

“SAFE PLACE”



First
Mennonite
Church
Edmonton

A Policy to Protect the Children, Youth, Leaders, and Others at Risk for First Mennonite Church

I. POLICY STATEMENT & INTRODUCTION

A. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the commitment of First Mennonite Church to ensure the protection of all who attend our ministries and to recognize our responsibility for the people in our care. The following procedures are intended to balance the spiritual, moral, and ethical responsibilities of the First Mennonite Church with its legal obligations under the laws of Canada and the Province of Alberta. It is our desire to protect all the people in our ministries from all forms of abuse, and to protect church workers from false or wrongful allegations so freeing them for ministry.

B. SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR POLICY

1. *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ... But God has so arranged the body, ... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (I Corinthians 12:12, 24b, 25, 26. NRSV)*

The church is called to be a light to the nations, a place where God's intentions are lived out among the community of faith. At the same time, we recognize that the church is part

of an imperfect world. There are many examples of times when churches have not been places of healing and hope, but have been places of pain and suffering. While instances of abuse or other serious injury may be unlikely to occur within our congregation, we also accept our responsibility to implement clear policies and procedures to minimize the risk of such harm taking place.

2. *"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.... Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 5:13; 6:2. NRSV)*

As a church, we are made up of all those who walk through our doors. Our church community is a place where we experience God's grace, share God's love with each other, and respond to God's call to serve. The responsibility to provide well-trained leadership for our church activities is something we share as a congregation. It is our duty to ensure our ministry functions in ways that reflect a concern for the safety of those in our care, for those who have been hurt in church settings, and for all in need of God's healing and grace.

3. *"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." (Ephesians 5:3; NIV)*

Given the reality of different forms of abuse in our world, clear guidelines and procedures demonstrate that we as a church are doing all that we can to ensure such harm does not take place within our congregation. These are steps intended to reassure all those involved in our ministries that we are concerned about those who are given into our care and about who serve in our ministries.

C. POLICY RATIONALE

1. People entrusting loved ones to the care of the church will be assured that the church is a safe place.
2. Abuse has lasting and far-reaching effects, as do false allegations of abuse.
3. Children, the elderly and people with disabilities are recognized as being especially vulnerable to abuse.
4. In order to receive abuse insurance, insurers require the implementation of a policy preventing abuse.
5. Such policies are being introduced in most organizations working with children. The church should not be tardy in responding to the concerns of society.
6. Having a Safe Place Policy in place helps to minimize risks to vulnerable people in our congregation while enabling effective programs and ministry.

D. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are intended to clarify understanding of the terms used in this policy. For legal definition of terms, reference to the applicable statutes and case law is recommended

1. **'Abuse'** includes sexual, physical or emotional abuse of a person.
 - a) **'Sexual abuse'** means any sexual exploitation whether consensual or not. It ranges from touching of a sexual nature to sexual intercourse. In determining

whether a behaviour is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether a reasonable observer looking at the behaviour in its context would conclude that it is.

- b) **'Physical abuse'** means any physical force or action, which results in, or may potentially result in, injury to a person and which exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline.
 - c) **'Emotional abuse'** means acts or omissions of those responsible for the care of a person that are likely to produce long term and serious emotional disorders.
 - d) **'Child'** is legally defined as someone under the age of 18 years. In practice, for programming, we sub-divide the group into (younger) 'children' and 'youth'.
2. **'Allegation'** means a claim of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.
 3. **'Church worker'** includes pastors, youth workers, Sunday School Teachers, Committee members, volunteers, and any other person hired or approved by the church.
 4. In these guidelines, where warranted, the singular includes the plural and vice-versa.

II. PRINCIPLES OF PROTECTION POLICY

First Mennonite Church (FMC) is committed to the following principles:

1. We will screen all our workers, both paid and volunteer, for any position involving work with pre-schoolers, children or youth, or with the elderly or disabled. Anyone with criminal abuse violations will not be allowed to work with children or youth or other vulnerable people.
2. All those, both paid and volunteer, who work with preschoolers, children or youth or other at-risk people will receive training to understand the nature of abuse and how to carry out our policies to prevent abuse, including our reporting procedures for suspected incidents.
3. A basic “Two-Adult” rule will apply to programs involving children and youth. Such a rule says that at least two screened adults should be present during any activity. This is a minimum requirement, not a maximum, as there should be sufficient adults to adequately supervise the number of participants.
4. The ‘Two-Adult’ rule will also apply to pastoral visits and counseling sessions. Either two adults should be present when pastors or deacons make pastoral care visits and when counseling takes place, or a second adult should be in the immediate vicinity. If this is not possible, every effort should be made to have the meeting take place in a public setting. Because a one-on-one visit may be unavoidable in rare circumstances, Pastors and Deacons will undergo additional screening including a child welfare check and the completion of a yearly FMC Driver form. A record of all visits should be maintained.
5. The ‘Two Adult’ rules reduce the risk of abuse and also reduce the risk of false accusations of abuse by individuals seeking an award or quick legal settlement.
6. For ‘Mentors’, who may be involved in one-to-one activities with youth, additional screening will be applied, including a child welfare check, completion of a yearly FMC Driver form, an interview, and the obtaining of two character references. Mentor pairs will be asked to maintain a journal of their activities with each other.
7. We will follow the “Ten Month” rule. Volunteers will be permitted to work with pre-schoolers, children, youth, or other at-risk individuals only after they have been regularly attending or become members of First Mennonite Church for a period of ten months. This provision may be waived where the person is transferring in from another church and has a letter of recommendation signed by the pastor of that church indicating that the person has already been screened.
8. “Southview Child Care” a daycare operated on the premises of FMC but under an independent board, shall operate according to Provincial standards, and shall ensure that all requirements are followed, including screening of workers and volunteers, and maintenance of records.

III. PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Recruiting, Screening, and Supervision of Church Workers

A. “Safety Awareness Team”

A “Safety Awareness Team” (SAT) will be responsible for screening potential workers on behalf of the congregation. The team will consist of one member of the pastoral staff team and two other people chosen by the congregation through the normal Call-to-Service process. These individuals are asked to commit to an extended period of time (preferably three years) in order to protect confidentiality and maintain continuity of records. The Moderator Elect and Past Moderator will also be asked to serve on the SAT, with the Past Moderator serving as FMC’s Privacy Officer.

1. The “Safety Awareness Team” reports to the Executive, who will handle any queries or appeals regarding decisions of the SAT.
2. The “Safety Awareness Team” will be responsible for:
 - a. Coordinating annual policy awareness and training sessions
 - b. Providing advice to ‘Branches’ on the policy and its implementation.
 - c. Screening workers for ministry.
 - d. Maintaining a master list of individuals accepted for ministry at FMC
 - e. Producing an annual list of workers in the congregation.
 - f. Updating the Ministry Application Forms as required.
 - g. Ensuring completed Ministry Application Forms, police check reports, reference check reports, records of training undertaken by volunteers, and related documents are stored securely in perpetuity in a central registry file.
 - h. Maintaining the confidentiality of Personal Ministry Records.
 - i. Handling of incidents as they are reported, including communication with media.
3. Acceptance of or rejection of potential workers and volunteers will be decided by the “Safety Awareness Team” and communicated to the applicant by the SAT.
4. In handling reported incidents, care shall be taken to ensure that the members of the “Safety Awareness Team” are impartial to both the accused and the alleged victim.

B. Ministry Requirements

1. Prior to serving in any capacity, all persons, need to be accepted for ministry by the “Safety Awareness Team.”
2. No person with a criminal record of abuse will be accepted for ministry for positions where the person would work with youth, children, the disabled, or other at-risk people, would be in a counseling relationship of any kind, or would have access to church facilities alone at any time.

3. Changes to these requirements will be subject to approval by the congregation.

C. Process For Recruitment & Screening of Paid Staff and Volunteers

First Mennonite Church, through its “Safety Awareness Team,” will screen all children’s and youth ministry workers, members of executive and others working with vulnerable people. The process will include:

1. Receiving a ministry/volunteer registration form;
2. Conducting the volunteer interview and completing associated paperwork;
3. Requiring all persons wishing to work with children, youth or other vulnerable people to give permission for a criminal record check and other checks deemed necessary by FMC;
4. Soliciting criminal record checks and Social Services searches where required;
5. Interviewing new attendees who, following the waiting period, wish to work with children or youth, or other at-risk people;
6. Doing background checks, including asking for two letters of reference, and following up on them;
7. Recording and filing a summary of information received from the background checks;
8. Repeating such checks every three (3) years.
9. FMC will cover any costs associated with obtaining Checks as part of the screening process.

