

KEEPING FMC SAFE FROM ABUSE
Guidelines for Protecting Children, Youth and Adults

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH
Indianapolis, Indiana

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TABLE OF CONTENTS
First Mennonite Church
Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

Purpose and Scope.....3
Definitions Utilized.....4
Guidelines for Registering Staff and Volunteers... .. 6
General Guidelines..... 7
Identifying and Reporting Abuse.....9
Guidelines for Reporting Abuse..... 10 & 11
Memorandum of Understanding... ..12

Purpose and Scope

First Mennonite Church (FMC)

Keeping FMC Children, Youth and Adults Safe from Abuse

Across society, the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children and youth is becoming a tragic occurrence. Abuse of a child or youth brings suffering, erodes self-esteem, destroys relationships, splits families, and violates human decency and integrity. Child (and professional) abuse is not only an abuse of power, but also a betrayal of trust and can be extremely devastating and long lasting in effect. FMC believes that God is a God of love, that any such abuse is against the wishes of God, and that God is highly interested in the protection of children, youth, and adults. FMC is committed to providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all children, youth and adults who enter its doors.

To this end, FMC has adopted the following guidelines. FMC will not allow, condone, or tolerate the abuse of any child, youth or adult at our church building or at any church-sponsored activity. Recognizing that there is potential for abuse to occur, FMC is taking preventive steps in developing this abuse prevention policy and will follow all laws with respect to child abuse and neglect reporting procedures.

This policy is not intended to create alarm or suspicion among people, but rather to ensure the safety of children, youth and adults and to protect workers from possible false accusations. This policy contains five areas: Screening of Staff and Volunteers, General Guidelines, Reporting Procedures, Response Plan, and a Restoration Plan. It is our prayer that it will never be necessary to go beyond the educational part of this policy.

These guidelines shall apply to all congregational or FMC program participants, and current and future workers (compensated and volunteer). This abuse prevention policy will also govern children to children relationships, youth to children relationships, and youth to youth relationships. The administration of this policy is the responsibility of the Pastors and Trustees, and other committees or groups given specific responsibilities by this document. Individuals will be invited and ad hoc committees will be created as necessary to ensure the adequate resources to initiate and maintain this policy. Changes may be made to this policy with approval from Leadership Council.

Definitions Utilized
First Mennonite Church
Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

General Definitions

Adult:	A person eighteen (18) years of age or older.
Child:	A person under the age of twelve (12).
FMC:	First Mennonite Church.
Minor:	A person under the age of eighteen (18).
Nursery children:	Children from birth through - 3 years.
Pastoral Team:	The co- pastors at FMC.
Preschoolers:	Children from age 3 - 5 years.
Response Team:	A team that will be created as needed and maintained in order to give leadership to the processing of any reports of abuse, neglect or domestic violence, lending guidance and support to the reporter, the alleged victim, the alleged perpetrator, the families of all of these persons, to the Trustees, and to the congregation. Please refer to pages 10 & 11 for further information about the formation and purpose of the Response Team.
Staff:	Pastors, Interns and any other employees of FMC.
Trustee:	Person called by the congregation to oversee FMC's administrative functions, as well as the pastoral team.
Volunteer:	A person providing services at FMC, on behalf of FMC, but who is not employed by FMC for those services.
Worker:	Any employee or volunteer assigned regular ongoing work or tasks related to children and youth of all ages at FMC.
Youth:	A person from the age of twelve (12) years to the age of eighteen (18) years.

Definitions/Forms of Abuse, which may be committed by those persons who are in a position of responsibility (for others), such as custodian, guardian, parent, or pastor:

- Abuse** Any willful behavior that endangers one's development, security, or health. Abuse may be perpetrated on a child, youth or adult by an adult. (Note: Such behavior by another child or another youth, although not child abuse according to state law, must still be reported to the Pastors and Trustees, and in some instances to law enforcement authorities as well.)
- Emotional Abuse** Verbal or unspoken messages (such as gestures) or written language insinuating another person is worthless, bad, unloved or undeserving of love or care. Emotional abuse includes the use of disparaging or derogatory terms, and may include the withholding of affection or affirmation of the person's self-worth.
- Neglect** Any act of omission by a person that endangers another person's health, safety or welfare. Neglect may include the withholding of food, clothing, medical care or education.
- Physical Abuse** Any non-accidental physical injury or impairment of physical well-being inflicted or allowed to be inflicted upon a person by another person.
- Professional Abuse** Any form of abuse defined in this section which is engaged in by a Minister under contract with, or serving as an Intern at, First Mennonite Church.
- Sexual Abuse** A specific abuse in which a person of less power is tricked, coerced, bribed or in any way caused to participate in non-consensual sexual contact. (Minors, youth and children lack the capacity to consent to sexual activity.) The power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim may result from the perpetrator's greater age, size, role, experience or authority. Examples of sexual abuse may include groping, fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to pornography or prostitution.

Other Forms of Violence, which may occur within the congregation:

- Bullying/intimidation** Behavior, often between children and/or youth, resulting in a person feeling threatened, fearful or coerced.
- Domestic Violence** Acts of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, used by one person for the purpose of exerting power and control over the other person, occurring in a dating, cohabiting or marital relationship.

Guidelines for Registering Staff and Volunteers

First Mennonite Church

Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs, the following guidelines have been established for those who desire a position involving the supervision or custody of minors. The Pastors and Trustees, committees designated by the Pastors and Trustees, and persons (or groups of persons) assigned responsibilities by this document will be responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy with all church employees and volunteers.

1. All individuals who seek to volunteer with the children and/or youth must sign the Memorandum of Understanding, and they will be screened against the Indiana Sheriff's Sex and Violent Offender Registry.
2. If contract child care providers are utilized, they must sign the Memorandum of Understanding, and they will be screened against the Indiana Sheriff's Sex and Violent Offender Registry.
3. Any person required under Indiana law to be listed on the Indiana Sheriff's Sex and Violent Offender Registry shall not be approved (to work) as a volunteer with the children and/or youth.
4. All employed staff must sign the Memorandum of Understanding, and they will be screened against the Indiana Sheriff's Sex and Violent Offender Registry.
5. All volunteers and employees must sign the Memorandum of Understanding on an annual basis. After a particular individual is screened against the Indiana Sheriff's Sex and Violent Offender Registry, that same individual does not need to be screened again.
6. An individual who has attended regularly at FMC for less than one year prior to volunteering to work with children or youth must provide to the program for which they are volunteering (such as Children's Education, JYF or MYF) the names of two persons who have known him or her for at least two years and can attest to his or her suitability to work with children and youth. The persons providing the recommendations may be from within or outside the congregation.

General Guidelines First Mennonite Church Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

For all activities and programs involving children and youth, including Christian Education, MYF, Vacation Bible School, nursery care, mentoring program and Junior Youth:

1. Two adults should be present whenever possible during on-site church activities involving children or youth. When this is not possible, the door must be left unlocked and the room readily accessible.
2. At the conclusion of an activity (e.g. Sunday School hour, end of VBS, etc.), a child under the age of six should be released only to his or her parent or guardian, to an adult designated by the parent or guardian, or to an older sibling designated by the parent or guardian.
3. Supervision during unstructured events (e.g. potlucks) and during transition times (e.g. before and after Sunday school) is the responsibility of the individual child's parent(s) or guardian(s), with the understanding that at FMC we function as a community to ensure the safety of our children and youth.
4. With regard to discipline and expressions of affection, volunteers and staff are expected to treat all minors in an appropriate fashion, including:
 - a. Respecting physical boundaries. A kiss on the mouth or any touch of private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit) are considered inappropriate. Appropriate physical affection (e.g. a quick hug, hand squeeze, etc.) can be offered, but not forced. The best approach is to ask permission of the child or youth to hug. (This section refers to discipline and expressions of affection, therefore the touching that is necessary to changing or diapering nursery children is not being proscribed.)
 - b. Nurturing discipline. Hitting, spanking, kicking or slapping a child is not permitted under any circumstances. Verbal discipline may be administered respectfully and compassionately. The child's parent(s) or guardian(s) should be involved if additional intervention is needed.
5. Training
 - a. Pastors, church staff, Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, and youth group leaders along with all other persons who will be registering to volunteer will be expected to attend an annual orientation program in which they are educated regarding the:
 - church's policies for the prevention of child abuse
 - procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth

- appropriate steps to report suspected child abuse
- dynamics of abuse

The Children's Education Committee will plan and be responsible for this annual orientation program, and will determine how to provide education to those unable to attend the annual orientation program.

- b. VBS teachers, Bell choir, Drama and Choir directors and Sunday school substitute teachers will be included in the annual orientation program.
- c. Congregation, Parent or Guardian and Family Education
Family educational opportunities shall be provided as an appropriate part of church programming in order to learn about the facts of abuse and neglect and its prevention. A main goal for this education will be to assist parent(s) or guardian(s) and children in the discussion of abuse and neglect, and ways of increasing children's safety. Separate educational opportunities will be provided for the junior and senior youth. Educational events shall be held for the congregation as a whole in order to share information regarding abuse and neglect and this policy for its prevention.

6. Outside Programs

FMC will require each of the outside programs that use the church facility to agree to take responsibility for the care and welfare of their children and youth as well as sign the "Agreement for the Use of Building" which includes release of liability.

Identifying and Reporting Abuse First Mennonite Church Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

The church's responsibility is to be aware and to report suspected abuse and neglect. The State of Indiana has legislation for mandated reporting of abuse and neglect or suspected abuse and neglect (Indiana Code 31-33: Reporting and Investigation of Child Abuse and Neglect). IC 31-33-5-1 (Duty to make report) states: In addition to any other duty to report arising under this article, **an individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect shall make a report as required by this article.** IC 31-33-5-4 (Immediate oral report to department of child services or law enforcement agency) states: A person who has a duty under this chapter to report that a child may be a victim of child abuse or neglect shall immediately make an oral report to: 1) the Department (of Child Services); or 2) the local law enforcement agency.

Any resident of Indiana is mandated by law to report suspected abuse, and FMC believes that any person involved with children and youth who suspects abuse also has a moral obligation to report. When signs or symptoms of abuse or neglect arise, or a staff person witnesses abuse or a child makes a disclosure, the volunteer/staff person should immediately notify a member of the Pastors and Trustees who will subsequently activate the Response Team. **Notifying the Pastors and Trustees does not relieve the person of responsibility for reporting under Indiana law; therefore the person must also follow through immediately by notifying authorities.** Understandably, church workers may be hesitant to report a suspected incident of abuse or neglect for many reasons such as embarrassment or fear of personal and legal recrimination. It is important to remember that reporting suspected abuse reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty.

A sound reporting procedure promotes safety among our children and youth and accountability among church workers. Church workers will be trained in identifying inappropriate behavior with children, and to identify the symptoms of abuse or neglect. Reporting guidelines have been created to guide the reporter through this difficult process and ensure the safety and confidentiality of all involved parties.

We recognize that incidents or behaviors may occur, such as bullying or intimidation, that are not mandated by law to be reported to law enforcement or child protection authorities. FMC does not condone such behaviors in its congregational life. Each church program that serves children or youth (such as Children's Education, JYF and MYF) should have a plan with alternative strategies in place to address bullying and intimidation, and make their volunteers aware of it, so that children and youth can be protected from these behaviors within our community. If any church program serving children or youth is unable to utilize its available plan or strategies to address successfully a problem when it arises, they may seek the assistance and advice of the Pastors and Trustees.

Guidelines for Reporting Abuse and Response Plan for Allegations

FIRST Mennonite Church
Keeping FMC Safe from Abuse

1. Any incident or reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect shall be reported, in writing, by summarizing the incident or the child's description of the abuse or neglect, or orally, to a member of the Pastors and Trustees. Further, the reporter shall immediately notify the Department of Child Services or the police department. **(NOTE: If the reporter is unable to make contact with a member of the Pastors and Trustees, he or she still must follow through immediately with the report to authorities.)** If possible, an advocate from the Pastors and Trustees will be available if desired to assist the reporter in reporting and processing the incident.
2. The Pastors and Trustees shall notify the parent or guardian of the victim and help ensure the immediate safety of the victim, and take needed steps to activate the Response Team.
3. The church will seek guidance from the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference staff and will obtain legal counsel as deemed necessary.
4. The Response Team may work with the alleged victim, the accused, and their families in order to seek resolution and healing, however, this may be done only if it does not interfere with or compromise the official investigations undertaken by the authorities. All parties involved will be treated with dignity, compassion and respect.
5. A brief and honest statement will be prepared at the discretion of the Response Team that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy or violating any confidentiality concerns.
6. The Response Team may make recommendations, as they deem appropriate, to the Pastors and Trustees. If the Response Team believes it is wise to set limitations on the involvement of the accused person in the life of the congregation, the Pastors and Trustees will receive such recommendations from the Response Team and will retain final decision-making authority in such matters.
7. An allegation of Professional Abuse at FMC should be made in writing to the Chairperson of the Trustees. The same Response Team used to process an allegation of child abuse shall be convened to assist with such an allegation. Their responsibility will be to seek resolution and healing among all parties to the situation. The Response Team may make recommendations about the job status of the minister and whether to forward a complaint to the Indiana-Michigan Conference for action on the minister's credentials, but the Pastors and Trustees, with the accused minister or intern recusing himself or herself, will retain final authority on these matters.
8. If an instance of Domestic Violence within FMC comes to the attention of the Pastors and Trustees, the Response Team may be convened at the discretion of the Pastors and Trustees.
9. Members of the Response Team should be chosen for their professional experience with abuse, their skill in handling conflict, their ability to provide emotional support and their spiritual maturity. The Gifts Discernment Committee shall identify a panel of six laypersons from the congregation who possess the necessary experience and skills to serve on the Response Team, and who would be willing to serve if the need were to arise. When the need arises, the alleged victim (hereafter this refers to the alleged victim's family if she or he is a

child) may nominate one of the persons from the panel identified by Gifts Discernment to serve on the Response Team. The alleged victim may also strike one of the names from the panel. Then the alleged perpetrator may nominate one of the persons from (those that remain on) the panel to the Response Team, and strike one of the names (from those that remain on the panel). The Pastors and Trustees will identify a Trustee (who is not from the panel identified by Gifts Discernment) to serve on the Response Team, and will confer with the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator for their approval and support of this Trustee to serve on the Response Team. The Pastors and Trustees will complete the process of creating the Response Team, without negating or over-riding the choices or the strikes made by the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator, by choosing additional names remaining on the panel (identified by Gifts Discernment) so that the Response Team consists of five persons, four from the panel identified by Gifts Discernment, and a Trustee appointed to the Response Team by the Pastors and Trustees with the consent and approval of the parties. The Trustee appointed to the Response Team will serve as a liaison to the Pastors and Trustees regarding the work of the Response Team. Since the Co-Pastors and Associate Pastor are not on the Response Team, they are not expected to minister to the needs of the parties regarding the abuse allegations and will minister to the overall pastoral needs of the congregation.

10. The six persons identified by Gifts Discernment will remain on this panel indefinitely unless a person leaves the congregation or asks that his or her name be removed from the panel. The responsibility of the Gifts Discernment Committee extends to the identification of these persons and appointing new persons to the panel if a person leaves the congregation or becomes unable to serve for some other reason. Gifts Discernment may, at its own initiative, periodically ask these persons if they remain willing to serve if the need for a Response Team arises.

Memorandum of Understanding for Child and Youth Workers (Volunteer and FMC Staff)

First Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all children and youth who participate in its ministries and activities. The Keeping FMC Safe policy reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter our doors. Our goal is to create a community where all people experience God's love, healing and hope through relationships with others.

As a volunteer/staff member in this congregation:

1. Do you agree to follow Indiana law with regard to immediate reporting of child abuse and neglect, and to promptly report to the Pastors and Trustees any incident of abuse or violence, including bullying/intimidation, emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or professional abuse? Yes No

2. Do you agree to complete an annual orientation or other educational event provided by the church? Yes No

3. Do you agree to observe and abide by the Keeping FMC Safe policy and guidelines regarding working with children and youth? Yes No

4. Have you ever been the subject of an investigation regarding child abuse or neglect?
 Yes No

5. Have you ever been charged with a crime involving an offense against a child, domestic violence, or other violence? Yes No

If you have answered yes to either question 4 or 5, please return your form directly to a member of the Pastors and Trustees to ensure your confidentiality.

I have read the Keeping FMC Safe Policy of First Mennonite Church and this Memorandum of Understanding, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth therein.

Signature Date

Print Full Name

Volunteer or Staff Position