

BETHESDA MENNONITE CHURCH
HENDERSON, NEBRASKA

Child Protection Plan

Completed by
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Church Safety Task Group

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Working together to build safe spaces for children in Christ's name.

*The Bethesda Mennonite Church is a member of
Central Plains Conference and Mennonite Church USA*

“Together the church and the community must seek God’s guidance in bringing restoration to our families and protection to our children.”

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14) These well-known words of Jesus give us a picture of God's love for children – it is inviting, welcoming, empowering, and safe! We see Jesus’ open arms outstretched toward the young ones the disciples were trying to turn away; a posture of blessing and care. In the previous chapter, Jesus even goes so far as to say, *“whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me,”* (Matthew 18:5) making this act of providing nurturing spaces for children an especially holy one. As in so many other ways, God incarnate in Jesus shows us how to be faithful followers of Christ through our relationships. We are called to invite children to be among us. We are called to bless them. In doing so, we welcome God into our lives.

For this welcome to be truly extended to children in the context of our congregations, our churches must be places of refuge and safety. Young people must feel free to come in their inexperience, immaturity, and vulnerability with the expectation that they will not be harmed. They must also have confidence that if they have been harmed, they will find healing.

At Bethesda Mennonite Church, we believe that *“to be effective in ministry we face the challenge of cultivating healthy patterns and relationships and addressing directly unhealthy ways of relating among us. Our witness to Jesus and the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us are directly related to the quality of our relationships and the ways we structure our life in the body of Christ.”* (John 13:34-35, Rom. 12:1-13, Col. 3:1-17) Ensuring that our congregations are truly sanctuaries for our children is part of encouraging these healthy relational patterns. By working together toward safety for children in our churches, we share a common intention for their well-being. This shared priority widens our welcome of children, makes more certain that they will be blessed to be among us, and strengthens the spirit of God in our midst.

Jesus not only calls us to welcome children, but also calls us to “become like little children” (Matthew 18:3) ourselves, so we too can experience the reign of heaven that belongs to them. We are to come to God with vulnerability, curiosity and that spirit of openness that gives little ones their vibrancy, creativity, resilience, and joy. If we can take this attitude as we do the work of child protection, we may find healing for the hurts of our childhood, deeper connection with one another, and peace in knowing we have been faithful to the most vulnerable ones among us.

May the process of protecting the children, in the care of our congregation or organization, be marked with the hopeful spirit of young people as we travel together on this journey toward growth in caring, trust, and wholeness.

The Bethesda Mennonite Church Safety Task Group

II. GENERAL CHILD PROTECTION

A. Child Protection Philosophy

Bethesda Mennonite Church places a high priority on the safety of all children within its care. While recognizing that each area of a comprehensive child protection program is essential to the proper functioning of a high-quality youth ministry, special attention will be given to child abuse prevention and recovery.

Bethesda Mennonite Church commits to a collaborative, strategic approach to child protection, which includes identifying and addressing the threats and opportunities Bethesda Mennonite Church faces. The views and participation of personnel at all levels of Bethesda Mennonite Church including volunteers, will be welcomed as Bethesda Mennonite Church identifies child protection priorities and implements strategies for modifying, retaining or financing risk.

This collaborative effort culminated in the creation of the following Child Protection Plan. The most recent version of the plan was presented to the Board of Education for its review on August 20, 2013 and was approved by the Board of Education on that date. The plan was presented to the Church Council on August 27, 2013 and approved by Church Council on that date.

B. General Safety Principles

1. Bethesda Mennonite Church will at all times operate in compliance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations.
2. Bethesda Mennonite Church adheres to the policies and standards of Central Plains Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA in matters related to the health, safety, and well-being of those impacted by its ministry.
3. All adults involved in Bethesda Mennonite Church, bear responsibility for the health, safety, and security of children and youth under the age of 18. This is a primary responsibility of the Board of Education, the Church Council, pastors, volunteers, and staff.
4. Child protection activities are multi-faceted and include:
 - a. Thoughtful screening, selection, and training of both volunteers and employed staff.
 - b. Creation and implementation of policies, standards, guidelines, and procedures as guides for planning.
 - c. Maintaining safe and secure facilities.
 - d. Establishing procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency.
 - e. Maintaining clear communication channels.
 - f. Purchasing insurance coverage as a financing mechanism for certain risks, while recognizing that insurance is not a substitute for vigilance in planning and implementing programs.

