Providing Safe Spaces for Vulnerable Persons at Waterford Mennonite Church

Goals and Rationale
Waterford Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe place in which to nurture faith formation in the lives of God’s children of all ages. As part of this, we are committed to an environment free from physical, mental, and/or sexual abuse for all, but especially the children, youth, and vulnerable adults at Waterford, as they interact with volunteers and leaders in Sunday school and other settings. We have established this policy and training program to educate our paid staff, volunteer staff, and congregation. We cannot assume sexual or other abuse will not occur because we are a church. We need to be clear about what steps we have taken and will continue to take as we try to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

State and local laws
Though our primary commitment to vulnerable persons is rooted in the Gospel, the following definitions from state and local law may be helpful. For the purpose of this policy, youth/child shall mean anyone under the age of 18; and vulnerable adult shall mean an individual, age 18 or over, who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently. The term vulnerable person will be used to include individuals in these and other similar groups.

The state of Indiana defines abuse as 1) intentional or willful infliction of physical injury; 2) unnecessary physical or chemical restraints or isolation; 3) punishment with resulting physical harm or pain; 4) sexual molestation, rape, sexual misconduct, sexual coercion, and sexual exploitation; 5) verbal or demonstrative harm caused by oral or written language, or gestures with disparaging or derogatory implications; 6) psychological, mental, or emotional harm caused by unreasonable confinement, intimidation, humiliation, harassment, threats of punishment, or deprivation. Neglect is the failure to provide supervision, training, appropriate care, food, medical care, or medical supervision to an individual. Exploitation is 1) the unauthorized use of the personal services, the property, or the identity of an individual; 2) any other type of criminal exploitation, including exploitation under IC 35-46-1-1, for one’s own profit or advantage of for the profit or advantage of another.

In addition to these definitions, it is important to name that according to Indiana Code 31-33 (IC 31-9-2): “Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect must make a report to Child Protective Services or the local law enforcement agency.”
**Reporting an allegation**

**How to report an allegation:**

1. Any vulnerable person that feels s/he has been or may have been abused or neglected, is encouraged to immediately report such abuse or neglect to the person(s) in charge of the activity in which s/he is participating, a member of the pastoral team, some other person they trust, the police, or other public service or protective agencies.

2. Any volunteer or staff members who has reason to believe that a vulnerable person is a victim of abuse or is a victim of a sexual offense must report this belief to the pastor with whom they work most closely. This is in addition to the legal requirements described above.

3. Any person, when receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect, shall make a written report to the Pastor of Family Life within 48 hours. The format for this written report should include the information indicated in the *Reporting Form for Suspicion of Abuse* located in the appendix. If the allegation involves the Pastor of Family Life, the report should be made to the Pastoral Team Leader.

4. In addition to the reporting above (including to law enforcement/protective services), all reports of abuse or neglect, when received by any pastor, shall be reported as soon as practical to the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

5. Once a volunteer or staff member has reported knowledge or suspicion of sexual abuse, the pastor will follow through with the procedure outlined in the section “If An Allegation Occurs.”
If an Allegation Occurs

