



## Guidelines for the Kehilla Community on Responding to Abuse

### Considerations Upon an Allegation of Abuse Being Reported

- An allegation of abuse will be taken seriously and pursued as fully as possible by the congregation's representatives, if requested to do so by the party reporting that they have experienced abuse.
- The Committee Against Abuse and the Congregation Rabbi should be informed of the allegation. A rabbi or spiritual leader and a representative of the Committee—both acceptable to the one alleging his or her being abused and of the gender they prefer whenever possible—should work to pursue the matter, to deal appropriately with the one who is asserting that he or she was abused, and to deal appropriately with the one accused of abuse. Outside agencies and experts should be contacted in order to determine the best ways to proceed. Should a rabbi or spiritual leader be accused of abuse, the other rabbi(s) and/or spiritual leaders should determine who will act in his or her place under the circumstances.
- Allegations of current abuse will be reported to the authorities when appropriate, and where required by law.
- Adult survivors of abuse are usually the best judges of what they need for their healing, for the restoration of wholeness and for their ability to continue to participate in the community. Active listening to the survivor is a necessary component of both healing and determining the best course of action. The processes necessary for healing are individual, complex, and of differing duration in time. The survivor must be a primary participant in determining how that process should occur.
- Special consideration may need to be given in circumstances when the person who has been abused is of diminished capacity. Outside agencies and experts should be contacted in order to determine the best ways to proceed, and all reporting requirements should be complied with.
- When the survivor is a child or youth, there may be factors that prevent her or him from being able to make the best choices regarding his or her safety needs. It may be necessary to act or report against the spoken desires of the child/youth survivor, as in the case of mandatory reporting of abuse. At the same time, it is important to hear the child out, be honest, and remember that s/he still holds valuable information regarding her/his own healing and safety needs.
- All situations where child abuse has been reported will be taken seriously. We are committed to protecting our children from all forms of abuse, even in situations where the legal system may not become involved. With this in mind, we will determine the best courses for referral, safety, protection, counseling, and healing for our children that are available to us as a synagogue community. The safety of the child(ren) will be our first consideration, and all appropriate means should be exhausted to provide that safety and protection. Outside agencies and experts should be contacted in order to determine the best ways to proceed.
- Considerations concerning *Lashon Ha-Ra*, the Hebrew term for gossip and other misdirected speech: The prohibition against *Lashon Ha-Ra* will not be used as a means of silencing

survivors, or those aware of abuse, who appropriately report abuse, or seek aid, therapy or comfort. One who is accused of abuse should not subject the one who reports it to opprobrium or ridicule. Congregants should also take special care not to gossip, conjecture or spread rumors about the matter. Beyond the impact on the community, *Lashon Ha-Ra* can also jeopardize the safety of the survivor.

#### Considerations on the Survivor's Role After Disclosure

Historically, focus is often placed on the healing and protection of the accused to the detriment of the survivor's safety. For this reason, while we are committed to serving all our members, the safety and healing of the survivor should have our highest priority in any situation where abuse is alleged. This priority includes her or his confidentiality and right to participate in making decisions about the process which will deal with the abuse within the community. At the same time, in cases in which the survivor is unable or unwilling to proceed with pursuing the matter further toward resolution, the congregation may decide to proceed on its own if there is indication of risk to other congregants. In such cases, the congregation shall preserve the confidentiality of the survivor in order to prevent further endangerment. A survivor should not be forced to relive traumatic experiences by giving testimony against the abuser, particularly if this puts the survivor at risk. Furthermore, to ensure the safety of other members who have been abused or who may be at risk for future abuse, allegations of abuse may be sufficient for the congregation to pursue the matter further. The presence within the community of an abuser who is not under treatment constitutes a risk to others, even if the one who has been abused does not choose to pursue the matter further. Even with treatment, some abusers may still constitute a risk. For the safety of the survivor, confidentiality must be preserved, unless the survivor has specifically requested otherwise. The survivor shall not be subjected to further abuse in the name of investigation or resolution. The survivor's safety and full inclusion in the life of the community are our primary concerns.

