

REPORT OF THE CANADIAN STUDY COMMISSION ON DOCTRINE

July 1996



Free Methodist Church in Canada

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Responding to Sexual Abuse When It Occurs

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Purpose

The sexual abuse of children and youth not only violates the body, but compromises emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual development. It is a trauma that brings confusion, anger, fear, anxiety and guilt to the victim. It results in a personal sense of worthlessness, rejection and abandonment that continues long after the incidents of abuse have stopped. When the abuse is at the hands of a parent or someone who professes to be a Christian, the experience distorts the victim's concept of God and creates significant barriers to spiritual growth.

Child sexual abuse is also a criminal offence.

That abuse occurs within our society is a recognised and widely documented fact. That many children and youth are victims is also an established fact. Sadly, being a member of a community of faith does not reduce the risk of being abused. Many victims identify their abusers as members of their own church communities. Abusers may be family members (e.g., parents, siblings); individuals in positions of trust or authority within the congregation (e.g., child or youth workers, leaders, pastors); or they may be members at large who, because of their affiliation, have trusted access to children and youth (e.g., adolescents who baby-sit or assist in programs).

When abuse occurs within the congregation the impact goes beyond the violation experienced by the victim. Trust has been broken with the victim's family, with members of the abuser's family, with friends, and with the congregation at large.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for handling abuse situations that occur within the congregation. Specifically it outlines steps for ministry to perpetrators by hold them accountable in order to facilitate repentance, restitution, restoration and reconciliation.

(The reader is referred to the document "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse" for guidelines designed to prevent sexual abuse from occurring within the congregation, and for the legal definition of child sexual abuse.)

Understanding Abusers

When sexual abuse occurs within the congregation, the church is faced with a problem that requires a multifaceted response. The behaviour signals spiritual and psychological dysfunction on the part of the perpetrator. It is also illegal behaviour.

There is need to afford safety and support to the victim(s), and ensure the safety of potential victims. A process needs to be put in place that facilitates healing for those involved and affected. The church's response can only be effective if it is grounded in an understanding of those who abuse.

The information that follows is intended to provide a cursory review of the demographic, psychological, cognitive and spiritual profile of sexual offenders. The nature of this document does not allow for a more in-depth discussion. The reader is encouraged to do additional reading on this subject. The references in the bibliography can serve as a helpful beginning point.

Demographic Profile

- **Gender:** Most sexual abusers are heterosexual males (i.e., 90%). The majority of victims are girls, although it is believed that more boys are victims than is reported.
- **Age:** Sexually abusive behaviour often begins in adolescence and continues throughout adulthood. It is estimated that 25% of sexual abuse in Canada is perpetrated by adolescents. Fourteen percent of those imprisoned for sexual offenses against children are under 21 years of age. On average, a perpetrator is in his mid-30s when his behaviour is reported.
- **Marital Status:** Most adult perpetrators are married with children. Those involved in incest have stable (albeit dysfunctional) and long-term marriages.
- **Occupation and Education:** All occupations, professions (including the clergy), and educational levels are represented.
- **Religious Affiliation:** All faiths and Christian denominations are represented among known offenders. Many who have a church affiliation are members of conservative, fundamentalist Protestant organizations. In fact, the second highest risk factor for children becoming victims for incest is for their families to belong to a conservative religious group that espouses traditional male-female roles and rigid sexual attitudes (Heggen, p. 73). It is believed that this risk stems from several factors. Sexual offenders are attracted to firm belief systems that identify absolute rights and wrongs. Given their rigid personalities, with little awareness or insight into their own, or others' emotional states, they find it difficult to make decisions, and to deal with the ambiguities of life that are inherent in a more flexible belief system.

A belief system that holds males as dominant and superior to submissive women and children provides abusers with justification to enforce their control and to see family members more as objects for their gratification than as separate and unique individuals. The family dynamics revolve around the meeting of the husband's / father's needs with little open discussion of feelings, attitudes or opinions, including sexual issues. Without open communication and respect for personal integrity within the family, children can become victims and lack the supports needed to seek protection and advocacy.

- **Occurrence Rates:** Numerous studies confirm that child molesters have a high number of victims, and that individual victims are repeatedly abused. Many offenders count their victims in the hundreds.
- **Risk of Conviction:** The risk of the abuse being reported and the offender convicted is minimal. Most abuse incidents are not reported, and of those that are, only a small portion result in convictions. One offender, interviewed recently on the CBC, stated that of his 200 odd victims, only two reported the abuse. Most sexual perpetrators are not in prison - they are living in the community, and may be part of any community of faith.

Psychological and Spiritual Profile

There are a number of common characteristics that mark the emotional, cognitive and spiritual functioning of sexual perpetrators. These include:

- **Childhood Trauma:** Many share childhood experiences of being victimised themselves through physical and/or sexual abuse, family violence and emotional deprivation.
- **Emotional Functioning:** These are individuals who experience deep feelings of personal inadequacy, low self-esteem, helplessness and powerlessness. Their acts of abuse often are attempts to gain a sense of control through the exercise of power over someone more vulnerable than themselves. The sexual abuser exhibits limited insight into his own behaviour and feelings, and is insensitive to the needs and feelings of others. He often is unable to recognize the harm - physical, emotional, social and spiritual - he causes his victims.
- **Defence Patterns:** Most perpetrators develop defence mechanisms and patterns of thinking that allow them to justify, and thus continue, their behaviour. Denial is the most prevalent of these defences. When confronted, most perpetrators will either deny that the behaviour occurred or will minimise the severity of it. These

patterns are evident even in the face of obvious facts. Typical statements include: the event did not happen; this was the first time; the behaviour was not what it seemed; it was not as severe as reported by the victim.

Another common defence mechanism is to minimise responsibility and project blame onto the victim, e.g., the child consented to the behaviour. (Children under the age of 14 years are considered by law incapable of giving informed consent.) Common statements include: "I didn't know what I was doing"; "I couldn't help myself" (claiming the influence of drugs, alcohol or uncontrollable sexual urges).

It is not surprising that, given their restricted emotional development, many perpetrators have difficulty with intimate peer relationship, and with maintaining and enhancing long-term relationships. They are often more comfortable with children than with their peers and begin to view children as their equals. They rationalize that children have sexual knowledge and desires that are, in reality, not consistent with the child's physical, social, and emotional development. With this rationalisation in place they see children as not only wanting sex, but enjoying it.

Spiritual Functioning: From a spiritual standpoint, perpetrators have not committed an unpardonable sin. On the other hand, they are involved in sin that has been glossed over with self-deception and selfishness. They need help: to come to grips (in confession) with the multidimensional nature of their sin; to develop and exercise self-control (repentance) over their behaviour; and to develop and maintain (discipleship) a new way of life internally and externally.

When Abuse Occurs

The presence of abuse within the community of faith usually comes to light because the victim tells someone. When a disclosure is made the church as a number of response options it can consider. The follow chart summarises the options described below.

Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Responses	Implications
1. Discount the Disclosure / Report	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will break the law by not reporting the allegation. 2. The alleged offender may continue to abuse the victim. 3. The circle of victims may increase. 4. At a future date, I may be charged for not reporting the allegation. 5. I will give the message to victims that they do not matter.
2. Spiritualize the Offence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A talk and a prayer will "fix" the situation. 2. I will take full responsibility for the situation. 3. All the implications in #1 above.
3. Manage the Situation within the Congregation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will break the law. 2. I can work with the alleged victim - investigate the allegation, document the history, assess the needs and do the therapy. 3. I can work with the alleged perpetrator - investigate the allegation, confront, document, assess, treat (monitor, therapy, support), network with the community to investigate whether offender is abusing in other settings. 4. I can manage the "congregational context" - protect the victim and offender, educate the congregation, engage monitoring, preventive measures, work with the families involved, and open the way for other victims to disclose.
4. Report the allegation to the Child Welfare Authorities or the Police	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I will respect the law (Rom. 13:3-6). 2. I will trust and cooperate with trained professionals in the community to investigate, assess, and apply the law. 3. I will confidentially engage community resources to get help for both victims and perpetrators. 4. I will lead the congregation to understand, process and respond appropriately to all the parties involved. 5. I will ensure that monitoring and preventive measures are in place to guard against a recurrence by the offender or by another perpetrator. 6. I will develop an "atmosphere of openness and safety" so that other victims can disclose.

Option One The statement of the victim can be discounted and the victim disbelieved. This response has the effect of burying the abuse and has serious implications for the victim, the alleged abuser and the church.

One of the methods perpetrators use to ensure the secrecy of their actions is to threaten their victims against making disclosures. One of the common threats is that the victim will not be believed. For a child or youth who defies his or her abuser and makes a disclosure, it confirms the threat, and places the victim in a more vulnerable position with the abuser. Having tried once and failed, it may be years before the victim has enough strength to defy the threats again.

The church's failure to act on behalf of victims sends a message to perpetrators that they can victimize without being held accountable. Not only will the abuse of the victim who disclosed continue, but the circle of victims will increase.

By failing to take action, the church opens itself to future accusation and legal action.

Option Two A second response option to a disclosure of abuse is to consider the behaviour only from a spiritual perspective. The disclosure is acknowledged, but the emotional, physical and social harms are submerged. Rather, wholeness and healing is sought through prayer. Quick forgiveness is counselled to bring resolution.

Unfortunately, this option has similar effects as the first option. Often the focus is on the victim, re-enforcing an already heightened guilt and responsibility. The specialised treatment and support required is discredited, leaving the victim both vulnerable to further victimisation, and confused with the continuing emotional pain in the face of supposed spiritual healing.

For the perpetrator, acknowledgement of his behaviour, coupled with quick repentance may be easily offered if he senses that he will not be held legally accountable or be required to seek professional and specialised help. Without facing his behaviour within the context of emotional and cognitive issues, his repentance will be short lived. He will not be able to "go and sin no more." His behaviour will continue, bolstered by the knowledge that he faces limited accountability.

The church leaves itself open to future liability.

Option Three A third option the church may choose is to accept the victim's disclosure, investigate the allegation, and if founded, proceed to hold the offender accountable. This approach aims to manage the abuse within the congregation by offering counselling that attempts to address the emotional, social, cognitive and behavioural issues presented by the victim and by the perpetrator.

By being prepared to address the issue of sexual abuse openly and directly, the church

can put in place a number of helpful and productive processes. It can openly implement procedures to protect the victim and limit the movements and influence of the offender. It can educate the congregation as to child sexual abuse and put in place measures to reduce the risk of abuse occurring within its programs. It can find avenues through which support can be offered to the victim, the families of both the victim and the offender, and to others who are affected. All of these actions will have the effect of opening the way for others who are victims to take the step of disclosing, knowing that they will find support and safety.

Although this approach recognises the broader implications of sexual abusive behaviour, it has significant disadvantages. Sexual abuse is a criminal offence and must be dealt with as such by the police and/or child welfare authorities. The law requires that disclosures of abuse be reported. It is not the role of the church to determine the legal validity of an accusation of abuse.

The multifaceted issues faced by both victim and perpetrator require professional assessment and skilled therapy over an extended period of time. Few congregations have staff with this level of expertise or with the time required to offer treatment services to either the victim or the abuser.

Option Four The fourth response option for the church, and the one recommended, is to recognize the multifaceted nature of sexual abuse and facilitate a multi-service approach. This response begins with reporting the disclosure of abuse to the police and/or child welfare authorities (as required by law), co-operating with them during the investigation that follows, and joining with treatment professionals to offer both victim and abuser the varied help and support each needs.

For the victim, this response ensures that the disclosure is taken seriously and will be investigated by trained and experienced individuals. This frees the victim from the abuser's threats and opens the way for the utilisation of professional help.

For the alleged abuser, reporting the disclosure ensures the receipt of a strong message from the church that this behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. It may also mean that the offender is charged and held accountable by the courts. The avenue for professional treatment is also opened for him. Being held accountable for his behaviour both legally and by the community of faith may provide sufficient motivation to seek help. As the church works with treatment personnel, the abuser can receive both psychological and spiritual help.

For the community of faith, the advantages identified in option three are also afforded through this preferred option. In addition, by taking the action required by law and working with specialised professionals, the church limits its liability.

Responding to Allegations Of Abuse And Confirmed Abusers

Choosing to report the disclosure of abuse is the beginning step by the church in a process aimed at ensuring a safe environment and restoring the abuser to faith and fellowship. For these goals to be met the church needs to take firm but careful action. The action steps described below are summarised in the following chart.

Steps of Response to Allegations of Abuse

When a disclosure of abuse is made

1. Carefully document the details of the disclosure in writing.
2. Report the incident to police and/or child welfare authorities.
3. Suspend the activities of the alleged abuser until the investigation is completed.
4. Contain the awareness of the incident to as few people as possible.

If an incident of abuse is confirmed

5. Spell out the restrictions and expectations to the perpetrator in writing and initiate monitoring.
6. If there is a **violation of restriction** - increase monitoring, warn of expulsion.
7. If there is a **series of violations of restrictions** or a **re-offence** - EXPEL.
8. If there is substantial evidence of repentance, begin preparations for restoration.
9. Restoration - though restrictions continue.

Step One: The disclosure of alleged abuse must be reported to the police and/or Child Welfare officials. The disclosure will trigger an investigation. This investigation needs to proceed without hindrance by the church. This requires that the alleged abuser not be confronted by church personnel, or be made aware that a disclosure has taken place.

Containing knowledge of the details of the disclosure may prove a challenge depending upon when and to whom the disclosure is made. Those who are aware of the disclosure will need to be cautioned to keep the information confidential until the investigation is complete.

Careful documentation should be kept of the disclosure details. This information should be filed to ensure confidentiality. The person receiving the disclosure may be called upon to testify if charges are laid and the case goes to trial.

Several decisions may arise from the investigation. The police may find insufficient evidence that abuse occurred. They may believe that abuse occurred but consider the evidence too weak to proceed to a criminal trial (e.g., the child victim is too young or too traumatised to testify and withstand cross examination). Charges may be laid, or child welfare authorities may take action to protect the child. The abuser may acknowledge his behaviour and seek treatment.

Once the investigation is complete, the church leaders need to meet with the named abuser to detail the course of action that has been taken, the rationale for that action, and to spell out any expectations that will be placed on his continued participation in the congregation. If the results of the investigation are any of those other than that of insufficient evidence of abuse occurring, the expectations placed on the alleged abuser should include:

- suspension from any position of authority and/or any involvement that provides access to children and youth.
- restriction of movement within the church building to areas and programs involving only adults, or settings (e.g., worship) where interaction is structured;
- monitoring the alleged abuser's whereabouts by select individuals to ensure opportunities are not found to be alone with children and youth.

It will be made clear that support is extended, but that continued participation in the body is contingent upon the individual's abiding by these conditions.

At this stage, the allegation and identity of the alleged offender can be contained within a relatively small group of people. It may be necessary to alert children's workers that the individual should not be asked to participate. This can be done with discretion without providing a detailed rationale.

Step Two: If the abuser is **convicted** of an offence, or if there is acknowledgement of behaviour, the church needs to review its restrictions and monitoring procedures to ensure they are providing safety and that the offender is abiding by them. The perpetrator is advised that these restrictions remain in place and that any violation of them will result in his being named to the congregation. The ban on holding any position of authority and involvement with children and youth remains in place.

Therapy is insisted upon, with church personnel working closely with treatment personnel in providing joint redemptive support and professional treatment. One of the tasks of treatment is to detail a relapse prevention program (a step-by-step action plan the perpetrator can follow to avoid re-offending.) The church staff working with the perpetrator need to be aware of this plan, and to maintain close consultation with treatment personnel.

Step Three: This step is applicable only if there is a **violation of the restrictions**, but no known re-offence, by the perpetrator. If the abuser has violated the restrictions put in place by the church to ensure child and youth safety (and to reduce the abuser's opportunity to re-offend), not only must the church follow through on its previous warning to expose him to the entire congregation, but it will need to review its present restrictions and monitoring procedures. It may well be necessary to restrict further the freedom of movement the offender has within the building and participation within the community. Monitoring behaviour and whereabouts will, of necessity, need to be increased. The offender will receive a clear and strong warning that continued violation will result in expulsion from the community of faith.

Efforts will be made to increase the intensity of individual support provided by church staff to the perpetrator. Treatment personnel will be advised of any violations of expectations and continued close communication maintained.

Step Four: This step is applicable if there has been **additional violations of restrictions** imposed by the church or if there is **another conviction** of an offence. Continued unsafe and/or criminal behaviour by the perpetrator will result in expulsion from the congregation. The perpetrator will be advised **not** to attend public meetings or programs, and **not** be on or close to church property during these times. He may attend meetings with church staff during non-program times to facilitate the continued support. Again close communication is maintained with treatment personnel.

The situation outlined in I Corinthians 5:1-4 and the Apostle Paul's instructions to that church to ban from fellowship an unrepentant member involved in inappropriate sexual behaviour guides us at this step.

Step Five: The goal of the church is to restore the offender to faith and fellowship. This is predicated on evidence of self-control (ability and commitment to follow a relapse program); of repentance and the taking of responsibility for behaviour; and restitution for the harm caused (often includes the payment for counselling services required by the victim). Heggen describes repentance as:

admitting sin and looking unflinchingly at the awfulness of what has been done. It means feeling deep grief for the pain caused another. ...True repentance...involves the bitter realization of inner wretchedness. Because of the agony of this step, the offender needs the support and love of Christian friends or a pastor. (Heggen, p. 124)

Written confirmation from the offender's therapist should be obtained confirming that progress has been made in treatment. Of specific concern are: the development of empathy, resolution of past trauma, acceptance of responsibility for behaviour, and the development and commitment to a relapse program. These new-found abilities coupled with a growing spiritual awareness should be evident to support persons from the church.

There is need for reconciliation between the perpetrator and the victim. This is facilitated by the abuser taking full responsibility for the abuse, apologising for it and the harm caused. (Child sexual abuse is always the responsibility of the offender.) For the abuser genuinely to take responsibility for behaviour towards the victim requires coming to a point of being able to feel the pain caused to the victim.

It is left to the victim to extend forgiveness when this can genuinely be done. This may be after a period of time when there has been opportunity to address the sense of betrayal, fear, confusion and anger experienced. Although forgiveness is necessary for healing, the victim should not be pressured into offering forgiveness prematurely.

For those working with sexual abuse it is important to understand that forgiveness is not excusing the abuse or that the abuse can be forgotten once it is forgiven. Forgiveness is letting go of the intense emotional pain associated with abuse. It is disarming the power of the abuse to continue causing pain, turmoil and re-victimisation. It is accepting that the abuse experience will always be a part of one's life, but being able to view it now as a part, rather than as the only part (Heggen, p. 129-134). It is not an easy, nor necessarily quick, process to come to this place of wholeness. The perpetrator has to be prepared to wait, and to accept that trust will never be fully restored.

If Step Three and/or Four were required, the victim and the congregation will need to be informed and comfortable with the intended return of the perpetrator. The congregation will need to process its own sense of betrayal, anger, confusion and fear before it can offer forgiveness and be prepared to be reconciled with the offender. This requires considerable effort by mature spiritual leaders but the Apostle Paul's words to the Corinthian church about the "banned sexual offender" in his second letter make it clear that **not** opening the way for restoration to the congregation is **not** an option.

Step Six: When the work of Step Five has been done, reconciliation and restoration to the community becomes possible. The individual can be welcomed back into the fellowship. But reentry into the community of faith, or reconciliation between abuser and victim does not mean that participation in the body is without restriction. Maintaining a non-abusive lifestyle requires life-long vigilance. For the church it means continued restriction placed on the abuser to positions of authority; continued restrictions to activities that would place children and youth in his trust; the offering of continued support; and the continued preparedness to take action to hold him accountable for violations of restrictions.

Utilising a Response Team

When it has been established by child welfare authorities or the police that an incident of child sexual abuse has occurred within the community of faith, its impact is felt throughout the congregation. Not only must the church address those issues presented by the perpetrator, it must also address the feelings of betrayal, anger, confusion and fear experienced by others within the congregation. This work is not easy, and requires an enormous amount of time and energy. It is recommended that the church develop a response team that can not only share the work load but also act collectively in making and implementing decisions.

The work of the team will require the following skills:

- the ability to provide spiritual support and counsel;
- the ability to provide emotional and practical support to family members (the victim's and the perpetrator's families);
- the ability to lead group and congregational discussions;
- the ability to interact with treatment and legal personnel; and
- the ability to mediate family relationship and practical issues.

Team members should be chosen on the basis of their ability to address these tasks so that the team as a whole has within itself a variety of resources. Care should also be taken to ensure that prospective members have the ability to work co-operatively within the structure of a team. It may take an extended period of time (e.g., 1-2 years) before resolution of all the issues is gained. Nor should the emotional stress of this work be underestimated. Team members need to be emotionally stable and healthy, having resolved any of their own abuse issues.

The team will need to be aware of several individuals and sub-groups within the congregation. These include: the victim(s) and members of the family; the

perpetrator's family (if the abuse was non-incestuous); the peers of the victim (e.g., education classes, youth group); and abuse survivors who are part of the congregation at large (an incident of abuse may raise old issues for survivors of child sexual abuse). These individuals and groups will need specific support and opportunities to process the impact and implications of the abuse.

The **adults of the congregation** as a whole may also need to be informed that an incident of sexual abuse has occurred. At the same time, they should be informed as to who is on the response team, to whom they can direct questions and concerns, what the legal process is, general education about sexual abuse and perpetration and the steps that are being taken to achieve restoration and reconciliation. This should **not** be done in a public service but in a separate, private meeting after a service that excludes children, younger teens, and, of course, visitors.

Throughout its work the team needs to take a position of openness about the situation with subgroups and with the congregation. This must be done however **without violating personal confidentiality**. Factual information prevents damaging rumours from spreading and enables congregational support for affected individuals. Trust has been broken by the abusive action of the perpetrator. Trust between the team and the congregation can be maintained and fostered by open and honest communication. Keeping the congregation well informed and involved facilitates the eventual reconciliation between the perpetrator and the congregation.

Postscript

The recommended option and steps outlined in this document may seem excessive and particularly hard on the perpetrator. Child sexual abuse is a particularly devastating evil that has inter-generational effects. It has no place within the community of faith. The fundamental principle for the congregation is the safety and protection of those most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the reality is that recovery from sexually abusive behaviour is particularly difficult.

Most professionals who work with sex offenders believe perpetrators need maintenance counselling for the rest of their lives. Congregations can provide the kind of accountability needed to ensure that offenders get and stay with the help they need never to abuse again. Congregations can firmly and lovingly say, "Because we love you we won't tolerate abusive behaviour any more. We're going to name this sin and make sure you get the help you need to never abuse again" (Heggen, p. 146-147).

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Chapter F

REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE THAT OCCURS

Introduction

Free Methodists value persons deeply. In a society where abuse is reported at alarming levels, we are determined to take every action we can to prevent abuse, especially in the context of the church, and when it does take place, to deal with it responsibly. Protection of children and youth is our paramount concern. It is also important to protect the denomination and our churches from liability prosecution.

At the close of this paper we will recommend that the Free Methodist Church in Canada adopt the following documents as the policy statements of the Free Methodist Church in Canada, and recommend them to local churches and camps as a guide for developing their own policies and procedures.

The policy is composed of two parts:

- I. Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse
- II. When Sexual Abuse Occurs

Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse

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Personnel Related Guidelines

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Oath of Confidentiality

Request for Criminal Record Check and Authorization

Reference Contact Request Form

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Purpose

Sexual abuse is a particularly vicious form of violence against children and youth. It is a violation of the body, of personal boundaries and of trust. It can profoundly hinder emotional and spiritual development. Its effects are immediate and can be long-lasting.

