

Youth Worker Screening History and Proposal:

Due to various concerns from our insurance company as well as our desire to provide a safe sanctuary for children and youth at Silverwood Mennonite Church, the Discipling Commission along with input from the Board began the process of implementing a proactive plan to address sexual abuse in the church setting in the spring of 2009. This concept had already been discussed as far back as November of 2001 and as recent as August of 2007.

Why is this important? The news is constantly filled with disturbing stories of abuse of minors. This has claimed the attention of our nation and society. Unfortunately churches have unique features that make them susceptible to incidents of child abuse (trust, opportunity, access, and need). There is a desire to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth, and a place where parents feel comfortable and confident letting their children be involved. It is also an important step for protecting volunteers from high-risk situations and accusations. An additional reason is liability insurance.

A Covenant and Memo of Understanding was finalized after processing past work and other congregational models. It is attached along with our policy and procedures. This will be implemented in September of 2009 with the intent to be reviewed annually by the Discipling Commission at which point we can make any necessary revisions.

We believe that if Silverwood Mennonite Church is really making a difference for God in our community, we will be reaching out to and attracting those who are broken, hurting and in need of God (both youth and adults). As this takes place we will need more formal methods of expressing our love to those in our midst and providing a safe environment for our volunteers and our children.

Silverwood Mennonite Church
Safe Congregation
Policy and Procedure Manuel

Silverwood Mennonite Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all people. The following policy reflects our commitment to provide protective care of the youth who participate in church sponsored activities as well as to protect our adult staff and volunteers.

POLICY

1. All persons, paid or volunteer, who work with minors at Silverwood Mennonite Church will complete and turn in a *Silverwood Mennonite Church Youth Worker Covenant and Memo of Understanding* prior to working with children or youth. The Pastoral Team will review these memos. They will be kept in a locked file in the church office and will be updated every three years. If a regular attender leaves the church for any reason and then resumes attending, they will be handled as a new attender, waiting the sufficient amount of time to volunteer (see #4 & 5) and filling out a new memo even if it has been less than three years since a previous memo was filed.
2. All paid staff, youth sponsors, and mentors will be required to complete a police/criminal history check. These reports will be reviewed by the Board Chair and Vice-Chair and will be kept in a locked file in the church office and will be updated every three years. If the criminal records check shows a criminal history which the applicant or volunteer did not disclose on the screening form, his or her services will not be accepted. If the criminal records check reveals criminal convictions which were already disclosed on the screening form, the church will use it's discretion in determining whether the individual's services will be utilized. No one with a criminal history of abusing or neglecting children will be permitted to work with children or youth.
3. All youth workers will attend an annual training session in August led by the Discipling Commission and Pastoral Team staff to include teaching the church's policy and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse as outlined in this document. At this training session, the *Silverwood Mennonite Church Youth Worker Covenant and Memo of Understanding* will be distributed to be completed and handed back before the Christian Education year begins on September 1.
4. Volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth as a Christian Education teacher or nursery worker only after they have been regular attenders of the church for a minimum of six months.
5. Volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth as youth sponsors or mentors only after they have been regular attenders of the church for a minimum of two years.
6. All parents of youth or children in a mentor/mentee relationship will sign a *Parent Affirmation* granting permission and blessing of the relationship as well as providing medical information in case of an emergency.
7. Any person convicted of physical and/or sexual abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker.

8. Volunteers will provide a safe space for children and youth by keeping doors open at all times in classrooms and offices if there are no windows in the doors.
9. Volunteers will cultivate an “open door” culture in which parents are encouraged at any time to drop-in and observe or participate in activities.

PROCEDURE

I. Understanding and Identifying Abuse

i. Behaviors

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

ii. Physical Signs

Physical signs of abuse include but are not limited to lacerations and bruises; nightmares; irritation, pain or injury to the genital area; difficulty with urination; discomfort with sitting; torn or bloody underclothing; venereal disease.

iii. Behavioral Signs

Behavioral signs of abuse include but are not limited to anxiety when approaching the church or nursery area, nervous or hostile behavior towards adults, sexual self consciousness, “acting out” type sexual behavior, withdrawal from church activities and friends.

iv. Verbal Signs

Verbal signs of abuse may include phrases like, “I don’t like...(particular church worker)”;

“(A church worker) does things to me when we’re alone”;

“I don’t like to be alone with (A church worker)”;

“(A church worker) fooled around with me.”

II. Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Abuse.

- i. When abusive or unhealthy activities are suspected, a report should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of a member of the Pastoral Team, the Board Chair or the Board Vice-Chair.
- ii. The recipient of the initial report will be responsible for confirming the suspicion and the condition of the child, within 24 hours of when the first report was made.
- iii. In the case that someone is approached and wrongly accused of abusing, they too should immediately report the accusation and situation in writing and bring it to the attention of a member of the Pastoral Team, the Board Chair or the Board Vice-Chair.
- iv. All efforts at handling the incident must be documented.
- v. To protect the child and the accused, information regarding the complaint and the investigation will be limited to only those with a need-to-know in the Church organization. One person will be designated as the church spokesperson who will have the responsibility to respond to inquiries from law enforcement, social services, the media and the congregation.
- vi. Suspend any accused from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation has been completed.
- vii. Every allegation of abuse shall be investigated promptly and thoroughly by officials and reported to the church insurance company immediately.

Silverwood Mennonite Church Covenant & Memo of Understanding For children and youth

Youth Worker/Paid Staff:

Thank you for your consideration to work with the children/youth of Silverwood Mennonite Church. The children/youth are an active and vital part of our congregation. As someone who has a passion for working with young people, you will understand the need and desire to maintain a safe environment and appreciate that Silverwood has this policy to protect us all.

The information that follows will allow us to better know those who are working with children/youth. Our desire is to be proactive in protecting the children/youth as well as the adult volunteers who participate in activities at Silverwood.

Silverwood Mennonite Church
COVENANT & MEMO OF UNDERSTANDING
For Children & Youth Ministries

I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

Full Name: _____
Address: _____

Birth Date: _____
Phone: _____

II. CHURCH HISTORY AND PRIOR CHILDREN & YOUTH EXPERIENCE Please list (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

Please list all previous church work involving children/youth. List church name, address, type of work and dates

Please list all other work involving children/youth. List organization name, address, type of work and dates

III. REFERENCES (not former employers or relatives)

Name: _____	Name: _____
Address: _____	Address: _____
_____	_____
Phone: _____	Phone: _____
Relationship: _____	Relationship: _____

IV. CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Have you ever been investigated, charged with or convicted of sexual abuse? Yes____ No____
If yes, please explain: _____

Have you ever been charged with a crime involving child abuse, neglect, domestic violence or other violence? Yes____ No____
If yes, please explain: _____

V. POLICIES

To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children and youth who participate in our congregational programs the following guidelines have been established for those who want to work with our children and youth. The Discipling Commission and a designated individual will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the Safety Covenant with all church employees and/or volunteers.

1. All individuals who seek to volunteer with the children and/or youth will sign a memo of understanding. (Memos will be review by the Pastoral Team and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. Memos will be updated every three years.)
2. All paid staff will agree to a police background check. (Background checks will be reviewed by the Board Chair and Vice-Chair and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. Background checks will be updated every three years.)
3. Volunteers will have attended Silverwood Mennonite Church regularly for at least six months prior to volunteering for activities involving the supervision of groups of children (ie. CE teachers, nursery workers, VBS teachers, etc)
4. Volunteers will have attended Silverwood Mennonite Church regularly for at least two years prior to volunteering for activities involving regular off-grounds supervision of groups of youth (youth sponsors) or individuals (youth mentors.) A police background check will also be required and read by the Board Chair and Vice-Chair.
5. Any person convicted of physical and/or sexual abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker.
6. Volunteers will provide a safe space for children and youth by keeping doors open at all times in classrooms and offices if there are no windows in the doors.
7. Volunteers will cultivate an "open door" culture in which parents are encouraged at any time to drop-in and observe or participate in activities.

VI. AGREEMENT / COVENANT

The information provided above is correct to the best of my knowledge

I authorize any references or churches listed above to provide information they may have regarding my character and fitness for children and/or youth work. I also authorize any further background checks to be made if thought necessary by the staff or Board Chair of Silverwood Mennonite Church.

I have read the policies of Silverwood Mennonite Church regarding those who work with children and youth. I agree to observe these policies while serving in this capacity.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Revised: June-2009