Mountville Mennonite Church

Safety in the Congregation

What you need to know

- Theological Foundations
- Definitions
- Policies
- Key Terms
- Reporting Procedures
- General Guidelines

Our Vision

Being transformed by Jesus, we support and care for others, building relationships through unconditional love, all for the glory of God.

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Child Safety in the Congregation

Table of Contents

Theological Foundations 4
Definitions 6
Policies 9
Key Terms 11
Reporting Procedures 12
General Guidelines 13

a. Before giving a hug to a child/youth ask for permission.
b. Respect a child's/youth's refusal of affection.
c. Be aware of appropriate hand placement. A child/youth or an observer could misinterpret a pat on the bottom or a bear hug. Note that a touch on private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit) or a kiss on the mouth is always inappropriate.
d. Discipline of any type involving physical contact is not permitted
are encouraged not to send two children/youth with a four or more year age difference to an isolated setting, e.g., bathroom, tent, empty classroom.

3. **Bathroom and Diapering**
In general, children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before and after classes or other activities. In this way parents can assist as needed.

If you need to take a child to the toilet, be aware of your visibility and the child’s privacy, e.g., adult stands holding public bathroom door open while child enters toilet stall alone. Volunteers will assist the child only when necessary. If assistance is needed, leave the stall door open.

*Diapering*: Two volunteers should be present when clothes or diapers are being changed. A parent can also be recruited to change clothes or a diaper.

4. **Expressions of Affection**
True expressions of affection toward children/youth can be a manifestation of Christ’s love for all of us. A kind word of encouragement to a child/youth or a pat on the back can be a small but significant act for both the adult and the child/youth. That being said, adults must use caution and common sense when physically expressing affection toward children/youth.

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**Child & Youth Protection Policy**

“Being transformed by Jesus, we support and care for others, building relationships through unconditional love, all for the glory of God.”

**Vision of Mountville Mennonite Church (MMC)**

**Purpose:**

Because we live in a context where abuse is much more rampant than we’d like to admit we have adopted this *Child & Youth Protection Policy*. The purpose of this policy is to provide protection from abuse for our children and youth, but also to provide protection for our staff and volunteers as they seek to care for, nurture and disciple our young people. This policy outlines MMC’s expectations for appropriate behavior regarding the care and supervision of children and youth. We desire MMC to be a safe place where abusive words and actions are not tolerated and where staff and volunteers who work with children and youth are protected from false or wrongful allegations.
Theological Foundations

We believe that each person is created in the image of God and so deserves care, respect, and honor. God calls us to share our lives together in the Church, which is also described as a body in Scripture. In this body, each person is valuable and indispensable.

We recognize that our sinfulness can blind us to the importance of others, particularly vulnerable people such as children. Their voices are often silenced, distorted, or not heard at all. Yet Jesus’ words ring in our ears, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Since we desire to follow Jesus, we also seek to welcome and care for children and other vulnerable people God has created.

We want MMC’s building to serve as a sanctuary, a refuge for all people, where grace is extended and received. Jesus invites all people to come and follow, so we long for all people to find a home among God’s people. Since the Church serves as a representation of God’s Kingdom, we are called as Christ’s ambassadors to make this building a place of shalom, a place where God’s peace reigns.

Yet the Church is not a building. We, God’s people, are the Church. So, wherever we go, we want to bring the good news that all people are valuable.

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General Guidelines

To ensure that a nurturing Christian environment for children/youth is maintained within the congregation, to protect children/youth who participate in activities sponsored by the church from sexual, mental, and/or physical abuse, and to protect the congregation’s staff and volunteers from false allegations of abuse, the congregation encourages the following of these guidelines:

1. **Protection & Safety:** It is recommended that two adults (volunteer or staff) be present during any church sponsored children/youth activity to provide a greater level of protection and safety for our children, youth, volunteers and staff. If two persons are not available during SS, in the nursery, or during Children’s Church, the door (top half of door for nursery) to the room should be left open at all times. A designated volunteer will circulate outside the classroom or nursery area and be within easy reach to provide assistance if needed.

2. **Visibility:** All activities/meetings with children/youth should be conducted in a way that allows visibility, e.g., glass areas of doors should not be obstructed, curtains/blinds should be open, when possible, door should be open or a window should allow easy observation of the room. Where possible, conduct activities in a public place, with another person within sight and sound of the activities.

Because abuse is sometimes perpetuated by an older, stronger child/youth, staff and volunteers

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31. All Scripture references are from Today’s New International Version (TNIV).
2 Luke 18:16.1
**Good Faith:** Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of suspected child abuse will be free from discrimination, retaliation and civil or criminal liability related to this action.

