



The Dove's Nest Collaborative: Mennonites Keeping Children Safe

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

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Child Protection Practices in Mennonite Church USA Churches: Survey Results

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

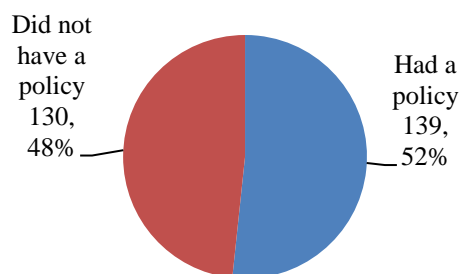
Jeanette Harder, Kristina Haynie, 8-27-2010

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. The survey was developed by members of the leadership team for The Dove's Nest Collaborative, and was administered online in June 2010. Responses were received from 269 out of the approximate 855 Mennonite Church USA churches (32% response rate).

Description of churches: Nearly two-thirds of responding churches had fewer than 100 adults, and 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 were much more likely to have written child protection policies than were smaller churches. Half of responding churches have had a written child protection policy for more than three years.

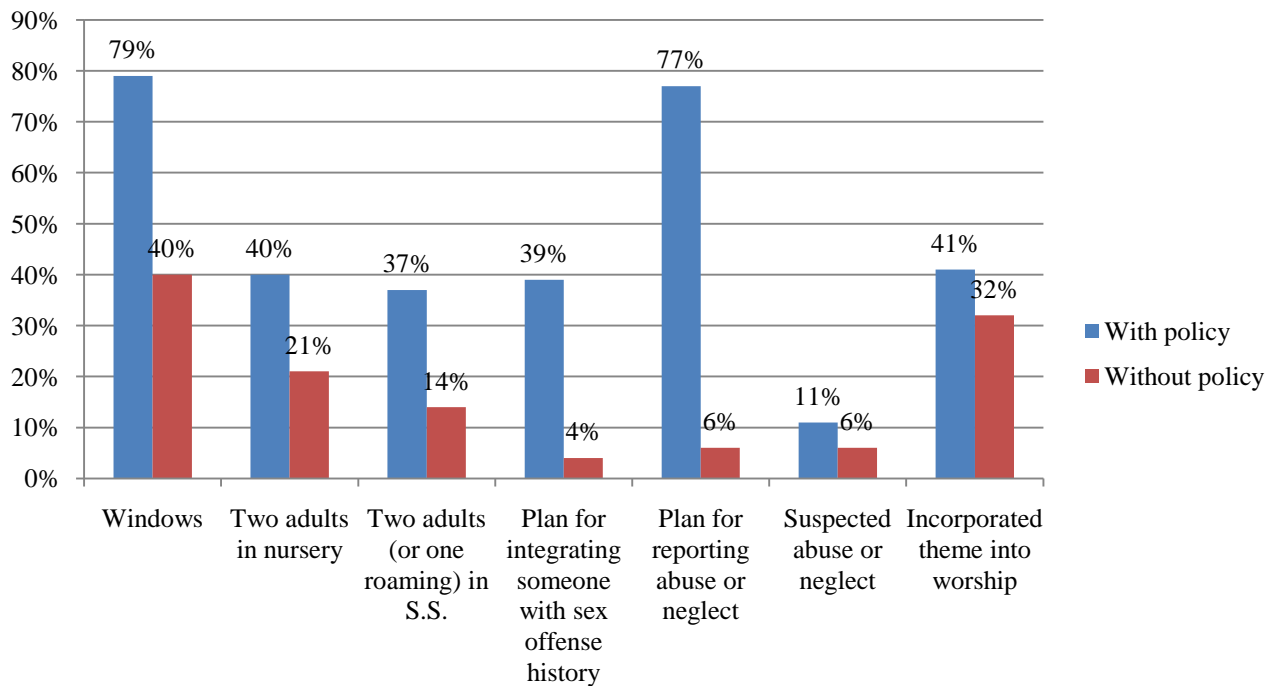
Written Child Protection Policies



Overall child protection practices: 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.

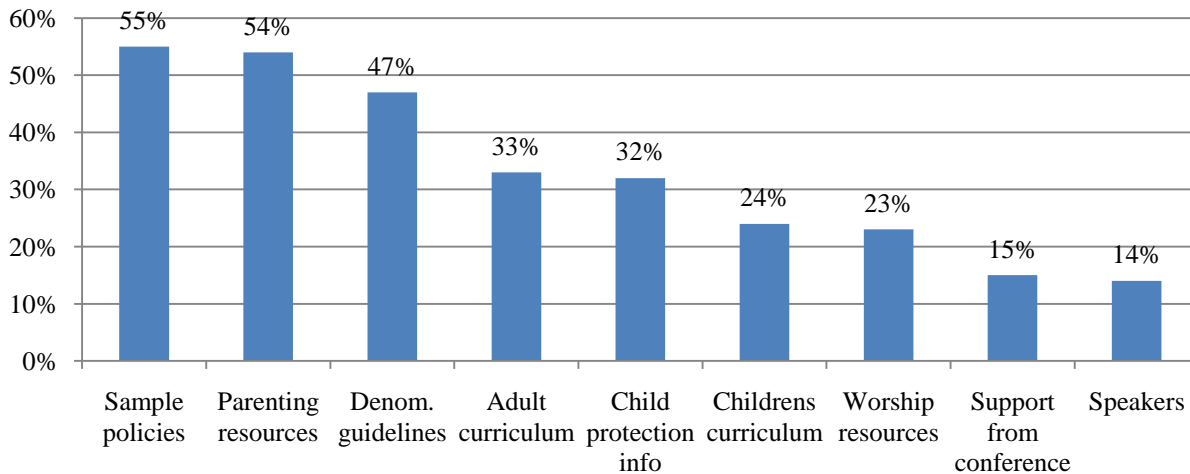
Child protection practices in churches with and without policies: Churches with written child protection policies reported more child protection practices than did churches without written child protection policies. The differences were most significant in these areas: having a written plan for reporting 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.

Child Protection Practices in Churches With and Without Written Policies



What do churches want? 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.

What Churches Want



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.

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