

Blossom Hill Mennonite Church
Child Protection Policy
regarding the prevention of sexual and other abuse
2010 Designated Pastor: Jane H. Peifer

Purpose

This policy has been established to:

1. help assure a safe, loving, and open atmosphere for children and youth, as well as adults who work with them, as they worship, study, play, and are nurtured in their Christian faith.
2. serve as a guide for the prevention of childhood sexual and other abuse by setting and enforcing standards of ethical behavior.
3. protect adults involved with children and youth activities.

According to our Anabaptist understanding of Biblical faith and what it means to be a faith community, we strive to follow Christ in word and deed. We are called by Christ to act with integrity and love in all our relationships, and to avoid exploitation of vulnerable people or the use of positions of power within the church or family. Because the combination of abuse and “the name of Jesus” is a very destructive form of abuse, this policy reflects our desire to protect “the name of Jesus” as well as all those who worship and fellowship with the Blossom Hill Mennonite Church community.

This policy stems from our awareness that abuse has been, and continues to be, a major problem in society. Statistics show that the church is not immune to this problem; in fact, churches can be especially vulnerable because they are naturally trusting and unsuspecting institutions.

This policy outlines Blossom Hill’s position on abusive behaviors and its expectations for appropriate behavior regarding the care and supervision of children. Our goal is that all who attend Blossom Hill are able to pursue activities and worship in a safe environment where abusive conduct is not tolerated and where staff and volunteers are protected from false or wrongful allegations.

Definitions

Child Sexual Abuse is any contact or interaction between a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent, and an adult, when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult person or of a third party. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered to be forced, whether or not consented to by the child. Currently, in the state of Pennsylvania, anyone younger than 18 years of age is considered to be a child.

Although this policy focuses primarily on child sexual abuse, all forms of child abuse are prohibited, and are included under this policy. Definitions of abuse from the **Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (CPSL [Title 23 PA.C.S. Chapter 63]**, are as follows:

- A) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child.

- B) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to a child.
- C) Sexual Abuse or Exploitation: (1) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct. (2) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in simulation of sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting, and filming. It also includes any of the following offenses committed against a child: rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation.
- D) Endangering Welfare of Children: A recent act, failure to act or series of the acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. A parent, guardian, or other person supervising the welfare of a child under 18 years of age, or a person that employs or supervises such a person commits an offense if he knowingly endangers the welfare of the child by violating a duty of care, protection, or support.
- E) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning.

Sexual Harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It consists of inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's sense of well-being by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment from the viewpoint of the affected individual. It is defined by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act as follows:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Although in a legal sense, the term "sexual harassment" deals with the workplace, the sexual harassment of anyone – including all adults and children – is prohibited in this church.

Sexual Misconduct includes: child sexual abuse as defined above; sexual harassment as defined above; rape and sexual contact by force, threat or intimidation; sexual behavior, which includes but is not limited to offensive, obscene, or suggestive language or conduct; unacceptable visual contact; and touching or fondling which is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another. Sexual misconduct directed toward a person of any age is prohibited in this church.

An ***Approved Adult*** is anyone over 20 years of age who has satisfied the requirements of this Child Protection Policy. An Approved Adult can be an employee or non-employee of the congregation. Approved Adults include, but are not limited to all staff, Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School teachers, youth mentors, youth group leaders, and nursery volunteers.

Policies and Procedures

Selection of Approved Adults

To protect the children/youth in our care, the following guidelines are established for those who desire to work with children/youth less than 18 years of age.

Approved Adults must:

1. be 20 years old.
2. attend BHMC for a minimum of six months.
3. complete an Approved Adult application form. (see appendix)
4. sign and comply with our Child Protection Covenant. (see appendix)
5. attend a congregation-authorized training session which covers
 - * the Child Protection Policy
 - * procedures to follow for all children and youth activities
 - * appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse
 - * state laws regarding child abuse.

In addition, paid church staff, as well as youth mentors, will complete a criminal records check authorization form and Pennsylvania child abuse clearance form. As of July 1, 2008, Pennsylvania law required that any staff hired after that date expected to have substantial contact with children must also submit fingerprints and obtain FBI clearance. The congregation will pay for these clearances.

Volunteers who have attended for fewer than six months may work with children if an Approved Adult is also present.

Applications and completed forms will be locked in a confidential file under the responsibility of the designated pastor. Applications may be made available to the chair of the Child-Safe Church Committee. Clearances are confidential and will only be made available to current pastors of the congregation.

Approved Adult supervision

In all church activities involving children and youth, no fewer than two Approved Adults should be present. Every attempt will be made to provide for this ratio. The nursery should always be attended by at least two Approved Adults. The only exception to the “two Approved Adults” policy is in the youth mentoring program – see full description below.

In Sunday school situations where only one Approved Adult teacher is available, another Approved Adult will be assigned as a “roamer,” to move in and out of Sunday school rooms throughout the session.

