

**Respecting and Caring for Children and Each Other**  
**Our Practice**  
5/1/2017

*We are a community of disciples sharing the confession, "Jesus is Lord."*  
Hope Fellowship Vision Statement

*As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.*  
*Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God.*  
1 Peter 2.16-17c

As a family of believers we are called to love, support, and encourage each other so that "all of us come to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Ephesians 4.12-13)

The "all" in this verse from Ephesians means all. It means each one of us should genuinely love and care deeply for each other, from the youngest to the oldest, without regard for gender or ethnicity. As Peter put it, we should honor everyone. We should treat each other with respect just as we would treat Jesus himself.

Understanding that we live in a fallen world and that each of us is a sinful human being capable of deceit, power-mongering, abuse, selfishness, and violence, we affirm the following practices as a rule for our life together. We do this with full confidence that God is growing us individually and corporately into the fullness of Christ and the perfection of God's love.

We will see Christ in each other and build each other up in love.

In relationships with each other and with our neighbors we will:

- Always forgive
- Listen first and avoid verbal domination
- Speak gently without harsh language
- Avoid gossip
- Pause to greet each other
- Respect speakers and avoid distractions while someone else has the floor
- Talk directly to those with whom we have conflict (Matthew 18)
- Never use violence or seek to cause someone harm
- Be patient with each other's idiosyncrasies and sensitive to each other's differences and preferences
- Be open to correction and suggestions from our brothers and sisters

In sexual ethics we:

- Affirm faithfulness in marriage and celibacy outside of marriage
- Reject pornography and the use of any human beings as objects of sexual fantasy
- Seek to be sensitive to issues of gender and power and will avoid in our speech and mannerisms actions that will make others uncomfortable or could be perceived as sexual advances or suggestions
- Avoid as we can putting ourselves in the way of temptation

If we see, suspect, or experience sexual abuse or other inappropriate behavior and for whatever reason feel we cannot address this directly with the person(s) in question, then we will bring the issue to one of the pastors.

**Regarding Children**

Living as a community and sharing life together holds wonderful possibilities for our children as they grow in their understanding of God and of the world. We know, however, that the closeness of our life can also increase the risk of our children being sexually mistreated or assaulted. We need an extra measure of

respect and care for the children since they are particularly vulnerable to abuse and manipulation.

In relationship to our children we will:

- Model positive relationships, non-sexual and sexual
- Seek to provide appropriate and sensitive sexual education opportunities for children and youth
- Listen respectfully to children, making eye-contact with them, and will always avoid bullying and sarcasm
- Develop a sincere interest in the concerns and sensitivity of the children
- Help children grow in respect for each other, for adults, and for the life and meetings of our church
- Wait an appropriate amount of time until trust and familiarity have been built to ask any newcomer to our church to teach Sunday School
- Have all Sunday School teachers and youth leaders review and sign this statement on an annual basis
- Always make it clear that all youth are free to talk with their parents about anything regarding their time with mentors or in the youth group or Sunday School classes
- Attempt to maintain at least a five year difference between the age of children watched and the older child who is watching them
- Leave room doors open when one teacher is with one student
- Have doors with windows to the hallway for the Sunday School class rooms
- Will gently correct each other as adults when we see these rules being violated and will be open to the correction of each other.