

Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy

FELLOWSHIP OF HOPE MENNONITE CHURCH, Elkhart, IN, November 2021

Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry, and seek to make all our church gatherings and spaces safe, especially for children, youth, and vulnerable persons. Sadly, child abuse is prevalent. It is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. No faith community is immune.

Definitions of Abuse

1. Physical abuse exists when a child has a non-accidental injury.
2. Emotional abuse is injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.
3. Sexual abuse exists when another person (child or adult) uses a child as a part of any type of sexual act.
4. Emotional neglect is when a child suffers from an adult failing to give the chance for feeling loved, wanted, secure, and worthy.
5. Physical neglect is when an adult does not provide basic, protection, or supervision.

We who attend Fellowship of Hope desire to be responsible in preventing all types of child abuse and neglect, and to strengthen families.

THE FOLLOWING CHILD / YOUTH SAFETY POLICY APPLIES TO ALL CHURCH MINISTRIES AND ACTIVITIES, WORSHIP, CHURCH MEALS, SUNDAY SCHOOL, AND NURSERY.

WE COMMIT TO:

1. Offer safety information and trainings.

- a. The congregation will become familiar with this document and sign a commitment of agreement.
- b. Training and materials on abuse prevention from Dove's Nest will be offered annually to all adults in the congregation and especially to teachers and leaders of children. Related topics may also be addressed in sermons or other areas of congregational life.
- c. Circle of Grace training will be provided every year for all children, appropriate to the child's age group, covering topics such as safety, empowerment, and boundaries.

2. Make our church facility safe for children.

- a. Windows are placed in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (e.g., Sunday school rooms, pastor's office).
- b. A fully stocked first-aid kit is available and maintained in the well marked church kitchen drawer.
- c. Areas where children or adults and children could easily be alone together unsupervised will be locked or restricted.
- d. Practice hand washing, sanitize high touch areas and toys, and instruct sick or symptomatic children to stay home.

3. Provide safe and adequate supervision for children.

- a. We will follow a two-adult rule with children. When that is not possible, the door will be left open. It's also best to avoid one adult with multiple children, although that's better than one-on-one.
- b. A youth/minor will not teach or care for children alone without supervising adults available.
- c. Prior consent will be obtained from a parent or guardian if a child is to be transported away from church facilities.
- d. We will practice and model appropriate touch and healthy boundaries.
- e. Guidelines for child-to-child and youth-to-youth and child to adult contact will be implemented. We will expect respectful behavior at all times.
 - Teasing, verbal abuse, and any form of bullying will not be tolerated.
 - Minimize indoor running and chasing to supervised activities.
 - Only one child or youth may use a bathroom stall at a time.
- f. We will use respectful words and redirection to guide a child's behavior. If this does not work, the child will be taken to their parent or guardian. If not available, we will speak with them as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will ensure the child's safety but remove him or her from the activities to minimize disruption. (No physical discipline will be used.)

4. Attend to related personnel issues.

- a. Annually, each teacher and leader of children will be presented with a copy of this **Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy** and be asked to acknowledge that he or she has read it and will abide by the policy.

b. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on final candidates for all church staff positions—including the pastor and custodians—before hiring. A background check will also be conducted on all adult volunteers working with children/youth. These background checks will be conducted in all the states the individual has lived in during the previous twenty years. Background checks will be repeated every three years.

c. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before they are permitted to become a teacher or leader of children or youth.

5. Deal appropriately with allegations of abuse.

a. If a child discloses abuse or if you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, immediately make a report to Child Protective Services . **CALL: Indiana Department of Child Services' Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline today. 1-800-800-5556** (It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including weekends and holidays. You can report anonymously.)

Report to the pastor and an elder, and ask for Abuse Report Forms, in church office, to be completed.

b. When the victim and alleged offender are both in the church community, we will follow these additional steps:

- Immediately attend to the victim and his or her family's safety and needs **through church leadership and an outside child advocacy agency, (like Dove's Nest)**, keeping the victim's needs at the center of any process.

- Immediately relieve the alleged offender from all activities or responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation.

- Within 12 hours, notify all parents whose children may have encountered the alleged offender. Let them know that allegations have been made and reported.

- Leadership needs to consider the likelihood that more than one individual has been harmed.

- Keep victims and alleged offenders separated during the investigation. Support child victims in engaging in age-appropriate activities. If the alleged offender is an adolescent, find alternate activities for him or her.

- Inform area conference leadership [or the equivalent].

- After the investigation, follow all legal implications for the offender.

- Inform the entire church, as secrecy not only makes children unsafe, it also does not help offenders.

- Even if the abuse is not confirmed, attend to the dynamics that prompted the allegations and carefully consider the degree to which individuals involved need to remain separated.

- Make pastoral care available to all involved, prioritizing the needs of the victim.

c. When considering including an individual with an offending history, **always work with an external organization or resource**, such as Dove's Nest. Most churches are not prepared for such integration.

d. The church community will be notified if there is a registered or known sex offender attending the church at the time this information becomes known. New families to the church will be notified of this information within two months of beginning to attend church.

e. Any known or credibly accused child abuse offender will not be allowed to be around children or youth unsupervised and will not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal).

6. Consider: technology, video conference, and social media concerns.

a. Adults will limit one-on-one electronic communications with children.

b. Parents or other adults will be copied on emails and kept apprised of ongoing texting or phone conversations.

c. Communication will be traceable.

d. Photos of children or youth will not be shared on personal social media platforms or church website without permission from a parent/guardian.

7. THIS POLICY will be implemented and facilitated by a child protection team of at least two individuals, appointed by the congregation.

This policy will be posted on the church website and posted in the building. It will be reviewed and updated every 2-3 years. UPDATED DATE: November 18, 2021.

8. WORKER REFERENCE FORMS and ABUSE REPORT FORMS are available from the Pastor or the Elders.