

Shalom Mennonite Church

Policy and Procedures for Abuse Prevention and Response

Policy

Shalom Mennonite Church is committed to being a compassionate congregation working together toward peace and wholeness. We desire to create a safe space where adults and children are welcome to worship and learn together. We recognize that physical, sexual and emotional abuse are serious problems that undermine healthy relationships in homes and community. Shalom Mennonite Church will not tolerate abuse in the Church or during Church-sponsored activities. We will learn how to respond as a congregation to reports of abuse involving people within the Shalom community, whether the abuse happened in a congregational setting or elsewhere. In an effort to reduce the risk of abuse, particularly to our youngest and most vulnerable participants in the community, and to promote congregational support for survivors of abuse, we commit to follow the procedures outlined in this document and to foster mutual accountability.

Definition of Abuse

Physical Abuse: Any non-accidental physical injury causing substantial risk or impairment of physical well-being, inflicted or allowed to be inflicted upon another person.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual harassment or sexual behavior that occurs when one party does not give, or is incapable of giving, informed consent. All ages are incapable of giving informed consent when the other party is in a position of power/authority/leadership over them. Examples of sexual abuse include, but are not limited to, fondling, intercourse, incest, and sexual exploitation.

Emotional Abuse: A pattern of excessive, aggressive, or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a person beyond that person's capacity, which limits that person's development and sense of self-worth.

Neglect: Acts or omissions by a parent, guardian, or person responsible for the care of a child resulting in harm to a child, or presenting a likelihood of harm, and the acts or omissions are not due solely to the lack of financial means of the child's parents or other custodian. For example, failure to provide the child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child.

Procedures

I. Congregational education regarding healthy relationships and abuse prevention

A. The Safe Sanctuary Task Force¹ will plan Worship once a year to include a training/information time during Sunday school and a worship service related to the theme of healthy relationships and abuse prevention.

B. Educational programming will emphasize the following:

- Modeling respect and care in relationships
- Encouraging individual gifts and interests
- Instructing adults in how to prevent, identify, and report abuse, and instructing children and youth on ways to stay safe in various situations.

II. Protection Plan

These procedures apply to all activities and programs sponsored by Shalom Mennonite Church.

A. Screening of Persons Working with Children and Youth

- Persons involved with primary leadership of junior and senior high youth should be 23 years of age or older.
- Persons interested in primary leadership of children and youth must have been in fellowship with this congregation for a minimum of six months, except for pastoral staff.
- No person who has been convicted of any criminal offense involving physical or sexual abuse, or who is required to register under the Kansas Offender Registration Act, will be allowed to work with children or youth in any capacity. To confirm this, the Safe Sanctuary Task force will check the Kansas Registered Offender website (<https://www.kbi.ks.gov/registeredoffender/>) and the national Sex Offender Registry (<https://www.nsopw.gov/>).

B. Training of Persons Working with Children and Youth

- All persons working with children and youth will be required to attend a training session on abuse prevention with refresher training recommended every two-three years. The training may include information on:
 - Recognizing signs and symptoms of child abuse;

¹ The Safe Sanctuaries Task Force is currently (2019) the Children, Youth, and Christian Education Committee, but a separate ad hoc task force may at times be convened.

- Responding to a child's report of abuse;
 - Procedures for reporting abuse to local authorities;
 - Behavioral expectations for volunteers, staff, and leaders in child and youth programs;
 - Location and use of all first aid and safety equipment.
 - Healthy touch, consent and appropriate interactions with children and youth.
 - Constructive, nonviolent and age-appropriate discipline.
- All persons working with children and youth will be required to sign a participation agreement annually (see Attachment I). All signed forms and reports will be kept in a locked file in the church office and be reviewed by members of the Safe Sanctuary Task Force.
 - Pastoral staff will be required to attend the Western District Conference Healthy Boundaries Training every three years. This is also required by WDC.
 - A background check is required of Shalom Mennonite Church pastoral staff prior to employment.

C. Guidelines for Healthy Touch

- Children need love. At times, affection can be appropriately expressed through physical touch that is in the view of others.
- Touch will not be based on the adult's emotional need, nor will it ever be forced on a child.
- Adults should practice consent and ask before initiating touch, such as prior to giving a side hug or handshake.
- Touch will be age appropriate, will never involve private parts (except as needed for diaper changing/wiping),
- Touch will only be offered as a response to the child's needs.

D. Supervision of Persons Working with Children and Youth at Shalom Church and on Official Church-Sanctioned Outings

- There will be at least two adults present when supervising children and youth during official church functions and outings: for infants through grade 5, adults must be 18 years of age or older; for junior and senior high youth, adults must be 23 years of age or older.
- During Sunday School, a hall monitor will be present in the children's education area, periodically checking on each class.

