

CHILD PROTECTION GUIDELINES

**FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH of DENVER
JULY 2005**

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RATIONALE

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

Across society, physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children and youth has become a tragic occurrence. When a child/youth is abused, it brings suffering, erodes self-esteem, destroys relationships, splits families, and violates human decency and integrity. Child abuse is not only an abuse of power, but also a betrayal of trust and can be extremely devastating and long lasting in effect. To this end, the following procedures have been established for implementation by all members of the church, as well as persons employed by, or volunteering in the service of the church, to protect those vulnerable populations.

First Mennonite Church has the desire to provide a safe refuge for everyone, children and adults, who enter its doors. Recognizing that the potential prevails for abuse to occur, First Mennonite Church is taking preventative steps in developing these Child Protection Guidelines. First Mennonite Church will follow all legal guidelines with respect to child abuse/neglect reporting procedures.

This guideline is not intended to create alarm or suspicion among the people, but to ensure the safety of potential victims and to protect workers from possible false accusations. The Child Protection Guideline contains five areas: Screening of Workers, Safeguards for Workers, Reporting Procedures, Response Plan, and Restoration Plan. It is our prayer that the last three areas of this guideline will never be used.

Definition of Terms

ADULT:	Is a person eighteen (18) years of age or older
CHILD:	Is a person under the age of twelve (12)
MINOR:	Is a person under the age of eighteen (18)
STAFF:	Are the pastors, and any employees hired by FMC
TEENAGER/YOUTH:	Is a person from the age of twelve (12) years to the age of eighteen (18)
VOLUNTEER:	Is a person providing services at FMC but is not employed by FMC for those services
WORKER:	Is any employee or volunteer assigned regular ongoing work related to children and youth of all ages at FMC
PASTORAL TEAM:	Is the pastor and co-pastor. If the position is vacant, it will be the lead pastoral partner

PROCEDURE FOR SCREENING STAFF/VOLUNTEERS

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs, the following guidelines have been established for those who desire a position involving the supervision or custody of minors (age 17 and younger). The Associate Pastor and/or designated individual will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the Child Protection Guidelines with all church employees and/or volunteers.

SCREENING

The screening process will include four steps:

- An application form
 - Acceptance of guidelines
 - References
 - A background check
1. The applicant must regularly attend the church for at least six months before becoming involved in children and/or youth service program. Parents who volunteer as Sunday morning nursery attendants and have children in the nursery are exempt from the 6 month rule and screen process.
 2. The applicant must complete and sign the First Mennonite Church of Denver Service Application (Appendix A). Applications will be kept confidential and on file at the church office. A renewal application is required for subsequent years (Appendix B).
 3. If an applicant/application presents any concerning information (e.g., involved with DHS due to neglect issues, domestic violence, etc.) the applicant's participation in the children/youth FMC programs will be at the discretion of the Pastoral Team.
 4. With each application, a Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) check and/or Colorado Courts records check will be required. Additional background information may be sought if deemed necessary by the Pastoral Team. This information will be confidential and used only by the staff member(s) who are directly responsible for monitoring the Child Protection Guidelines.
 5. Any person convicted or substantiated of abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker. If there are arrests but no convictions that are concerning (e.g., arrested for domestic violence but no conviction), a member of the Pastoral Team will have discretion as to whether or not the applicant can participate in the children/youth program.
 6. Service may begin after receiving approval from the church leadership staff or appointed designee(s).
 7. First Mennonite Church of Denver will require each of the outside programs (e.g., DOOR, Head Start, VORP) who use the church facility to institute a screening policy and to retain liability insurance.

SAFEGUARDS FOR WORKERS

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

All children and youth activities must adhere to the following guidelines:

NURSERY

1. At least two non-related adults (i.e., from separate families) must be present in the nursery. The door should remain closed for child safety.
2. If there are not at least two non-related adults present in the nursery, children cannot be left in the nursery.
3. The nursery attendants should accompany a child to the bathroom.
4. Other persons (e.g., teenagers) may be present to help in the nursery but may not accompany the child to the bathroom or change diapers. These helpers should follow the instructions of the adult nursery attendants.
5. Nursery attendants may hold children and change diapers if needed. See guidelines for appropriate Expression of Affection and Discipline (outlined in number 8 below) for more information.
6. The children should be released until the parent and/or designated adult has come to retrieve the child.

