

First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, Nebraska
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 due 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

Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is protection of the children entrusted to our care by God. The secondary purpose is the protection of the FMC community by ensuring transparency of our actions to protect children.

Definitions:

Children –anyone under the age of consent as defined by Nebraska law.

Child Protective Services (CPS) – Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) department responsible for protecting children.

Church sponsored activity – Any activities sponsored by First Mennonite Church

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. Door windows must never be covered.
 - c. A fully stocked first aid kit will be available in the church building.
3. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children:
 - a. Activities during formal church hours (Sunday 0930-1200)
 - i. Efforts should be made to have 2 people (either 2 adults or 1 adult/1 youth) for each Sunday School class; however, due to difficulty finding adequate Sunday School teachers it is acceptable to have only one adult for each child Sunday School class as long as the class remains within the FMC facility.
 - ii. The Youth Sunday School Superintendent should designate someone to 'look in' on the Sunday School rooms during Sunday School. Parents of children are encouraged to do so as well.
 - iii. Nursery should always have two adults/youth. Youth are permitted for this supervision since it can be observed at any time by any church member.
 - b. Activities outside formal church hours
 - i. All church sponsored activities should follow a 'two-adult rule', unless all parents of involved children give permission for such supervision. This includes supervision by one adult alone or one adult with one youth.
 - ii. Overnight activities at church will always be supervised by two adults or should be cancelled.
 - iii. Off-site church sponsored activities require supervision by two adults. This includes church sponsored activities in member homes & other private locations.
 - iv. Mentoring remains a unique exception where the youth, the youth's parents, & the adult mentor have all agreed to promote a positive relationship between the adult mentor & the youth. Such an activity, although facilitated by FMC, does not require two adult supervision.
 - 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. Annually, 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.
 - 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.

1 Nebraska Revised Statute 28-711

1.1.1 *Child subjected to abuse or neglect; report; contents; toll-free number.*

(1) When any physician, any medical institution, any nurse, any school employee, any social worker, the Inspector General appointed under section 43-4317, or any other person has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or neglect or observes such child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which reasonably would result in child abuse or neglect, he or she shall report such incident or cause a report of child abuse or neglect to be made to the proper law enforcement agency or to the department on the toll-free number (800-652-1999)...

5. Deal appropriately with allegations of abuse & known offenders:
 - 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 in most cases. 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 or until the Elders, Child Protection Team and Pastor determine that the accused can be re-instated with, or without, boundaries. All parties involved will be notified. 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. If someone other than a child makes an accusation against another member, the accuser should report their suspicions to Child Protective Services (800-652-1999) or the police (911). He or she should not be discouraged from making a report. If any member of church leadership is aware of information that supports the accusation, a separate report must be made to CPS or police.
 - c. 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)
 - d. All parents of children and youth in the church must be notified if there is a registered sex offender attending church.

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

Updated and approved 2/2016