- Exceptions to the two-adult rule may be made in the following cases:
 - Because of the openness of classroom layout and interaction between classes one teacher per class may suffice for each Sunday School class, as long as the classroom door remains open and a hall monitor is present.
 - Because of consistent parental traffic through the nursery one adult with youth helpers may suffice for Sunday morning nursery staffing.

E. Obtaining Parental/Guardian Permission

- Persons interacting with Children and Youth must obtain the consent of the child’s parent or guardian before spending time with a child in an unsupervised one-to-one situation.
- In the youth group program, parents/guardians of the participants will sign a consent form.
- In the mentoring program, parents/guardians of the participants will sign a consent form. (See Attachment II – Mentoring Parent Affirmation Form)

F. Sharing Safety Expectations with Outside Groups

- This document will be shared with all groups using our facilities for children and youth programming in order to encourage them to be aware of safety issues.

G. Expectations when there is no scheduled activity.

- When there is no specific scheduled activity, children and youth are expected to remain in public and visible areas, while two adults are expected to provide supervision for children or youth to be in the basement or the sanctuary.

III. Reporting and Response Procedures

When reporting abuse, procedures differ depending on whether the victim is a child (section A) or an adult (section B).

A. When reporting the abuse or neglect of a minor, only reasonable suspicion is necessary. You do not have to have evidence or proof. Do not do your own investigation. Take the following steps:

- 1) First, report allegations to the Kansas Protection Report Center (1-800-922-5330) to be dealt with by appropriate authorities as defined by state and local laws. Pastors or Safe Sanctuary Task Force Members are available to help with this step.

2) If you have not done so already, notify a pastor or member of the Safe Sanctuary Task Force. They will have you record your report in writing using Shalom's reporting form, available in the church office or magazine rack in the gathering space. (Attachment III: Report of Suspected Incident Form.) Completed forms will be filed in a secure location in the church office. Church leadership will then be responsible for implementing the remainder of this response policy.

3) The congregation will immediately attend to the victim's safety and needs through pastoral care and referrals to outside agencies, like a child advocacy center. The victim's needs will be central to any following process.

B. When reporting the abuse of an adult, seek the consent of that adult before reporting to local authorities or church leadership. If you are the abused adult, you are encouraged to pursue any or all of the following options. When a report is made:

1) Incidents shall be recorded in writing by the concerned party. (See Attachment III: Report of Suspected Incident Form.) Blank copies of this form can be obtained from the church office or the magazine rack in the gathering space. Pastors or Safe Sanctuary Task Force Members are available to help with this step. Completed forms should be given to a pastor or member of the Safe Sanctuary Task Force for filing in a secure location in the church office.

2) Allegations will be reported to the Kansas Protection Report Center (1-800-922-5330) or to the local police (316-284-6030) and dealt with by appropriate authorities as defined by state and local laws. Pastors or Safe Sanctuary Task Force Members are available to help with this step.

3) The complainant will be directed to local resources as needed, such as a crisis center or trauma-informed therapy. (See Appendix: Local resources for survivors of abuse)

4) Throughout the process, the complainant is entitled to an advocate to help them evaluate their options and to communicate about the case on their behalf.

5) The alleged abuser may also name an advocate to aid in communication with the response team and Congregational Board.

C. When the congregational leadership becomes aware of a report of abuse, the following steps will be taken. These steps apply whenever the person accused of abuse is in fellowship within the congregation, regardless of the victim's involvement with the congregation.

1) A two-person response team will be named by the Congregational Board to carry the congregational process forward. This team will include:

- If the report of abuse involves a minor, one member of the Congregational Board and one member of the Safe Sanctuary Task Force.
- If the report of abuse involves only adults, one member of the Congregational Board and another member of the congregation appointed by the board.

The response team is not to include pastoral staff, or two individuals closely related to one another or any of the parties in the complaint.

2) Western District Conference will be contacted for congregational support and resourcing.

3) The accused individual will be informed that an allegation has been made against them, and will be asked to sign a limited access agreement for the duration of the investigation. This limited access agreement will relieve them of their congregational responsibilities, and set the terms for their continued participation in congregational life, up to suspension from all congregational events. The exact terms of the limited access agreement will be determined by the Congregational Board.

4) The Congregational Board will inform the congregation of the limited access agreement within seven days, both verbally and in writing. This may happen through an announcement during worship, a letter in church mailboxes, and an email to the congregational announcement email list. This will include a call for other complainants to come forward to the Pastors or Safe Sanctuary Task Force. Pastoral care resources will be offered. The congregation will be asked to pray for those involved.

