



The Dove's Nest Collaborative: Mennonites Keeping Children Safe

*Empowering and equipping Mennonites to keep children safe
in their homes, churches, and communities.*

Website: www.DovesNest.net

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Child Protection Practices in Mennonite Church USA Churches

Survey Results

Jeanette Harder, Kristina Haynie, 8-27-2010

I. Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to determine the characteristics, practices, and experiences of Mennonite Church USA churches with and without written child protection policies.

II. Methodology

The survey was developed by members of the leadership team for The Dove's Nest Collaborative: Jeanette Harder, Linda Gehman Peachey, and Nancy Kauffmann (see Appendix 1). The survey was administered online through Survey Monkey and was piloted by four pastors of Mennonite Church USA churches.

During the month of June 2010, invitations were sent twice through conference ministers and once by E-mail to all churches listed in the Mennonite Church USA online directory with valid E-mail addresses. Responses were received from 269 out of the approximate 855 Mennonite Church USA churches (32% response rate).

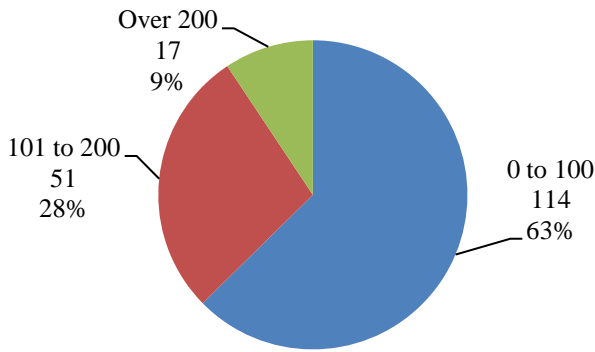
Analysis of survey results were conducted by Jeanette Harder and Kristina Haynie, and reviewed by the members of the leadership team of The Dove's Nest Collaborative.

III. Sample Description

Size of Churches

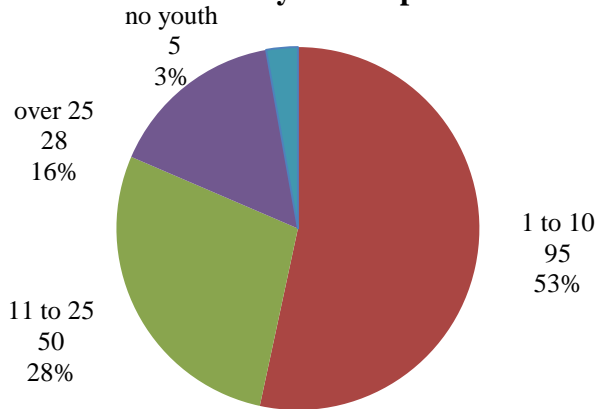
The numbers of individuals who attend weekly worship in respondents' churches are shown in Figures 1-3. About half of churches who responded to this survey had 100 or fewer adults, 10 or fewer youth, and 15 or fewer children in weekly worship. The other half of churches were larger. (One-third of respondents did not answer these questions.)

Figure 1 # of Adults Who Attend Weekly Worship



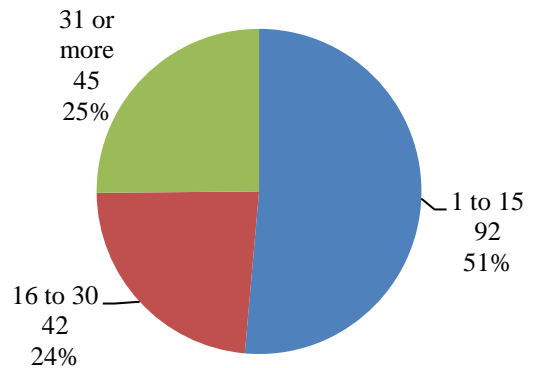
Missing responses: 87 (32%)

Figure 2 # of Youth Who Attend Weekly Worship



Missing responses: 91 (34%)

Figure 3 # of Children Who Attend Weekly Worship



Missing responses: 90 (34%)

Race and Language of Church Members

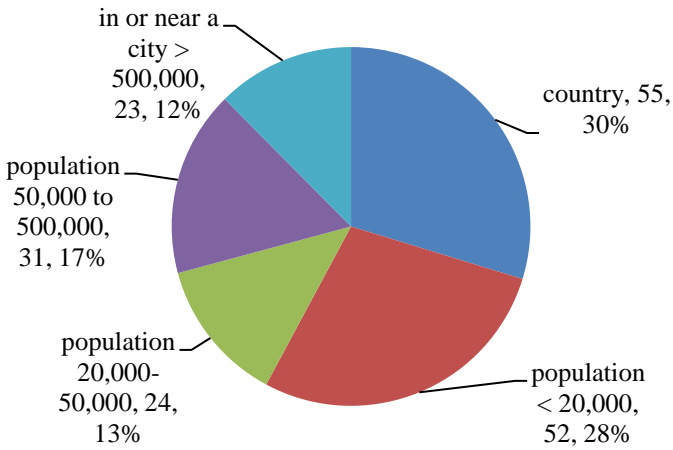
English was the primary language for nearly all responding churches. Only one church reported that English was not the primary language spoken by its members. (One-third of respondents did not answer this question.)

Respondents were asked what percent of their church was certain races. On average, 93% of members of responding churches was White/Caucasian with less than 5% being Latino/Hispanic, mixed racial/ethnic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or African-American/Black. (One-third of respondents did not answer this question.)

Setting of Church

As shown in Figure 4, just under one-third of churches were located in the country, and less than one-third were in a community of less than 20,000 people. The remaining two-thirds of churches were located in larger communities.

Figure 4 Setting of Church



Conference Membership of Churches

As shown in Table 1, at least one church in every conference responded to the survey. (One-third of respondents did not answer this question.)

Table 1 Conferences of Responding Churches

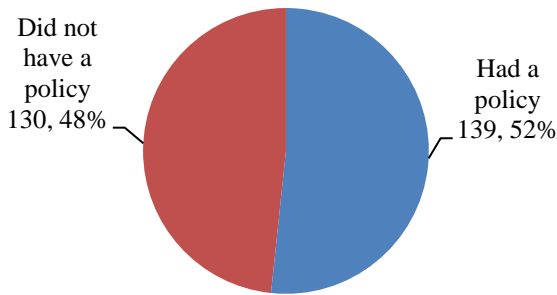
Conference	Number	Percent of Responses	Conference	Number	Percent of Responses
Lancaster	24	14%	Southeast	5	3%
Indiana-Michigan	18	10%	Mountain States	4	2%
Central Plains	17	10%	South Central	4	2%
Western District	17	10%	Pacific Southwest	3	2%
Ohio	14	8%	Identifies with more than one conference	3	2%
Pacific Northwest	13	7%	Eastern	2	1%
Franconia	11	6%	Franklin	1	1%
Central	10	6%	Gulf States	1	1%
Illinois	9	5%	New York	1	1%
Atlantic Coast	7	4%	North Central	1	1%
Virginia	7	4%			
Allegheny	6	3%			

IV. Results

Written Child Protection Policies

As shown in Figure 5, about half of responding churches had a written child protection policy and half did not.

Figure 5 Written Child Protection Policies

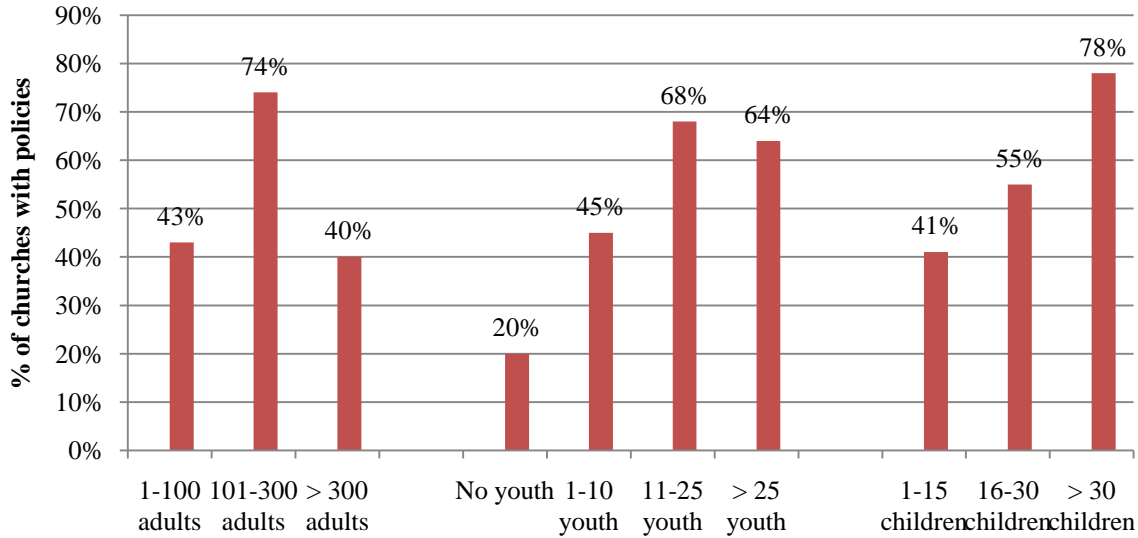


As shown in Table 2 and Figure 6, larger churches (those with more than 100 adults, more than 10 youth, or more than 15 children who attend weekly worship) were much more likely to have written child protection policies than were smaller churches. The setting in which the church was located did not appear to have a relationship with whether the church had a written child protection policy.

