



# Bethany Christian Reformed Church Safe Church Policy

## Policy Statement

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As a body of believers, Bethany Christian Reformed Church of Fenwick, Ontario proclaims that “love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:6-7). Therefore, every man, woman, and child, regardless of age, cultural background, or sex, when in contact with the people and ministry of Bethany CRC of Fenwick, will find an environment free from abuse.

A Safe Church Policy is intended to outline the obligations of the Church to children and vulnerable persons in its care by prescribing certain policies or procedures designed to minimize the risk of abuse. The information provided in this document is expected to be a guideline for the protection of participants, church leaders, and volunteers of all Church programs. It is anticipated that the policies in this statement will further the reality of the Church as a “sanctuary” and as a place of ministry. Abuse must be condemned, and every reasonable step taken to eliminate the risk.

Bethany CRC seeks to live the new life in Christ. It is our hope that our church community will be a place of God’s presence in the world. Therefore, we strive to create an environment in our church that nurtures each person’s dignity and safety so that everyone can grow and mature as the Creator intended.

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## History of Abuse in the Church

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The absence of a procedure for handling abuse allegations has discouraged abuse victims from coming forward. Some who did were reminded that forgetting is good, and forgiving is better. Dealing in such a way often exacerbated the problem rather than bringing justice. Requiring the abused person to forgive and

forget re-victimized them because they struggled with the guilt of not being able to forgive such a heinous crime. Furthermore, sometimes the victim was required to forgive even though the perpetrator had not repented nor confessed the sin. By not being held accountable for their actions, the abusers quite often continued to abuse again. If the abused person is forced or coerced into facing his or her abuser, the abused person feels like a victim once again.

*Duty to Report:* Every person in Ontario is required under The Child & Family Services Act to promptly report his/her belief that a child (under 16 years of age) is in or may need protection. "A person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is, or may be in need of protection, shall share the belief and the information upon which it is based to a society." C.F.S.A. s. 72(1)

*Persons must report directly:* The person who has the reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in or may need protection must make the report directly to a children's aid society. The person must not rely on anyone else to report on his or her behalf. CFSA s.72 (3)

*Ongoing duty to report:* A person must report any additional information, even if that person has reported previous information about the same child and family. CFSA s72 (2)

*Protection from liability:* All persons, in making a report of suspected child abuse to a Children's Aid Society, are protected in law against civil action unless the person is proven to have acted maliciously or without reasonable grounds for the belief or suspicion. C. F. S.A. s. 72(7)

*Failure to report:* The penalty imposed upon certain professionals and officials for failure to report a suspicion of child abuse emphasizes that the child's safety must take precedence over all other concerns, including confidentiality of information and all other provincial statutes. Any professional who fails to report his/her suspicion of a child's abuse where that information was obtained during his or her professional or official duties is liable, upon conviction, to a fine of up to \$1000. C.F. S.A. s.72 (4), (6.2)

#### Why People Do Not Report

- "I must have made a mistake."
- "It's not really any of my business."
- "I'll deal with it next week."
- "I'm overreacting."
- "What if I am wrong?"
- "It's not my responsibility."

We have a fear of getting involved, making a mistake, feeling vulnerable, confronting disagreement, or facing criticism. Move past your fear and realize that you may be the only person who cares enough to help someone in need. Further information about the type of situations that must be reported is available from the local Children's Aid Society. "Reasonable grounds" are what an average person, given his or her training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgment, would suspect. The Children's Aid Society will decide if the information provided will require an investigation or intervention or may make suggestions about how the child and family can be helped in other ways if necessary.

## The Church's Responsibility

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The church recognizes that there is a legal obligation to create a safe environment for those participating in church programs which is why a safe church policy is in place.