*In the case of an actual allegation these guidelines will be followed:*

1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
2. It is possible that a person will either willingly or unintentionally indicate that he or she has been abused. This indication could be received through their words, or by noticeable harm to their body. If you suspect abuse, do the following:
   a. Ask another adult to assist in listening to what the person has to say or in observing the physical evidence. This process should never happen with just one adult present.
   b. If one or both adults feel it is appropriate to pursue the matter, follow the reporting guidelines described below.
3. Provide a written report for the church files.
4. The recipient of the initial report will be responsible for confirming the facts reported and the condition of the vulnerable person, within 24 hours of when the first report was made. Do not try to handle allegations without professional outside assistance.
5. Pastoral staff will be responsible for contacting the proper civil authorities within 24 hours. This may be done through Division of Family and Children (DFS) for Elkhart County at (574) 293-6551 or Child Protective Services (CPS) at (800) 800-5566.
6. Pastoral staff will work with professionals familiar with issues of abuse and neglect to conduct an in-depth investigation.
   a. A member of the pastoral staff will notify the parents/caregiver with information about the procedure being followed.
   b. Pastoral staff and parents/caregiver will ensure that the safety of the vulnerable person is secured before the accused is confronted.
   c. Pastoral resources will be extended to both the victim and the victim’s family. The care and safety of the victim will be the first priority.
7. The pastoral team leader or chair of Ministry Leadership Council (MLC) will be responsible for contacting the church insurance company, attorney, and denominational officials.
8. In the event a report is made and the alleged abuse or neglect has involved the church or a church sponsored activity, the congregation should be informed as soon as practical and at the direction of the lead pastor or MLC. In most cases this should not occur until the reporting procedures described above have been followed. Information on the specifics and details of an alleged abuse or neglect incident should be at the discretion of the lead pastor or MLC. Restraint should be used in disseminating this information. Information should be confined to the fact that an alleged abuse or neglect incident has occurred involving the church and/or a sponsored activity, and that appropriate reports have been made to proper authorities. The person to deliver this information to the
congregation would typically be the chair of the MLC. Confidentiality of the parties involved, both the victim and alleged aggressor, must be respected.

9. The response to the accused will be done with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, that person will be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the person is a paid employee, Ministry Leadership Council (MLC) will decide to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

10. If the allegation is cleared, the accused worker will be reinstated. If the charges are substantiated, the worker will be relieved of all duties relating to vulnerable persons and will not be allowed to work with vulnerable persons at WMC.

11. In instances where the evidence is inconclusive the church will take appropriate action, attempting to honor the request of the vulnerable person and/or his or family with regards to safety for the victim and also the rights of the accused. The pastoral staff will keep the congregation informed of the investigation with respect to matters which are not confidential, so that the congregation will hear about the investigation from within the church.

12. Since these incidents often draw attention, we may assume it is possible for an incident involving our church also to reach the news media. In the event this should occur, only a statement approved by the chair of MLC and/or the church's legal counsel will be the official church statement. Any other statements made will be at the sole discretion and responsibility of the individual making the statement and under no circumstances does the church assume any responsibility for having made such statements.
Screening those working with vulnerable persons

As an integral part of our efforts to reach our goal of providing safeguards to protect vulnerable persons from physical, mental, and sexual abuse, the following procedures are established for all paid employees and volunteer workers of the church working directly with vulnerable persons. Volunteer workers will include youth directors, counselors and assistants, Sunday school teachers, assistant teacher aides and substitutes, all nursery attendants, those persons who regularly or occasionally have contact with youth or children as chaperones, those who are involved with overnight activities, those involved in one-on-one mentoring, or counseling situations, and others deemed appropriate by pastoral staff.

Guidelines for Screening

1. No one may drive children if they have (six) or more points on their license or have had any convictions related to alcohol or drug usage, or if they have had their license suspended or revoked.
2. Persons found charged with any sexual offense but not convicted are subject to additional screening procedures including:
   a. Contacting law enforcement officials where the charge was made.
   b. Personal interviews by a member of the pastoral staff.
3. Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the criminal background check or by any other means, the following items can automatically disqualify a worker from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with vulnerable persons. This includes any conviction for:
   a. Criminal homicide
   b. Aggravated assault
   c. Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances
   d. Sexual abuse
   e. Sexual assault (rape)
   f. Aggravated sexual assault
   g. Injury to a child
   h. Incest
   i. Indecency with a child
   j. Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child
   k. Possession or promotion of child pornography
   l. The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor
   m. Employment harmful to children
   n. Abandonment or endangerment of a child
   o. Kidnapping or unlawful restraint
   p. Public lewdness or indecent exposure
q. Enticing a child
r. Solicitation, conspiracy, or attempt to commit any of the above enumerated offenses.
s. All criminal charges and any convictions for any crimes not listed above will be considered in the application process.