C. Child Protection Goals

Bethesda Mennonite Church seeks to create and sustain a safe environment that enables a caring ministry and the creation of meaningful opportunities for individual and community involvement using the tools of non-profit Child Protection principles and strategies.

Bethesda Mennonite Church further commits to ensuring an appropriate response to all incidents that threaten or violate the spiritual, physical, social, psychological, emotional, or sexual well-being of children in their scope of influence.

D. Responsibility for Child Protection Plan

1. All Boards and Committees

- a. Responsible for reviewing the Child Protection Plan annually, paying particular attention to specific areas of responsibility listed below.
- b. Responsible for Section III Part H of the Child Protection Plan: Child Abuse Prevention Overview.
- c. Responsible for Section IV Part A and B of the Child Protection Plan: Vehicle Accident Procedures and Reporting Child Abuse.
- d. Responsible to have all volunteers complete the Children/Youth Volunteer Form (Form A).
- e. Volunteers who are expected to serve as drivers are required to fill out the Driving History/Record Release (Form B).

2. Board of Education

- a. The Board of Education champions Bethesda's wide effort to protect children of Bethesda Mennonite Church and engage leadership, parents, and other members/attendees of Bethesda Mennonite Church in child protection activities.
- b. Approves child protection goals and adopts annual operating objectives with child protection included.
- c. Adopts annual budget with child protection in mind.
- d. Reviews committee and ministry reports to determine compliance with the child protection plan.
- e. Adopts and establishes policies and standards.
- f. Reviews Bethesda Church's Child Protection Plan annually.
- g. Implements training related to child protection strategies for staff? volunteers, parents and children at Bethesda Mennonite Church. Suggested resources are www.dovesnest.net and Circle of Grace.
- h. Assists Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Team in reviewing its Child Protection Plan as needed.
- i. Evaluates the insurance program in collaboration with the Board of Business.
- j. Develops, with pastors, the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team.
- k. The Sunday School Superintendent will send a letter home yearly to inform parents that the Sunday school classrooms and hallways will not be supervised until church services have ended.
- l. The Board of Education will be responsible for implementing and overseeing the Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Plan.
- m. Responsible for Section III Part D number 5 of the Child Protection Plan: Conditions of Acceptance for - and Grounds for Removal from - Positions Working with Children and Youth.
- n. Responsible for Section III Part E and F of the Child Protection Plan: Supervision of Volunteers and Volunteer Dismissal.
- o. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

3. Board of Business

- a. The Board of Business will review the Bethesda church insurance program annually.
- b. The Board of Business addresses the list of safety changes presented by the Board of Education and Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team.
- c. Section III A of the Child Protection Plan - In collaboration with its insurance company, Bethesda Mennonite Church's Board of Business will inspect its entire facility at least annually to ensure that it is safe for children and youth to occupy. For a Safety Audit Checklist, see page 46-47.
- d. Transportation concerns or needs should be brought to the attention of the Board of Business.
- e. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.
- f. Responsible for Section III Part G, numbers 3, 4, 5: Vehicle Selection, Vehicle Maintenance, and Accident Procedures.

4. Pastors

- a. Keep the Bethesda Board of Education apprised of emerging concerns and opportunities to improve child protection in Bethesda Mennonite Church.
- b. Pastors act as Response Team in the event of any "unusual incident" or report of suspected child abuse.
- c. The pastors, along with the Board of Education, will develop and appoint members to the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team.
- d. Develop with the Office Manager, a policy for internet use, which will be available in the church office. This will be posted by computers available for congregational use.
- e. Provide tours for new office staff and new pastors. (Training per Section III Part D number 4b.?)
- f. Responsible for Section III B of the Child Protection Plan: Information Management.
- g. Responsible for Section III H of the Child Protection Plan: Child Prevention Overview.
- h. Responsible for Section IV of the Child Protection Plan: Responding to Unusual Incidents.
- i. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

5. Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team

- a. Convenes periodically to review the Bethesda's emerging problem situations and corresponding child protection strategies.
- b. Check sex offender register monthly.
- c. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.
- d. Responsible for Section V of the Child Protection Plan: Job description, responsibilities and desired traits of team members.

- e. Confidential files will be kept in the church office, locked with membership information in the church office. Pastors and Office Manager will be the only people with access to this information.
- f. A volunteer list and driving forms will be kept in the church office.
- g. Review the Child Protection Plan annually with the Board of Education.
- h. Responsible to review Children/Youth Volunteer Forms and Driving History/Record Release Forms. (How does this impact me?; How does this impact drivers for camp?)
- i. Responsible for Section IV Part C of the Child Protection Plan: Guidelines for Actions and Responsibilities of the Pastoral Team of Bethesda Mennonite Church.
- j. Provide support for implementation of Section IV Part D of the Child Protection Plan: Policy for Including Sex Offenders in Church.