Table 2 Characteristics of Churches with Child Protection Policies

	χ^2	Had a policy	Did not have a policy	Missing	Totals
# of adults who attend weekly worship				89 (33%)	
1-100 adults	16.547	48 (43%)	65 (58%)		113 (100%)
101-300 adults	$p \leq .000$	46 (74%)	16 (26%)		62 (100%)
> 300 adults		2 (40%)	3 (60%)		5 (100%)
Totals		96 (53%)	84 (47%)		180 (100%)
# of youth who attend weekly worship				91 (34%)	
No youth	10.381	1 (20%)	4 (80%)		5 (100%)
1-10 youth	$p = .016$	43 (45%)	52 (55%)		95 (100%)
11-25 youth		34 (68%)	16 (32%)		50 (100%)
> 25 youth		18 (64%)	10 (36%)		45 (100%)
Totals		96 (54%)	83 (46%)		179 (100%)
# of children who attend weekly worship				90 (34%)	
1-15 children	16.194	38 (41%)	54 (59%)		92 (100%)
16-30 children	$p \leq .000$	23 (55%)	19 (45%)		42 (100%)
> 30 children		35 (78%)	10 (22%)		45 (100%)
Totals		96 (54%)	83 (46%)		179 (100%)

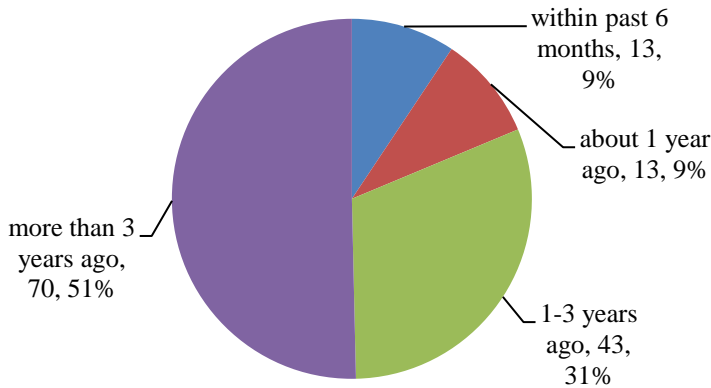
Figure 6 Churches with Child Protection Policies



(Example interpretation from Figure 6: 43% of churches with 1-100 adults have child protection policies.)

Over half of churches who had a written child protection policy adopted the policy more than three years ago (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 When Child Protection Policy was Adopted

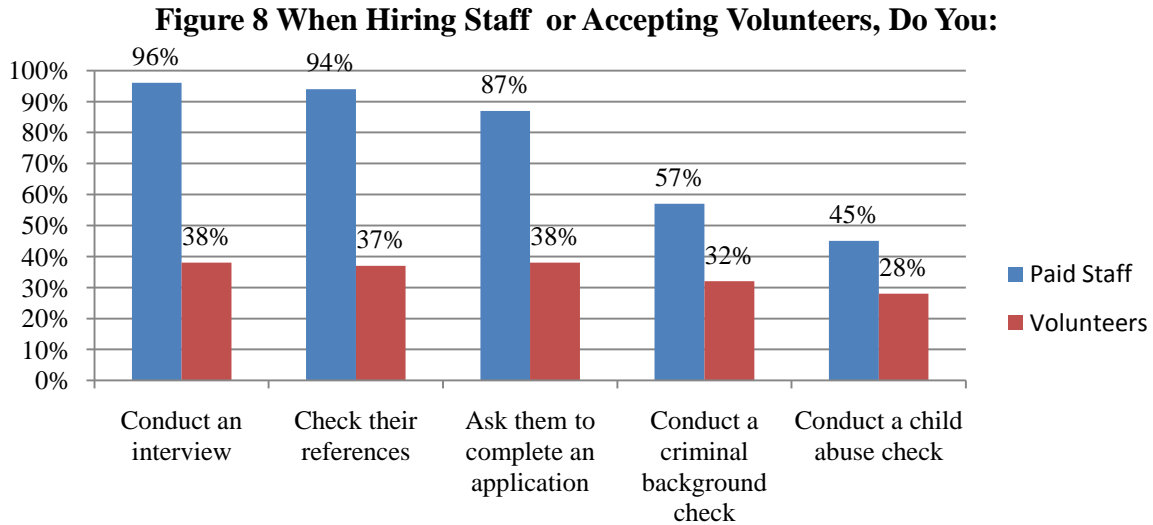


In churches that had written child protection policies, respondents indicated that more than 95% of parents with young children, teachers of young children, youth leaders, and staff know about the policy. Over 75% of all adults know about the policy.

Practices Related to Child Protection

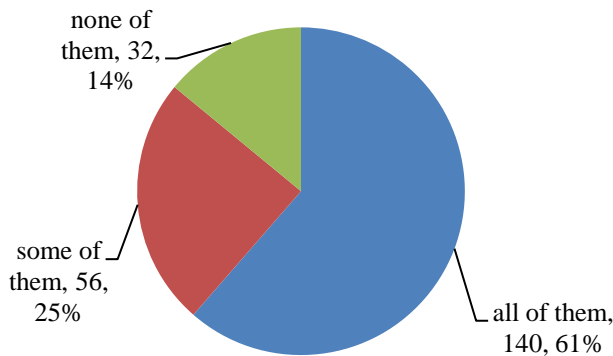
When hiring paid staff, most responding churches conduct an interview, check references, and ask applicants to complete an application. About half of churches conduct a criminal background

check and about half conduct a child abuse check when hiring paid staff. When accepting volunteers, about one-third of responding churches use these personnel practices. (See Figure 8.)



