up to the Parish Safe Church Team as soon as possible. Furthermore, any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of the Parish Safe Church Team. The Parish Safe Church Team will document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability. Any concerns about the Parish Safe Church Team may go to the rector or vestry. The Parish Safe Church Team may make use of a limited access agreement to clarify specific boundaries and expectations with an individual whose behavior is causing concern.

The Parish Safe Church Team will contact the Diocesan Safe Church Team if the policy violation or concern involves clergy.

VI. Reporting Policy

The Diocese of Central Florida is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any allegations or findings of abuse or harassment within the diocese. We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to abuse, the Diocese of Central Florida will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons. In most circumstances, it is difficult for victims to come forward. The Diocese of Central Florida will do its best never to blame victims for struggling to come forward, delaying disclosure or displaying other common disclosure behavior. All adults in Florida have a legal obligation to report abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult. By virtue of our baptism, all Christians have an ethical obligation to speak up on behalf of the vulnerable.

Immediate Reporting Policy

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g., an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911. After the call, contact a member of the Parish Safe Church Team.
2. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (age 17 or younger) or vulnerable adult (e.g., elder abuse or abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities), all adults within the Diocese of Central Florida must immediately report to the Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-962-2873. Then report to the appropriate local law enforcement department.

Online exploitation of children may also be reported to the CyberTipline at 1-800-843-5678 or online at [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org).

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 the report, contact a member of the Parish Safe Church Team. If the potential abuse involves a member of the clergy, after reporting as detailed above, a person may contact the Diocesan Safe Church Team by contacting the diocesan office or reaching out directly to the canon to the ordinary.

If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. The only exceptions are if the abuse occurred within our parish community or if the name of the perpetrator is made known.

3. If there is a disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a non-vulnerable adult, all persons should contact the Parish Safe Church Team. The report may also go to the Diocesan Safe Church Team if it pertains to potential abuse by clergy.
4. After receiving any information from any above steps, a Parish or Diocesan Safe Church Team member shall inform the entire team (except a person or family member of a person who is involved in any allegation) and document the information. If there are concerns or allegations involving a member or members of the Safe Church Team, the report may go to the rector, the vestry or the Diocesan Safe Church Team (or the canon to the ordinary or bishop in the case of a concern regarding a member of the Diocesan Safe Church Team).
5. The Parish Safe Church Team shall ensure reports have been made to proper authorities (law enforcement and social services when applicable) in situations of potential abuse, as explained above, including child abuse and neglect, elder abuse or abuse against an adult with intellectual disabilities. In other cases involving an adult victim, the Parish Safe Church Team will respect the agency of any adult victim(s) regarding whether the adult victim(s) reports personally to the appropriate authorities. The decision of a survivor to personally report adult abuse and/or cooperate with authorities is ultimately their choice. However, the Parish Safe Church Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way. There may be situations where the Parish Safe Church Team will report information pertaining to a potential crime against an adult or child even when the victim is not ready to do so. When reporting is required or is – in the judgment of the Parish Safe Church Team – in the best interest of the safety of others, such as when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault or threats), the Parish Safe Church Team may coordinate with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan. The Safe Church Team will also seek to communicate to the victim, as sensitively as possible, the reason for said reporting.
6. If the Parish Safe Church Team receives any information pertaining to potential abuse by clergy within the Diocese of Central Florida, that information shall be communicated promptly to the canon to the ordinary or other members of the Diocesan Safe Church Team through the diocesan office.

VII. Response Protocols

After receiving any information from any above steps, the Diocesan Safe Church Team (in situations involving clergy) or Parish Safe Church Team (in situations involving non-clergy) will coordinate with the rector and vestry on critical response issues, including:

1. Assessing safety.
2. Assessing accountability or boundaries for alleged perpetrators.
3. Implementing care for any victims and families.
4. Connecting to specialized resources.

When the alleged perpetrator is within the parish and non-clergy, the Parish Safe Church Team shall make any recommendations regarding administrative leave, suspension, other restriction or discipline to the rector. This will be reevaluated as necessary as the situation develops. It is strongly recommended that any person be restricted by the rector from any contact with any vulnerable persons when there are credible or substantive allegations of abuse as defined above. This would be a temporary step until the completion of any investigations and/or the rector and vestry have sufficient information to make personnel decisions and/or decisions about other accountability. The rector, vestry and Parish Safe Church Team are encouraged to seek support and guidance as needed from the Diocesan Safe Church Team.