D. Child Protection Procedures

1. All ministry leaders working with children are to be properly identified (egg. Introduction, name tags, etc.)
2. A Registration Form for all children and youth participating in FMC ministries will be maintained. This form shall include personal information relevant to the activity, such as names, phone number and addresses of parents, information on allergies, consents, and Alberta Health Care Numbers.
3. Attendance records will be kept for all activities involving children and youth.
4. Children are never to be dropped off at the Church, or in the nursery or classroom without a teacher/care-giver present.
5. Procedures shall be established to ensure the two-adult requirement is maintained during foreseeable events. (E.g. When preschool children need assistance in the washroom, an adult may enter the washroom cubicle to assist only when a second adult is within visual contact. If this is not possible, inform another adult when taking a child to the washroom and when returning. During Sunday School, if only one teacher/care giver is present, the door to the room must be left open until the arrival of

the second adult leader.)

6. Church activities conducted away from the church property should be pre-approved by the church leadership. Parents should be notified at least one week prior to the outing. All trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved leaders, which could include parents of participants.

E. Health and Safety Guidelines

1. When a child appears to be ill or endangering the health of others, parents/guardians will be contacted to remove the child from the activity.
2. Volunteers and staff at FMC will not give or apply any medication, unless written consent is given by the parents, along with clear written instructions on procedure and frequency.
3. In an emergency, staff and volunteers will take whatever steps are necessary to obtain medical aid.

F. Informed Parental/Guardian Consent

In providing a secure environment for children and youth, FMC is committed to ensuring that parents and guardians have given their informed, written consent before their children or youth may participate in FMC programs and activities. Informed parental/guardian consent means that a parent or guardian:

1. Has been fully informed of all information relevant to the program or activity for which consent is sought; this includes full and clear identification, disclosure and explanation of the specific risks and hazards inherent in the program or activity;
2. Understands and agrees in writing to the child's participation in the program or activity for which consent is sought, and the consent adequately describes the program or activity;
3. Understands that the granting of consent is voluntary on the part of the parent/guardian, and may be revoked at any time; and
4. Assumes and accepts risks and hazards inherent in the program or activity.

All FMC informed consent forms will:

1. meet the requirements set out above
2. be signed by the parent or guardian. All executed consent forms will be forwarded to SAT for safe-keeping.

G. Record

1. The "Safety Awareness Team" shall maintain a central registry with a file for each paid staff and volunteer that contains the ministry/volunteer registration form, signed release forms, criminal record check, and interview form(s).

2. The central registry will be kept confidential. The rest of the “Safety Awareness Team” shall have access to specific files in the case where an incident requires further investigation. Individuals have unlimited access to their personal files, in the presence of a member of SAT, but may not remove anything from them. Each file will be placed in a locked filing cabinet in the archival room which is fireproof and secure.
3. Records shall be maintained by the “Safety Awareness Team” and be kept indefinitely.

H. Monitoring of Policy

Each ‘Branch’ together with SAT will develop procedures required for its activities ensuring uniformity and conformity to the policy. Ministry leaders should thoroughly review these policies and procedures as part of their pre-fall program planning. Attention should be given to monitoring annually so that the following questions are taken into consideration:

1. Have the workers in each branch received training regarding the policies?
2. Are workers following the required policies and procedures?
3. What obstacles exist in complying with the policies and procedures?
4. What is the level of cooperation?
5. Do sufficient materials exist for training and information?
6. Are the policies and procedures printed and available?

The “Safety Awareness Team” will report to the Congregation’s Annual General Meeting.

IV. EQUIPMENT AND FACILITY REQUIREMENTS

When the church plans to build or to renovate, the following features are to be kept in mind- Where possible, these features will also be added to existing facilities, if not already in place.

Windows:

Large interior windows, that allow for easy viewing by parents and others. Doors with windows, which also provide for easy viewing. Sight lines through these windows should remain unobstructed at all times.

Washrooms:

Toilets in close proximity to the pre-school area prevent the need for children to leave the immediate area. Child size toilets make it possible for children to use the washroom with little assistance.

Nursery Facilities:

Nursery change tables should be in full view.

Nursery doors should be secured from the inside to prevent anyone from entering unnoticed.

Electrical outlets must be covered or out of reach of children.

Cribs and toys must meet safety standards

Emergency Exit:

An emergency exit plan with maps and procedures is to be visible in each room.

All workers need to be familiar with the emergency exit plan.

