

CHURCH
OF THE
APOSTLES

COLUMBIA

Child Abuse Response and Reporting Plan

Church of the Apostles Policy Manual for the Protection of Children

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What is Abuse?

Child Abuse, in practical terms, refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. In general, the definitions of "child abuse" and "child neglect" includes the following elements (among others):

- Physical abuse
- Neglect (both physical and mental)
- Sexual abuse/Exploitation

Sexual abuse of a child includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In a more general sense, child sexual abuse is:

Any sexual activity with a child — whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse).

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- Fondling
- Oral, genital, and anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments
- Pornographic videos
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

Symptoms of molestation

Church workers and staff members should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioral and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. Some of the more common signs are summarized below (Sloan, 1983).

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Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

Behavioral signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching the church
- nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- “acting out” of sexual behavior
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- I don't like [a particular church worker]
- [A church worker] does things to me when we're alone
- I don't like to be alone with [a church worker]
- [A church worker] fooled around with me

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Why Report Suspected Abuse or Abuse Allegation?

Reporting Obligations

An effective reporting procedure enhances the effort to protect children. Ordinarily, child molesters will not remain in a church where workers are trained to identify symptoms of child abuse and are encouraged to report suspicious behavior. Child abusers thrive on secrecy and are more likely to commit criminal acts in organizations where they go unnoticed.

State Compliance: A Legal Obligation

South Carolina law requires that certain professionals report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, because they have unique opportunities to observe and interact with children. The following professionals are **mandated reporters** of child abuse or neglect:

- Healthcare professionals: physicians, nurses, dentists, optometrists, medical examiners or coroners or their employees, emergency medical services, mental health or allied health professionals
- Educational professionals: teachers, counselors, principals, school attendance officers
- Social or public assistance professionals: substance abuse treatment staff, childcare workers, foster parents
- Legal professionals: police or law enforcement officers, juvenile justice workers, volunteer non-attorney guardians ad litem serving on behalf of the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem program or on behalf of Richland County CASA, judges
- Undertakers, funeral home directors, or their employees
- Film processors
- Computer technicians
- Clergy (there is protection for disclosures made by the perpetrator during confession if the clergy member chooses to exercise that provision of the law)

However, the law encourages all persons to report.

When to Report according to State Law

Mandated reporters must report abuse or neglect when, in their professional capacity, they receive information giving them reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health has been, or may be, adversely affected by abuse or neglect. A decision to report must be based upon a reasonable belief that a child has been, or may be, abused or neglected. Thus, mandatory reporters need not have conclusive proof that a child has

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been abused or neglected prior to reporting abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. A person who is required to report and fails to do so is guilty of a misdemeanor. Upon conviction, he or she may be fined up to \$500 or imprisoned up to six months, or both.

How to Report according to State Law

To report suspected child abuse or neglect, contact the SCDSS 24-hour, toll-free hotline at **1-888-CARE4US** or **1-888-227-3487**. This hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Intake staff will assist the person making the report and assess the information provided to determine if an investigation is necessary.

Whether a mandatory reporter makes the report to DSS or to law enforcement depends upon the identity of the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect. **When the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect is the child's parent, guardian, or a person responsible for the child's welfare, mandated reporters must report to DSS office or to Law Enforcement in the county where the child resides or is found.**

When the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect is not the child's parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, the law requires that a report be made to law enforcement. All law enforcement officers are authorized to place a child in Emergency Protective Custody if the child might be in imminent and substantial danger. However, only the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction where the incident occurred has the authority to conduct an investigation. Mandated reporters who suspect that a child has died as a result of abuse or neglect are required to report to the appropriate medical examiner or coroner.

Contact 911 immediately if the situation is a life-threatening emergency. An emergency is a situation where a child appears to face an immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in death or serious harm.