6. Church Council

- a. The Church Council will seek out legal counsel as needed.
- b. Responsible for background checks for employees.
- c. Responsible for Section C: Human Resources and Child Protection and D: Screening employees of the Child Protection Plan.
- d. Work in collaboration with the Board of Education on Section F of the Child Protection Plan: Volunteer Dismissal.
- e. Section IV part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

7. Office Administrator

- a. Keep confidential files in the church office locked file cabinet.
- b. Keep a list of volunteers in the office.
- c. Central location for transportation forms including signatures (page 44).
- d. Central location for Youth Permission/Waiver Forms (page 42-43).
- e. Responsible for Section III Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Information Management.
- f. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

8. Technology Management Committee

- a. Responsible for Section III Part B number 2 of the Child Protection Plan: Internet Guidelines.
- b. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

9. Preschool Committee

- a. Responsible for Section III Part D number 4b. of the Child Protection Plan: Orientation and Training.
- b. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

10. Board of Service and Outreach

- a. Responsible for Section III Part H number 6 of the Child Protection Plan: Use a Church Nursery Identification Procedure.
- b. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.

11. Board of Deacons

- a. Responsible for Section IV Part B of the Child Protection Plan: Reporting Child Abuse.
- b. Responsible for Section IV Part C and D of the Child Protection Plan: Guidelines for Actions and Responsibilities of the Pastoral Team of Bethesda Mennonite Church and Policy for Including Sex Offenders in the Church.

III. SAFETY POLICIES

A. Facilities

In collaboration with its insurance company, Bethesda Mennonite Church Board of Business will inspect its entire facility at least annually to ensure that it is safe for children and youth to occupy. For a Safety Audit Checklist, see page 39.

B. Information Management

1. Access to Confidential Information

- a. Bethesda Mennonite Church has files on children/youth, families, staff, and volunteers that contain confidential information. Therefore, it is essential to limit access to certain records to only those whose positions require access. Confidential information in paper form will be stored in locked file cabinets and in a locked room during non-working hours. All should use good judgment and common sense in protecting confidential information.
- b. The pastors and Administrative Assistant/Office Manager will oversee a system to limit access to electronic records based on duties and responsibilities in the congregation. Access will also be protected through the use of passwords. Access will be modified from time to time as work assignments change.
- c. Any employee or volunteer who intentionally obtains unauthorized access to records shall be subject to discipline, up to and including termination. Any volunteer or employee who accidentally obtains access to confidential records should inform the pastors immediately.

2. Internet Guidelines

- a. A Technology Policy will be developed that establishes reasonable boundaries for acceptable use of the Internet at Bethesda Mennonite Church, which will be available in the church office.
- b. Bethesda Mennonite Church will refrain from featuring any information on its website that could result in inappropriate access to children/youth. The names, schools, phone numbers, home addresses, and/or email addresses of children or youth will not be included on the website. Parental permission for photos to be displayed on the website will be obtained. See annual and activity permission forms located on pages 35-37 of this manual.
- c. Young people using the computers at Bethesda Mennonite Church will be protected from inappropriate material on the web using end-user software, server-based blocking, or limiting to child-friendly websites. A filter is in place to ensure inappropriate websites are blocked.

C. Human Resources and Child Protection

Bethesda Mennonite Church integrates the Child Protection Plan into its staff and volunteer recruitment, screening and selection process by:

1. Communicating to prospective volunteers Bethesda's requirements and expectations.

2. Designing position descriptions that support the identification of appropriate screening tools based on the risks associated with a particular position. Bethesda Mennonite Church uses job descriptions for both paid and volunteer positions in the Bethesda Mennonite Church. These documents are developed by the Board of Education and can be updated on an as needed basis. See page 28 of this manual for job descriptions.
3. Volunteer positions requiring contact with vulnerable members/attendees (such as children) will require the completion of the covenant, volunteer form, and possible criminal history and other records checks.

D. Screening Employees and Volunteers

Screening is to be used with all applicants (including clergy) for full-time, part-time, compensated or volunteer work within the Bethesda Mennonite Church. Screening must be completed according to the guidelines below prior to working with children or youth.