Procedures are to be reviewed annually for fire emergencies.

First Aid Supplies/Training

A First Aid box must be kept on hand. A list of items shall be included in the box. An individual will be appointed to ensure that appropriate supplies are in the box.

A sign shall be posted in the hallways identifying the location of the First Aid Box

A review of those ministry leaders holding first-aid certificates should be made before the fall programs commence.

V. DEALING WITH AN ALLEGATION OR DISCLOSURE

A. Identifying Abusive Situations

Those who work in settings with vulnerable persons will be trained about the indicators of possible abuse often portrayed by victims.

1. A person who believes on reasonable grounds that someone is or may be in need of protection from abuse **is required by law** to report the belief and the information upon which it is based to the appropriate agency.
2. In particular, the Alberta Child Welfare Act, (which defines a child as a person under the age of 18), states that "Any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe and believes that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report the matter to a director."
3. If the person is alleged, to have been abused by a church worker, the SAT should be advised immediately.
4. Any investigation conducted shall be conducted either by the police or by the appropriate agency.

B. Responding to an Allegation or Disclosure

1. When a person makes it clear he wants to be listened to, it is always appropriate to do so. At the same time, common sense should prevail, so that the response does not interfere with the police investigation. For example, asking leading questions about the details of an allegation, or showing a photograph of the alleged offender, before the police arrive will interfere with the subsequent investigation. Any person involved in responding to an allegation or disclosure should be aware that he may become a witness in a court proceeding.
2. When an allegation surfaces, the church worker shall be asked to step aside temporarily from his duties, pending the outcome of the police or social services investigation into the allegation. Paid staff will continue to receive pay, and may be assigned other duties. SAT should obtain legal advice if a lawsuit could occur.
3. When questionable conduct surfaces, which in and of itself would not interest the police, such as extended hugging, spending time alone with a child behind closed windowless doors, spending too much time alone with a disabled person, or any other conduct which might pose a danger to a vulnerable person, steps shall be taken to prevent a recurrence.
4. If an allegation concerning a pastoral staff member arises, the Mennonite Church Alberta Congregational Leadership Committee shall be notified.

C. Assistance to the Victim and the Accused

After the allegation has been reported, the "Safety Awareness Team" will be responsible for ensuring that assistance and support is given to the victim, the accused, the person

reporting, and the church body. This will be done only with the consent of the police or appropriate agency. It is recommended that, whilst avoiding conflict of interest, the Pastor and Deacons be available for on-going support to the abused individual and his/her family, and also to the accused.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION & ALTERATIONS

1. Implementation Schedule

September 2004:	Draft to Council September 8 and to congregation September 19
October 2004:	Feedback from congregation
November 2004:	Further discussion and approval by congregation
March 2010:	Review of policy with Executive and SAT
June 2010:	Policy review presented to congregation

2. Alterations and Modifications to the Policy

Once implemented, the policy may be changed by vote of the congregation at a properly constituted meeting.

APPENDICES

These appendices include a list of all of the forms/records needed to fulfill the requirements of the policy. This section of the policy should be understood as subject to frequent change, as forms are modified, deleted or added. SAT is responsible for the development of such forms, with Executive oversight. Forms are available in the Church Policy Binder and in electronic form from SAT. Some forms are available in the racks outside the church office.

Forms to Accompany the SAFE Policy

- § Ministry/Volunteer Registration Form which includes a release of information and declaration of intent section.
- § Police Check Protocol
- § Mentor Interview Form
- § Reference Form
- § Driver's Information Form
- § Children/Youth Registration Form

- § Attendance Forms (Sunday School, Celebrations, Kid's Club, Jr. Youth Group, Sr. Youth Group, Yellow Pages)
- § Parent's Consent Form For Pas'de Youth under 18 years old Form
- § Incident Report Form
- § Procedures for Reporting Disclosures of Child Abuse
- § Emergency Procedures for Churches
- § Field Trip Request Form
- § Field Trip Consent Form
- § Guidelines for Overnight Field Trips
- § High Risk Activities and Unlicensed Vehicles
- § Overnight Field Trip Checklist Form
- § Overnight Field Trip Request Form
- § Overnight Field Trip Information Package
- § Overnight Field Trip Consent Form
- § Pastoral Care Visitation Record
- § The Personal Information Privacy Policy of First Mennonite Church of Edmonton
- § Sign In Sheet Form