CHILD & YOUTH PROGRAMS and ACTIVITIES

To include Christian Education, MYF, Vacation Bible School and any other program involving children/youth.

1. Two-Person Standard: Two adults (over 21) should be present during any church activity for children/youth. At least one of the adults should be an approved provider (successfully completed the application process). The second adult can be a non-approved "helper." If two individuals are not present, the classroom door should be left open if there are no windows in the doors.
2. Groups of children (e.g., in classrooms) must be supervised by an adult at all times.
3. At the conclusion of the Sunday School hour and/or other activity, children under age 6 should be released only to their parent and/or designated adult.
4. Teacher/volunteers are strongly encouraged to use the "buddy system" (2 same age children accompanying each other) when bathroom use is necessary.
5. Parental Permission: In a situation where an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child/youth, parental consent should be obtained and/or an appropriate church leader notified in advance.
6. Overnight Standard: All adult chaperones (supervisors, sponsor parents, and helpers) must complete the Service Application before they can accompany children/youth on an overnight activity.

7. The Associate Pastor and/or designated person should perform an unannounced visit to each classroom at least one time per quarter. This visitation should be documented and retained in the church office.
8. Expressions of Affection and Discipline: Adults must use caution when expressing affection and discipline toward children/youth. Reasonable limits must be placed on physical and verbal interactions with children.
 - Respect a child's/youth's refusal of affection.
 - Be aware and sensitive to what makes a child feel uncomfortable.
 - A body-to-body embrace, a touch on private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit) or any kiss on the mouth is inappropriate.
 - Physical discipline is not permitted under any circumstances.

MENTORING

1. The two-person standard does not apply to mentoring relationships.
2. In order for an adult to serve as a mentor, he/she must regularly attend FMC Denver for at least 2 years.
3. Parental consent should be obtained prior to beginning any mentoring activity.
4. Overnight Standard: All adult chaperones (supervisors, sponsor parents, and helpers) must complete the Service Application before they can accompany children/youth on an overnight activity.
5. The mentoring program committee should offer consistent supervision to mentors on a regular basis.

TRAINING

1. The Pastors, church staff and volunteers of any program serving children/youth will attend a training program annually regarding the signs and symptoms of child abuse, awareness of abuse, reporting suspected child abuse, and the dynamics of abuse. Records of the training will be kept in the church office.
2. The training must be conducted by an individual qualified to provide abuse prevention training to church volunteers and staff.
3. The training should include, but not be limited to: the Colorado Children's code (Title 19), Department of Human Services requirements, reporting forms, and reporting procedures. The training must be provided by someone who has expertise in the area of child abuse and neglect.

NOTE: Any deviation from the above guidelines must be pre-approved by the appropriate church leader on a case-by-case basis.

REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR CHURCH WORKERS

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

The church's responsibility is to be aware and to report suspected abuse and/or neglect. Although a volunteer/staff person may not be a mandated reporter, FMC believes that anyone involved with children/youth, has a moral obligation to report. When signs or symptoms of abuse arise, or a staff person witnesses abuse or a child makes a disclosure, the volunteer/staff person should not conduct an investigation of the matter. An investigation will be conducted by a trained person who works for the police department or a child protection agency.

Legal Obligations

Legal obligations for reporting for individuals working with children in the State of Colorado are defined in the Colorado Children's Code. The Colorado Children's Code states that "any person specified in subsection 19-3-304 who has reasonable cause to know or suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect or who has observed the child being subjected to circumstances or conditions which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect shall immediately report upon receiving such information report or cause a report to be made of such fact to the county Department of Human Services (where the victim resides) or Law Enforcement agency (where the alleged/suspected offense occurred)."

Church Obligations

A sound reporting procedure promotes accountability among church workers. Church workers need to be trained in identifying inappropriate behavior with children, and to identify the symptoms of abuse or neglect. Workers should be encouraged to warn each other when questionable behavior occurs, and to report questionable behavior to the proper individuals. Great care and sensitivity needs to be exercised for the protection of everyone involved.