In situations where teenagers are providing childcare, at least one Approved Adult should also be present.

The glass in Sunday school room doors must never be covered. If a Sunday school room door does not have a window, the door must be kept ajar.

Only a parent or caregiver (i.e. grandparent) should be permitted to remove a child from a group or from a teacher's supervision for any reason.

Youth mentoring Program:

Youth mentors are same-gender, Approved Adults, chosen by 12-year old youth, and approved by the Pastoral Team and Child Protection Committee, to provide friendship and companionship for youth throughout their teenage years. Mentors are offered to youth to facilitate their spiritual growth and maturity, complementing the role of parents. These relationships are an exception to the policy of needing 2 Approved Adults present for all activities with youth. This additional risk is addressed by the following policies:

1. Mentor and mentee will each keep a log of the times and places they meet. The child's parent or legal guardian will initial the log the child keeps after each meeting; the designated pastor will initial the log the adult keeps after each meeting. The logs will include designation of the date/time/place/duration and purpose of the meeting, and will be provided to mentors in their training session. All logs are subject to review by the Child Protection Committee.
2. All mentoring with children or youth should always occur in a public place, never in a private car, or in a vacated building.
3. In the event of one-on-one evening meetings, be aware of time. This is to avoid any appearance of impropriety, and to discourage mentor pairs from meeting late in the evening.
4. Mentors are not to engage children/youth in counseling that requires professional help. For example – drug or alcohol addiction, sexual assault by a dating partner; severe problems with parental relationships, sustained depression or chronic anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal tendencies, etc. The need for formal or professional counseling should be turned over to the Pastoral team.

Appropriate touch

Children need love. At times, this can be appropriately expressed through physical touch, such as hugging, a pat on the back, an arm around the shoulder, holding an infant or toddler, etc. If an adult working with children shows physical affection, it must occur with another adult present.

Adult staff and volunteers should not force affection on any child. If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, the child's wishes will be respected at all times.

At no time should a child, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals or buttocks.

Diapering and bathroom assistance

In general, children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before and after classes or other activities. In this way parents can assist as needed.

Diapering: Two approved adults must be present when clothes or diapers are being changed. A parent can also be recruited to change clothes or a diaper.

Two and Three Year Olds: An approved adult must accompany children to and from the bathroom and inform another adult when this takes place. The adult will assist the child only when necessary. If assistance is needed, the adult must leave the stall door open.

Preschool: An approved adult must accompany preschoolers to the bathroom. The adult will remain outside the stall. If assistance is required, the approved adult should encourage independence but can assist with minimal tasks if necessary (belts, snaps, etc.).

Before and after services

Children are not permitted to play in front of the building at any time. Parents are responsible to monitor where their children are playing. The play area gate will remain closed and locked.

General permission slips

Children/youth must have permission to participate in activities. Parents/guardians need to fill out and sign a General permission form, which includes pertinent medical information and emergency phone numbers, and the opportunity to cross out any activities in which their child is not allowed to participate. These forms will be updated every year and filed in the church office.

Overnight activities

An additional overnight-permission form must be filled out for children/youth engaged in overnight activities. Overnight activities involving children/youth will be chaperoned by at least two Approved Adults. If the event involves children/youth of both genders, then there should be at least one Approved Adult of each gender. The designated pastor and/or other designee may waive the requirement for overnight-permission slips when the slip serves no useful purpose (for example when a youth is accompanied by his or her parent to the activity).

Transportation

When children/youth are transported for church activities, they will be transported in groups with at least one Approved Adult in each vehicle. Drivers must be 21 years of age or older.

Reporting suspected child/youth abuse

Volunteers should inform the designated pastor immediately when there is any reasonable cause to suspect that a child/youth under their care, guidance or supervision, or a child/youth not directly under their care, guidance or supervision, but involved in any church program or activity, has been abused by anyone (including but not limited to the child/youth's family, guardians, an Approved Adult or volunteer). The volunteer must also document the suspected abuse by completing a *Suspected Child Abuse Incident Report* (See appendix).

When the designated pastor is informed of suspected abuse, he or she will follow the guidelines defined for Mandated Reporters in the Handbook for Recognizing and Reporting of Child Abuse in Pennsylvania.

1. **(Required by law)** Call The Pennsylvania ChildLine and Abuse Registry (ChildLine) at 800-932-0313.
2. **(Not required by law)** Call Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency (717-299-7925) as follow-up in order to put the reporter directly in touch with the persons

who are familiar with the community and will be taking action on the report made to ChildLine.

3. **(Required by law)** Within 48 hours of the oral report to ChildLine, complete and send a written report of the suspected abuse on Form CY-47 (see appendix), based on the oral report and Suspected Child Abuse Incident Report of the volunteer.
4. Notify the person who made the report as to the date the written report on Form CY-47 was sent.
5. Notify the Administrative Team chair and the chair of the Child-Safe Church Committee of the report.
6. Information that the designated Pastor can request about a child who was the subject of a report, either via phone call or in writing the county agency is:
 - ❖ The final status of the child abuse report, whether it is indicated, founded or unfounded.
 - ❖ Any services provided, arranged for by the county agency to protect the child.