D. Relationship between congregational process and outside legal processes.

1) Members of the congregational response team are not responsible for investigating the facts of the case. Rather, they mind the congregational process, outlined in this document, of communication and record-keeping.

2) If the victim of abuse is a minor, Child Protective Services and local law enforcement will conduct an investigation. The congregational response team will report the result of the investigation to the congregation.

3) Frequently, cases of reported abuse will involve outside legal activity, such as police investigations, restraining orders, or divorce settlements. Ongoing relationships within the congregation will be guided by these processes.

E. In the case that a complainant calls for an investigation of the congregation's role in or response to abuse.

1) An investigation will be carried out in consultation with the complainant.

2) The congregational response team, with input from Western District Conference, will contact a trained investigator or investigative team to complete the investigation.

3) The investigator(s) will establish a schedule for the investigation, and keep the response team informed of the investigation's progress. The response team will continue to communicate progress with the complainant and congregational leadership.

4) At the conclusion of the investigation, the complainant and the accused individual will be informed of the results in writing, as well as by phone and/or in person. The congregation will also be informed of the outcome in writing.

F. In addition to the procedures outlined in sections A-E, above, the following congregational actions will be taken:

- 1) Pastoral care will be made available to all, especially privileging the needs of the victim and their family.
- 2) Congregational leadership will attend to the need for healing and processing within the entire congregation. This could look like informational meetings, circle processes, prayer meetings, and task forces to address future concerns.
- 3) The response team will maintain a record of events in the congregation's process, from the first report through the outcome. This will include meetings and major communications that took place. The Congregational Board and pastors will help keep this timeline complete.
- 4) If the complainant agrees, and following all applicable confidentiality laws, the Congregational Board will make available public written communication about the case. This information can be requested by people within the congregation, or outside of it. Examples of this public written communication are letters from the Congregational Board to the congregation about the complaint, investigation process, or results, as well as the record mentioned in III.C.3.

G. Reports of abuse involving pastoral staff will be reported to Western District Conference and will go through their process. The congregational response will be carried out following sections C, D, E (as applicable) and F, above.

H. Transparent public communication is necessary in situations regarding abuse. With that in mind, issues regarding abuse will be dealt with in respect for the confidentiality of the names of victims and specific details of the abuse.

IV. Care of Survivors of Abuse

The congregation and pastors will seek to offer emotional and spiritual support and care for survivors of abuse. This support and care may be provided both from within our congregation, as we are able, and through referrals to appropriate resources in the wider community.

V. Integration of Offenders into the Congregation

A. When known offenders, persons being investigated for abuse, or persons who have been asked to sign a limited access agreement in a different congregation or organization, are seeking fellowship in our congregation:

- They will be assessed in terms of readiness and appropriateness for participation in church activities, both through personal conversation and by referring to their case history, court orders, treatment status, and other relevant information.
- They will be accountable to a group of at least five persons who will support the offender and develop and manage a limited access agreement for their safe participation in the life of the congregation. The agreement will be shared with the congregation. The written agreement will include supervision plans and clear definition of the role of the individual in church activities with no access to children or youth.
- They will be asked to share their story with the congregation. This can happen either publicly or through the Safe Sanctuary Task Force and the Congregational Board – whichever is deemed most appropriate to care for survivors within the congregation.
- The Safe Sanctuary Task Force will seek official information regarding the offender’s case from other sources (parole officer, news reports, or other public records), and communicate the necessary information to the congregation.
- If the limited access agreement is violated, the support team will meet and address the situation. The individual may not be welcome at future church gatherings.
- Conversations with known victims and survivors in the congregation will also take place prior to writing the plan and along the way.

VI. Policy upkeep and review

A. This policy will be reviewed each summer by the Safe Sanctuary Task Force. Any changes deemed necessary will be brought to the Congregational Board for approval.

Original document written August 2007

Revised September 2013

Revised August 2016

Revised November 2019

Revised November 2020

Appendix I: Resources for Survivors of Abuse

National Sexual Assault Hotline. For help finding local resources: 800.656.HOPE (4673)

Safe Hope Shelter. Advocacy, therapy, emergency shelter, and other resources. 24-Hour helpline: 316-217-1880 or 833-217-6004

Prairie View. Mental health services, counseling: 316-284-6400

Kansas Protection Report Center. 800-922-5330

Western District Conference: report ministerial misconduct.
<http://mennowdc.org/report-ministerial-misconduct-abuse/>

Appendix II: Documents and resources for Abuse Prevention and Response

Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-Credentialed Individuals:
<http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/SAP-Booklet-digital-5.5-x-8.5-FINAL.pdf>

Dove's Nest. Sample policies, speakers, consultation: dovesnest.net

MCUSA Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure, along with announcement forms and file protocols <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct/>