It is the responsibility of Bethany CRC to:

- Coordinate and implement this Safe Church Policy
- Conduct training sessions at the beginning of each church program year, and at other times if needed.
- Evaluate the policy annually and update as needed with changes being reviewed by the Safe Church Committee (appointed by Council) and presented to Council for approval.
- Maintaining current documentation, including the following:
  - Release for Background Check Forms
  - Criminal Background Checks
  - Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct Forms
  - Accident or Incident Report Forms

### *Principles of Reducing Risk*

- When risk increases, supervision should also increase.
- Risk increases as accountability decreases.
- Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim.
- Risk increases as isolation increases. Meetings should:
  - be done in groups or pairs.
  - have more than one adult present or aware of the gathering
  - held in public or open spaces.
  - leave doors open.

## Definitions of Abuse

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The word abuse covers the many ways someone may harm a child or vulnerable persons.

### *Physical Abuse*

Any intentional act that results in physical pain or injury regardless of whether an obvious physical symptom such as a wound or bruising results. May be a single event or a chronic pattern of behaviour. Physical abuse is often followed by a request/threat to the victim to not tell anyone what happened, not to report the abuse, or not to show anyone a mark or bruise.

### *Sexual Abuse*

Any sexual action taken by one person against or in the presence of another who is an unwilling participant or observer of such action. Physical contact is not a necessary element of sexual abuse. Suggestive speech, pornographic material, public exposure of genitals and requests for sexual contact all represent forms of sexual abuse which do not involve physical contact. Sexual abuse includes any role inappropriate sexual encounter, even if consensual at the time (example: between parent and children, teachers and children, pastor and counselee). All sexual activity between an adult and a child is considered sexual abuse regardless of whether the adult participant believes the child has consented to the activities, and regardless of the intentions of the adult participant.

### *Emotional Abuse*

Any attempt to control another person's life through threats, fears, and/or deprivation in such a way that it impairs a person's sense of self-worth. Criticism, ridiculing, yelling, and threat of physical abuse or centering out for public humiliation are forms of emotional abuse.

### *Harassment*

Any attempt to humiliate someone using comments or conduct that is known or ought to be known as unwelcome. Harassment is often a behaviour that persists over time. Serious one-time incidents can also sometimes be considered harassment.

### *Neglect*

Any attempt to deprive a child or vulnerable adult of the care necessary to maintain their physical or mental health. Not providing basic items such as food, water, clothing, a safe place, or health care are forms of neglect.

### *Inappropriate Touching*

Any form of touch that makes someone feel uncomfortable. If someone attempts to forcefully hold a hand or another part of the body, or tries to hug without consent, those instances would be considered forms of inappropriate touching.

### *Financial Abuse*

The misuse of someone's funds or assets without them knowing, or without consent.

## Staff & Volunteers

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Group or program leaders will propose names of volunteers to Council for review and screening. Council is responsible for appointing acceptable people to the programs. All church staff and volunteers are to have completed a criminal background check and to have been approved in advance of accepting a position of leadership. A clear criminal background check does not automatically mean that council will approve a placement. Council is responsible to use their best judgement when assigning a person to a certain position. It is the church's right to exclude anyone for any reason.

### *Screening*

Prospective Volunteer/Staff Personnel are to submit to the recruitment and screening process. The recruitment and screening process may include, but is not limited to:

- Being a member or believer in good standing with the church and approved by council.
- Volunteer/Staff Personnel Application Interview
- Signing the Statement of Faith & Beliefs
- Signing the Code of Conduct/Ethics Form
- Reference checks
- Criminal Record Check for 16+, and every 3 years thereafter
  - If a police check is returned "NOT CLEAR" the prospective candidate will be asked to do one of the following:
    - either do a more in-depth criminal record check; or
    - accept that they are not allowed to participate as a volunteer.

- - Annual Refresher Training

Volunteer/Staff Personnel must complete the recruitment and screening process prior to being placed in a ***position of trust*** and must have a personnel file kept with church records.

Individuals, who have been accused, convicted, or are under the suspicion of crimes against children/youth/vulnerable persons, or been convicted of violent crimes or other relevant crimes will not have any involvement in ministries or programs where children/youth/vulnerable persons participate.