Personal Responsibility: A Moral Obligation

Workers may not report a suspected incidence of child sexual abuse for a variety of reasons. Some may want to avoid embarrassing situations. A fear of possible personal and legal recrimination may exist. Discrete and confidential reporting of suspected abuse is critical to abuse prevention. Church workers should understand that reporting reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty.

While you may not be a Mandatory Reporter by state law, we as Christians do carry a moral obligation, as repeatedly taught in Scripture, to protect those who cannot protect themselves. This protection applies to all victims of child abuse. Thus, Church of the Apostles strongly encourages all Staff and Volunteers, even if they are not mandatory reporters, to report any suspected case of child abuse to the proper authorities.

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What Should I do Right Away?

You have been told information about the abuse of a child or you have noted signs and symptoms that lead you to believe that the abuse of a child has occurred – What do you do now?

Protect the Child

Upon hearing of an incident, the safety of the victim is vital. Take any steps necessary to create distance between the alleged suspect and victim. It is wise to temporarily remove any suspects, whether they are staff or volunteers, from any position that puts them in contact with minors.

Get Facts Quickly

Then seek to gather as much initial information as you can. It cannot be stressed enough that no church or leader should think they should be the investigator of an incident. Leave this to professionals. This fact-finding step is to simply try and understand what is being alleged and who is involved. Use the form in the Appendix under **Tab-D** to gather all the relevant facts.

As soon as possible after the initial fact-finding phase, you should make sure the mandatory reporting is done according to the state's requirements. Too often, church leaders delay this process. Please know you do this at your own peril.

Your Response should be Victim-centric

In any allegation response, adopting a 'victim-centric' approach is fundamental. The perspective a ministry adopts in handling an allegation will shape its actions and priorities and might determine whether subsequent civil litigation ensues.

The majority of litigants bring suit based upon how they are treated POST-allegation ... AFTER the allegation becomes known to leaders. Abuse survivors who are treated with dignity and care are far less likely to consider subsequent litigation.

While safety of children in the program is clearly the primary concern, the risk of subsequent litigation is real and compelling.

False allegations are rare

False allegations are rare; academic studies indicate 92% to 98% of outcries are real and factual. You should assume the allegation received is likely factual, and multiple (unknown) victims might exist, whether the alleged victim is male or female.

Prioritize a victim-centric response

When receiving an allegation or outcry, a ministry's priority (and therefore what it says and does) should be 'victim-centric,' especially at the very beginning. The priority should be protecting and caring for the alleged victim and his or her family, and determining if other victims exist in the ministry program.

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Make no mistake: when an allegation is received, there are very few ‘neutral’ statements or positions. The ministry’s response will be either victim-centric or other-centric (actions and statements that clearly demonstrate a priority for something or someone other than the victim).

Avoid a ministry-centric response

Too often, a ministry adopts a ministry-centric response: communicating and acting in a defensive manner meant to serve the best interests of the ministry, rather than the victim. This defensive posture tends to appear self-serving, self-protective, self-justifying, blame-shifting, and self-righteous. The message of this defensive posture is that the alleged abuse is unfortunate and inconvenient to the otherwise good work or service provided by the ministry. The expressed (or unexpressed) concern is that ongoing ministry work continues without disruption, including building campaigns and donation drives. The welfare of the alleged victim is secondary. The service has become more important than the served.

Above all, steer clear of an abuser-centric response

A truly harmful ministry response is abuser-centric: communicating and acting in a manner meant to protect the alleged abuser. Typically, this includes public statements focusing on the risk to the alleged abuser — his or her marriage, career, reputation, or future. This defensive response is common when the alleged abuser is influential or in upper leadership.

Offer Help

Many victims and accused suspects report they feel immediately isolated and ostracized. Remember, we are people of faith. We should offer careful, intentional pastoral care to the reported victims as well as the alleged perpetrator. Remember as well the families involved. To meet with them and offer prayer is a good and godly response.

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Who Needs to Know?

An allegation or suspicion of the abuse of a child is not something you should ever keep to yourself. Immediately following the filling out of the Form for Report of Suspected Child Abuse (Tab – D), you should ask yourself, “Who else needs to know about this?” The answer will depend on your position – Volunteer Leader, Ministry Director, Clergy Member, or Rector. Please refer to the ‘Report and Response Flow Charts’ found in the Appendix under **Tabs A – C** for the exact list to whom you need to report the suspected child abuse.

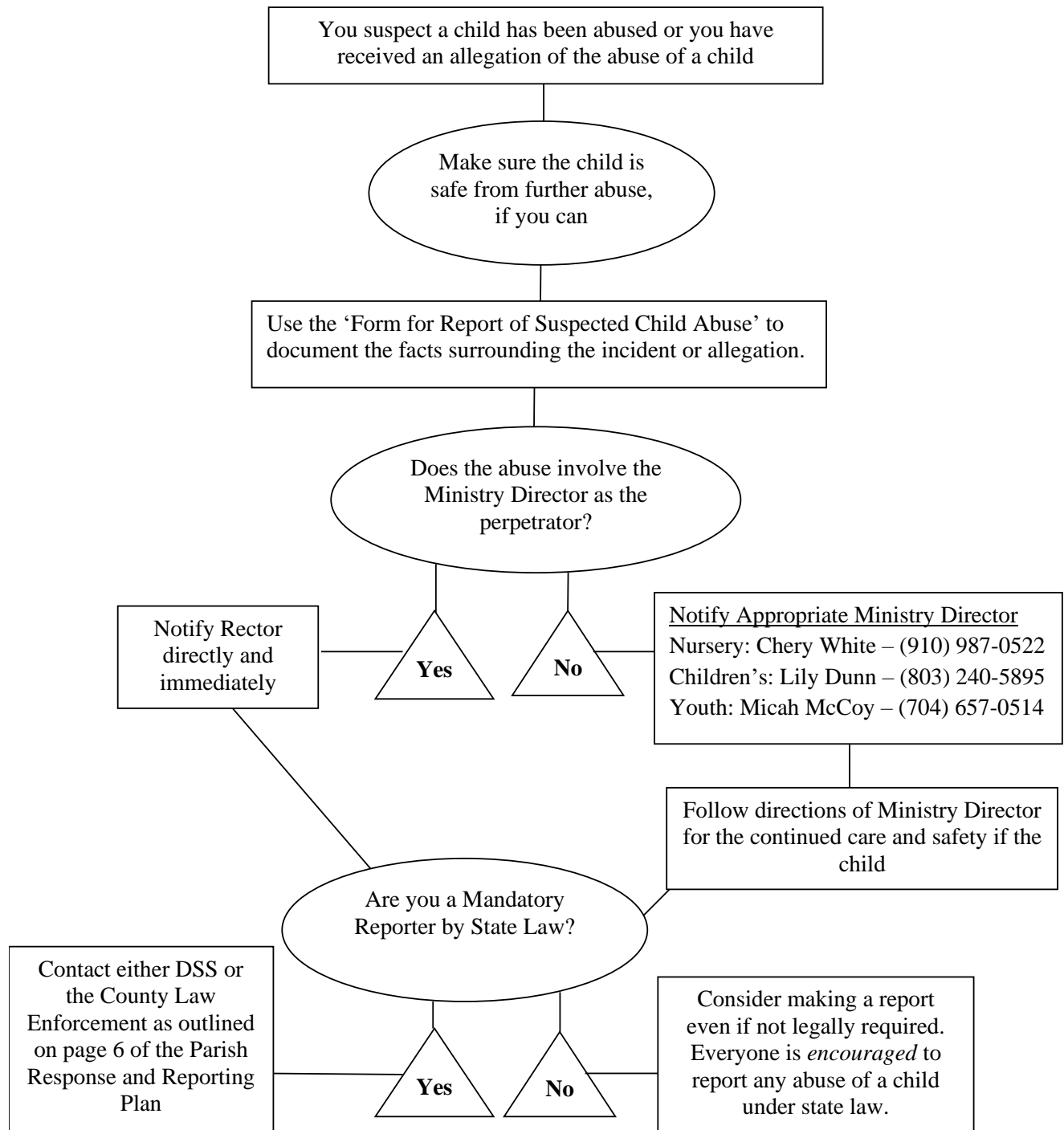
Those who will need to be informed by the various levels of responsibility include:

- State Authorities (DSS or County Law Enforcement)
- Ministry Director (Nursery, Children’s, or Youth)
- Rector
- Parents of the Victim
- Senior Warden
- Bishop
- Parish Legal Counsel
- Parish Insurance Provider

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Appendix: Tab – A

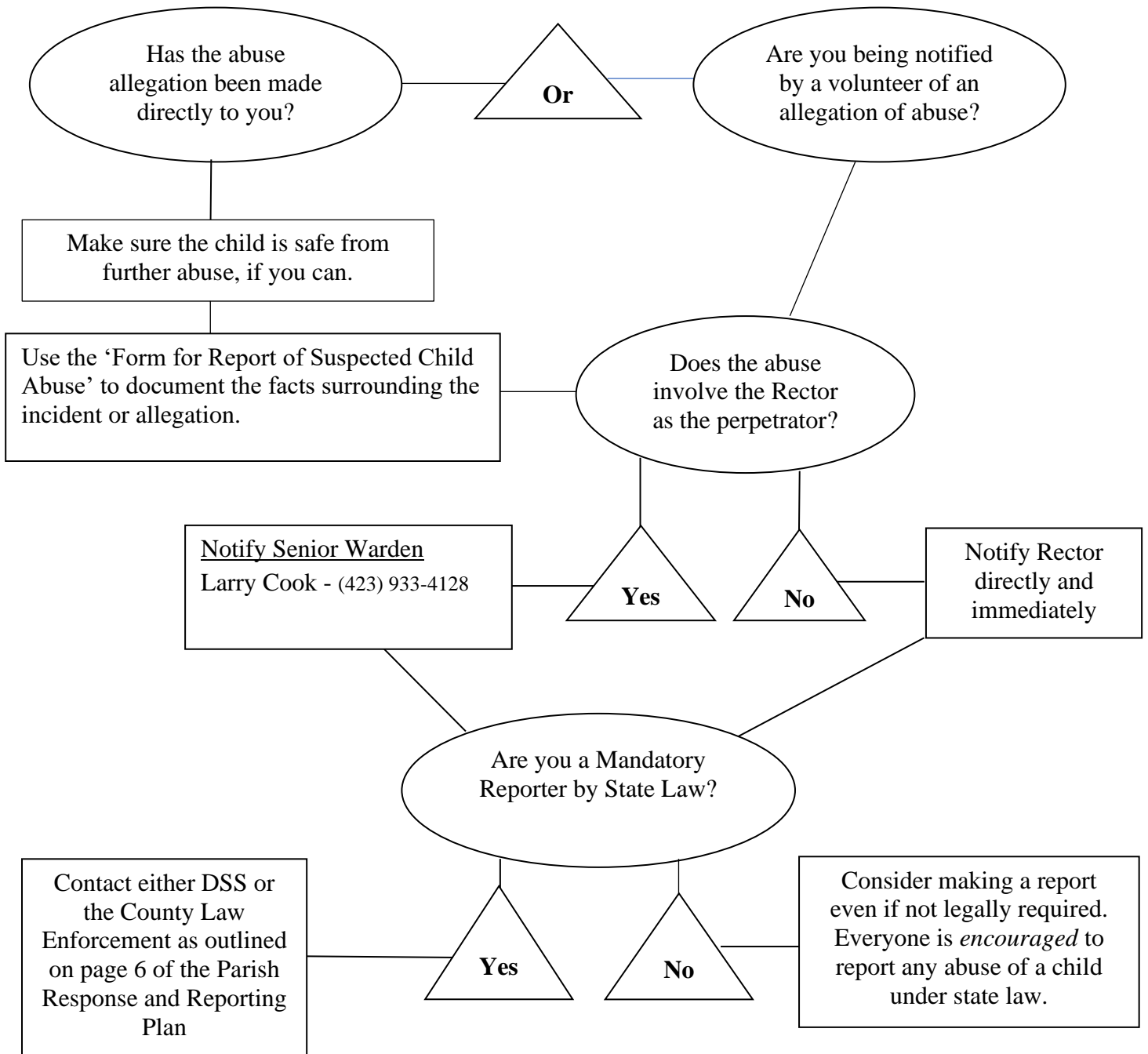
Response and Reporting Flow Chart for Volunteer Leader



