

East Goshen Mennonite Church
Child Protection Policy
“Seeking to prevent sexual and other abuse”
September 2016



Introduction

According to our Anabaptist understanding of Biblical faith and what it means to be a faith community, we strive to follow Christ in word and deed. We are called by Christ to act with integrity and love in all our relationships, and to avoid exploitation of vulnerable people or the use of positions of power within the church or family. This policy reflects our desire to protect “the name of Jesus” as well as all those who worship and fellowship with the East Goshen Mennonite Church (EGMC) community.

This policy stems from our awareness that abuse has been, and continues to be, a major problem in society. Statistics show that the church is not immune to this problem; in fact, churches may be especially vulnerable because they are naturally trusting and unsuspecting institutions.

This policy outlines EGMC’s position on abusive behaviors and expectations for appropriate behavior regarding the care and supervision of children. Our goal is that all who attend EGMC are able to pursue activities and worship in a safe environment where abusive conduct is not tolerated, where steps have been taken to limit opportunities for abuse to occur, and where staff and volunteers are protected from false or wrongful allegations.

I. Purpose

This policy has been established to:

- A. Help assure a safe, loving, and open atmosphere for children and youth, as well as adults who work with them, as they worship, study, play, and are nurtured in their Christian faith.
- B. Serve as a guide for the prevention of childhood sexual and other abuse by setting and enforcing standards of ethical behavior.
- C. Protect adults involved with children and youth activities.

II. Definitions

A. *Child Sexual Abuse* is 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 consensual. Anyone younger than 18 years of age is considered to be a child.

B. *Other Forms of Child Abuse*

Although this policy focuses primarily on child sexual abuse, all forms of child abuse are not tolerated, and are included under this policy. Definitions of abuse are as follows:

- 1.) Any act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child.
- 2.) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to a child.
- 3.) Sexual Abuse or Exploitation: (a) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct. (b) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in simulation of sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting, and filming. It also includes any of the following offenses committed against a child: rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation.

- 4.) Endangering Welfare of Children: An act, failure to act or series of the acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. A parent, guardian, or other person supervising the welfare of a child under 18 years of age, or a person that employs or supervises such a person commits an offense if he knowingly endangers the welfare of the child by violating a duty of care, protection, or support.
- 5.) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.

C. *Sexual Harassment* is a form of sex discrimination, consisting of inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's sense of well-being by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment from the viewpoint of the affected individual.

Sexual Harassment is defined as follows: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Although in a legal sense, the term "sexual harassment" is usually associated with the workplace, the sexual harassment of anyone – including all adults and children – is prohibited in this church.

D. *Sexual Misconduct* includes: child sexual abuse as defined above; sexual harassment as defined above; rape and sexual contact by force, threat or intimidation; sexual behavior, which includes but is not limited to offensive, obscene, or suggestive language or conduct; unacceptable visual contact; and touching or fondling which is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another. Sexual misconduct directed toward a person of any age is prohibited in this church.

E. An *Approved Adult* is anyone 18 years of age or older who has satisfied the requirements of this Child Protection Policy. An Approved Adult may be an employee or non-employee (volunteer) of the congregation. Approved Adults include, but are not limited to all staff, Sunday School teachers, children's ministry leaders, youth mentors, youth group leaders, and nursery volunteers.

III. Policies and Procedures

A. Selection of Approved Adults

To protect the children/youth in our care, the following guidelines are established for adults volunteering to work with children/youth less than 18 years of age.

Approved Adults must:

1. Be at least 18 years old.
2. Attend EGMC for a minimum of six months.
3. Read the EGMC Child Protection Policy

4. Complete and sign a Children/Youth Worker Information Sheet (Addendum A).
5. Give consent for a background check (Addendum B).
6. Attend/ participate in a congregation-authorized child/youth volunteer training session which covers:
 - a. The Child Protection Policy
 - b. Procedures to follow for all children and youth activities
 - c. Appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse
 - d. Relevant state laws regarding child abuse.

Volunteers who have attended for fewer than six months may work with children if an Approved Adult is also present.

Completed Child/Youth Worker Information Sheet, consent for background check, and other relevant records will be locked in a confidential file under the responsibility of the designated pastor. Applications will also be made available to the Youth Ministry Coordinator, or another church designee. These clearances are confidential and will only be made available by current congregational pastors.

B. Approved Adult Supervision

In all church activities involving children and youth (where parents may or may not be present), no fewer than two Approved Adults should be present. Attempts will be made to provide for this ratio. The nursery should always be attended by at least two Approved Adults. The only exception to the “two Approved Adults” policy is in the Youth Mentoring Program – see description below.

In Sunday School activities where only one Approved Adult teacher is available, another Approved Adult will be assigned as a “roamer,” to move in and out of Sunday School rooms throughout the session.