Response to the Reporting of suspected child/youth abuse

All allegations of child/youth abuse or serious physical neglect will be taken seriously by Pastoral Team and Administrative Team and the Child-Safe Church Committee. All allegations will be treated in strict confidence. All reporting steps taken will be documented, including a log of phone calls, personal visits, and written reports. All communications regarding the report of child abuse shall attempt to protect the dignity and privacy of those person affected by the report including the alleged child/youth victim and the person suspected of child abuse, while at the same time ensuring that persons in responsibility and law enforcement authorities remain fully informed.

The congregation will cooperate with government authorities investigating allegation of abuse. The initiative for investigating alleged abuse resides with the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and shall not be carried out by the congregation.

Additionally, these steps will be followed:

1. The person suspected of abuse will discontinue his/her work with children/youth until the allegation can be properly investigated.
2. The designated Pastor will notify parents or guardians of all children/youth involved in an alleged incident. Discretion may be used if the parents or guardians are the person suspected of the abuse. All phone calls or visits will be documented.
3. In the event that a church-related incident has occurred, the Administrative Team chair will notify the congregation's insurance broker and/or carrier when the reporting procedures have been initiated. All contacts will be documented.
4. The Pastoral Team and the Administrative Team will determine whether the congregation shall engage legal counsel in consultation with the insurance carrier.
5. The Administrative Team will authorize the designated Pastor or Administrative Team chair to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only that person may speak for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys, or others.

Providing community for known sexual offenders:

Known sexual offenders who have fulfilled their sentences, are willing to participate in victim offender reconciliation meetings, and abide by the guidelines noted below, are welcome to attend worship services at Blossom Hill.

Minimum guidelines under which a known sexual offender may participate:

1. **Offenders are expected to comply fully** with all restrictions and requirements placed upon them as a result of any legal actions, and provide the designated pastor with copies of any judgments, conditions of parole, or other documents in which restrictions on or requirements as a result of convictions or judgments are stated.
2. **Offenders are expected to continually participate in a professional counseling program,** specifically addressing their abusive behaviors, for the entire time they participate in this church community.
3. **Offenders will not accept any leadership** or representational position within or on behalf of this church. Known sexual offenders can never become Approved Adults.
4. **The CPC will assign supervisors to any offender participating in the life of the congregation.** They will be adults who are not related to the offender. They will receive training that will include information on sexual offender dynamics, the long-term impact of sexual abuse on victims, and any specific conditions related to participation under the specific covenant established.
5. **The CPC will identify a small group of “covenant partners” for offenders.** This small group will provide spiritual, emotional and practical support and will meet with the offender on a regular basis. The supervisors and “covenant partners” will not be the same individuals.
6. **The offender may participate in worship in the sanctuary and attend adult Sunday school classes.** The CSCC may designate a specific service and time for attendance. Any other activities the offender is permitted to participate in will be detailed in the covenant.
7. **A supervisor must accompany the offender at all times when on church property.**
8. **At no time should the offender deliberately place him or herself in or remain in any location in or around the church facilities which would cause undue distress to others.**
9. **At least twice each calendar year and as otherwise requested, the offender shall meet with and report to the designated pastor regarding status of adherence to these guidelines.**
10. **If the offender should decide to relocate membership (or substantially attend) another congregation,** the designated pastor will seek to inform the leadership of that congregation of the conditions of these guidelines.

Child Protection Committee (CPC)

The CPC will include the designated pastor, a nursery committee representative, an Administrative Team representative, and one member appointed at large.

The committee will:

1. implement, enforce, review, and revise this Child Protection Policy every other year.
2. provide training for all staff and Approved Adults regarding child abuse and this policy.
3. maintain a list of Approved Adults.
4. monitor Approved Adults to ensure that policies are being followed.
5. be accountable to the Administrative Team.
6. be kept apprised of investigations.
7. oversee the support and accountability of known sexual offenders attending the church, by assigning a supervisor and covenant partners and setting boundaries.
8. keep file of General permission slips up to date

The designated pastor will:

1. review all applications for Approved Adults.
2. collect and forward requests for clearances, with cover letters, to PA State Police, PA Dept of Public Welfare, and the FBI.
3. maintain all clearances.
4. receive and process reports of suspected abuse.
5. make available, upon request of an individual, his/her own clearance reports.
6. review Youth mentor logs.
7. meet with and review known sexual offender's adherence to guidelines and covenants

The CPC chair will be appointed by the Pastoral Team and will:

1. document that required forms are received for all applicants.
2. have access to applications but not clearances.
3. chair committee meetings.
4. ensure that annual congregation-authorized training sessions are held, and videotaped for subsequent viewing and training.

Adopted February 2010