More than half of responding churches had internal windows in all church offices and classrooms (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 How Many Church Offices/Classrooms have Internal Windows?



About one-third of respondents have one adult and one youth in the nursery during worship, and about one-third have two adults. Sixteen respondents wrote that they do not staff a nursery at this time, or parents care for their own children, as needed.

Nearly three-fourths of respondents have one teacher in their children’s Sunday School classes. The category of “one teacher plus one roaming adult or superintendent” was formed based on comments written; it is unknown how many churches do this. (See Figures 10 and 11.)

Figure 10 Individuals in Nursery During Worship

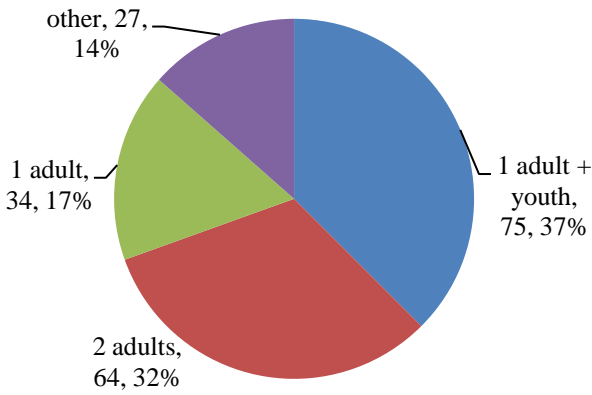
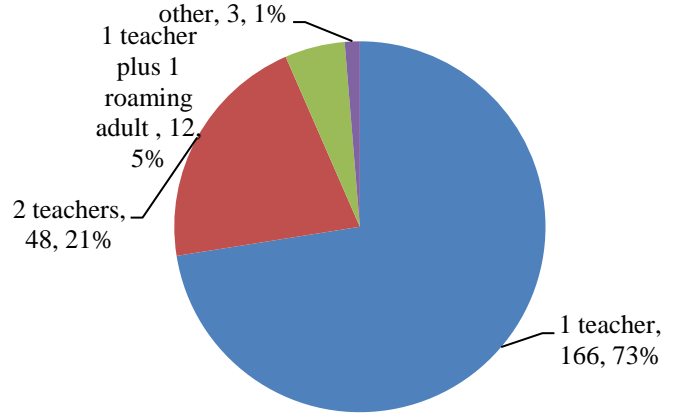


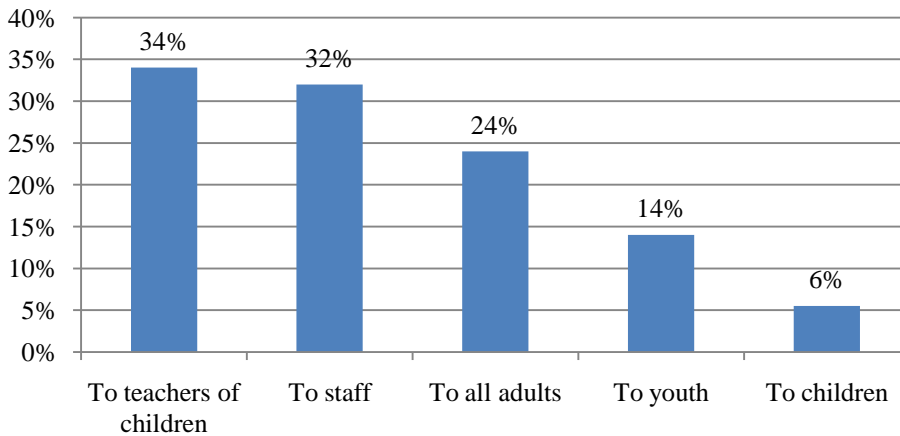
Figure 11 Teachers in S.S. Classes



Of those who responded to the survey, 44% (n=95) had a written plan for reporting suspected child abuse and 22% (n=48) had a written plan for integrating someone with a history of sexual offense while still keeping children safe. Of respondents, 9% (n=19) had suspected child abuse or neglect of a child connected to their church. (19% missing in each of these variables.)

