

Safe Church Policy: Prevention & Response to Child Abuse

We at First Mennonite Church are committed to providing an environment that is safe and healthy for our children and youth to learn about and experience God's love. This policy will be our guide for being proactive in preventing abuse and addressing any reports of abuse within our faith community. The safety and best interest of our children and youth is our main priority.

I. Definitions

- A. Children/Child** - anyone from birth through grade 6
- B. Youth** - anyone grade 7 through grade 12
- C. Child Sexual Abuse** - when an adult or older adolescent uses a child/youth for sexual stimulation. It can include both contact and non-contact behaviors.
- D. Committee** - references to "the committee" are to FMC's Safe Church Committee

II. Guidelines for Working with Children & Youth

- A. Windows in All Classroom Doors.** All rooms used with children or youth will have an unobstructed window in the door. If a door does not have an unobstructed window, the door must remain open at all times.
- B. Two Adults.** Two or more adults will be present with children and youth at all times including during transport. The two adults should be unrelated whenever feasible; however, for any overnight event, the two adults must be unrelated.
- C. Child Pickup Process.** Children will only be released directly to their caretaker.
- D. Bathroom Assistance.** If a child requires assistance using the bathroom, the door will remain ajar.
- E. Electronic Communication.** Electronic communication with children will happen through the child's caretaker. Electronic communication with youth will not be 1-on-1 and should only occur in a traceable format.

III. Screening Process to Work with Children & Youth

- A. Persons to be Screened.** All adults who wish to work with children or youth and all church staff will be screened and approved by the committee prior to their work.
 - 1. Waiting Period.** New persons to FMC will have a waiting period of six months before beginning the screening process.
- B. Process of Approval:**
 - 1. Background Check.** All adults who wish to work with children or youth will have a background check.
 - a)** The Safe Church Committee has discretion in determining whether or not to approve an adult for service. **It will take seriously any concern regarding the adult and err on the side of protecting children.** There is no appeal process.
 - b)** However, no one with a criminal history of sexual abuse of any kind or a history of abusing or neglecting children will be approved.
 - 2. Two Year Rule.** Persons who began regularly attending FMC within two years will provide two references, with preference of one of the references being from their previous pastor.
 - 3. Training Every 3 Years.** All adults who wish to work with children or youth will complete Safe Church training, as directed by the Safe Church Committee, which will include a review of this policy. This training will be completed by the adult every three years.
 - 4. Sex Offender Registry.** The committee will annually check those wishing to work

with children or youth against the state and federal Sex Offender Registries and will rescind approval to anyone who appears on either list.

IV. Reporting and Responding to Abuse Allegations

- A. Report to Safe Church Committee.** Anyone who suspects or learns through a direct report of an incident of child abuse will report the incident immediately to a member of the Safe Church Committee.
- B. Written Record.** The committee will ensure that a confidential, written report is made outlining the allegation. The report should be verified and signed by the one reporting the incident. The report should include the following when possible:
 - 1. Name, age, address of victim and offender
 - 2. Nature of incident
 - 3. Number of times it occurred including dates of occurrence
 - 4. Relationship of victim to offender
 - 5. Any other witnesses to the incident
- C. Contact Parents, State Authorities, and Alleged Offender.**
 - 1. The committee will contact the child's parents to inform them of the reported incident.
 - 2. The committee will contact state authorities (e.g. DHS, police) to make a report of the incident.
 - 3. The committee will contact the alleged offender to inform them of their suspension from all work or contact with children or youth until the committee releases such a suspension, and any other restriction as decided by the committee.
 - 4. The committee will maintain a written record of the above contacts.
- D. Follow DHS's Direction.** The committee will follow the direction of DHS or other state authorities and will fully cooperate in any investigation.
- E. Contact Church Insurance.** The committee will contact the church's insurance company to alert them to the reported incident.
- F. Contact Church Hierarchy if Accusation Involves Clergy.** If the allegation of child sexual abuse involves a pastor as the alleged offender, the committee will use the procedures outlined in the [Mennonite Church USA policy](#). That policy will not prohibit or delay reporting the incident to the proper legal authorities.
- G. Committee Makes Decisions.** If the investigation by legal authorities results in founded abuse, the offender will not work with our children or youth. If the abuse is unfounded, the committee will decide next steps.
- H. Contact Mennonite Abuse Prevention. In a case of founded abuse the Safe Church Committee will submit documentation of the case to MAP- Mennonite Abuse Prevention <https://www.themaplist.org/>**

V. Duties of Safe Church Committee

- A.** Report to the Leadership Council.
- B.** Ensure that the above policy, including screening process and response to incident reports, is being followed.
- C.** Ensure that proper records are being maintained and that confidential information is kept confidential.
- D.** Provide any needed forms to those wishing to work with children or youth.
- E.** Oversee all Safe Church trainings.
- F.** Inform and remind the congregation about this policy, and answer questions.

Update and revised June 2023.

Appendix A: Appropriate & Inappropriate Behavior Examples

Appropriate Physical Interactions	Inappropriate Physical Interactions
Side hugs	Full frontal hugs
Pats on shoulder or back	Kisses
Handshakes	Lap sitting for children over 5
High-fives and hand slapping	Wrestling
Arms around shoulders	Tickling
Holding hands (with young children in escorting situation)	Any form of affection that is unwanted by the child or youth

Appropriate Verbal Interactions	Inappropriate Verbal Interactions
Positive reinforcement	Name-calling
Appropriate jokes	Off-color or sexual jokes
Encouragement	Cursing
Praise	Secrets
Strength-based conversations	Shaming, belittling

Appendix B: Background Check Form

Required for all wishing to work with children or youth

(Volunteer will be screened by online background check provider.)

Appendix C: Reference Check Form

Required for those who began attending FMC within the past two years

1. Your Information

- a. Your Name:
- b. Your Phone Number:

2. First Reference (preferably a pastor from your last church)

- a. Name:
- b. Phone Number:
- c. Position Title/Connection to You:

3. Second Reference

- a. Name:
- b. Phone Number:
- c. Position Title/Connection to You:

Appendix D: Record of Interview of References

To guide interview of references conducted by the Safe Church Committee

1. How long have you known the applicant?
2. In what capacity have you known the applicant?
3. Rate the following areas (1=low, 10=high)
 - a. Honesty:
 - b. Dependability:
 - c. Ability to work well with others:
 - d. Ability to deal with conflict:
 - e. Ability to complete a task or project:
 - f. Motivation and initiative:
4. Are you aware of any reason why we should not allow the applicant to work with children or youth?
5. If this applicant worked either paid or as a volunteer for your organization, would you allow the applicant to return to service with your organization?
6. Based on your knowledge of the applicant's character and background, do you recommend allowing the person to serve with children and youth at our church?
7. Do you have any additional comments or questions?

Date of Interview:

Committee Member Conducting Interview: