

Hesston Mennonite Church Policy and Procedures for Adults Affected by Abuse (by a Non-Credentialed Individual)

Introduction

The purpose of the following policy and procedure is to establish a process for how all forms of abuse are handled, with a goal of providing transparency and trust. This policy and procedure outlines the church's response for when abuse is reported or revealed within the Hesston Mennonite Church (HMC) congregation.

The following information is informed by the Prevention and Response pamphlet, "Sexual Abuse and Non-Credentialed Individuals." This pamphlet was completed in 2018 in response to the Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse, passed in 2015 at the MC USA Kansas City convention.

The following applies to situations where the alleged offender involved is not licensed or ordained and is 18 years old and older. In situations where the alleged offender is licensed or ordained, please refer to the MC USA policy, Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure. In addition, use this policy as it relates to the resources provided to survivor(s). If the survivor is a child, younger than 18 years old, please refer to the Hesston Mennonite Church Child Protection Policy and Abuse Response Procedure. All policies can be found in the HMC office.

Policy

Hesston Mennonite Church resolves to tell the truth about abuse; hold offenders accountable; acknowledge the seriousness of the offense; listen with care to those who have been wounded; protect vulnerable persons from injury; work restoratively for justice when appropriate for the circumstances; and hold out hope that wounds will be healed, forgiveness offered, and relationships established or reestablished in healthy ways.

The Vision Statement of Hesston Mennonite Church identifies our church as "A community of God's people, seeking and following the way of Christ, experiencing and sharing the good news of healing and hope." It is HMC's desire to live out this statement as we shape ways to be approachable, make resources available to someone experiencing abuse, and provide loving access to Christ's healing and hope.

Definitions

Throughout this document specific terminology is used to describe our policy and procedures. It is our intent to ensure consistency in how this document is presented, but it is important to note that the terms used here may not be the terms others would use.

Abuse

Abuse is the improper usage or treatment of a person, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit. Abuse can come in many forms, such as: physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, or other types of aggression.

Allegation

Allegation is a claim or assertion that someone has done something illegal, inappropriate, or wrong, against another person or persons.

Reporter

A reporter is someone who is not the survivor that brings forth an allegation of abuse on behalf of someone else.

Survivor

A survivor is someone who states some sort of abuse has occurred against them, and is bringing forth an allegation of this abuse.

Offender

An offender is someone that offends, abuses or mistreats another; someone whom an allegation is made against.

Procedures

Education

Resources are available in the church library. Other opportunities for education will be offered to the congregation. Materials will be reviewed and updated as needed biennially.

Prevention / Safety Measures

It is expected that HMC will take an active approach to prevention and safety measures provided to congregants. Some of these steps include the following:

- Review physical spaces in the church to increase safety.
- Display posters throughout the church informing readers of our commitment and what to do if they need to report abuse.
- Because of the power imbalance implied within leadership positions, congregants interested in leadership positions must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before participating in leadership positions.
- Provide first-aid kits in various locations (i.e. Welcome Center in the foyer, in the church office, and in the education office) in case physical injuries occur in which immediate attention is required.

All individuals are encouraged to be aware of and disrupt potentially compromising situations and respond appropriately. Suggestions for this include the [5 Ways to Support Your Neighbor](#) from Mennonite Mission Network:

Direct - Respond directly to the harasser only if you and the targeted person are safe and if it seems unlikely that the situation will escalate.

Distract - Interrupt the situation. Ignore the harasser and engage the person who is being targeted.

Delegate - Ask others to help out. Before calling 911, ask the targeted person.

Delay - If it is too late to intervene, check in with the targeted person after the incident.

Document - If unable to intervene, document what you witnessed, either by recording the situation or writing down what you saw, and offering this to the survivor should they seek help.

Allegations of Abuse

When a survivor or a reporter discloses abuse, appropriate care from the pastors or others will be offered to all involved. Relevant referrals will be made as desired. The church's priority when someone states that they have been abused is the safety and wellbeing of all involved. Each situation is unique and each survivor has different needs. As such, the steps taken may vary by situation.

Regardless, it is important for the receiver of the information to:

Listen. Believe them. Be gentle and patient. Listen with openness and empathy. Ask them if they feel safe right now.

1. Process with them, or help them find someone who is able to process with them.
2. Assess any physical injuries and encourage them to seek emergency medical care if needed. Call 911 if needed.
3. Provide them resources to call for additional assistance. Examples include: Emergency help 911; Hesston Mennonite Church pastors (620) 327-4885; Safe Hope (316) 283-0350; Central Kansas Counseling (620) 869-9986; Prairie View (800) 362-0180; Kansas Protection Report Center (800) 922-5330.
4. Recognize what you can and cannot handle. Get help if you feel you are in over your head. If this is not something that you feel you can appropriately respond to, find someone who can, such as a pastor, leader in the congregation, or someone outside of the church such as a counselor or Safe Hope.
5. Following an assessment of the situation, encourage the survivor to complete an Incident Report, which will be available in the church office and education office. If the survivor does not want to fill this out, ask if they would be comfortable with you disclosing what occurred via the incident report. This report should be turned in to the Caring Team Leader or Governance Board Chair and filed in the confidential file in the church office.

Alleged Offenders

There may be situations in which the alleged offender is a participant at HMC as well. Should this be the case, the following will occur:

1. The alleged offender will be given an opportunity to complete an incident report, which is available in the church office and education office. If the alleged offender does not want to fill this out, ask if they would be comfortable with you disclosing what occurred via the incident report. This report should be turned into the Caring Team Leader or Governance Board Chair and filed in the confidential file in the office.
2. Once the church is made aware of the allegation, the alleged offender will be released immediately from all church responsibilities (if applicable) and will be required to not attend any church activities or come onto church property until the conclusion of the investigation by appropriate authorities. Those recommendations will be provided to them in writing and will be expected to be followed until they receive a release from these requirements in writing from HMC.
3. Alleged offenders will be provided resources as requested, to include appropriate care from pastors or other leaders. Relevant referrals will be made as desired to organizations such as Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (316) 283-2038; Central Kansas Counseling (620) 869-9986; or Prairie View (800) 362-0180.

HMC is not responsible for investigating or confirming whether or not abuse occurred. If the offense is either confirmed or dismissed by the appropriate authorities, however, the congregation and relevant church institutions will be notified of any pertinent information as determined by the Governance Board Chair and Caring Team Leader (in consultation with others as deemed appropriate), and in the manner that makes sense for the situation (i.e. in writing, verbal).

Persons with a History of Disclosed or Confirmed Offenses

When HMC leaders become aware that allegations have been made, disclosed, or confirmed with regard to an incident that occurred in the past or in another locale, or a registered sex offender wishes to connect with the congregation, an assessment will occur by the Caring Ministry Team leader (with counseling from the Caring Ministry Team and Governance Board) to determine if building a relationship with this person is appropriate. If they determine to move forward, a plan will be created and put into place to set expectations for how this person will interact with persons of all ages in the congregation. Outside resources with expertise may be utilized. Appropriate care from pastors or other leaders will be offered to all involved. Relevant referrals will be made as needed. When an assessment occurs, it will be documented and filed in the confidential file in the office.

The congregation and relevant church institutions will be notified of any pertinent information as determined by the Governance Board Chair, Caring Team Leader, and Pastors (in consultation with others as deemed appropriate), and in the manner that makes sense for the situation (i.e. in writing, verbal).

This policy was written by Barb Kaufman, Monica Miller, and Cindy Penner (HMC members) and Pastor Kay Schroeder. It was approved by the HMC Governance Board and Caring Team.

Adopted January 13, 2022.