Moral Obligations

Church workers may not want to report a suspected incident of abuse or neglect for many reasons such as embarrassment, fear of personal and legal recrimination. Discrete and confidential reporting is critical for the safety of the children in our church. Church workers should understand that reporting reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty.

RESPONSE PLAN FOR ALLEGATIONS

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

If there is a suspicion of abuse/neglect, it must be reported immediately to the 1) Pastoral Team, 2) Department of Human Services or Law Enforcement. The “reporter” is anyone who has a suspicion of abuse/neglect or to whom the child has directly disclosed abuse/neglect. Please follow these guidelines when reporting abuse/neglect:

Receiving Allegation from Victim

1. The reporter should document the allegation directly from victim. Great care must be given to refrain from interviewing or asking leading questions of the child as this could taint an official investigation.
2. The reporter should outline the response procedure to the victim being careful not to make promises about the outcome.
3. The reporter should err in the direction of protecting the child. A report should be made if there is suspicion of any type of maltreatment.
4. The reporter and designated member of the Pastoral Team should confirm the immediate safety of all involved. Law Enforcement may be contacted directly if timing is critical and church leaders are unavailable for consultation.
5. The reporter should complete a Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting Form and submit it to the Department of Human Services, Law Enforcement and the Pastoral Team.
6. If the alleged offender is the parent/guardian, the reporter/Pastoral Team should seek advice from Department of Human Services (DHS) in the County where the child resides before contacting the parent. If the allegations are against a non-family member, Law Enforcement where the alleged abuse took place should be contacted.
7. The designated Pastoral Team member should consult with an attorney and insurance company (if applicable).

Responding to Alleged Offender

1. The designated person from the Pastoral Team should temporarily remove the alleged offender from his/her duties and/or susceptible environment while the investigation is being conducted.
2. A designated person from the Pastoral Team will follow up with DHS or Law Enforcement to learn of the disposition of the case.

Allegations Unsubstantiated

1. If the Department of Human Services and/or Law Enforcement determine the allegations are unsubstantiated, the investigation will cease.
2. The Pastoral Team should make every effort to exonerate, reconcile, and restore the accused.
3. The Pastoral Team can make a public statement if the accused so chooses.

4. The Pastoral Team should respond with love, care and concern to the complaint, to the congregation, and to the accused and his/her family.

Allegations that are not Substantiated as Abuse/Neglect, but a Demonstration of Poor Judgment

1. A member of the Pastoral Team will hold the accused responsible and accountable for the behavior. Grace and mercy are extended in the context of repentance, accountability and justice.
2. Education and/or counseling will be expected to correct the unhealthy behavior pattern. The accused may be removed from susceptible environments for a stated period of time.
3. The Pastoral Team will communicate the action taken with complainant to congregation as needed.

If Allegations are Substantiated:

1. The Pastoral Team may assist the victim in obtaining medical care, counseling, etc.
2. The Pastoral Team may require specialized counseling for the offender.
3. The Pastoral Team will permanently remove the offender from the susceptible environment.
4. The Pastoral Team may provide care for the offender and family during treatment.
5. The Pastoral Team will monitor the offender's treatment after obtaining the necessary release of information forms.
6. At the successful conclusion of treatment, the Pastoral Team will carefully decide if and how the offender can be fully reinstated into church life using his/her spiritual gifts in a non-susceptible ministries.
7. The Pastoral Team will protect others from harm and protect the integrity of the ministry. In cases where treatment of the offender is unsuccessful, more stringent restraints may be enforced or required.
8. The Pastoral Team should seek spiritual support through prayer, study, counsel, and fellowship.

RESTORATION PLAN

First Mennonite Church of Denver Child Protection Guidelines

Restoring the lives shattered by abuse is not limited to the victim, the accused and their families; it also includes the members of the congregation. Restoring trust and oneness may be a long, painful process for everyone involved; therefore, the following guidelines will be used to assist on this difficult journey.