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Appendix: Tab – B

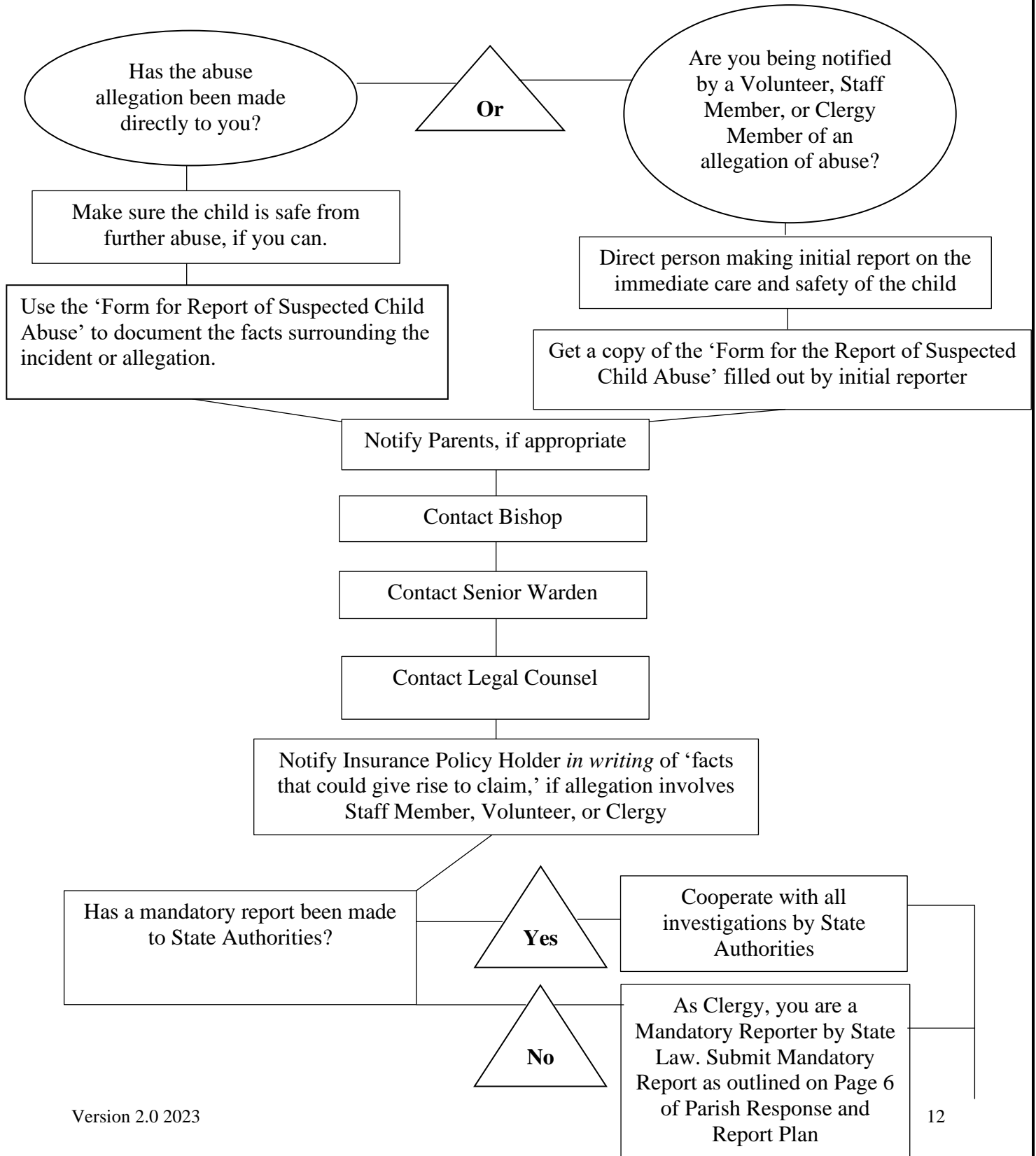
Response and Reporting Flow Chart for Ministry Director or Clergy Member