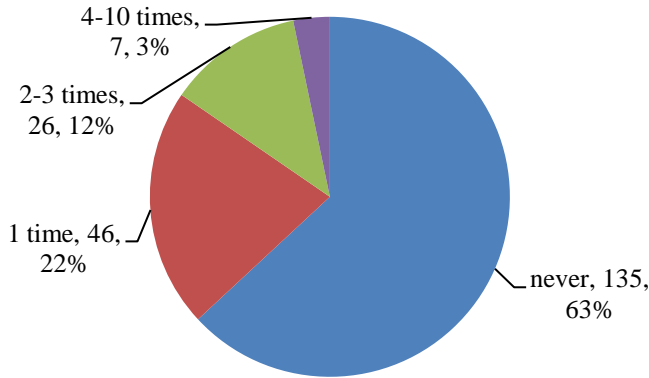
One-third of respondents provide a minimum of one hour of training on child abuse/protection to teachers of children and staff (see Figure 12). (20% missing.)

Figure 12 Provide at Least 1 Hour of Training on Child Abuse/Protection



Nearly two thirds of respondents indicated that a child protection theme had not been incorporated into worship during the last one year. (See Figure 13.) (20% missing.)

Figure 13 Child Protection Theme in Worship



As shown in Table 3 and Figure 14, churches with written child protection policies report more child protection practices than do churches without written child protection policies. The differences are most significant in these areas: having a written plan for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, asking volunteers to complete an application, providing training on child abuse/protection to teachers and staff, and having internal windows in all church offices and classrooms.

Table 3 Child Protection Practices of Churches With and Without Child Protection Policies

	Missing	χ^2	Had a policy	Did not have a policy
When hiring staff, do you:				
Conduct an interview	47 (18%)	.021 $p = .884$	111 (96%)	101 (95%)
Check references	50 (19%)	1.244 $p = .265$	112 (96%)	94 (92%)
Ask them to complete an application	47 (18%)	9.079 $p = .003$	111 (93%)	82 (80%)
Conduct a criminal background check	64 (24%)	25.658 $p \leq .000$	79 (74%)	38 (39%)
Conduct a child abuse check	74 (28%)	22.365 $p \leq .000$	62 (61%)	26 (28%)
When accepting volunteers, do you:				
Conduct an interview	68 (25%)	2.728 $p = .099$	44 (44%)	33 (33%)
Check references	67 (25%)	16.935 $p \leq .000$	52 (51%)	23 (23%)
Ask them to complete an application	64 (24%)	64.468 $p \leq .000$	68 (64%)	9 (9%)
Conduct a criminal background check	57 (21%)	32.653 $p \leq .000$	55 (50%)	13 (13%)
Conduct a child abuse check	70 (26%)	36.618 $p \leq .000$	47 (47%)	8 (8%)

	<i>Missing</i>	χ^2	Had a policy	Did not have a policy
Provided at least one hour of training on child abuse/ protection to:				
Adults	60 (22%)	27.937 $p \leq .000$	42 (39%)	9 (9%)
Children	68 (25%)	4.651 $p = .098$	9 (9%)	2 (2%)
Youth	68 (25%)	21.202 $p \leq .000$	24 (23%)	3 (3%)
Teachers	55 (20%)	44.597 $p \leq .000$	61 (54%)	11 (11%)
Staff	56 (21%)	42.360 $p \leq .000$	58 (51%)	10 (10%)
Other child protection practices:				
Have internal windows in all church offices and classrooms	41 (15%)	44.261 $p \leq .000$	99 (79%)	41 (40%)
Have at least two adults in nursery during worship	69 (26%)	10.636 $p = .014$	47 (40%)	17 (21%)
Have at least two adults in each classroom (or one adult and a roaming adult)	40 (15%)	19.173 $p = .001$	46 (37%)	15 (14%)
Have a written plan for integrating an individual with history of sexual offense	54 (20%)	37.906 $p \leq .000$	44 (39%)	4 (4%)
Have a written plan for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect	52 (19%)	112.304 $p \leq .000$	89 (77%)	6 (6%)
Have you suspected child abuse or neglect with a child connected to your church?	51 (19%)	1.934 $p = .164$	13 (11%)	6 (6%)
Incorporated child protection theme into worship in past 12 months	55 (20%)	2.075 $p = .557$	46 (41%)	33 (32%)
(Example interpretation: Of responding churches that had policies, 96% conduct interviews when hiring staff. Of responding churches that did not have policies, 95% conduct interviews when hiring staff.)				

Figure 14 Child Protection Practices in Churches With and Without Written Policies