Sexual abuse is prevalent within our society. Studies confirm that more than 40% of Canadians have been victims of sexual abuse. The majority experience their first unwanted sexual act as children or adolescents.

Sadly, the church community has not always been a place of safety. Many victims identify their abusers as members of their communities of faith (their parents, siblings, adolescents, children/youth workers, choir masters, youth pastors), and that the abuse occurred on church property or during church sponsored events. The church has a spiritual, moral and legal responsibility to ensure, as much as possible, the safety of children and youth attending its programs.

The purpose of this statement is:

1. to increase the safety of children and youth attending church programs;
2. to provide practical guidelines for church staff/volunteers; and
3. to limit the church's legal liability.

Church boards are strongly encouraged to review the following guidelines and develop policies and procedures that are applicable to the local situation. Child sexual abuse is not limited by geography, occupation or economic condition. No congregation is immune, regardless of size, from the probability of abuse occurring.

Definition

Sexual abuse occurs whenever anyone with less maturity or power is tricked, trapped, coerced or bribed into a sexual experience. It occurs whenever anyone disempowered by handicap, age, or situation is involved in an activity which is sexually stimulating to the perpetrator and which the victim does not fully comprehend or to which he/she is unable to give informed consent. (Heggen, p. 20).

This generic definition can be applied to anyone, regardless of age. It identifies a critical factor in understanding and identifying abuse-the imbalance of power or authority between the abuser and the victim. Imbalance may result from the perpetrator's great age, size, position, experience or authority.

Sexual abuse against children and youth is also defined in legal terms by both provincial child welfare legislation and by the Criminal Code of Canada. Child welfare legislation is designed to protect children and definitions tend to be open to interpretation. For example, the Alberta Child Welfare Act (1984) states that "a child is sexually abused if the child is inappropriately exposed or subjected to sexual contact, activity or behaviours." The Criminal Code of Canada is concerned with criminal prosecution and is thus much more specific. It defines 16 different sexual offenses that apply to children and youth.

1. Sexual Interference: anyone who, for a sexual purpose, touches directly or indirectly, with a part of the body or an object, any part of the body of a child under 14 years. **Exception:** a person under 14 cannot be convicted of this offence, unless the young person is in a position of trust or authority in relation to the child (e.g., baby-sitter, parent), or is in a situation where the child victim is dependent on the young person.

2. Invitation to Sexual Touching: anyone who, for a sexual purpose, invites, counsels or incites a child under 14 to touch directly or indirectly with a part of the body or an object the body of any person, including the child's own body and the body of the person encouraging the touching. **Exception:** a young person under 14 cannot be convicted of this offence, unless the young person is in a position of trust or authority in relation to the child (e.g., baby-sitter, parent), or is in a situation where the child victim is dependent on the young person.

3. Sexual Exploitation of a Young Person: "young person" is defined as a child 14 years of age or more but under 18. Every person is in a position of authority or trust towards a child or on whom the young person is dependent, who, for a sexual purpose, touches a young person's body, or invites, counsels or incites the young person to touch directly or indirectly with a part of the body or an object the body of any person, including the young person's body and the body of the person encouraging the touching.

4. Anal Intercourse: Acts of anal intercourse are prohibited with children and young people under 18. (Young persons under 18 are deemed unable to consent to anal intercourse unless they are husband and wife.)

5. Bestiality: Every person who has sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with an animal, or who compels someone else to have sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with an animal, or who has sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with an animal in the presence of a child under 14, or who incites a child under 14 to have sexual intercourse or other sexual activity with an animal.

6. Parent or Guardian Procuring Sexual Activity of a Child: Every parent or guardian of a child under 18 who procures (prevails upon or induces) the child to become involved in an illegal sexual activity with any person, other than the parent or guardian.

7. Householder Permitting Sexual Activity: An owner, manager or someone who assists in the management or control of premises who knowingly permits a child under 18 to be in the premises for the purpose of engaging in an illegal sexual activity (any sexual activity prohibited by the Criminal Code).

8. Exposing Genitals to a Child: Every person, in any place, who exposes his or her genitals to a child under 14 for a sexual purpose.

9. Vagrancy: Everyone who has been convicted of sexual assault, one of the secular touching offenses, bestiality or exposure involving a child found loitering in or near a playground, school, public park or bathing area.

10a. Living Off the Avails of Child Prostitution: Every person who lives wholly or in part off the profits of prostitution of a child under 18.

10b. Attempting to Obtain the Sexual Services of a Child: Every person who obtains, or attempts to obtain for consideration, the sexual services of a young person under 18.

11. Incest: Having sexual intercourse with a blood relation (parent, child, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, grandparent, grandchild).

12. Corrupting Children: Endangering the morals of children under age 18) or rendering home an unfit place for a child.

13. Indecent Act: Performing an indecent act in a public place in the presence of one or more persons, in any place, with intent to insult or offend any person.

14. Sexual Assault: Applying force to another person, directly or indirectly, without consent, under circumstances of a sexual nature.

15. Sexual Assault with a Weapon, Threats to a Third Party or Causing Bodily Harm: Committing a sexual assault while carrying, using or threatening to use a weapon or imitation of a weapon, or threatening bodily harm to a person other than the victim, or causing bodily harm to the victim, or being party to this offence with someone else.

16. Aggravated Sexual Assault: Wounding, maiming, disfiguring, or endangering the life of the victim while committing the sexual assault. (Wells, pp. 44-59)

PERSONNEL RELATED GUIDELINES

1. Recruitment of Paid Staff and Volunteers

The following guidelines apply to all paid staff and to all volunteers over age 14 years working with children and youth. Documentation of each step is important. Developing a "paper trail" not only ensures that the recruitment process is followed, it also reduces legal risk by providing evidence that the church has taken careful and deliberate action to limit the potential of abuse occurring.

a. Employment / Volunteer Application and Screening Form: Each individual seeking employment with the church is required to submit a resume of his/her qualifications and experience and complete an application form. In addition, prospective employees are asked to complete a screening form. Volunteers are required to complete screen forms before becoming involved in child/youth related programs.