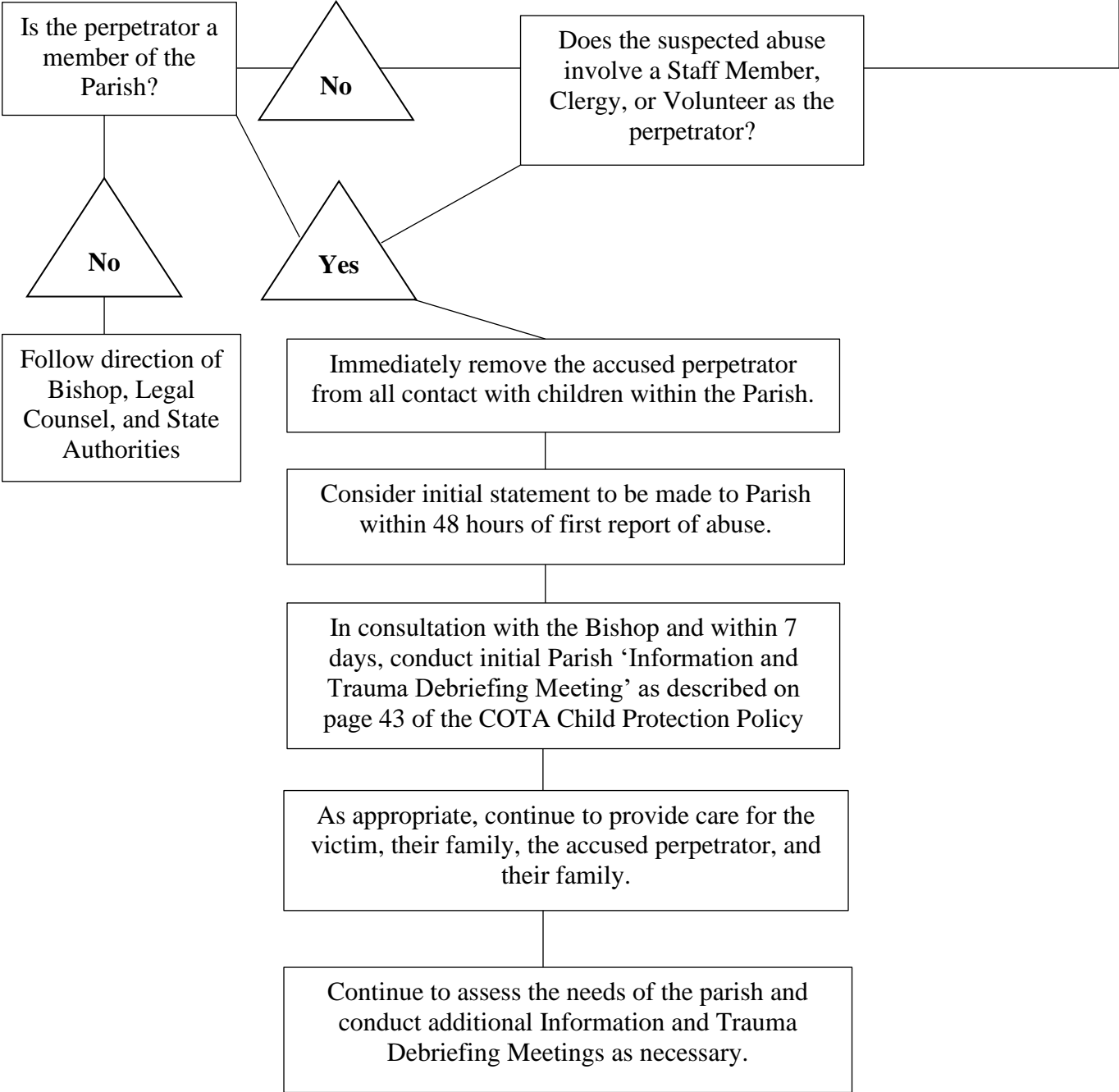
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Appendix: Tab – C