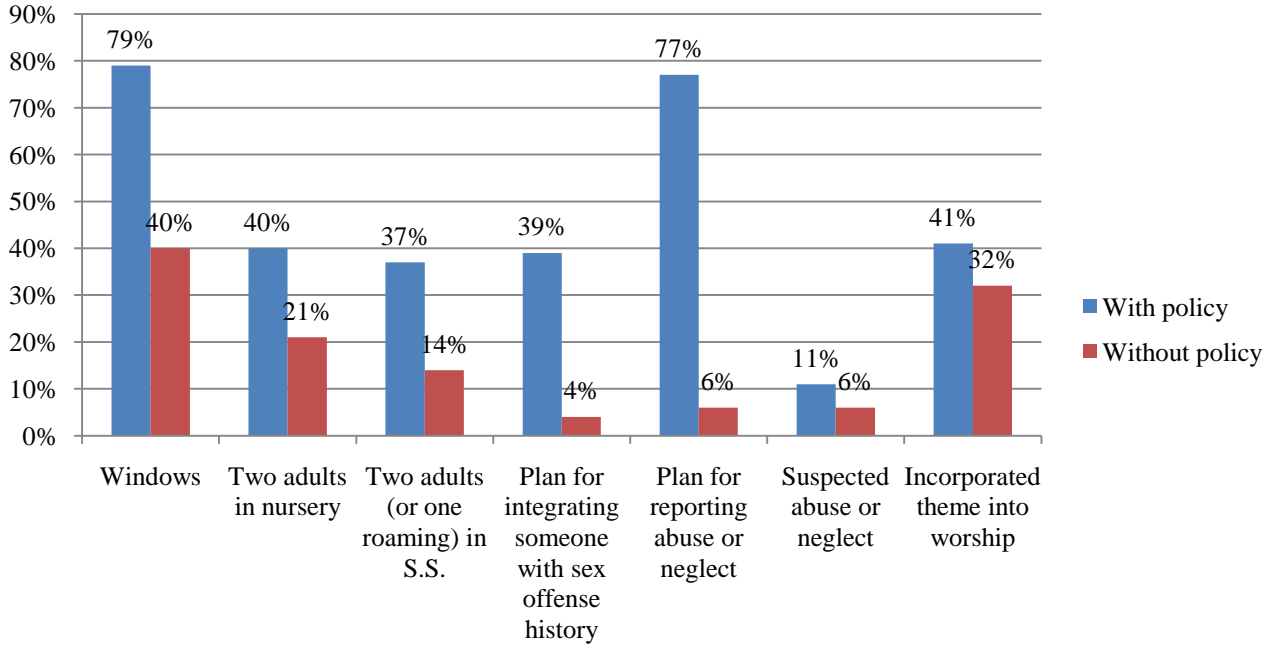


Table 4 provides a summary of responses to the question, “Have you suspected child abuse or neglect of a child connected to your church?”

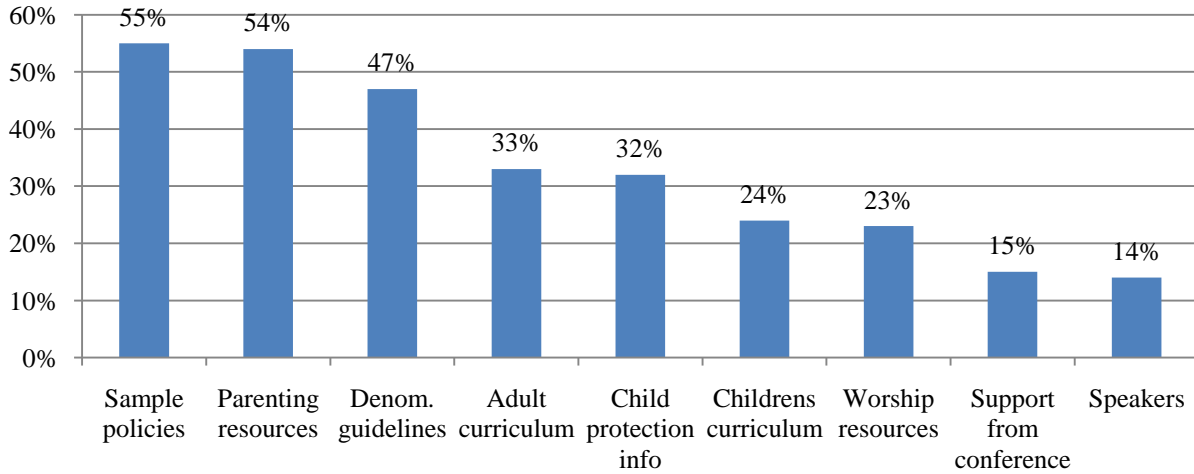
**Table 4 Open-Ended Responses:
“Have you suspected child abuse or neglect of a child connected to your church?”**

#	Type of Response
5	Yes, we suspected child abuse or neglect of a child who is somewhat involved with church activities, but the rest of the family is not involved with our church. The authorities were either already involved or became involved.
4	Yes, we suspected child abuse or neglect and we reported to the authorities.
2	Yes, we suspected child abuse or neglect, and the situation was addressed (unknown if it was reported to the authorities).
2	Yes, we have suspected child abuse or neglect (no indication if anything was done).
1	We are currently helping a family through an abusive situation.
1	We suspected child abuse or neglect, confronted the situation, and consequently, developed a policy that we give to every incoming church member.
1	We suspect child abuse or neglect in a child in our church right now and the process is underway.
1	The perpetrator is in prison.

Respondents were asked to identify three things that would help their church protect children. Most respondents wanted sample child protection policies, parenting resources, and denominational guidelines. Many respondents also wanted adult and children’s curriculum, child

protection information, and worship resources. (See Figure 15.) (23% missing, also 11% indicated more than three things.)