Implementation procedures

1. WMC attenders who work with vulnerable persons in WMC programs must complete and sign the Memo of Understanding for Work with Vulnerable Persons.
2. All volunteers (teachers, sponsors, mentors, nursery workers, etc.) should have attended WMC at least six months before working with vulnerable persons.
3. References will be checked and applications processed by the appropriate pastor.
4. Volunteers working with vulnerable persons (mentors, small group leaders, etc.) are required to complete the Background Investigation Consent Form. A pastor will address any concerns regarding past history of abuse. In the case of a history of abuse, the pastor will work with the person to compose a confidential, written statement for the church files addressing the specifics of what that person’s involvement as a volunteer in the church programs will be. Persons with criminal child abuse violations will not be allowed to work with children or youth at WMC.
Training process and materials

In order to provide an effective program for providing safeguards to protect vulnerable persons from physical and sexual abuse, a training program for paid and volunteer staff and congregation is to be provided annually. This training is to include the church’s policy regarding Providing Safe Spaces for Vulnerable Persons at Waterford Mennonite Church and any additional information the pastoral staff feels is pertinent.

1. The training may include materials, lectures, and audio/visuals provided by outside service agencies familiar with the problems/solutions associated with child abuse and neglect in addition to the above.

2. Volunteers will be given a training packet, which will include: a copy of the WMC policy, the Memo of Understanding for Work with Vulnerable Persons and information on how to identify and report abuse.

3. A written record of attendance will be maintained on file for review and a notation will be made in the individual's file of such attendance. Any paid staff or volunteer staff working with vulnerable persons who does not attend a minimum of one training session per every three calendar years shall be reviewed by the Pastoral Staff for possible suspension of responsibilities as a paid staff or volunteer worker with vulnerable persons until training requirement is met.

4. A non-mandatory program will be made available for parents and children.

5. Primary responsibility of the training will lie with the Pastor of Family Life.
   a. There will be a minimum one-hour training session for all volunteers upon implementation of these procedures, and annually thereafter. Information about procedures as well as how to be helpful in reducing the risks will be covered.
   b. These procedures will be made known to the parents and children through regular communication channels and periodic introductory sessions for new attendees.
   c. Orientation for new volunteers will include information during a training session on what WMC does to provide a reasonably safe environment, explaining our need for such a prevention plan. The Memo of Understanding for Work with Vulnerable Persons will be explained and distributed during orientation.
General guidelines for working with children and youth

1. Do not strike or push children or youth when attempting to discipline.

2. There should be at least two persons present in the nursery at all times. At least one of the two must be an adult. Teens may help only if an adult is present.

3. Whenever possible, children and youth classes should have two teachers per class, preferably one male, and one female.

4. Doors of classrooms used for vulnerable persons should be equipped with windows in them. If windows are not available, doors should be propped open.

5. Never be alone with a child or youth of the same or opposite sex. It is best to have at least another adult with you.

6. Whenever possible, any activity involving youth or children should include at least two adults present over the age of 21.

7. Where an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child or youth, the adult is to obtain the consent of the child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) before being alone with that child or youth, or spending time with the child in any unsupervised situation. This includes transporting a child or youth to or from supervised activities. Consent should be in writing whenever practical. Those involved in mentoring relationships should complete the Permission for Involvement in Mentoring Relationships form in the Appendix.

8. Children or youth should have parental permission for involvement in church-sponsored programs or activities. Whenever practical this permission should be in writing.

9. Sunday school classrooms should occasionally be visited by the Pastor of Family Life or appointed assistant. Visits to the classrooms should be random. This should include periodic visits to inspect areas of the church building that are isolated from view.

10. Supervisory personnel, which may include teachers, chaperones, or others working with children or youth, are to be provided before and after an activity until all children or youth are in the custody of their parents. This applies to Sunday school classes as well as other activities.

11. The matter of acceptable touching of children and youth needs to be handled with a great deal of thought and caution. Clear, sensible judgment must be followed. For instance:
   a. A child or youth should only be hugged in the presence of others, preferably adults.
   b. Hugging should never be considered appropriate if it is unwanted or attempts are made to thwart it.