Response and Reporting Flow Chart Rector or Senior Warden



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Tab – D: Form for Report of Suspected Child Abuse

Confidential: Keep completed form in locked file

Information Regarding the Person Suspected of Child Abuse:

Name of suspected abuser: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Title/Relationship to Church (if any): _____

Information Regarding Suspected Victim(s):

Name of suspected victim: _____

Age: _____ Male/Female: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Relationship to the Church: _____

Name of any other suspected victim: _____

Age: _____ Male/Female: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Relationship to the Church: _____

(Continued)

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Confidential: Keep completed form in locked file

Information Regarding Incident(s) of Suspected Child Abuse:

How did you become suspicious of possible abuse?

Describe any physical evidence of the suspected abuse:

Describe each incidence of suspected sexual abuse, including the type of abuse, date(s), time(s), and location(s) of suspected abuse:

Name any eyewitness to each suspected abuse incident (additional information regarding witnesses is sought below), and describe how that witness viewed the event:

(Continued)

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Confidential: Keep completed form in locked file

Information Regarding Witnesses to Suspected Child Abuse:

Name of Witness: _____

Age of Witness: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Relationship to Church: _____

Name of Additional Witness: _____

Age of Witness: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Relationship to Church: _____

Information Regarding Person(s) to Whom Suspected Abuse was Reported:

Name and title of church official to whom the abuse initially was reported (for example, Sunday School teacher, Rector, etc.): _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Date that initial report was made: _____

(Continued)

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Name and title of the person making the initial report to the church official:

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Relationship to the Church (if any): _____

Was the suspected abuse reported to Child Protective Services (“CPS”)?

If yes, state the date the report was made to CPS: _____

Name and title of person reporting to CPS: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Name of CPS worker contacted: _____

CPS contact’s telephone number: _____

Was the suspected abuse reported to police?

If yes, state the date the report was made to police: _____

Name and title of person reporting to police: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Police department and contact person: _____

Police contact’s telephone number: _____

(Continued)

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Were the parents notified?

If yes, the date parents were notified: _____

Name and title of person notifying parents: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Parents' names: _____

Parents' address: _____

Parents' telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Was suspected abuse reported to the Diocese via telephone?

If yes, the date report was made to the Diocese: _____

Name and title of person reporting to the Diocese: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Diocese contact person: _____

Diocese contact number: _____

Is a copy of this completed report being sent to the Diocese?

If yes, state date when report is being sent: _____

Name and title of person sending report to the Diocese: _____

Address: _____

(Continued)

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Confidential: Keep completed form in locked file

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Diocese contact person to whom report is being sent: _____

Any other information which may be helpful to the investigation:

Information Regarding Person Completing this Form:

Name and Title: _____

Address: _____

Telephone (home/work/cell): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____