A sample Screen Form is attached. If a church chooses to develop its own form, at least the following items should be included:

- Applicant's name (identity should be confirmed by photo identification)
- Address
- Provision for a criminal records check
- Area of work in which the applicant is interested

- Any training or education in child or youth work
- Description of church membership over the past five years, including the names of contact persons
- Description of church volunteer work over the past five years
- Description of any youth work (at churches or any other organization) over the past five years
- Names and addresses of two references

Volunteers will be considered for work with children/youth only after they have been regular attendees of the congregation for six months. This allows the church an opportunity to evaluate character and behaviour and will help to repel persons seeking immediate access to children.

b. Interview: Each employee or volunteer applicant is interviewed by a committee of at least two members who are familiar with sexual abuse issues, and are comfortable in discussion of the topic. In preparation for interviewing, the selection committee members should determine the questions they wish to ask the applicant. These will be guided by the job description or responsibilities of the position, and the expectations of the individual. The applicant's resume, and information provided by the application form and/or screen form will be reviewed by the committee prior to the interview to ensure applicable education and experience, and identify any areas of concern that need to be clarified during the interview.

During the interview the applicant will receive a clear and direct statement about the church's general concern for the safety of children and that policies are in place to this end. Conduct expectations towards children/youth are provided in writing, and reviewed. The applicant is asked if he/she anticipates any difficulty meeting the expectations.

A written summary of the interview is completed.

c. References: The Screening Form asks for two references who can speak to the applicant's work/volunteer experience and character, and the names of contact persons from each of the churches with which he/she has been involved over the past five years. Both references and all of the church contact persons are contacted. A written record is made of each contact and the information received. (See attached sample of report form)

d. Criminal Records Check: The Screening Form asks for the provision of a criminal records search. The applicant can either be requested to provide verification of an up-to-date search, or be asked to cover the church's

cost of having one done. In either case a criminal records search is a necessary part of the recruitment process. In the case of returning volunteers, this would be done at the beginning of their ministry to children/youth and would not be required on an annual basis.

e. Approval Process: Once all of the above steps have been completed, a decision is made as to the applicant's suitability for the position. The information obtained through each of the recruitment steps is reviewed by the selection committee (or pastor / department leader in the case of a volunteer), and a recommendation made to the appropriate authority, e.g., the Official Board, the Christian Education Director.

f. Records: An individual file is established for each applicant. The file contains the complete record of the recruitment process, i.e., resume, application and/or screening form; interview summary; reference and contact check information; and criminal records search. The confidentiality of these records is essential. They are stored in a filing cabinet that can be locked and access is limited and controlled by the pastor, or a designated individual. Access to personnel records is limited to individuals who carry immediate responsibility for the applicable program(s). An oath of confidentiality can be requested to emphasize the importance of keeping confidential personnel related information. (See attached statement)

The church must address the issue of child sexual abuse directly and openly. Although the above procedure may appear overwhelming for congregations who rely on a large number of volunteers, a documented screening process must be followed to safeguard children / youth and to reduce liability. Each part of the procedure should be completed before individuals begin work / involvement in programs. Present employees / volunteers should be required to complete the Screening Form, provide references / contacts, and provide verification of a criminal records search.

Anyone who is identified as having sexual activity with a child/youth, or who has been convicted of any sexual crime is not an appropriate candidate for any position of authority or trust, particularly involving children and youth.

Occasionally individuals will freely admit to criminal convictions of sexual abuse, or sexual behaviour involving children and/or youth, but insist that they have since had a conversion experience and no longer present a risk. Anyone with a history of sexual perpetration is not an acceptable candidate for positions of trust involving children and youth. The question is not whether conversion has occurred, but one of accepting responsibility. Not accepting responsibility

for their behaviour is one of the characteristics of sexual perpetrators. Claiming conversion can be a method of avoiding responsibility. One of the components of treatment and behaviour control is a relapse prevention program. Perpetrators who are walking with the Lord, and taking responsibility for their past actions, will realize the danger of being involved in situations that increase their risk to re-offend. This condition is similar to that of a reformed alcoholics who recognize that they must avoid all alcohol. A church that permits such an individual to work with children or youth, on the basis of the professed religious conversion, will have a virtually indefensible position should another incident of abuse occur.

2. Training

Training will be provided or arranged by the church and required of all paid employees and those volunteers working with children/youth. Training will include the following topics:

- defining sexual abuse;
- the short and long term effects of abuse;
- the disclosure process and how to receive a disclosure;
- the requirement to report abuse;
- the need to work with civic authorities throughout the investigation of the allegation;
- awareness of applicable church policies and procedures. An opportunity will be provided for each volunteer to read these within a designated period of time, e.g., 6 weeks of assuming responsibility. He/she will verify, by way of signature, having read and understood these.

Training sessions will be organised to allow that all new staff members and volunteers have opportunity to attend within two months of assuming their responsibilities. Local and/or denominational resource professions will be accessed to ensure expertise. A record of each individual's attendance will be kept in his/her personnel file.

3. Individual Conduct

It is expected that all paid employees and volunteers will not abuse positions of authority and/or trust to trick, trap, coerce or bribe another individual, regardless of age, into a sexual experience. It is expected that he/she will respect the personal boundaries and dignity of others. It is expected that conduct will not include behaviour and/or activity that are defined by the Criminal Code of Canada as constituting a sexual offence.

It is expected that concern and caring will be conveyed to young children by:

- addressing children at eye level;
- speaking kindly and listening carefully to what the child is saying;
- comforting and quieting by placing an arm around the shoulders;
- affirming by patting the head (if culturally appropriate), hand, shoulder or back;
- holding a child by the shoulders or hand to keep his/her attention, or to direct his/her movements;
- gently hold a child's chin to help him/her focus on what the adult is saying.

It is expected that the staff member or volunteer will avoid the following behaviours / activities with children and youth:

- kissing, extended frontal hugs and tickling;
- touching of breasts, thighs, buttock, and genital areas (the child's, youth's or the adult's);
- physically carrying older children or having them sit on the adult's lap;
- discussing personal private matters with a child;
- dating between a youth and a volunteer.