12. Two adults should typically be involved with restroom breaks for children.

13. Overnight activities:
a. All adult chaperones or counselors must be screened and cleared by the Pastor of Family Life for working with children or youth.

b. Activities should include chaperones and counselors with a ratio providing at least the following minimums:
   i. Children age 0-2: 1 adult for each 4 children
   ii. 3-5: 1 adult for each 5 children
   iii. 6-11: 1 adult for each 6 youth
   iv. 12-17: 1 adult for each 8 youth

c. Whenever possible there should be both male and female chaperones and counselors.

d. All over-night activities will require written parent(s)/guardian(s) permission for youth to attend or participate. These permission slips should be kept on file with the church office for a period of one year.

e. All overnight activities will require the approval of the Pastor of Family Life.

f. All overnight activities require the separation of sleeping areas for males and females.

14. Trips:

a. All trip activities involving minors will require the approval of the Pastor of Family Life.

b. All trips will require each youth to have written parental/guardian permission to attend or participate. These permission slips should be kept on file with the church office for a period of one year.

c. All transportation of children or youth should begin and end at the church.

d. All drivers should be approved by the Minister of Family Life.

e. No driver under the age of 21 is ever to be an authorized driver for a youth or children's activity.

f. All trips will require a written notification to the youth or child's parent or guardian regarding:
   i. Purpose of the trip
   ii. Estimated departure and return times
   iii. Any other pertinent information

g. If it is not possible for the group to return on time, the responsible adult should call the church and/or parents to inform them of the reason for delay and estimated return time.

15. Discipline: While caring for and supervising our children and youth, we intend to provide a loving and safe environment. Providing such an environment requires planning and discipline.
a. The preferred method of discipline recommended is distraction away from the problem area of activity.

b. Know your group and try to anticipate problems. Any form of physical punishment is not appropriate or tolerated.

c. Expectations and appropriate consequences should be clear to the children and youth. Children should never be isolated outside of the classroom. If there are difficult discipline problems that consistently recur, talk to the Pastor of Family Life. For severe problems we will seek parents help in a solution workable for all concerned, which may include calling the parent to take custody of the child/youth.

d. If a volunteer has been scheduled to work in the nursery, they should not take the children from the nursery to other places in the church while in their care. Children should remain in the nursery for the safety of all involved.

e. On Sunday mornings the nursery is for children ages 0-2 years.
Violations

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program. These acts or omissions are to be immediately reported after the safety of the vulnerable person involved has been assured.

1. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a vulnerable person.
2. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a vulnerable person.
3. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind.
4. Infliction of physically abusive behavior, bodily injury, or mental or emotional injury.
5. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials.
6. The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
7. Physical neglect including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to church activities.
Appendix

1. There will need to be developed a public statement that can be released if there is an allegation of abuse. The public statement should include a clear position statement that includes policies and established safeguards. The report should indicate that there is an allegation, but should typically not spell out details of the allegation. It should indicate our aware of the problem of abuse and described how we have taken extensive steps to reduce the risk and provide a safe environment for our children and youth.

2. The Ministry Leadership Council should designate a spokesperson to present a statement of factual information about the allegations to members under the terms of Qualified Privilege. This may happen at a congregational meeting or through privileged and confidential correspondence.

3. The designated spokesperson will use the prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

4. An attorney should be present while answering any investigative questions from the police or social service agencies.

Reviewing the Safe Spaces policy

It is anticipated that this program will require periodic review to determine if the program is meeting its established objectives and if there is need to change safeguards to meet changing laws, program shortcomings, or other requirements. This is the responsibility of the pastoral team. Frequency of reviews should be determined as needed, but should occur at least every two years.
MEMO OF UNDERSTANDING FOR WORK WITH VULNERABLE PERSONS

Confidential

All persons involved in the supervision or custody of vulnerable persons at Waterford Mennonite Church must complete this form to help the church provide an environment as safe as possible for those who participate in our programs and use our facilities. This form will be kept in a confidential file and the following information will not be shared more broadly without consultation with you.