## Premises

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It is essential to maintain a safe environment and provide adequate supervision during all church programs. Therefore, Bethany CRC shall ensure that:

- There is adequate lighting during church programs,
- Storage rooms and equipment are locked when not in use,
- There is an open-door policy for church programs,
- There are windows in all meeting room doors in the church building for safety,
- There is controlled access/entry for children's programs,
- Mandatory signing in/out for children under grade 1, and
- Designated monitors that circulate from room to room periodically to observe from the hallway to ensure safety and to minimize the risk of false allegations. Drop in visits may be made for group meetings or outings that are not at the church.

## Training

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Training is a vital part of implementing our Safe Church Policy. Therefore, Bethany CRC shall ensure that:

- Abuse prevention education and training is required for all Volunteer/Staff Personnel serving with children/youth/vulnerable people.
- Training by designated trainers is to include a review of the Safe Church Policy and procedures. All Volunteer/Staff Personnel are to affirm that they have read the policy, understand it and the procedures that pertain to their area of ministry. They must sign a Ministry Agreement Form confirming they are willing to comply with the Safe Church policies and procedures.
- Volunteer/Staff Personnel will be educated about their legal obligation to report suspected abuse and to recognize and identify the symptoms of abuse and molestation.
- All Volunteer/Staff Personnel, Pastors, and Ministry Leaders should attend orientation training prior to ministry placement and refresher training ideally happening yearly. Attendance is to be taken at training courses.
- Copies of the Safe Church Policy will be available to all leaders, church members, and anyone who wishes to have a copy.
- Formal training is available through the presentation of resource materials, videos, 'in-house' seminars, and

- Training sessions are conducted at the beginning of each church program year, and at other times if needed.

## Role of Leaders

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Program Leaders are responsible to make sure that everyone in their program is aware and complies with this Safe Church Policy. It is imperative that leaders create a safe environment for program participants and avoid activities that can lead to allegations of abuse or harassment. Therefore, Bethany CRC shall ensure that:

- All ministerial personnel, office bearers, church leaders, program leaders, staff/volunteers are required to have completed the screening process in advance of their installation. This includes signing a Release of Background Check Form and a Code of Conduct/Ethics Form to confirm understanding of an intention to keep children and vulnerable persons safe, and
- All staff/volunteers 16+ have received an approved criminal background check.

During church programs, counselling or visitations, Volunteers/Staff Personnel shall ensure that:

- Defined boundaries which are committed to maintaining interpersonal relationships are established,
- Appointments are conducted during normal daytime hours with evening appointments only when others are present in the building or at the appointment. The risk of meeting alone in an off-premises site is acknowledged.
- Ministerial personnel or council members may choose to bring another office bearer or spouse to meetings, or the counselee may request the presence of another person,
- It is recommended that the secretary is informed of schedule or that appointments are noted in a diary. Keep written documentation of contacts,
- Meeting with children is done only in the presence of an adult or with the consent and knowledge of the parent or guardian,
- Avoid transporting children or vulnerable persons alone,
- Leaders should be accountable to a colleague, spouse, or council member to ensure that they are maintaining proper boundaries in their interpersonal relationships. Openly discuss the threats to these boundaries, and
- Leaders should be giving adequate attention to their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being; maintaining a healthy attitude towards the ministry, being alert to negative attitudes and the potential for temptation and self-destructive behaviour. They should listen earnestly to the feedback and counsel of others who supervise or to whom they report if they express concern about their behaviour or attitude.
- Volunteer/Staff Personnel ratios to Children & Youth: A minimum of Two unrelated Volunteer/Staff Personnel present for supervision, except in the event of an emergency **OR** One Volunteer/Staff Personnel present with the door open with Hall Monitors circulating periodically from room to room.
  - Two Volunteer/Staff Personnel for every 6 infants (newborn -15 months)
  - Two Volunteer/Staff Personnel for every 10 toddlers/pre-schoolers (15 months-5 yrs.)
  - Two Volunteer/Staff Personnel for every 20 elementary age Children (6 yrs.-gr. 6)
  - Two Volunteer/Staff Personnel for every 16 “Jr. High” Youth (gr. 6 to 8)
  - Two Volunteer/Staff Personnel for every 20 “Sr. High” Youth (gr. 9 to 12)

- While the appropriate use of touch is often a way to show support and encouragement, such displays can be misunderstood. Therefore, displays of encouragement between a leader and a program participant should be limited to actions such as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-handed pat on the back, a handclasp or a handshake, a light touch of the forearm. A person's right to refuse any of these will be respected. Non-physical alternatives include an encouraging compliment, a thumbs-up sign, etc.- Avoid misinterpretation of affection by choosing not to give gifts to counselees or program participants.