1. The "Six Month" Rule

- a. Volunteers will be permitted to work with youth or children only after they have been regular attendees of the church for 6 months. Excluded from this rule are volunteers for Daily Vacation Bible School. DVBS volunteers will be assigned a position with other approved adults.

2. Applicant Age Requirement

- a. Approved volunteers who work with children or youth must be 18 years of age or older. Young leaders (age 14-18) may be approved to work as assistants to adult leaders, but not as leaders in charge of any group of children/youth or individual child/youth. All leaders in charge must be at least five years older than the children/youth for whom they have responsibility, or at least be a sophomore in college.

3. Volunteer Form

- a. A volunteer form/covenant will be completed prior to assignment. See Form A. The form will include a detailed authorization and release form giving permission for the release of criminal history and child abuse history information.
- b. Applicants who are expected to serve as drivers for program participants as a part of their position, will be required to release their motor vehicle record as well.
- c. These forms will be completed and submitted to the church office annually. See Forms A and B.

4. Orientation and Training

- a. Bethesda Mennonite Church is responsible for designing and conducting an appropriate orientation session for all staff and volunteers. The orientation of a new staff person or volunteer must take place annually in concordance with DVBS teacher meeting and training. A typical orientation will include review of the Bethesda's expectations of someone serving as a staff person or volunteer and a review of the Child Protection Policy. The following designates who gives the tours and orientation.
- b. Board of Education is responsible for volunteers.
 - i. Pastors are responsible for office staff, janitors and new pastors.
 - ii. The Preschool Committee is responsible for Bethesda Preschool.

5. Conditions of Acceptance for – and Grounds for Removal from – Positions Working with Children and Youth

Employees or volunteers who match the following criteria may be disqualified for work with children and youth at Bethesda Mennonite Church. These are also grounds for removal from a position working with children and youth:

- a. Failure to sign the covenant agreement.
- b. Failure to accurately report criminal/child abuse history.
- c. History of violence or any sexually exploitive behavior, including but not limited to a history of sexual abuse of children/youth.
- d. Conviction for any crime in which children/youth were involved.
- e. Termination from a paid or volunteer position caused by any form of misconduct with a child/youth, including but not limited to inappropriate discipline or affection.
- f. Current drug or alcohol abuse.
- g. Current poor driving record (if the position requires transportation of children/youth).

E. Supervision of Volunteers

Bethesda Mennonite Church has established clear lines of authority and supervision for the volunteers serving the Bethesda Mennonite Church. Volunteer performance is monitored on an ongoing basis and evaluated more formally if needed or concerns arise through the practice of a one-on-one meeting with the person appointed by the Board of Education.

F. Volunteer Dismissal

1. Volunteers serving Bethesda Mennonite Church may be dismissed at any time when the Board of Education and Church Council determines that:
 - a. The volunteer is indifferent with regard to Bethesda Mennonite Church's essential rules and requirements.
 - b. The volunteer cannot adequately perform the job for which they have been retained.
 - c. The volunteer's continued service presents an unacceptable danger to Bethesda Mennonite Church or its personnel or clients.
2. At the time of dismissal, departing volunteers will be provided with a letter thanking them for their past service and explaining the reason why their continued service is no longer required.
3. All volunteer dismissals will be reviewed by the Board of Education and Church Council in advance of taking action.

G. Transportation

1. Authorized Vehicle Use Policy

Providing transportation services to young people is a mission-critical function. However, Bethesda Mennonite Church recognizes its responsibility to provide safe and efficient transportation. The following rules apply to all drivers and vehicles:

- a. Only people approved and authorized by Bethesda Mennonite Church are permitted to drive either a Bethesda Mennonite Church-owned vehicle or any

other vehicle on the Bethesda Mennonite Church's behalf. All approved drivers must provide proof of their possession of:

- i. a valid driver's license
 - ii. acceptable driving record
 - iii. personal automobile insurance
- b. Occasional drivers: Those who drive for children's/youth activities may be approved by filling out the Driving History/Record Release Form and Driver Agreement [see page 25-26 of this policy manual for the appropriate forms].
- c. Bethesda Mennonite Church-owned vehicles are to be used within the approved guidelines for use.
- d. Any complaints or information received by Bethesda Mennonite Church about unsafe or illegal driving will be reviewed to determine if any corrective action is needed. Such a review may require an updated Motor Vehicle Records check.

2. Driver Ineligibility

Those drivers who exceed the recommended guidelines for accidents or violations are ineligible to drive a vehicle owned by Bethesda Mennonite Church or to drive a personal vehicle on Bethesda Mennonite Church's business.

A driver will not be approved if he or she has in his/her driving record in the past seven years:

- a. 1 major violation or
- b. 3 or more moving violations or
- c. 2 or more accidents or
- d. 1 at-fault accident and 2 moving violations

3. Vehicle Selection

Currently Bethesda Mennonite Church operates a 15-passenger van. Due to safety concerns, it is suggested that the church purchase an eight-passenger vehicle, which follows Nebraska Public School Transportation Laws when replacing the van.

4. Vehicle Maintenance

It is the policy of Bethesda Mennonite Church to inspect all vehicles, except personal vehicles. Vehicle operators/custodians are responsible for ensuring vehicles are serviced/maintained according to the manufacturer's recommended schedule. Any safety problems on vehicles owned by Bethesda Mennonite Church will be reported by vehicle operators/custodians to the Board of Business immediately for proper follow-up. The owner must address any safety problems on personal vehicles before using the vehicle to transport children/youth of Bethesda Mennonite Church.

5. Accident Procedures

- a. See Unusual Incident Section on page 27 of this policy manual.

H. Child Abuse Prevention Overview

Bethesda Mennonite Church recognizes that child abuse is a serious problem. It is often committed by a person who is a caretaker of a child, or in a position of trust and authority. Child abuse is not accidental and can be physical, sexual, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Detailed

definitions of child physical, emotional, and sexual abuse can be found at the end of this policy manual.

While abuse in any form can be devastating to a child, of particular concern to Bethesda Mennonite Church is child sexual abuse, which affects one in four girls and one in six boys in the United States. Because of the high levels of access and trust that are provided to workers in faith community settings, such as Bethesda Mennonite Church, special care must be taken to prevent and address child sexual abuse. The following policies are intended to ensure that Bethesda Mennonite Church serves young people in the safest environment possible by encouraging adults to take responsibility for their individual roles in child protection.

The following are Guidelines for Child Abuse Prevention:

1. Use a Team Approach – The Two-Adult Rule

- a. Two adult leaders will be present during any church activity involving minors. We recommend a "roamer" and open doors to the hallways if not able to provide 2 adults for supervision; some examples, but not limited to would be: Preschool, Sunday School, Midweek Services, and Bible School. Young leaders (under age 18) may assist in classrooms with adult supervision but may not substitute for the leadership of an adult and will never be left alone with a child or group of children.
- b. We recommend that children over 5 will also use a "buddy system" when traveling throughout the building for activities such as using the restroom. Children under five will be accompanied to the restroom by an adult leader and given assistance as needed. The stall door should remain open.

2. Provide Adequate Personnel

It is recommended that programs that involve children and youth will include adequate supervisory personnel. Supervision will be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

- a. The following ratios are recommended:
Under 3 years of age: Two adults (preferably one of each gender), plus additional adults to match these ratios:
 - 0 to 1 years: 1 adult to 5 children
 - 1 to 3 years: 1 adult to 6 children

3 years and over: Up to 20 children/youth, 2 adults (preferably one of each gender) plus 1 additional adult for every 1 to 10 additional children/youth.

Example:

- 20 children = 2 adults (at least)
 - 21-30 children = 3 adults
 - 31-40 children = 4 adults
 - and so on
- b. On all overnight events, a minimum of two trained leaders will be in attendance. One-adult/one-child sleeping arrangements are prohibited, including sharing a bed in a room with other people.

3. Minimize One-Child/One Adult Situations

- a. All interactions between children/youth and adults must be visible to others, preferably with more than one adult and more than one child present. If private conversation is required, it may occur out of earshot of others, but not out of sight. Activities will be observable and interruptible at all times.
- b. All classrooms and other areas used by minors must have a window in the door or the door must be left open during use if this does not pose a safety risk.
- c. At least one “roving” Children’s/Youth Ministries team member will monitor the doors, circulate through the church and provide assistance as needed during Sunday school, and other children’s/youth activities.
- d. A letter will be sent home yearly to inform parents that the Sunday school classrooms and hallways will not be under supervision until church services have ended.

4. Use Appropriate Discipline and Expressions of Affection

- a. Use appropriate hugs and touches that are reassuring or comforting, not uncomfortable or hurtful.
- b. Avoid total body-to-body hugs, touching in private areas or kissing on the lips.
- c. Use warm, caring, verbal comments.
- d. Do not use demeaning or blaming comments, verbal put-downs, hurtful discipline (such as physical restraint), or corporal punishment.
- e. Use constructive, age-appropriate discipline suited to the behavior and the child.
- f. Do not withhold food as a form of discipline.
- g. Be aware of, and sensitive to, what makes a child feel uncomfortable.
- h. Respect a child/youth's refusal of affection.