Supervision and Staffing Guidelines

Children and youth programming requires staffing in a variety of settings, for a variety of purposes and to accommodate varied developmental competencies of participants. The following guidelines are intended to highlight areas where precautions need to be taken. Implementing these can enhance the quality of programming by ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for all.

1. General Guidelines and Precautions

a. Staffing Pattern: Adopt a two-volunteer staffing pattern, either two adults or one adult and one adolescent. In no circumstances should two adolescents be assigned responsibility for children and/or youth. A team approach allows for flexibility in handling specific situations, and can facilitate the development of leadership and teaching skills.

b. Visibility and Accessibility: Ensure that there is visibility and easy access to any classroom or group activity area. This may require that windows

be installed, doors remain open, or that a supervisor make periodic, unannounced, visits.

c. Registration: Programs for nurseries and pre-school aged children will provide a sign-in sheet, identifying the child's name, parent / caregiver's name and location during the class / activity time, and the names of the volunteers accepting the child. Children are not accepted until they are received by a volunteer and properly registered. A child will be released to a parent or to a representative only on the basis of prior, written notification from the parent and proof of identification.

d. Monitoring: Regular monitoring of the property / area will be done to ensure that out-of-the-way places, or places that provide a level of privacy are not being accessed by individuals (older children, adolescents, adults) as places to lure and abuse others. Examples of spaces that will be regularly checked include: bathrooms, storage areas, unused rooms, poorly lit areas inside and outside the building.

2. Nursery

Nurseries for children under two years will be staffed by two volunteers, one of which must be an adult. The diapering area will be separate, but visible and accessible from the main activity area. This arrangement allows both a level of privacy for the child and openness between team members. Only assigned volunteers (i.e., those who have completed the recruitment process) will work in the nursery.

3. Pre-school Ages (2-5/6 years)

Volunteer teams working with pre-schoolers will include at least one adult. (To facilitate same-gender bathroom assistance, teams should include both males and females.) Parents will be encouraged to ensure that their children use the bathroom prior to joining the class/activity. If a child requires the bathroom facility during class/activity, one volunteer will advise the team partner that he/she is escorting the child to the bathroom. The child will be escorted to the bathroom door, and asked if he/she needs further assistance. If not, the volunteer will stay outside the door until the child exits. If the child requires assistance in the washroom, a female volunteer will provide this for girls and a male for boys. While the volunteer is in the bathroom with the child, the bathroom door will remain ajar (by propping open if necessary). Encouraging the child to do as much for him/herself as possible and modelling that the bathroom is a "private" place for the child, builds the child's sense of personal boundaries.

4. Elementary Ages (6-12 years)

A volunteer may need to escort a child to the bathroom (depending on location, the child's familiarity with the facility and the child's ability), but assistance within the bathroom should not be required and will not be given. If a child requires assistance, the child's parent will be asked to provide this. If the child is escorted to the bathroom, the volunteer will wait, outside the door, to escort the child back to the group. A volunteer will not be alone with a child in an unsupervised bathroom, and will never enter a stall with a child and close the door.

5. Special Day and Overnight Events

Special events that occur on or off church premises will be pre-planned, sanctioned by a designated body / person (e.g., the church board, C.E. Director), and advertised at least one week in advance. Depending upon the activity, written parental consent may be required.

Only assigned volunteers will be involved in these events and will be named in the advance advertising. Functions that include all boys will be staffed by at least two male volunteers. Functions that include all girls will be staffed by at least two females. Co-educational groups require male and female staff members. A participant-to-leader ratio of 10 to two is recommended as a minimum for children under age 12 years.

6. Special Areas of Concern

a. Transportation: Transportation arrangements will be organised so that a driver is not alone with a child/youth. Parents will be requested to bring their children to, and collect them from, the church whenever possible.

b. Counselling: One-on-one counselling will always be arranged with the knowledge of the parent, or a ministry related third party. The meeting will occur in a public place, or a place that allows for easy visibility and access. The adult will arrange the seating so as to not be between the child/youth and the door. This allows the child/youth freedom to leave the room at any time. The door will always be left ajar.

Attitude of Openness

One of the most powerful control mechanisms used by perpetrators against victims is imposed secrecy. Silence is enforced through threat of further harm

to the victim, of harm to another person and/or that the victim will not be believed if a disclosure were to be made. If the perpetrator holds a position of social stature or of authority within the congregation, this latter form of intimidation is particularly powerful.

An attitude of openness by church and program leaders about sexual abuse can counteract the intimidation of the abuser and make it easier for victims to disclose any inappropriate behaviour and personal violation. It is important for children/youth to know they can tell someone of the abuse, and that they will be believed.

Openness can be conveyed in a number of ways: sexual abuse can be named from the pulpit as an inappropriate action and one that the church will take action against; training sessions can be advertised and open; children/youth workers can be alert to individual behaviours and emotional states of children and youth, and initiate statements of awareness and concern. Sexual abuse can be discussed as part of the curriculum, thereby letting children and youth know directly that they have access to leaders.

Reporting Requirements

It is required by law that disclosures, or awareness, of alleged sexual abuse be reported to designated civil authorities. The identity of the reporter is protected by law.

Reporting requirements are mandated by provincial child welfare legislation. Copies of this legislation can be obtained through local provincial offices. It is recommended that each church obtain a copy of the Act and that leaders familiarize themselves with those sections which define child abuse and specify reporting requirements. In addition, church leaders should become aware of the names and phone numbers of the appropriate child welfare and police resources in their community to which reports of abuse can be made.

Child welfare legislation defines circumstances and conditions in addition to sexual abuse that also carry the responsibility to report, e.g., neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse. These are significant dangers to children and youth. Children's ministry leaders should be familiar with the definitions and signs of these forms of child maltreatment and be prepared to take appropriate and protective action.

The church will establish procedures for the reporting of any allegations of occurrence or disclosure of abuse to the leadership of the church (e.g., the pastor, the C.E. Director, the Board). If the alleged abuser is a leader in the church, he/she cannot be made aware of the disclosure prior to the investigation beginning. Other leaders must assume responsibility and work with civil and denominational resources in handling the situation.