Personal Information

Name ___________________________ Date ___________________________
Address ___________________________ City, State, ZIP ___________________________
Home Phone ___________________________ Cell phone ___________________________
Email address ___________________________ ___________________________
Name of church of which you are a member ___________________________
Church Address, including city, state, ZIP ___________________________
Church Phone ___________________________
Name of Pastor ___________________________

Work/Volunteer Experience

Have you had experience working with vulnerable persons, either in a volunteer capacity or paid position?

☐ Yes    ☐ No

If yes, list the settings in which you have worked with vulnerable persons:
Name of organization ___________________________
Address, including city, state, ZIP ___________________________
Phone ___________________________ Email address ___________________________
Supervisor’s Name ___________________________

Name of organization ___________________________
Address, including city, state, ZIP ___________________________
Phone ___________________________ Email address ___________________________
Supervisor’s Name ___________________________

References (other than a relative)

Name ___________________________ Name ___________________________
Address ___________________________ Address ___________________________
City, state, ZIP ___________________________ City, state, ZIP ___________________________
Phone ___________________________ Phone ___________________________
Email ___________________________ Email ___________________________
Background Information

Have you ever been accused of or convicted of a crime other than minor traffic offenses?
- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain:

Have you ever been accused of or convicted of child abuse or a crime involving actual or attempted sexual molestation of a minor?
- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain:

Is there anything from your past that would limit your work with children and youth?
- Yes
- No

If yes, please explain:

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

I commit myself to respect and treat well the children/youth at Waterford Mennonite Church and to refrain from unscriptural or unlawful conduct in the performances of my services on behalf of the church. The information contained in this Memo of Understanding is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references, or any other person or organization, whether or not identified in this Memo, to give WMC any information regarding my character and fitness for children/youth work. I release all such references from any liability for furnishing such evaluations to WMC, provided they do so in good faith and without malice. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf. I further understand a criminal records check may be conducted on me, and I consent to any such check.

Name ____________________________ Date ____________________________
BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION CONSENT FORM

I, (Print Name) __________________________ hereby authorize the WMC pastor in the area of requested employment or volunteering, with assistance from the church office, to make an independent investigation of my background, references, character, past employment, education, criminal or police records, including those by both public and private organizations and all public records for the purpose of confirming the information contained on my application or volunteer form(s), and/or obtaining other information which may be material to my qualifications for employment or as a volunteer now and, if applicable, during the tenure of my employment or as a volunteer with our church.

I release Waterford Mennonite Church and any person or entity which provides information pursuant to this authorization, from any and all liabilities, claim or lawsuits in regards to the information obtained from any and all of the above referenced sources used. This information is required for identification purposes only, and is in no manner used as qualifications for employment or placement.

Full name (Printed) __________________________________________

Phone __________________________ Email address ______________________

Maiden name or other names used __________________________________

Present street address _____________________________________________

City, state, ZIP _________________________________________________

Length of time at present address __________________________________

Former street address _____________________________________________

City, state, ZIP _________________________________________________

Length of time at former address ___________________________________

Date of Birth _____/_____/_______ Social Security Number _____ - _____ - _____

Driver’s License # ______________________ State of License _________________

The information above is true and correct to the best of my knowledge

Signature __________________________ Date ___________________________
TELEPHONE REFERENCE CHECK FORM

(Confidential)

Name of Applicant _____________________________________________

1. Reference or church contacted (if a church, identify both the church and person or minister contacted):

   Summary of conversation (including date):

2. Reference or church contacted (if a church, identify both the church and person or minister contacted):

   Summary of conversation (including date):

3. Reference or church contacted (if a church, identify both the church and person or minister contacted):

   Summary of conversation (including date):

_____________________________________________________________
Signature

_____________________________________________________________
Position
PERMISSION FOR INVOLVEMENT IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Parent/Guardian Affirmation:

As parent(s)/guardian(s), I/we affirm the mentoring relationship between (child/youth)__________________ and (adult)___________________.