5. Obtain Parental Permission

Children and youth up to age 18 must have written parental permission for involvement in church sponsored programs or activities. See pages 34-37 of this policy manual for annual and trip-specific permission forms. Church workers will obtain the consent of the child's parent or guardian by phone if an emergency situation necessitates that an adult will be alone with that child.

6. Use a Church Nursery Identification Procedure

Nursery personnel will clearly identify the child and the child's parent or legal guardian. Children will only be released to a properly identified and pre-authorized adult, at least 18 years of age. See page 38 of this policy manual for a copy of the Nursery Sign In/Out Sheet.

IV. RESPONDING TO UNUSUAL INCIDENTS

All incidents in which a child/youth’s safety is compromised or violated (i.e. accidents, injuries, altercations, etc.) will be considered an “unusual incident,” requiring the completion of the Unusual Incident Form at the end of this policy manual. The Unusual Incident Form must be completed and turned in to a pastor (Leadership Team?) of Bethesda Mennonite Church by an involved adult, an adult witness to the incident, or any adult to whom the incident was reported within 24 hours of the occurrence of the incident. The pastors of Bethesda Mennonite Church may share any Unusual Incident Report submitted to him/her with the Church Safety Task Group (Leadership Team?) of Bethesda Mennonite Church.

Special instructions for certain scenarios are listed below.

A. Vehicle Accident Procedures

Persons authorized to drive for Bethesda Mennonite Church will follow this procedure if they are involved in an accident while driving any vehicle for the Bethesda Mennonite Church:

1. Call the police or ask a bystander to contact the police. Tend to any medical needs.
2. Do not discuss the accident or admit fault to any other driver involved or bystander.
3. Fill out the Unusual Incident Form with special attention to Vehicle Accident Information.
4. When timing allows, call the church office and parents of attending students.

B. Reporting Child Abuse

1. Know the Facts about Child Abuse

- a. Using the introductory material on child abuse and childhood stress available for your reference on pages 41-46 of this policy manual, assess the condition and situation of the child whom you suspect may be experiencing child abuse.
- b. Learn more by reading some of the recommended materials on page 21 of this manual, or by attending trainings on the subject. Bethesda Mennonite Church and other local child-serving agencies may also offer relevant trainings for members of Bethesda Mennonite Church and the wider community.

2. Discuss Suspicious Behavior Immediately

- a. All those involved in the ministries of Bethesda Mennonite Church should be alert to inappropriate behavior by adults and older children/youth and signs of abuse.
- b. Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a Bethesda Mennonite Church staff person or volunteer, or any family or community member and a child/youth should be reported immediately to a pastor of Bethesda Mennonite.
- c. The Child Protection Leadership Team will designate a person to check monthly on the Nebraska Registry of Offenders for current local offenders, for special consideration of any such listings, and alert pastors as necessary of any changes.
- d. Any suspicious behavior will be immediately investigated per the instructions below.

3. Reporting Obligations

- a. All workers with children and youth are considered mandatory reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. [See page 47 of this binder for information on this statute.] In addition to any legal requirements for reporting suspected abuse, there are also a moral imperative to report in order to protect children from harm. Any such person suspecting abuse or neglect is required by Bethesda Mennonite Church to make a report. Hotline phone number: 1-800-652-1999
- b. All workers should also know how to report this information to Bethesda Mennonite Church pastors in a discrete and confidential way. All should understand that reporting reflects care and concern, rather than disloyalty or recrimination.
- c. Reporting procedures for all those involved in the ministries of Bethesda Mennonite Church are outlined below. The individual reporting the conduct is protected from legal and civil liability if the report is made in good faith.

