

# Safe Haven: A Step-by-Step Guide

## for Ministries of ELCA Congregations, Schools & Learning Centers



This resource is intended to guide your school, learning center and congregation as you create or renew your commitment to be a Safe Haven – a place where all are considered God’s children and are safe in every way to grow in faith and love and discover their gifts to serve and be served in Jesus’ name.

Our congregations, ELCA schools and learning centers are encouraged to use this resource to build and sustain trusted relationships and safe places and spaces for learning and care giving—and to develop guidelines in your ministry context for the prevention of abuse and harm of the children, youth and the families we serve.

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### **Disclaimer:**

*This document is intended as a resource and guideline. It is not a manual or policy for you to implement. It does not cover every issue. It is very important that any guideline one adopts or implements is in compliance with all state, federal employment and privacy laws. One should consult with those professionals knowledgeable of such laws. What is crucial is that each school, learning center and congregation creates its own document or guidelines and procedures in the context of their own particular ministries. It is also critical that as you begin this work, that your school and/or congregation’s insurance carrier is informed of your intentions and consulted for suggestions and resources.*

## INTRODUCTION

As Congregations, Lutheran Schools and Early Childhood Centers of the ELCA we must be known as communities of trust where children grow in faith, develop and flourish in every way.

As Christians we are the Body of Christ. Children are a vital part of the Body of Christ and essential to our life of faith. It is our responsibility to keep them safe. The Church will only be a safe place and space if we care for its most vulnerable members. This includes people of all ages, but it most especially relates to children and youth.

The unfortunate reality of our world today is that we must be ever vigilant and intentional in making our faith communities safe. Our schools and congregations cannot ignore this reality. In God's love, we must respond with direct, positive, and preventative actions to build and sustain our schools and congregations as Safe Havens – a safe place for all children, youth and the adults who serve them.

For this reason, ELEA and the CENetwork encourages every congregation and associated school or learning center to go through the process of establishing Safe Haven Guidelines and offering regular training for staff, parents, volunteers and church members on how to prevent, recognize and respond to sexual abuse.

In a "Safe Haven" congregation, school and community the adults who lead, teach, and care are protected, trained, equipped, blessed, and serve with the power of the Holy Spirit. As Luther explains in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, "just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith."

Establishing guidelines is the start in the journey of being attentive to safety and care for all of God's children each and every day. It is as much about the establishment of guidelines as it is about the continual shaping of a culture of tested and practiced trust. Creating a Safe Haven is an ongoing process of establishing and keeping a mutual covenant so all can flourish.

Awareness, education, and prevention are ways our congregations and schools can be proactive and provide a Safe Haven for children and the youth we serve and the adults with whom we work. Establishing a school, learning center and congregation as a Safe Haven nurtures a culture that values each individual as a child of God, created in God's image and marked with the cross of Christ.

We are called to live a life of love in service to one another, bearing Christ's love to a world that longs for genuine, safe, unending grace and peace. God grant us the wisdom and strength to take these first steps and live out our calling!

The following pages share a process for how to create such a covenant and establish Safe Haven Guidelines.

*Thank you to the Safe Haven Task Force, formed in 2010 in the Rocky Mountain Synod- ELCA,  
that created the initial template for this resource – Linda Staats*

## ACTION STEPS: Creating A Safe Haven



### A. School Board and/or Church Council:

1. Review history of the Safe Haven Initiative. p.6
2. Read and discuss “WHY a Safe Haven?” p.7
3. Read and reflect upon the Theological Framework and Bible Study. pp.9-11
4. Create and approve a recommendation to create Safe Haven Guidelines and training.
5. Establish a Safe Haven Taskforce. p.8
6. Define scope of the work and responsibility of a Safe Haven Taskforce.  
*The Taskforce is charged with creating an action plan integrating the ideas from this resource while the appropriate governing board continues building a commitment by the school, learning center and/or congregation to becoming a Safe Haven for all children, youth and their families.*

### B. Safe Haven Task Force:

1. Review history of Safe Haven Initiative. p.6
2. Engage in Bible Study. pp.9-11
3. Complete Survey. p.12
4. Create Safe Haven Guidelines. pp.13-18
5. Plan for Safe Guarding God’s Children Training. p.19
6. Present recommendations to School Board and/or Church Council.

