

First Mennonite Church
Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy

Introduction

Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children.

Sadly, child abuse is prevalent; and is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. According to Nebraska Health and Human Services:

“There are three definitions used to describe *abuse*:

- 1) *physical abuse* -- an unexplainable, non-accidental injury to the child,
- 2) *emotional abuse* -- continual scapegoating or rejection of a child by parents which results in disturbed behavior, and
- 3) *sexual abuse* -- any sexually oriented act, practice, contact, or interaction in which the child has been used for sexual stimulation of an adult.

Neglect is typically defined in two ways. The first is emotional neglect. This is when the child is suffering severe negative emotional effects to a parent's failure to provide opportunities for normal experience that produce feelings of being loved, wanted, secure, and worthy. Physical neglect is when a parent fails to provide basic needs or a safe and sanitary living environment for the child. Examples include, but are not limited to: not providing adequate food or clothing, not following medical recommendations, lack of supervision that places a child at risk, or no heat in the winter.”

www.hhs.state.ne.us/cha/abuse.htm

Child abuse prevention within our church community

We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect, and to strengthen families. This policy applies to all church ministries including but not limited to Sunday School, youth activities, Vacation Bible School, mentoring, and nursery. We commit to:

1. Offer trainings:
 - a. Annually, training and materials will be offered to all adults in the congregation, and especially to teachers and leaders of children. Training may be specific to child abuse, or may be on a related topic such as child safety, child development, healthy family relationships, or any protective or risk factor for abuse.
 - b. Every 2 years for all children (ages 6-18) related to child abuse and/or child safety (possible topic for elementary age children: safe touch; possible topic for adolescence: dating violence). This training should be appropriate to the child's age group. Parents must be included in the selection of material and involved in screening of any books, movies, or other materials. Parents will be invited to participate in training with their child(ren).
2. Make our church facility safe for children:
 - a. Place windows in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (i.e. Sunday School rooms, pastor's office).
 - b. A fully stocked first aid kit will be available in the church building.
3. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children:
 - a. Follow a “two-adult rule,” whenever possible, but always at overnight activities involving children and when activities are being conducted in homes or other private locations.

- b. A youth (under 19 years of age) should never teach/care for children alone without a supervising adult available.
 - c. A parent must always be notified ahead of time and give consent for their child to be transported away from church facilities.
 - d. No physical discipline (hitting, slapping) may be used. When a child misbehaves, an adult may use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child shall be taken to his/her parent for further action.
4. Attend to related personnel issues:
- a. Each teacher and leader of children will be presented with a copy of the congregation's Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy and asked to acknowledge that they have read and will abide by the policy. As a reminder, copies of the policy will also be distributed to teachers and leaders each year.
 - b. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on all church staff, including the pastor, before hiring. This background check must be conducted in all the states this individual has lived in the previous 20 years.
 - c. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before being allowed to be a teacher or leader of children or youth.
5. Deal appropriately with offenders and allegations of abuse:
- a. When a child makes an outcry of abuse or child abuse is suspected, Child Protective Services (800-652-1999) or the police (911) will be notified at once. If there is uncertainty as to whether a situation requires reporting, it will be referred to the pastor, Child Protection Team member, or other church leader knowledgeable in the area of child abuse. When notification of abuse is made, the pastor and/or a member of the Child Protection Team member will be informed at once. The alleged offender will be removed immediately from all responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation. All parents whose children may have come into contact with the alleged offender will be notified within 48 hours that allegations have been made and reported to the authorities.
 - b. Any individual who is known to have been convicted of a child sexual offense must not be allowed any unsupervised contact with children, and may not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal)
 - c. All parents of children and youth in the church must be notified if there is a registered sex offender attending church.

Child abuse prevention within our other communities

1. As a church, we will participate in at least one outreach project each year that provides concrete goods to families in the Lincoln area (food banks, City Impact, People's City Mission).
2. As a church, we will participate in at least one outreach project each year that provides concrete goods to families outside the Lincoln area (i.e. MCC relief or school kits, sponsoring a student in India)

This policy will be implemented and facilitated by a Child Protection Team of at least two individuals, appointed by the congregation.