4. How to Report Suspected Abuse

In the event of suspected child abuse, the following steps will generally be taken:

- a. Initial Actions and Reports of any Concerned Adult:
 - i. If a child verbally reports abuse to an adult or if an adult observes/suspects suspicious behavior between another adult or older youth and a child:
 - (a) Secure the child's safety: If the child is in imminent danger, seems fearful to return home after a disclosure of abuse, or needs immediate medical attention, call 911.
 - (b) Report the information immediately:
 - ii. Call the Abuse Hotline to inform him/her orally of your concern. He/she will document your concern in writing by completing form CY-47 in collaboration with you.
 - iii. Call the pastor to inform him/her orally of your concern, unless the person accused is the pastor, in which case you should refer to the Child Protection Team.
 - (c) Do not discuss the incident with anyone else, unless requested by the pastor or other authorities.
 - (d) Tips to remember while acting on suspicions or report of abuse:
 - i. Stay calm and listen carefully to the child.
 - ii. Take the child's word seriously and keep any physical evidence.
 - iii. Do not ask leading questions or probe for more details. It is appropriate to say, "Tell me more," or ask other open-ended questions.
 - iv. Give emotional support, reminding the child that he/she is not at fault and that he/she was courageous and right to tell you about the problem.
 - v. Express your own sincere emotions. Tell the child how sad you feel that this has happened. Tell him/her how sad God feels when a child is hurt.
 - vi. Assure the child that you will do everything you can to make the abuse stop. Explain that in order to help, you must tell some other people.
- b. Pastors Actions and Reports:
 - i. Maintain complete confidentiality with regard to all conversations with the child and the accused adult that can be construed as confidential communications. This includes maintaining confidentiality when completing the written documentation outlined below.
 - ii. Report suspected child abuse as required by law. Clergy are mandated reporters in Nebraska, so it is your duty to ensure that child abuse is reported. Contact the Abuse Hotline @ 1-800-652-1999 to be sure your legal requirement to report is fulfilled, and to avoid any possible penalties for failure to report.
 - iii. Document every conversation and contact on the Pastoral Report Form. [See page 35 of this manual.] Place documentation directly in a locked file accessible only to you.

- a) If the alleged offender is not a parent/guardian, notify the child's parents/guardians. If the alleged offender is a parent/guardian, seek advice from Abuse Hotline before contacting the home.
- b) When appropriate, outline the response procedure to the child and parents/guardians.
- c) Speak directly with the child and anyone involved in reporting the incident for the purpose of assuring them that the child's safety is the main concern of Bethesda Mennonite Church and its leadership.
- iv. Seek ongoing support for your work with the family.
 - a) Cooperate with the appropriate agencies in any actions and/or pastoral care.
 - b) Consult with an attorney and inform Church Council Chair.
 - c) Report all findings and actions to the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Team.
- v. Continue to give pastoral care to all involved, as appropriate.
- vi. Tips to remember while acting on suspicions or report of abuse:
 - a) Encourage the family to keep all documents and evidence.
 - b) Work to ensure the safety of the child, in consultation with Children and Youth or the police, if they are involved.
 - c) Assist the child and family with obtaining access to appropriate medical and counseling services.
 - d) When in contact with the alleged offender, follow these guidelines:
 - i. Listen, be caring, and sensitive.
 - ii. Observe for behaviors such as denial, blaming, minimization, justification, jealousy, hostility and quick remorse.
 - iii. Ask questions such as who, where and when.
 - iv. If the alleged offender is not a parent of the child who reported abuse, provide no information about the child and his/her family, details of the reporting process (i.e. who reported) and who is responding to the child and his/her family.
 - v. Inform him/her that a team of people will be responding to his/her needs and the issues related to the allegations.

C. Guidelines for Actions and Responsibilities of the Pastoral Team of Bethesda Mennonite Church

If the alleged offender is a participant in the youth ministry of Bethesda Mennonite Church, remove him/her temporarily from his/her duties and any environment that gives him/her access to children/youth during the investigation.

1. Manage Public Communications

- a. Designate the person designated by pastoral staff to be responsible for handling all communications with others in the Bethesda Mennonite Church not directly involved with the suspected abuse situation and the media. No one else should speak on behalf of the Bethesda Mennonite Church.
- b. In consultation with legal counsel and the Care Teams, provide necessary information to the congregation. Give updates as needed to minimize the spread of rumors. Keep dated copies of these statements on file in the church office.

2. Organize Support Group

- a. Name a Support Group to minister to the child and his/her family, in consultation with the child's family. Also, offer a Support Group to minister accused and his/her family (assuming he/she is a member of the congregation.) See Support Group Guidelines below.
- b. Receive recommendations from the Child Protection Leadership Team, make decisions about any disciplinary actions or accountability plans, and monitor their implementation.