Ministry to the Victim(s)

1. The Pastoral Team will minister with sensitivity and care providing support and prayer.
2. One member of the Pastoral Team will be named and offered to the victim(s), and their families, to serve as advocate and support, and to interpret the procedure to be followed.
3. A list of qualified counselors/therapists will be provided to the victim by the Pastoral Team. The church may consider helping with the cost of sessions as an extension of the church ministry.
4. In the case of multiple victims, the Pastoral Team can provide an opportunity for these individuals to meet together (if they choose) for mutual support and prayer.

Ministry to the Accused

1. The Pastoral Team should minister with sensitivity and care providing support and prayer.
2. One member of the Pastoral Team will be named and offered to the accused and his/her family, to serve as advocate and support, and to interpret the procedure to be followed.
3. A list of qualified counselors/therapists will be provided to the accused by the Pastoral Team. The church may consider helping with the cost of sessions as an extension of the church ministry.

Ministry to the Congregation

1. The Pastoral Team should be sensitive to the victim in determining what is communicated to the congregation.
2. The Pastoral Team will report to the entire Leadership Council any results and disciplinary action taken and its implications.
3. A member of the Pastoral Team may issue a statement to be communicated to the congregation may include the charges and resolution. Updates will be given as needed to minimize the spread of rumors.
4. Trained people will be made available to assist members of the congregation in addressing needs and to help bring about healing.
5. The Pastoral Team/Child Protection Task Force may re-evaluate Child Protection Guidelines in light of the incident that occurred.

First Mennonite Church Child Protection Task Force Members

Angie Nofziger – chair
Norm Dewhurst
Mark Guengerich
Lori Oswald
Katrina Schorck
Arden Slotter
Heather Spragins
Leon Stutzman

REFERENCES

- Church of God, First (1996, November). Child Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedure Manual. Unpublished policy commissioned by the Administrative Council of the Church of God First, PA.
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- Washington Association of Churches (1991). Sexual Abuse: the Responsibility for the Safety of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults. Seattle, WA: Author.
- Zarra, E.J. (1997). It Should Never Happen Here: a Guide for Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse in Ministry. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH

430 West 9th Ave
Denver, CO 80204

SERVICE APPLICATION

This application is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision or custody of minors. It is used to help the church provide a safe and nurturing environment for those children and youth who participate in our programs and use our facilities. This is not an employment application form.

(Please Type or Print)

Name: _____
Last First Middle

Present Address: _____ (____) _____
Street Telephone

City State Zip Code

PERSONAL CHURCH HISTORY

Name of church where you are a member _____

List name and address of other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

Write a brief description of your church volunteer work with minors during the past five years.

Write a brief description of your non-church work with minors during the past five years.

List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for children or youth work:

Have you ever been investigated, accused or convicted of physical or sexual abuse or any child related offense? ____Yes ____No

If yes, please describe:

References (Please list two personal references. Do not include relatives)

Name _____ Name _____

Address _____ Address _____

Phone (____) _____ Phone (____) _____

I affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the information on this application is correct. I authorize any individual, organization, or church listed on this application to supply any information (including opinions) that may pertain to my character and fitness to work with children.

Regarding the information gathered pertaining to me, I release any individual, organization, or church from any and all liability for damages that may result to me or my family. In order to insure confidentiality, I waive any right to inspect any of the information provided about me by any individual, organization, or church.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the church constitution, bylaws, policies, etc., and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my service and with children.

I have carefully read this affirmation and waiver. I understand its contents, and I sign it freely.

Signature _____ Date _____

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH

430 West 9th Ave
Denver, CO 80204

RENEWAL SERVICE APPLICATION

Name: _____

I affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, the information on the original service application is still correct. I authorize any individual, organization, or church listed on this application to supply any information (including opinions) that may pertain to my character and fitness to work with children.

Yes _____ No _____

If no, please describe changes:

Regarding the information gathered pertaining to me, I release any individual, organization, or church from any and all liability for damages that may result to me or my family. In order to insure confidentiality, I waive any right to inspect any of the information provided about me by any individual, organization, or church.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the church constitution, bylaws, policies, etc., and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my service and with children.

I have carefully read this affirmation and waiver. I understand its contents, and I sign it freely.

Signature _____ Date _____