Handling Abuse Disclosures

When a disclosure of abuse is made, it is critical that the church work with the civil authorities. The responsibility to investigate the allegation rests with the civil authorities, not with the church. Sexual abuse is a criminal offence and must be investigated by those who have the appropriate expertise and legal authority.

The individual against whom an allegation of sexual abuse is made will be suspended from all positions of authority and activities that give him/her access to children. However, the timing of the suspension will be arranged in coordination with the child welfare / police investigation so as to not jeopardize the investigation or contaminate evidence. See the companion statement on Responding to Abuse Disclosure for a more complete discussion of handling occurrences and disclosures of child sexual abuse.

SCREENING FORM

Free Methodist Church

It is the intent of the church to provide children and youth attending its programs and facilities with a safe environment. We recognize the prevalence of sexual abuse within our society, and that it can, and does, occur within communities of faith. We realize that asking for the following information can be off-putting for some. Our purpose is not to offend. Please accept that our purpose is to ensure, as much as possible, that children and youth will not be exposed to risk.

This application is to be completed by all applicants, 14 years or older, seeking any paid position or any position involving the supervision or custody of children and youth. This is not an employment application form. The purpose of this form is to assist the church in providing a safe and secure environment for children and youth.

The information that you provide will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with policies and procedures established by the church. Only those individuals with a legitimate need will have access to it. If you have any questions or concerns about the information requested, please contact the senior pastor or the Christian Education Director.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name _____ Date _____
(Identity must be confirmed with a driver's license or other photographic identification.)
2. Address: Street _____
City _____ Postal Code _____
Telephone _____
3. Do you have a current driver's license? Yes _____ No _____
If yes, please list your driver's license number _____
4. Please indicate the type of position you are seeking or children/youth work you prefer:

- Date you are available to begin _____
What is the minimum length of commitment you can make? _____
5. How long have you attended this congregation? _____

6. Please identify the name and address of the church in which you hold membership:

List the names and addresses of other churches you have attending regularly during the past five years: _____

7. Have you ever been convicted of or pled guilty of a sex-related crime? Yes___No___

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORK HISTORY

8. List any gifts, callings, training, education or other factors that have prepared you for children or youth work _____

9. List all previous church work involving children and youth, providing the following information: (use the reverse page if more space is needed)

<u>Name, address and phone number of church</u>	<u>Type of work</u>	<u>Dates</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

For each church listed above, provide the name and phone number of a person we can contact who can speak to your participation. _____

10. List all previous non-church work involving children and youth providing the following information: (use the reverse side if more space is needed)

<u>Name, address and phone of each organization</u>	<u>Type of work</u>	<u>Dates</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

EXPECTATIONS

11. The church provides training for its staff members and volunteers working with children and youth. Are you prepared to attend training sessions prior to assuming responsibilities?

Yes _____ No _____

12. The church requires that all staff and volunteers working with children and youth provide verification of a criminal records search.

Have you previously provided this to the church? Yes _____ No _____

If no, are you prepared to provide one? Yes _____ No _____

13. The church expects you to be aware of and follow its policies and procedures in relation to its work with children and youth. Are you prepared to become knowledgeable of these and to follow them? Yes _____ No _____

REFERENCE CHECKS

14. Please provide the names, addresses and phone numbers of two individuals who can speak to your character, behaviour and abilities. References should be non-relatives, and someone other than those already named above.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Relationship</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

DECLARATION

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. Should I be accepted as a staff member or as a volunteer, I agree to be bound by the policies, procedures, bylaws and discipline of the Free Methodist Church. I agree to not abuse positions of authority and/or trust I may hold, or to trick, trap, coerce or bribe another individual, regardless of age, into a sexual experience. I will respect the personal boundaries and dignity of others and pledge that my conduct will not include behaviour and/or activities that are defined by the Criminal Code of Canada as constituting a sexual offence.

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness Signature _____ Date _____

Comment to Reviewers: This sample form follows the protocol developed by the Free Methodist Church of North America. The following, however, have not been included:

- the question asking whether the applicant is a victim of abuse; and
- the authorization for referees to provide information and the waiver of liability
- acknowledgement of understanding of the declaration and voluntary signature.

OATH OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I, _____, acknowledge that in my capacity as _____
I may become knowledgeable of specific personal information of individuals involved in
the church's program, either as paid employees or as volunteers. I hereby pledge to hold
this information confidential, except as required by law, and to use it only for purposes
related to the responsibilities I hold as _____.

Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

Request for Criminal Records Check and Authorization

I hereby request the _____ Police Department to release to the _____ Free Methodist Church any information which pertains to the records of any convictions contained in its files or in an criminal file maintained on me whether local, provincial or national. I hereby release said Police Department from any and all liability resulting from such disclosure.

Signature _____

Print Name _____

Print Maiden Name (if applicable) _____

Print All Aliases _____

Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____

Social Insurance Number _____

Today's Date _____

Send Record To:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Reference Contact Form

Confidential

Name of Applicant: _____ Date of Contact _____

Person Initiating the Contact _____

Method of Contact (telephone, letter, personal conversation) _____

Name of Person Contacted _____

Position and Relationship to the Applicant _____

Length of time Person has known Applicant _____

Specific Questions:

1. (If a church contact) In what capacity was the applicant involved with the church? _____

(If an employment contact) In what capacity was the applicant employed? _____

2. (If a church contact) What spiritual gifts were evident in the applicant's involvement? _____

(If an employment contact) What strengths did the applicant demonstrate in fulfilling his/her responsibilities? _____

3. (If a church contact) Would you welcome the applicant's re-involvement as a volunteer with children and youth programming? _____

(If an employment contact) Would you recommend the applicant for re-employment? _____

4. Are there any other comments you would like to make that may be helpful to us in our decision-making? _____

Summary (summarize the reference's/contact's remarks concerning the applicant's suitability)

Signature _____ Date _____

Position _____

Sources Consulted

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