In situations where teenagers are providing childcare, at least one Approved Adult should also be present.

The glass in Sunday school room doors must never be covered. If a Sunday school room door does not have a window, the door must be kept ajar.

Only a parent or caregiver (i.e. grandparent) should be permitted to remove a child from a group or from a teacher’s supervision for any reason.

C. Youth Mentoring Program:

Youth mentors are same-gender, Approved Adults, chosen by 12-year old youth, and approved by the Pastoral Team and Nurture Commission, to provide friendship and companionship for youth throughout their teenage years. Mentors are offered to youth to facilitate their spiritual growth and maturity, complementing the role of parents. These relationships are an exception to the policy of needing two Approved Adults present for all activities with youth. This additional risk is addressed by the following policies:

1. All mentoring with children or youth should always occur in a public place, never in a private car, or in a vacated building.
2. In the event of one-on-one evening meetings, be aware of time. This is to avoid any appearance of impropriety, and to discourage mentor pairs from meeting late in the evening.
3. Mentors are not to engage children/youth in counseling that requires professional help. For example – drug or alcohol addiction, sexual assault by a dating partner; severe problems with parental relationships, sustained depression or chronic anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal tendencies, etc. The need for formal or professional counseling should be turned over to the parents and Pastoral team.

D. Diapering and bathroom assistance

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.

- *Diapering*: Two approved adults must be present when clothes or diapers are being changed. A parent can also be recruited to change clothes or a diaper.
- *Two and Three Year Olds*: An approved adult must accompany children to and from the bathroom and inform another adult when this takes place. The adult will assist the child only when necessary. If assistance is needed, the adult must leave the stall door open.
- *Preschool*: An approved adult must accompany preschoolers to the bathroom. The adult will remain outside the stall. If assistance is required, the approved adult should encourage independence but can assist with minimal tasks if necessary (belts, snaps, etc.).

E. Transportation

When children/youth are transported for church activities, they will be transported in groups with at least one Approved Adult in each vehicle. Drivers must be 21 years of age or older. Situations where there is only one adult and one youth alone in a vehicle should be avoided.

F. Appropriate touch

Children need love. At times, this can be appropriately expressed through physical touch, such as hugging, a pat on the back, an arm around the shoulder, holding an infant or toddler, etc. If an adult working with children shows physical affection, it must occur with another adult present. Adult staff and volunteers should not force affection on any child. If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, the child's wishes will be respected at all times.

At no time should a child, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals or buttocks.

G. Overnight activities

An overnight-permission form must complete by parents for children/youth engaged in overnight activities. Overnight activities involving children/youth will be chaperoned by at least two Approved Adults. If the event involves children/youth of both genders, then there should be at least one Approved Adult of each gender. The designated pastor and/or other designee may waive the requirement for overnight-permission slips when the slip serves no useful purpose (for example when a youth is accompanied by his or her parent to the activity).

IV. Reporting suspected child/youth abuse

- A. Volunteers should inform the designated pastor immediately when there is any reasonable cause to suspect that a child/youth under their care, guidance or supervision, or a child/youth not directly under their care, guidance or supervision, but involved in any church program or activity, has been abused by anyone (including but not limited to the child/youth's family, guardians, an Approved Adult or volunteer).

When the designated pastor is informed of suspected abuse, he or she will notify the parents, appropriate authorities, and the pastoral team.

B. **Response to the Reporting of suspected child/youth abuse**

All allegations of child/youth abuse or serious physical neglect will be taken seriously by the Children Protection Committee (CPC). See below. All allegations will be treated in strict confidence while at the same time ensuring that persons in responsibility and law enforcement authorities remain fully informed. All reporting steps taken will be documented, including a log of phone calls, personal visits, and written reports and will be stored in a secure location. All communications regarding the report of child abuse shall attempt to protect the dignity and privacy of those persons affected by the report including the child/youth victim and the alleged offender suspected of child abuse.

The CPC and congregation will cooperate with government authorities investigating allegations of abuse. The initiative for investigating alleged abuse will reside with the appropriate authorities and shall not be carried out by the congregation.

Additionally, these steps will be followed:

1. The designated Pastor will notify parents or guardians of all children/youth involved in an alleged incident. Discretion may be used if the parents or guardians are the person suspected of the abuse. All phone calls or visits will be documented and stored in a secure location.
2. The proper authorities will be notified.
 - a. Local (Goshen) police; call 911 or 1-574-533-8661
 - b. Child Protective Services (CPS) #1-800-422-4453 (national)
3. The person suspected of abuse will discontinue his/her work with children/youth until the allegation can be properly investigated.
4. In the event a church-related incident has occurred, the CPC will notify the congregation's insurance carrier when the reporting procedures have been initiated. All contacts will be documented.
5. The Pastoral Team and the CPC will determine whether the congregation shall engage legal counsel in consultation with the insurance carrier.
6. The CPC will authorize the designated Pastor or designee to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only that person may speak for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys, or others.