When the alleged perpetrator is a member of the clergy, the Diocesan Safe Church Team shall coordinate with parish leaders on practical matters above. The Diocesan Safe Church Team shall make a recommendation to the bishop regarding any leave, suspension or other discipline as appropriate under Canon IV.

Any person facing an allegation of abuse, and any family member or close mentor of such a person, must recuse themselves from these response protocols, whether a member of the Parish or Diocesan Safe Church Team, vestry, rector or other clergy.

Whenever possible, the Parish or Diocesan Safe Church Team should refer the victim(s) to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations such as The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE); The Florida Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-500-1119); The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673); or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's National Helpline (SAMHSA: 1-800-662-HELP).

Each parish shall make available a condensed policy available within the parish with specific information related to the nearest resources available:

Nearest Child Advocacy Center

Contact Information: _____

Nearest Domestic Violence Shelter

Contact Information: _____

Available Sexual Assault Center

Contact Information: _____

Other Local Resources

Contact Information: _____

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for the Diocese of Central Florida to share certain information for the purpose of safeguarding other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

The appropriate Parish and/or Diocesan Safe Church Team shall coordinate further appropriate response, including, but not limited to:

- Ensuring all potential crimes against children and vulnerable adults have been reported to appropriate authorities according to the policy above.
- Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons.
- Facilitating cooperation with any investigations, including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the parish or with others.
- Ongoing, appropriate care for the victim(s), including helping them connect with professional trauma-informed care if desired.
- When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward victims.
- Maintaining contact with the alleged offender during any investigations, administrative leave or times of restricted access to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially with regard to controlling the narrative, retaliation and access to other vulnerable people.
- Caring for others in the parish and coordinating with outside resources as needed.
- Documenting relevant actions and information.
- Reaching out to qualified experts with questions or when an independent consultation or investigation is appropriate.

Those who use any position of power to abuse as defined by this policy shall never again serve in any formal role within the Diocese of Central Florida.

For more information about how our diocese may use independent consultation or investigation in abuse response, see our full policy.

VIII. Retaliation

The Diocese of Central Florida prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who is involved in any activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good-faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the well-being of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to a Parish Safe Church Team, rector or vestry. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy. Any retaliation by a Parish Safe Church Team, clergy or parish leaders (e.g., vestry) may be reported directly to the canon to the ordinary or anyone at the diocesan office.

IX. Trauma-Informed Care

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support. A Parish Safe Church Team, in coordination with the rector, may plan to care for any survivors of abuse in ways that prioritize safety, trustworthiness and respect for the agency of the victim as much as possible.

This support will include as desired by the victim and/or non-offending family members:

- Listening and staying calm.
- Affirming without judgment.
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal and confusion).
- Respecting their privacy.
- Encouraging and empowering their agency.
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate.
- Asking if there is anything practical the church can do.

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal or other professional advice but will focus on personal support and empowerment.

We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances – even when the abuse is alleged and not proven – will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim.
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse.
- Express disbelief.

- Attempt to silence the victim.
- Encourage noncompliance with the law.
- Express support for the perpetrator.
- Urge meeting with, reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator.

Receiving an abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. The Diocese of Central Florida encourages anyone receiving an abuse disclosure or in subsequent conversation with a survivor to be guided by the following responses:¹

DO Say	DON'T Say
Thank you for telling me.	Why are you telling me this?
I believe you.	Why didn't you _____ (run/scream/stop him, etc.)
I'm so sorry this happened to you. How can I help?	What do you mean when you say he abused you? What exactly did he do?
Take as much time as you need.	You need to forgive and move on.
I am here.	It'll take some time, but you'll get over it.
The following should only be said if the victim indicates these concerns are on his/her mind.	It was so long ago; why are you still letting your abuser win by hanging on to it? Let it go.
It is OK to be angry.	Try to be strong.
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 responses following abuse.	I know how you feel.
It wasn't your fault.	Perhaps you misunderstood.

¹ Recommended resources on trauma-informed care available from the diocese: *Caring for Survivors* by Justin Holcomb and Basyle Tchividjian; "[Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church](#)" by Pete Singer; "[Coordinating Pastoral Care of Survivors with Mental Health Providers](#)" by Pete Singer.

For more information about our approach to known offenders, see our full policy. See our full policy for more information and resources regarding:

- *Potential Indicators of Child Abuse.*
- *Important Forms.*
- *Guidance for Safety on Student Trips.*
- *Recommendations and Resources for Giving Child and Youth Safety Talks.*
- *Guidance for Supporting a Victim of Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence).*
- *Guidance for Providing Counseling in a Pastoral Relationship.*