

Hesston Mennonite Church Child Protection  
Policy and Abuse Response Procedure  
Revised: *September 2023*

**Introduction:** Each child is a special gift from God. We acknowledge the high value that Jesus placed on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children. It is our responsibility as adults to do all we can to protect children.

**Policy Rationale:** Sadly, child abuse is prevalent. It is hurting children, families, and societies everywhere. According to Kansas Department for Children and Families:

Child abuse is any physical injury, physical neglect, emotional injury, or sexual act incited upon a child. Several indicators, including a child's behavior, may indicate the occurrence of child abuse. For further information, a copy of the *Guide to Reporting Abuse and Neglect from the Kansas Department for Children and Families* will be available in the Church Office and the Christian Education Office. A digital copy can also be found by searching the web with the title of the document.

We must be prepared in both knowledge and practice to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. This policy applies to all church ministries, including but not limited to Sunday school, youth activities, vacation Bible school, mentoring, and nursery.

We commit to offer trainings, keep our church facility safe for children, provide safe and adequate supervision to children, attend to related personnel issues, and deal appropriately with offenders and allegations of abuse. We commit to seek resourcing from organizations which specialize in creating safe environments for children.

**Procedures for carrying out the policy:**

**1. Offer trainings.**

Annually, training and materials will be offered to all teachers and leaders of children as well as other adults in the congregation as needed. Training may be specific to child abuse or may be on a related topic such as child safety, child development, healthy family relationships, or any protective or risk factor for abuse. All teachers and leaders are required to complete one training annually, as noted on the Code of Ethics for Lay Ministers of Children and Youth. All Christian Education volunteers are required to complete one training every other year, beginning in their first year of volunteering, as noted on the Code of Ethics for Lay Ministers of Children and Youth.

**2. Keep our church facility safe for children.**

- a. Windows are in all doors where children or youth ministry is conducted (Sunday school rooms, pastors' offices).
- b. A fully stocked first-aid kit will be available in the church building.

**3. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children during church-sponsored events in which parents/guardians are not the responsible party.**

- a. Follow a two-adult rule, especially at overnight activities involving children and when activities are

being conducted in homes or other private locations.

b. Any person who is teaching/caring for/working with children should be at least 5 years older than the oldest child present.

c. A parent must always be notified at least one week in advance in writing and give consent for his or her child to be transported away from church facilities.

d. No physical discipline (hitting, slapping) may be used. When a child misbehaves, an adult may use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child shall be taken to his or her parent for further action.

#### **4. Attend to related personnel issues.**

a. Annually each teacher and leader of children will be presented a copy of the congregation's child protection and abuse response policy and asked to acknowledge that he or she has read and will abide by the policy.

b. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on final candidates for all church staff positions before hiring. A background check will also be run on all Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and nursery workers. These background checks will be conducted through a vendor with a comprehensive nationwide search. Persons whose background checks show convictions related to children and their safety and wellbeing will not be allowed to volunteer. Persons whose background checks show arrest, charges, and/or convictions that could directly impact the safety and well-being of the children in our care will be investigated further before being allowed to volunteer. The investigation may be conducted by someone within the church or a third party. Individuals will be expected to participate fully as Christian Education leaders and pastors seek to understand what occurred. The results of the investigation may include allowing full participation as a volunteer, partial participation as a volunteer (i.e. with supervision), no participation as a volunteer, or something other as determined by the circumstances.

c. Individuals must have regular involvement in the church for at least six months before being allowed to be a teacher or leader of children or youth.

d. Persons who are actively volunteering with youth and children in congregational activities are expected to self-report any arrest(s), charges, and/or convictions that could directly impact the safety and well-being of children. Reporting should be done to one of the following: pastoral staff, human resources committee members, or the Christian Education Chair.

#### **5. Deal appropriately with allegations of abuse involving children.**

a. When a child discloses abuse or child abuse is suspected by someone involved in our church activities, Child Protective Services (United States: 1-800-4ACHILD, Kansas 1-800-922-5330), or the police (911) will be notified at once.

b. An incident report\* will be filled out and given to the leaders of the program the child is involved with at the time of disclosure. Leaders will forward the incident report to pastoral staff to be delivered to appropriate lay leader(s). *See appendix one.* In the event that any individual in the reporting line is involved with the alleged abuse, or those in relationship with the alleged abuser, individuals should be omitted from the reporting line.

- c. When a child discloses abuse or abuse is suspected, pastoral care will be offered to all involved by pastoral staff and/or appropriate referrals will be made.
- d. The congregation will be made aware of situations involving the violation of children's safety and wellbeing when/if an arrest is made. Situations may include perpetrators who are HMC attenders, are on church grounds, or at church sponsored activities, or situations where there is a threat to a child's safety. Any information shared will be done via a printed letter and/or verbal announcement. The purpose of sharing concerning situations is to make sure accurate information is known by the congregation.

**6. Deal appropriately with alleged offenders.**

- a. When a child discloses abuse or child abuse by someone involved in our church activities is suspected, Child Protective Services (United States: 1-800-4ACHILD, Kansas 1-800-922-5330), or the police (911) will be notified at once.
- b. An incident report will be filled out and given to the leaders of the program the child is involved with. Leaders will forward the incident report to pastoral staff to be delivered to appropriate lay leader(s). *See appendix one.*
- c. When Child Protective Services is notified, the person who has made a report will also notify a member of the planning team for the program in which the worker is involved, a Sunday School Superintendent, or a member of pastoral staff.
- d. The alleged offender will be removed immediately from all responsibilities involving contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation. All parents whose children may have come into contact with the alleged offender will be notified that allegations have been made and reported to the authorities.
- e. When child abuse allegations have been made, a plan will be put into place outlining access guidelines as required by the situation and utilizing outside resources with expertise. Pastoral care will be offered to all involved by pastoral staff and/or appropriate referrals will be made.

**7. Deal appropriately with persons with a history of disclosed, or confirmed offenses.**

- a. Any individual who is known to have been convicted of a child sexual offense must not be allowed any unsupervised contact with children and may not be involved in children's or youth ministry (formal or informal).
- b. An Incident report will be filled out by the person receiving information and given to pastoral staff. Pastoral staff will share with the appropriate lay leaders and utilize outside resources with expertise. *See appendix one.*
- c. When allegations have been made, disclosed or confirmed, or a registered sex offender wishes to connect with the congregation, a plan will be created and put into place to set expectations for how this person would interact with persons of all ages in the congregation, utilizing outside resources with expertise. Appropriate pastoral care will be offered to all involved and/or appropriate referrals will be made.

*\* Incident Reports can be found in the church office and the Christian Education Office. Adopted 1.28.18, Revised 4.11.18, Revised 4.28.18, Revised 9.13.18, Revised 11.07.19, Revised 12.12.19, Revised 9.22.23*