## Operation Procedures

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The operational procedures provided are expected to be a guideline for the protection of participants and volunteers of all church programs.

- General Procedures
- High Risk Procedures
- Discipline Procedures
- Church Program Procedures
- Reporting Procedures

### *General Procedures*

- A 'Team' approach to children and vulnerable adult's ministries is used,
- All classes and activities are conducted with at least two staff or volunteers, at least one of whom is an adult. When this is not possible, assistance from another person should be available immediately in case of emergency,
- Out of program contact between children and leaders is discouraged,
- Leaders will not meet alone with a child without another leader nearby to observe,
- Transportation is the responsibility of the parents,
- All staff/volunteers should sign a Code of Conduct/Ethics Form agreeing to comply with policies and procedures and ensure that a police check has been completed,
- Documentation is kept indefinitely for all staff/volunteers,
- Incident Report Forms must be completed for all reports of suspected abuse, and
- Discipline Guidelines apply to all church programs.

### *High Risk Procedures*

- Written parental consent is obtained for off premises or unusual activities,
- Drivers for organized outings have required police checks. Serious driving offenses may preclude a person from driving children or vulnerable persons involved in Church programs. It is recommended that leaders check with the Church Secretary to confirm the list of drivers at the beginning of the season. The list can then be checked and returned with approved names of people who may be approached to drive,
- Internet access and social media are used cautiously and responsibly,
- Classrooms held in off-site facilities will adhere to the same safety considerations as classrooms in the church building. Children and vulnerable persons will not meet in a confined space without adequate supervision, and
- For all mixed-group activities away from the church site or on overnight outings, a responsible male and female chaperone must be provided.



## *Discipline Procedures*

The following general discipline guidelines apply to all church programs:

- Corporal punishment such as slapping, hitting, or pushing is not permitted,
- Abusive verbal discipline such as yelling, insulting, or threatening others is not permitted,
- Parents are to be informed and involved whenever a child misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases,
- Concerns about a child's behavior or the inappropriate response to a child's behaviour must be reported to the program supervisor,
- An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehaviour is an ongoing problem,
- Expectations of children behaviour must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension,
- Children are to be reminded of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form,
- Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with staff/volunteers before programs begin a new season,
- For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child.
- For example, a three-year-old should have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
- When nothing is working, staff/volunteers should get help before 'losing their cool.'
- Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child by choosing one or more of the following options:
  - Distract the child with another activity.
  - Help the child to focus on other more acceptable behaviour.
  - Isolate the child from others if another staff/volunteer is available to assist.

## *Church Program Procedures*

Attendance is to be taken each time a group or program is in session, including the date, participants first and last name and the full name of the leader.

### *Nursery, Toddler, and Heart to Heart*

- There shall be at least two nursery attendants in the room at a time. The more children in the nursery, the more attendants are needed,
- Diapering of children must take place at the designated change area. The bathroom door on the nursery side must be always open when a toddler is using the facility,
- Attendants may not take a child from the nursery/toddler area for any reason other than fire. In case of illness, serious distress, or medical emergency, the problem should be reported immediately to the parent or guardian,
- Members of the same family are allowed to serve in the nursery/toddler room together only if there is also an assistant present who is not family related,
- An unrelated adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant at that time may not spend time in the nursery rooms unless arranged with the nursery coordinator.
- A parent, guardian, or designated person is to introduce their child to the nursery volunteer and inform them of any special needs involving their child.
- A parent, guardian, or designated person is responsible to drop off and pick up the child from the nursery or toddler room. Mandatory signing in/out for children under grade 1 is required, and

- If a nursery volunteer is not able to help when they are scheduled, they must find a replacement. An adult is replaced by an adult and a minor volunteer with a minor.