### D. School Board and/or Church Council:

1. Accept and Approve Safe Haven recommendations.
2. Promote & implement Safe Haven Guidelines with staff, families, congregation and community.
3. Create a Response Team to handle concerns and violations.
4. Establish plan for Maintenance and Review.
5. Plan celebration. p.20
6. If your school is a member of ELEA - Inform ELEA  
*ELEA will acknowledge that your school/learning center and congregation is committed to being a Safe Haven and that you have created or reviewed your guidelines and procedures. ELEA does not approve or disapprove your Guidelines*
7. Share your resources, experience and stories with your synod, ELEA and the CENetwork.

## RESOURCES



History of Safe Haven for Children Initiative

WHY? and... We Will!

Bible Study

Establishing a Safe Haven Team

Survey – “Where Are We Now? What is Our Plan?”

- Areas To Consider Regarding Behavior
- Areas to Consider for Programming
- Areas to Consider Related to Facilities
- Areas Related to Administration

Additional Resources

Safe Guarding God’s Children Training

Celebrate

## ELCA History & Documents

### Safe Haven for Children

1. **Report to the 1997 Churchwide Assembly: Initiatives to Prepare for a New Century**, “The social upheavals of our time and the growing gap between the rich and poor have been especially damaging to the lives of children and families. As we prepare for the new millennium, we must assure the youngest and most vulnerable members of our world that they have a future.” —Bishop H. George Anderson

2. **Safe Haven for Children ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action CA99.03.03**. Passed by the **1999 Churchwide Assembly** in Denver, Colorado.

<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1999.pdf>

<http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/3457>

<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1999.pdf>

ELCA News Service: CHICAGO (ELCA) 2001 -- About 350 Spanish-speaking congregations and social ministry organizations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will receive the Spanish text "Safe Haven for Children: Hope for Congregations and Communities" is a resource designed to help congregations become safe places for children. It contains information about children living in poverty, advocacy, and childcare protection policies for a parish, Bible study and devotional materials, and a guide for initiating a safe-haven campaign.

Production of the resource was a final goal for team members of the ELCA's Help the Children Initiative, one of seven "Initiatives for a New Century" identified by the 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The church's work on the initiatives will come to a close at the 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, Aug. 8-14 in Indianapolis.

*The "Safe Haven for Children" resource is no longer published. Many of the ELCA Resource Centers still carry copies. This resource created for the ELEA contains relevant sections from the original ELCA produced resource.*

3. **ELEA National Board Meeting April 24-25, 2014**, Phoenix, AZ. The motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously to adopt the Safe Haven materials and work toward implementation in all our ELCA schools. A task force was established.

4. **ELEA National Board Meeting October 21-23, 2015**, Phoenix, AZ. A motion was unanimously adopted that *ELEA encourages each ELCA school and center to create a safe haven task force and develop Safe Haven guidelines, using the suggested "Step by Step Guide"*.

## **WHY - and WE WILL!**

*The process of your school, learning center and/or congregation becoming or renewing its commitment to being a Safe Haven is most effective if it is an intentional decision of your congregation and governing body. As you take these first, initial steps, you might incorporate some of the following language into your discussions. Create recommendations or a resolution that fits your context for ministry.*

### **WHY Create Safe Haven Guidelines for ELCA Schools, Learning Centers and Congregations?**

In Baptism the congregation promises to support and pray for the baptized in a new life in Christ;

- Through Baptism we are entrusted with the great responsibility to live together as God's faithful people;
- Jesus said, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God . . ." (Mark 19:14, Luke 18:16);
- God calls us to be a cross-generational community of faith, therefore we want to create ministries where children can flourish and adults can be trusted;
- Because children and young people are the most important gifts God entrusts to us, it is vital to our ministry with families, outreach to our neighbors and our testimony to the wider church and world that our schools and church take seriously the responsibility to protect its children, and the adults who care for them, so all may flourish physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually;
- Congregations and our schools are influential institutions in our communities, therefore every congregation and school needs guidelines in place to protect their children, youth, the vulnerable, and adults who care for them, from abuse of any kind;
- We desire our families, our immediate community, the wider church and the world to know we establish places where our children are safe.

Creating a Safe Haven is a lifelong process of learning, caring and keeping our promises,

### **THEREFORE WE WILL:**

- Follow the rules and expectations established by the laws of our state, county and city as well as our congregation and its respective insurance company;
- Create a Safe Haven Team and establish basic Safe Haven guidelines, unique to our context and ministry;
- Train the adults who work with children and the vulnerable in our midst, to regularly practice these Safe Haven guidelines;
- Hold all adults working with children accountable to the Safe Haven guidelines created for our school and congregation's context and ministry;
- Seek out ways to support families and educate households about the Safe Haven guidelines established by our school and congregation.