

Creating a Safe Church Environment Policy

First Mennonite Church
902 W Springfield Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801

Adopted 2005

PURPOSE

First Mennonite Church affirms our denominational statement “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” We seek to provide a safe and secure environment for all people; and this policy regarding child abuse was written with the intent to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family. This concern for safety and support for those who have been or could be harmed does not negate our concern for those who offend and our willingness to offer to all healing and hope. We do not absolve offenders from ongoing responsibility of working to change their behaviors. Neither do we deny that past actions have consequences that limit their options with children today. Having said that, we also believe that finding common ground in the tasks of restoration will serve us all, as together we seek to live in healthy relationships.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, full and/or part time, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of preschoolers, children, and youth.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. “Preschooler,” “child,” “children,” “youth,” and “minor” shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. “Adult” shall be defined as an individual at least eighteen (18) years of age (and whose mental capacity is that of an adult).
3. “Worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors and all paid staff.
4. “Child Abuse” shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, minor, or anyone whose mental capacity is that of a minor.
5. “Child Sexual Abuse” shall be defined as any sexual activity with a child whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting or church or any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual

behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

6. "Criminal Background Check" (CBC) is the procedure used by the Illinois State Police to perform a Conviction Information Name Check Request search under the Illinois Uniform Conviction Act or any other procedure used to check background for criminal activity.
7. "Church Program or Activity" shall be defined as any activity or ministry sponsored by First Mennonite Church.

WORKER ENLISTMENT

1. All paid employees of FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH will be required to complete a Screening Form.
2. Whether a paid employee or a volunteer, each worker desiring to work with minors, will also be required to complete a Worker's Statement form which is specifically designed for workers who will be working with minors.
3. After the Screening Form is received by the FMC Personnel Committee, prior employment and volunteer service and personal references may be checked. If checked, a written memorandum will be made of the contents of those telephone conversations.
4. Any prospective worker who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where he/she would have contact with minors.
5. A Conviction Information Name Check Request will be performed on each prospective worker prior to being enlisted as a worker. Annual background checks will be performed on workers, randomly or as deemed necessary. For paid staff and mentors, a more extensive background check will be required.
6. No volunteer will be allowed to work with minors until they have been a participant of the church for a minimum of six (6) months.

WORKER TRAINING

Each new worker will be given a copy of this policy. New workers will also be required to view child abuse prevention video(s) and read the written materials available on this subject to help them learn to recognize signs and symptoms of child abuse and also to help them learn methods of prevention of child abuse.

WORKER INFORMATION FORM AND RELEASE

In addition to all other employment application procedures, all employees, teachers of minor and volunteers who work with minors at FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH will be required to comply with all requirements for obtaining an Illinois State Police Conviction Information Name Check Request including any release requirements.

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 minors:

Any conviction for:

- Criminal homicide;
- Aggravated assault;
- Crimes related to the possession, use or sale of drugs or controlled substances;
- Sexual abuse;
- Sexual assault (rape);
- Aggravated sexual assault;
- Injury to a child;
- Incest;
- Indecency with a child;
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child;
- Possession or promotion of child pornography;
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor;
- Employment harmful to children;
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child;
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint;
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure;
- Enticing a child;
- Solicitation, conspiracy or attempt to commit any of the above enumerated offenses.

All criminal charges and any convictions for any crimes not listed above will be considered in the application process.

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

The following acts or omissions are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to a church minister or the First Mennonite Personnel Committee after the safety of the child, children, youth, or minor involved has been assured.

- Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.

- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior, bodily injury, or mental or emotional injury of a minor.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH.
- The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
- Physical neglect including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of First Mennonite Church.

WORKER SUPERVISION

1. The church will adopt the “two worker” rule, which means no worker shall be left alone with a child, and requires a reasonable ratio of adult workers to be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children. The exception will be that one worker may supervise children without a second worker present only with the written permission of the parents involved. This would include the mentor program.
2. Church staff and volunteer directors will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.
3. In counseling sessions with minors, parental permission shall be obtained prior to a minister/worker meeting privately with a minor, or the two worker rule shall be used in that instance. Prior permission may be granted by parents to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) for their child to receive counseling from a particular minister/worker. However, recognizing that some counseling is of such a sensitive nature, there may be infrequent occasions when a minister is unable to ask for parental permission or follow the two person rule for the protection of the child/youth.
4. Parental permission shall be obtained to cover a particular time period (i.e., a school year) when his/her child will be transported by a minister/adult worker.
5. Lists of workers that meet church approval, as workers with minors shall be posted.
6. Those who only volunteer occasionally must also go through the entire worker enlistment process. There are to be no exceptions for anyone to go through the complete process.
7. Only teenagers 13 and over can serve as teen workers in child care, activities, studies, or programs for preschoolers or children. All teen workers (13-18 years of age) will need to fill out a Screening Form for Teens Working with Minors or Mentally Handicapped and go through the training. (See attached form.) The only step in the process they are exempt from is a criminal background check.
8. A door without windows shall remain open at all times.

9. Use a “check-in/check-out” procedure for all kindergarten aged children and younger.
10. Educate all staff and workers with minors as to the church’s policies and procedures concerning this matter.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION REPORTING

Any person having cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report the person’s belief in accordance with this procedure.

1. Do not treat the suspicion as frivolous.
2. Upon the first suspicion of an instance of child abuse, a person is required to report his/her suspicions as soon as reasonably possible to the First Mennonite Personnel Committee or one of the paid staff ministers of the church.
3. The recipient of the initial report will be responsible for confirming the facts reported and the condition of the child, within 24 hours of when the first report was made.
4. Data concerning the child, name, address and other pertinent information will be obtained through discussions with the initial reporter and other staff members. The name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child, if available, will be obtained.
5. If the evidence suggests the probability of abuse to the recipient(s), the suspicion(s) will be reported within 24 hours to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services Hot Line at (800) 25-ABUSE, or 217-524-2606.
6. Confidentiality of the investigation will be maintained as much as possible. Emphasize confidentiality of the victim and any accused.
7. Cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.
8. Suspend any accused from the performance of duties involving children until the investigation has been completed.
9. Inform the victim and the victim’s family of the steps that are being taken, and continue to keep them advised of the status of the investigations.
10. In instances where child abuse is confirmed by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services, the church will immediately dismiss the worker from that position.

11. In instances where the evidence is inconclusive, the church will take appropriate action, attempting to honor the request of the victim's family with regards to safety for their child and insuring also the rights of the accused.
12. 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.
13. Promptly take steps to plan for a response to the media and attempt to speak to the media only through one contact person so that the church can emphasize through the media to the public the church's position on child abuse, its concern for the victim, and the steps the church is taking to address the present occurrence and to reduce the risk and to provide and maintain a safe environment for other children.
14. Every allegation of abuse shall be investigated promptly and thoroughly by officials and reported to the church insurance company immediately. It is unlikely the problem will ever be handled by relying on promises of the employee or volunteer to reform.

INSURANCE

The church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the church should have the levels of coverage that are required for limited immunity.

CONCLUSION

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH desires to be "a church that cares" through the implementation of the above policy. Adoption of these provisions will enable FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH to provide a more safe and secure environment for each individual of our church family and its guests.