#### Sunday School, Junior Gems and Cadets

- Children will not leave their classrooms except for illness, to use the washroom, or other compelling reason,
- When classes are in session, the classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room, and
- A parent, guardian, or designated person is responsible to pick up the child from the Sunday School classroom. Mandatory signing in/out for children under grade 1 is required.

#### Summer Day Camp

- Summer Day Camp participants should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of class, nor should they stay longer than ten minutes after class. This point will be stressed to parents as their responsibility. At least two Leaders/Counselors are to wait until all participants are picked up.

#### Youth Groups & Classes

- Each year, youth group leaders will devote one session to the topic of abuse for members of the youth group. Topics for this discussion might include dating violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, awareness of signs of abuse, a teenager's response to a teenage victim or abuse, or prevention of abuse,
- Regardless of relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a participant to date each other, and
- Persistent gift-giving, phone calls, or letters of a personal nature will not be directed to a youth group participant. Any gifts given should be ministry related.

### *Reporting Procedures for Abuse*

Do not confront the abuser.

- Report to Children's Aid Society if abused person is under the age of 16.
- Report to Niagara Regional Police if abused person is over the age of 16.
- The program leader will suspend the accused person.
- While proper authorities investigate, continue to support the victim or person affected.
- Ensure confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator.
- Refrain from making any public statements.

#### Hearing of an Allegation or Suspicion of Abuse

- For the protection of our Children, Youth and Vulnerable Persons all allegations and/or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously.
- Immediately upon hearing of potential abuse or allegations of abuse the Volunteer/Staff Personnel must complete a Suspected Abuse Report Form documenting all pertinent information. The victim should not be asked leading questions nor should the accused.

***Volunteer/Staff Personnel are requested to notify Council if they ever make a report to Child and Family Services.***

#### Reporting an Allegation or Suspicion of Abuse

- Any person with a reasonable suspicion of abuse has a legal responsibility to report the matter to authorities or the police. The reporting must be done promptly, directly, and needs to be on-going.
- A person who knowingly fails to report is in violation of the law and may be subject to disciplinary action by Bethany Christian Reformed Church.

- The Pastor should be notified whenever there is a report made; it is understood that the report is to be kept confidential.
- The Pastor must notify Bethany Christian Reformed Church's insurance provider and seek legal counsel.
- If the suspected abuse happened within Bethany Christian Reformed Church ministries or was committed by a church member or attendee, the Pastor must notify the parents of the victim.

## Response

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It is the hope of Bethany CRC that the church community will be a place of God's presence in the world. We acknowledge, however, that we live in a broken world, and that one of the signs of that brokenness is the violation of boundaries for healthy relationships. When sin of this nature occurs, appropriate action is required. We must strive to achieve justice, protect victims, promote the healing of those who have been abused, and work towards the repentance and healing of the abuser.

- a. Consult a lawyer for advice.
- b. Contact insurance agent to report incident.
- c. Find and fill out an incident report form.

### *Response to Allegations*

#### Spiritual Response and Counsel for the Victim

- Any suspected victims will be treated with dignity and respect.
- During the process of reporting and response, all Volunteer/Staff Personnel will be committed to prayer and strive to remain calm and hopeful.
- Situations of abuse must be handled with respect for people's privacy and confidentiality. Discretion must be observed, and details of the suspected abuse must not be shared among the church community.
- Pastors will seek opportunities to provide individual care and counsel both for the abuse victim and their family. He will determine the need for additional professional assistance.

#### Biblical Response and Discipline for the Accused or Convicted

- The accused is to be treated with dignity and respect. If the accused is a paid Staff member, they will be relieved temporarily of their duties until an investigation is completed.
- It is the responsibility and right of the Pastor and Council to exercise and practice church discipline. They will seek opportunity to provide individual care and counsel for the accused and their family.
- Anyone accused of abuse will be prohibited from having access to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Persons until they are cleared of all charges. Clear written guidelines will be provided to the individual with restricted activities and areas of the church property that they are not permitted to use or be in.