Figure 15 What Churches Want



As shown in Table 5, churches with child protection policies want worship and parenting resources, and adult and children’s curriculum. Churches without child protection policies want sample policies, information on child protection, and denominational guidelines. (23% missing)

Table 5 What Churches With and Without Policies Want

	χ^2	Had a policy	Did not have a policy	Totals
Sample policies	41.140 $p \leq .000$	39 (34%)	75 (66%)	114 (100%)
Parenting resources	8.038 $p = .005$	71 (63%)	41 (37%)	112 (100%)
Denominational guidelines	8.909 $p = .003$	42 (43%)	55 (57%)	97 (100%)
Adult curriculum	1.781 $p = .182$	42 (61%)	27 (39%)	69 (100%)
Child protection information	9.596 $p = .002$	26 (39%)	41 (61%)	67 (100%)
Childrens curriculum	.854 $p = .355$	30 (60%)	20 (40%)	50 (100%)
Worship resources	2.210 $p = .137$	30 (64%)	17 (36%)	47 (100%)

(Example interpretation: Of the 114 responding churches that wanted sample policies, 66% did not have a policy and 34% did have a policy.)

Table 6 shows a summary of responses to the question, “What comments do you have on protecting children and strengthening families in your church?”

**Table 6 Open-Ended Responses:
“What comments do you have on protecting children
and strengthening families in your church?”**

#	Type of Response
13	Our church is small.
10	We are in the beginning stages of developing a child protection policy or implementing child protection practices.
9	Adopting a child protection policy or doing trainings is/could be inconvenient and difficult.
9	Offered suggestions/opinions related to child protection.
6	This survey is a good reminder that our church needs to focus on child protection issues.
5	We do not have (m)any children in our church.
4	We are in the process of adopting a child protection policy.
4	Discussed procedures/programs that the church has implemented to protect children.
4	We do not have a child protection policy, but we do have something that addresses similar concerns.
4	We require youth/adults to be members for a certain length of time before they are allowed to work with children in the church.
3	We have a child protection policy (or informal procedures) and are satisfied with it.
1	Suggestions regarding the survey itself.

V. Discussion

Description of churches: Nearly all responding churches had fewer than 200 adults on a typical weekly worship service. Nearly two-thirds of churches had fewer than 100 adults. Half of responding churches had fewer than 10 children and 15 youth. Nearly all responding churches were primarily comprised of white/Caucasian members. Over half of churches were located in the country or a small-to-moderate size town. While responses were received from every conference, some conferences were more represented than others. About one-tenth of responding churches acknowledged they have suspected the abuse or neglect of a child connected to their church.

Who has policies? About half of responding churches had a written child protection policy and half did not. Larger churches (those with more than 100 adults, more than 10 youth, or more than 15 children who attend weekly worship) were much more likely to have written child protection policies than were smaller churches. The setting in which the church was located did not appear to have a relationship with whether the church had a written child protection policy. Half of responding churches have had a written child protection policy for more than three years.

Overall child protection practices: When hiring paid staff, most responding churches conduct an interview, check references, and ask applicants to complete an application. About half of responding churches conduct a criminal background check and about half conduct a child abuse check when hiring paid staff. When accepting volunteers, about one-third of responding churches use the personnel practices listed above. More than half of responding churches had internal windows in all church offices and classrooms. About one-third of respondents had one adult and

one youth in the nursery during worship, and about one-third had two adults. Nearly three-fourths of respondents had one teacher in their children's Sunday School classes. Fewer than half of respondents had a written plan for reporting suspected child abuse and fewer than one-fourth had a written plan for integrating someone with a history of sexual offense while still keeping children safe. One-third of respondents provided a minimum of one hour of training on child abuse/protection to teachers of children and staff. Nearly two thirds of respondents indicated that a child protection theme had not been incorporated into worship during the last one year.

Child protection practices in churches with and without policies:

Churches with written child protection policies reported more child protection practices than did churches without written child protection policies. The differences were most significant in these areas: having a written plan for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, asking volunteers to complete an application, providing training on child abuse/protection to teachers and staff, and having internal windows in all church offices and classrooms. Churches with policies still have room for improvement with their child protection practices, particularly in the areas of screening staff and volunteers, providing training to teachers and staff, having two adults with children and youth at all times, and having a written plan for integrating an individual with history of sexual offense into the life of the church while still protecting children and youth.

Limitations

1. Almost no response from intercultural churches, and from churches in some conferences.
2. With a survey, we cannot know if behaviors reflect intentions or responses provided.
3. The survey was conducted online during one summer month. Churches without ready access to Internet or E-mail and/or without permanent staff may not have responded.
4. Although anonymity was offered, churches without a child protection policy or without awareness of the need for child protection practices may not have responded. This survey is likely skewed in favor of churches with child protection policies and practices in place.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendations for Dove's Nest and denominational leaders:

1. Dialogue with intercultural churches and with churches in conferences not highly represented in these survey results.
2. Assist small churches (less than 100 adults) with writing and adopting child protection policies and practices.
3. Offer education/training and awareness-building on child abuse and neglect to churches, especially at conference annual meetings.
4. Make sample child protection policies available to churches.
5. Make parenting resources available to churches.
6. Require child protection training, and criminal background and child abuse checks prior to pastoral ordination.