#### Considerations on the Alleged Abuser's Response to Allegations

When people are justly accused of being abusive, they are apt to deny or minimize their behavior. Lying, exaggerating, rationalizing the abuse, and blaming the survivor are common responses. An abuser may have the support of many people simply because congregants have a hard time believing, for example, that their friend or leader could be abusive. This is particularly true if the abuser is well known, respected, or has authority within the community. Abusers have reinforced this belief by keeping their abuse a secret and threatening victims with further harm if they reveal the abuse. Meanwhile, they maintain a model public persona that does not appear abusive. This behavior discredits and isolates the survivor within the community, and in turn, further abuses the survivor. A consideration of this dynamic should be factored into the response to an allegation of abuse. An individual's status as a community leader, spiritual leader, therapist, judge, teacher, parent, or a person in a position of power or authority can coexist with his or her being an abuser.

Thus, we should not be deterred from further pursuit of the matter, or from reporting or referring the allegation simply because of the accused's denial, minimizing, or blaming, nor simply because of the alleged abuser's reputation, prior accomplishments, participation, or leadership. Full verification of the accusation is not required before taking appropriate actions to insure the safety of anyone who may be in danger of abuse.

We should preserve the confidentiality of the accused, prior to and during resolution of the matter, except on a need-to-know basis, or as necessary for the well-being and safety of the survivor, or where there is a reasonable belief that the safety of others is in jeopardy.

### Considerations if Abuse is Found

Those aware of an abusive situation shall obey all laws for mandatory reporting of reasonable suspicion of child abuse, elder abuse, and abuse of a dependent adult.

In situations of abuse involving either children or adults, we will honor and enforce any civil or criminal restraining orders in effect, in addition to any internal policies we may set regarding a particular situation. Internal policy cannot supersede or temporarily waive a court order.

Abusive behavior should not be sanctioned by honoring someone who is a known abuser and who has not undertaken a process of *teshuva* (the process of turning away from wrongdoing involving repentance, contrition and repairing what can be repaired). Giving favorable sanction in such circumstances may signal our acceptance of such behavior, may place the abuser in a position of greater authority, and may further isolate the survivor. This could place the survivor at greater risk and also may drive him or her out of the community. Honoring can include such activities as being called to the Torah, or taking a leadership role in a service or on a committee.

A process of *teshuva* should be determined by the designated spiritual leader or rabbi. *Teshuva* may include—and is not limited to—professional counseling and therapy, spiritual counseling, and restitution. An ability to refrain from further abusive behavior is essential. The designated spiritual leader or rabbi may need to consult in confidence for relevant advice in this determination. Support, healing, *teshuva*, re-education, and any other needs of the abuser shall not supersede or interfere with the safety of those who were abused.

The survivor should be given appropriate information as to the resolution of the matter with regard to the abuser.

### Abuse Involving Kehilla Staff and Volunteers: Principles Guiding Kehilla Policies

1. Abusive behavior is contrary to Jewish values, is unacceptable in this community, and will not be tolerated from our staff and volunteers.
2. Employees who are abused will not be penalized for seeking services and/or support, or for filing a grievance against their abuser/perpetrator.
3. Kehilla commits to dealing with the issue of child abuse responsibly and ethically by taking steps to protect the children in our care from all forms of abuse. Kehilla will safeguard our children while promoting a positive, nurturing environment.
4. Employees and volunteers must promptly report inappropriate or questionable behavior by other workers to a Rabbi, the Head of the School, or a designated member of the congregation, and must follow all legal reporting guidelines.
5. Under no circumstances shall a person under investigation for having molested children/youth or who is known to have done so, ever be alone with young members of the congregation.
6. Rabbis and other spiritual leaders must take particular care not to use their position of authority as a means to take advantage of congregants for sexual purposes.
7. Abusive behavior will not be tolerated or minimized because of the contributions, experience, wisdom, or reputation of a spiritual leader. Our spiritual leaders are expected to set an example of the highest moral conduct.
8. Kehilla Community Synagogue understands that it is our legal and ethical obligation to protect employees and volunteers from sexual harassment.

### Reference Materials for Dealing with Abuse

The Committee Against Abuse and others who are responsible for dealing with situations of abuse have at their disposal guidelines and other materials to aid them and give guidance in their work. An important work for our reference is the *Guidelines on Abuse Prevention*, developed by the Coalition

Against Abuse in preparing the present document. This document has not been officially adopted by Kehilla Community Synagogue. Moreover, it may be altered and further developed by those responsible for executing these policies. It is referenced here as an encouragement to study its materials, to apply the lessons and principles embedded in this text and to engage in a process of further refinement to determine how we can build a safe and supportive community. In doing so, we will live Torah and write Torah.