V. Providing community for known sexual offenders:

Known sexual offenders who have fulfilled their sentences, who are willing to participate in victim offender reconciliation meetings, and who abide by the guidelines noted below are welcome to attend worship services at East Goshen Mennonite Church. Parents of minor children will be informed of such persons participating in worship at EGMC.

A. Minimum guidelines under which a known sexual offender may participate:

1. **Offenders are expected to comply fully** with all restrictions and requirements placed upon them as a result of any legal actions, and provide the designated pastor with copies of any judgments, conditions of parole, or other documents in which restrictions on or requirements as a result of convictions or judgments are stated.
2. **Offenders are expected to continually participate in a professional counseling program**, specifically addressing their abusive behaviors, for the entire time they participate in this church community.
3. **Offenders will not accept any leadership** or representational position within or on behalf of this church. Known sexual offenders will never become Approved Adults.
4. **The Child Protection Committee (CPC)** (see below) **will assign supervisors to any offender participating in the life of the congregation.** They will be adults who are not related to the offender. They will receive training that will include information on sexual offender dynamics, the long-term impact of sexual abuse on victims, and any specific conditions related to participation under the specific covenant established.
5. **The CPC will identify a small group of "covenant partners" for offenders.** This small group will provide spiritual, emotional and practical support and will meet with the offender on a regular basis. The supervisors and "covenant partners" will not be the same individuals.

6. **The offender may participate in worship in the sanctuary and attend adult Sunday school classes.** Any other activities in which the offender is permitted to participate will be detailed by the covenant partners.
7. **A supervisor must accompany the offender at all times when on church property, or during church-sponsored activities located away from church property.** And generally, should only be physically in the “adult only” areas of the church.
8. **At no time should the offender deliberately place him or herself in or remain in any location in or around the church facilities which would cause undue distress to others.**
9. **At least twice each calendar year, and as otherwise requested, the offender shall meet with and report to the designated pastor regarding status of adherence to these guidelines.**
10. **If the offender should decide to relocate membership (or substantially attend) another congregation,** the designated pastor will seek to inform the leadership of that congregation of the conditions of these guidelines.

VI. Child Protection Committee (CPC)

The **CPC** will include the designated pastor, Children’s Department Superintendent, the Youth Ministry Coordinator, and one church member appointed at large. (Ideally, the church member appointed at large will have social work experience and/ or training.)

A. The CPC will:

1. Implement and enforce the guidelines of this policy.
2. Review and revise, if needed, the Child Protection Policy every other year (on the even year).
3. Inform and update the congregation as appropriate of policy and revisions. Display Child Protection Policy on church web site.
4. Provide training for all staff and Approved Adults regarding child abuse and this policy.
5. Obtain consent for and submit volunteer personal information for background checks via www.protectmyministry.com.
6. Over-see distribution and completion of the Child/Youth Worker Information Sheet when new youth volunteers are in this role.
7. Maintain a list of Approved Adults.
8. Monitor Approved Adults to ensure that policies are being followed.
9. Be accountable to the Spiritual Leadership Council.
10. Be kept apprised of investigations.
11. Oversee the support and accountability of known sexual offenders attending the church, by assigning a supervisor and covenant partners.

B. The Child/ Youth Worker Information Sheet will request applicants to disclose information about their church history and prior experiences working with children/youth. See Addendum A.

1. For adults working with children/ youth for more than one year, approved adults will be asked to review their application form and sign annually.

C. The *Designated Pastor* will:

1. Review all Child/Youth Worker Information Sheets for Approved Adults.
2. Maintain volunteer information in a locked file.
3. Receive and process reports of suspected abuse.

4. Meet with and review known sexual offender's adherence to guidelines and covenants.
 5. Designate a substitute pastor to act on their behalf when unavailable (on vacation, sabbatical, etc.)
- D. The **CPC Chair** will be appointed by the Pastoral Team and Youth Ministry Coordinator, and will:
1. Document that the required Child/Youth Worker Information Sheets are received for all applicants desiring to become an Approved Adult.
 2. Obtain consent for background checks.
 3. Provide volunteers with on-line education information. Track volunteer's completion of on-line education and quiz.
 4. Chair CPC meetings.
 5. Maintain/update list of Approved Adults annually.

This policy adopted September 1, 2016

Resources:

<http://protectmyministry.com/>

<http://dovesnest.net/>

Harder, Janette. (year). *Let the Children Come to Me.*

ADDENDUM A

Children/Youth Worker Information Sheet

ADDENDUM B

Consent for a Background Check