**Reporting Procedures**

**Step 1:** Immediately make an oral report of suspected child abuse via the statewide toll-free telephone number (Child Line 1-800-932-0313)

**Step 2:** Complete your report by filling out **Form CY47** at [www.reportsuspectedabuse.com](http://www.reportsuspectedabuse.com). *(It is recommended that one of the pastoral team assist with the report.)*

**Step 3:** Immediately after making the initial reports, contact the lead pastor or a member of the pastoral team if you have not already contacted them.

*At MMC mandatory reporters include:* all youth ministry staff and volunteers who have been given responsibility for the care of students, youth retreat advisors, event chaperones, children's church and Sunday school teachers and volunteers, nursery volunteers, Vacation Bible School staff, and all mission team leaders who will be leading mission trips that will include minors.

We believe that God’s healing and hope happens best in safe spaces. We want MMC to serve as a sanctuary where God’s grace can flow into people’s lives, where God transforms people into more of whom God created them to be, so that God is glorified.
**Definitions**

**Child Abuse**: Any act (or failure to act) which causes (or creates imminent risk of) intentional serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age (any recent act or failure to act is defined as occurring within the last two years). The term “child abuse” shall mean intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:

1. Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
2. Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease with results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
3. Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of acts or failures to act.
4. Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
5. Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
6. Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
7. Causing serious physical neglect of a child
8. Engaging in any of the following acts.
   a. Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
   b. Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
   c. Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.

**Key Terms**

**Mandated Reporters**: Under PA State law all volunteers serving in any regularly scheduled program or activity involving children under the age of 18 are mandatory reporters.

- Mandatory reporting means that a volunteer must directly report “out” when child abuse is suspected. In the past, a volunteer could simply report “up,” meaning they could report to their supervisor and their legal obligation would be fulfilled.
- Under the new law, all volunteers are required to report “out,” directly to the child abuse hotline. All mandatory reporters could be criminally liable and considered a “perpetrator” if they fail to report “out.”

**Reasonable Cause**: Mandatory reporters are required to make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of abuse as defined by the law.

- “Reasonable cause to suspect . . . ” means that someone has more than a hunch but less than “certainty.”
- If a mandated reporter has a “reasonable cause to suspect . . . ” they are not to investigate further to confirm any actions, but simply to report “out.”

**Willful Failure to Report**: Any person required to report child abuse who willfully fails to do so may be subject to criminal prosecution in accordance with Pennsylvania law.
**Records:** All records for clearances will be managed through the church office using **Protect My Ministry** as a way of keeping secure online records. Cost for clearances will be covered by MMC and reminders will be sent to staff and volunteers when they need to be renewed.

**Posting of Contact Information:** The PA Child Line 800 number, website, and reporting procedures will be posted in all children’s classroom, nurseries, information area, and office area.

**Review:** The *Child & Youth Protection Policy* will be reviewed annually in September to ensure that compliance with PA state law to ensure that all clearances are up-to-date. A pastoral associate or the lead pastor will meet annually (at the beginning of the scholastic year) with the coordinators of youth ministry, children and youth Sunday School and the nursery to review the policy and make sure that all our staff and volunteers are in compliance.

d. Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
e. Interfering with the breathing of a child.
f. Causing a child to be present at a location while a violation of 18 Pa. C.S. 7508.2 is occurring (this refers to a “meth lab”)
g. Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the actor knows or reasonably should have known:
   i. Is required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender.
   ii. Has been determined to be a sexually violent predator.
   iii. Has been determined to be a sexually violent delinquent child.

9. Causing the death of a child through any act or failure to act.

**Child Sexual Abuse:** Any contact or interaction between a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent, and an adult, when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third party. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered to be forced, whether or not consented to by the child. Currently, in the state of Pennsylvania, anyone younger than 18 years of age is considered to be a child.
**Serious Mental Injury**: Renders a child chronically anxious, agitated, depressed, psychotic. Seriously interferes with child's ability to accomplish age appropriate developmental and social tasks. There is reasonable fear for child’s life and safety.

**Serious Physical Injury**: Severe pain that significantly impairs a child’s physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

**Sexual Abuse or Exploitation**: The use, persuasion, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in any sexual explicit conduct including filming and photographing.

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**Policies**

**State Compliance**: All staff and volunteers who work with children under the age of 18 will comply with the PA state law regarding clearances and mandated reporting.

**Required Clearances**: All church volunteers and staff who work with youth and children under the age of 18 are now required by the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) to obtain the following clearances:

- **PA State Police Criminal History Record Information** – Required for all volunteers and staff

- **PA Child Abuse History Clearance Certification** – Required for all volunteers and staff

- **Federal Criminal History Background Check** – Required for all staff and volunteers who have not lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 years (See [https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_dpw.htm](https://www.pa.cogentid.com/index_dpw.htm) (COGENT) to locate a fingerprint processing center near our church).

  *All paid staff will have their background checks by September 31, 2015. All background checks for volunteers will be complete by July 31, 2016.*

  *These clearances will be renewed every 5 years as required by PA State law.*