Permission: We are aware that they will be participating in a variety of activities together and give our permission for (child/youth)__________________ to participate in them. Shall we be unable to be reached, we further grant (adult)__________________ permission to seek medical treatment and assistance in the event of emergency.

Driving: In the context of the mentoring relationship, we as parents ☐ give permission ☐ DO NOT give permission for (adult)__________________ to transport (child/youth)__________________ in a vehicle in a one-on-one situation.

Signed:

Parent/guardian: __________________________ Date: __________

Child/youth: ___________________________ Date: __________

Mentoring adult: ___________________________ Date: __________

Health insurance information:

Company ____________________________________________

Policy Number ________________________________________
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM FOR WATERFORD MENNONITE CHURCH EVENTS
(For events off of church property)

Permission:

I give my permission for (student’s name) ________________________________ to attend (event) ________________________________ at (location) _________________________________.

I understand that he/she will be meeting at (location) _________________________________.

at (time) ____________________________ am/pm on (date) _________________________________.

and returning to (location) _________________________________.

at (time) ____________________________ am/pm on (date) ________________________________. 

Medical Information:

Allergies: ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________

Medicine(s) presently taking (include name, dosage, and condition):

________________________________

________________________________

________________________________

Name of family physician: ____________ Telephone number: ________________ 

Insurance company: ________________ Policy number: ____________________ 

I understand that my son/daughter will be traveling in transportation provided or arranged by Waterford Mennonite Church. I authorize the adult leaders to administer first aid or to seek emergency medical treatment in the event of illness or injury. I hereby give my permission to the medical personnel selected to order x-rays and routine tests, and to provide medical treatment (including hospitalization), for the person named above. By signing below, the participant (or parent/guardian if participant is a minor) acknowledges and accepts the risks of physical injury associated with participation in the activity described above. Except for gross negligence on the part of the sponsor, the participant (parent/guardian) accepts personal financial responsibility for any bodily or personal injury sustained during the activity. Further, the participant (parent/guardian) promises to hold harmless the sponsoring organization and its representatives for any injury related to the activity. If a dispute over this agreement or any claim for damages arises, the participant (parent/guardian) agrees to resolve the matter through a mutually acceptable arbitration process.

Signature of parent/guardian: ____________________________________

Parent’s/guardian’s home telephone number: ________________________________

Parent’s/guardian’s alternate telephone number: ________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________________

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REPORTING FORM FOR SUSPICION OF ABUSE

The following information was provided to:
(Name of person/position/agency, including telephone number and address)

Child’s name and date of birth: ______________________________________________________

Address __________________________________________________________________________

City, state, ZIP _____________________________________________________________________

Parent(s)/caregiver(s) names: ________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

City, state ZIP _____________________________________________________________________

Telephone number: ___________________________________________________________________

Physical indicators observed:

Behavioral indicators observed:

Reporter’s name and position: _________________________________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________________________________________

(When completed, return form to the Pastor of Family Life. If the Pastor of Family Life is involved in the suspected abuse, return to the Pastoral Team Leader.)
Waterford Mennonite Church
Safe Spaces Policy Sign-Off Form

All persons who work with children or youth must sign and return a copy of this form to the church office no later than seven days following the receipt of this form. The signed form will be placed in the ministry application file and will serve as a record of acknowledgement of the following:

1. I acknowledge that I have received “Safe Spaces” training. I agree to read the entire Policy. I agree to abide by all policies and procedures contained and referenced in the Policy. If I have any questions about the Policy, I will consult the Pastor of Family Life or the Family Life Ministry Team.

2. I acknowledge that I have received the “Safe Spaces” policy and am aware that it is available online at waterfordchurch.org.

3. I understand that the contents of the Policy are subject to changes in existing and applicable state and federal laws and regulations as well as changes by the WMC Policies.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature                                      Date

_________________________________________
Name (printed)

Please return to the Pastor of Family Life