## Health & Safety Guidelines

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### *First Aid*

Ministry Leads and Volunteer/Staff Personnel are encouraged to be certified and trained in first aid. The names and contact information of individuals who are certified in first aid are to be posted in the Children's and Youth program areas for easy access with a Master List maintained by the office.

Ministry Leads must be informed of any individual(s) having severe allergies. The information will be posted in the Children's and Youth departments for easy access and Volunteer/Staff Personnel who have the individual(s) in their care will be informed.

### *Illness*

An individual who is ill and could therefore expose others to illness will not be received into the program room. Factors and symptoms to consider are:

- Fever, unusual fatigue, irritability, coughing, sneezing, runny nose, and eyes, vomiting, diarrhea, inflamed mouth and throat.
- Individual(s) with a known communicable disease

### *Dealing with Cuts or Injuries Involving Blood*

When an individual is injured, they are to be separated from others. The area where the injury occurred or where any blood may have dropped on the floor or toys is to be isolated. Volunteer/Staff Personnel need to ensure that no other individuals have had contact with any of the blood from the cut or injury.

Non-latex gloves are to be used when bandaging the injury, avoiding contact with mouth, ears, and eyes. Extreme care will be taken in cleaning up all blood and bloody bandages and the safe and secure removal of waste and disposal of gloves to a secure waste removal container. Hands are to be washed carefully with soap.

### *Emergencies*

- Pastor and Council will semi-annually review emergency evacuation procedures. These procedures are to be posted in a visible place in each classroom stating the planned route of escape to the nearest exit.
- Pastors, in cooperation with the Ministry Lead, will arrange for annual fire and evacuation drills.

A first aid kit will be kept in each classroom with Volunteer/Staff Personnel being educated on the kit's contents. Each kit will contain a pair of disposable non-latex gloves, disinfectant wipes, two or three 4" x 4" gauze pads for blood absorption, small scissors, and bandages.

A parent will be contacted when an injury, accident or medical emergency occurs. Incident Reports are to be completed for all accidents. Injuries are to be reported to the Ministry Lead.

## Important Contact Information

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### *Classical Safe Church Team*

If a reported abuse involves a pastor, church leader, or church staff, the matter will be reported to the appropriate authorities, as well as to the Classical Safe Church Team. Pamphlets outlining the Advisory Panel Process are available on bulletin boards in the church.

### *Safe Church Committee*

Council has appointed a Safe Church Committee. This committee will be available to provide information about responding to abuse, information for education and training of new leaders and have resources

available. For actual or suspected abuse, however, it must be reported immediately as outlined above. The Council chairperson has the authority to call together a response team as needed.

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| Children’s Aid Society – FACS Niagara  | 905-937-7731   |
| Distress Line  | 905-688-3711   |
| Women’s Place, Welland   | 905-788-0113   |
| Niagara Regional Police Department   | 905-735-7811   |
| Niagara Regional Police Emergency  | 911            |
| Kids Help Phone  | 1-800-668-6868 |
| Abuse Prevention CRCNA Grand Rapids  | 616-224-0735   |
| Shalem (Salem) Christian Mental Health Network<br>Hamilton, Ontario<br><a href="http://www.shalemnetwork.org">www.shalemnetwork.org</a>                          | 905-528-0353   |
| Niagara Life Centre Ministries<br><a href="mailto:admin@niagaralifecentre.ca">admin@niagaralifecentre.ca</a>   | 905-934-0021   |
| Elisha House Pregnancy and Family Support Centre   | 905-735-9934   |
| Family Outreach Ontario Christian Addiction Support<br><a href="mailto:info@familyoutreachontario.com">info@familyoutreachontario.com</a>                        | 1-888-809-0464 |
| Prevention Resources<br><a href="http://www.robertsonhall.com">www.robertsonhall.com</a><br><a href="http://www.reducingtherisk.com">www.reducingtherisk.com</a> |                |
| Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence<br><a href="http://www.cpsdv.org">www.cpsdv.org</a>  |                |