Recommendations for churches:

1. Each church will have a written and implemented child protection policy.
2. Install internal windows in all church classrooms and offices; until these are in place, leave doors cracked open.

3. If it is not possible to have two adult teachers in all Sunday School classes, identify an adult to be roving the hallways.
4. Provide annual training on child abuse prevention to all church members.
5. Incorporate a child protection theme into worship each quarter.

*For sample policies, worship resources, and other information,
see the Dove's Nest website: www.DovesNest.net.*

* 1. A child protection policy is a written document that outlines ways to keep children safe in your community(s) and what you will do if child abuse or neglect is suspected.

Does your church have a written child protection policy?

yes

no (click on "next" to go to next page)

2. When was your church's child protection policy adopted?

within the last 6 months

about 1 year ago

1-3 years ago

more than 3 years ago

3. Who in your church knows about your child protection policy?

	yes	no
parents of children and youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
teachers of children and youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
church staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
youth leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
all adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. When hiring a paid staff member (including a pastor), do you:

	yes	no
ask them to complete an application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct an interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct a criminal background check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct a child abuse check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
check references	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. When accepting a volunteer to teach or care for children or youth, do you:

	yes	no
ask them to complete an application	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct an interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct a criminal background check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conduct a child abuse check	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
check references	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. How many of your church offices and classrooms have internal windows (i.e. in the doors)?

- all of them
- some of them
- none of them

7. At a minimum, how many adults and/or youth are in the nursery during a typical worship service?

- 1 adult
- 1 adult + youth
- 2 adults
- 2 adults + youth

Other (please specify)

8. At a minimum, how many adult teachers do you have in each of your children's Sunday School classes

1 adult teacher

2 adult teachers

3 adult teachers

Other (please specify)

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9. Does your church have a written plan for protecting children/youth while also being able to include people with a history of sexual offense into your church?

yes

no

10. Does your church have a written plan for what you will do if you suspect a child or youth in your church is being abused or neglected?

yes

no

11. Have you suspected child abuse or neglect of a child connected to your church?

yes

no

If yes, briefly share your experience in responding to the situation.

12. In the last 1 year, how many hours of training has your church provided on child protection for each of these groups?

	no training	1 hour	2-5 hours	more than 5 hours
adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. How often has a child protection theme been incorporated into Worship in the last 1 year (i.e. lament, prayer, reading, sermon)?

never

1 time

2-3 times

4-10 times

more than 10 times

14. What would be most helpful in protecting children and strengthening families in your church? (check your top THREE)

- more information on child protection
- sample child protection policies
- a children's curriculum
- an adult curriculum
- speakers
- support from conference
- denominational guidelines
- worship resources
- parenting resources

Other (please specify)

15. What comments do you have on protecting children and strengthening families in your church (optional)?

Descriptors

16. Please identify your church so we can determine representativeness of responses (optional).

Name:

Church:

City/Town:

State:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

17. Is your church located: (check one)

- in the country
- in a town with a population of less than 20,000
- in a city/town with a population of 20,000-50,000
- in a city/town with a population of 50,000-500,000
- very near a city/town with a population of more than 500,000
- in a city with a population of more than 500,000

18. What Mennonite Church USA conference(s) is your church affiliated with? (check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allegheny | <input type="checkbox"/> Gulf States | <input type="checkbox"/> Ohio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Atlantic Coast | <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Northwest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Central | <input type="checkbox"/> Indiana-Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Southwest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Central Plains | <input type="checkbox"/> Lancaster | <input type="checkbox"/> South Central |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern | <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain States | <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Franconia | <input type="checkbox"/> New York | <input type="checkbox"/> Virginia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Franklin | <input type="checkbox"/> North Central | <input type="checkbox"/> Western District |

19. Are you the pastor of your church?

- yes
- no

If no, what is your role in your church?

20. How many people attend your worship services on a typical week?

adults	<input type="text"/>
youth (13-18 years old)	<input type="text"/>
children (0-12 years old)	<input type="text"/>

21. Is English the primary language spoken at home by church members?

yes

no

If no, please list the languages spoken at home

22. What percent of the people in your church are each of these races/ethnicities? (must add up to 100%)

African-American/Black	<input type="text"/>
Asian or Pacific Islander	<input type="text"/>
American Indian/Native American	<input type="text"/>
Latino/Hispanic	<input type="text"/>
White/Caucasian	<input type="text"/>
Mixed racial/ethnic	<input type="text"/>
other	<input type="text"/>