3. Attend to Congregational Healing Process

- a. Make available to the congregation trained people who can help bring healing and assist congregational members in addressing needs.
- b. Evaluate the process of dealing with incidents of suspected child abuse, revising policy as necessary.
- c. Support Group Ministry
 - i. Each team will have 2-3 people, who have had previous training on child abuse and response procedures, and whose involvement does not create a conflict of interest. Someone from the Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Team will serve as leader for each team.

4. Guidelines for the Support Group for the child and his/her parents (or guardians):

- a. Meet with the child and his/her family, assess further needs and explain the procedure to be followed.
- b. Offer support and care to the child and his/her family.
- c. Provide a list of qualified counselors/therapists and assist with securing financial help, transportation or other assistance, as needed, to access these professionals.
- d. Maintain confidentiality until the Support Group and Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Team agree on further disclosure to the Bethesda Mennonite Church or others involved in the situation.
- e. Complete the Support Group Form for each meeting, to document actions and decisions taken beginning on page 31.
- f. Report to the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team and recommend appropriate actions and follow-up.
- g. Work with Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team and other involved Bethesda Mennonite leadership in implementing these recommendations.

5. Guidelines for the Support Group for the alleged offender and his/her family:

- a. Meet with the alleged offender and his/her family. Assess further needs and explain the procedure to be followed.
- b. Offer support and care to the accused and his/her family.
- c. Provide a list of qualified counselors/therapists and assist with securing financial help, transportation or other assistance, as needed, to access those professionals.

- d. Maintain confidentiality until the Support Group and Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team agree on further disclosure to the Bethesda Mennonite Church or others involved in the situation.
- e. Complete alleged Offender Support Group Form for each meeting, to document actions and decisions taken starting on page 33.
- f. Report to the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team and recommend appropriate actions and follow-up.
- g. Work with Bethesda Child Protection Leadership Team and other involved Bethesda Mennonite Church leadership in implementing these recommendations.

6. Response to Investigation

When the investigation by law enforcement (and Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Committee, if applicable) is complete, the following steps will be taken:

- a. If the allegations are unfounded by Children and Youth and Law Enforcement Agencies and the information discovered is not a cause for reasonable concern, the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Care Teams and other involved Bethesda Mennonite leadership, will:
 - i. Share information about actions taken, as needed, with the child, his/her family and the congregation.
 - ii. Reinstate the accused to any position from which he/she had been removed due to the allegation.
- b. If the allegations are unfounded by the Children and Youth and law enforcement agencies, but the information discovered remains a cause of reasonable concern, the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Care Teams and other involved Bethesda Mennonite leadership, will:
 - i. Hold the alleged offender responsible and accountable for the behavior.
 - ii. Require education and/or counseling to correct unhealthy behavior patterns.
 - iii. Remove the alleged offender from environments where children and youth are involved for a stated period of time. Reinstatement to any kind of ministry with children and youth will be dependent upon open and frequent communication between the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team and any treatment providers working with the offender.
 - iv. Share information about actions taken, as needed, with the child, his/her family and the congregation.
- c. If the allegations are determined to be founded by Children and Youth and law enforcement agencies, the Bethesda Mennonite Child Protection Leadership Team, in collaboration with the Care Teams and other involved Bethesda Mennonite leadership will:
 - i. Support all recommendations and requirements of those involved in the treatment and supervision of the offender.
 - ii. Support those seeking to provide for the needs of the child in medical care, counseling, etc.
 - iii. Permanently remove the offender from any environment where children and youth are involved.
 - iv. Require the offender to obtain specialized counseling.
 - v. Protect others from harm and protect the integrity of the church's ministry.

- vi. Monitor the progress and accountability of the offender through a Circle of Support and Accountability. For more information on setting up a Circle of Support and Accountability see www.dovesnest.net

D. Policy for Including Sex Offenders in Church

Protection and Inclusion: Guide for Congregations on Safely Including Persons Who have Committed Sexual Offenses

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Vision: Healing and Hope, Mennonite Church USA

You must be as cautious as snakes and as gentle as doves. (Matthew 10:16 TEV)

Purpose

Churches that seek to minister in the name of Christ are called to be inclusive of those who may be stigmatized or rejected by society while providing for the protection of children and other vulnerable groups and caring for those who may be survivors of crimes or traumatic experiences. This document offers guidance for churches seeking to include persons who have committed sexual offenses while maintaining the congregation as a safe and healing community. Elements of it may also be useful for congregations ministering to persons who have committed other crimes or present other special needs.

General Background

Open Communities

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me. (John 7:37)

Jesus boldly invited all to come to him. The missional church will faithfully echo that invitation (Revelation 22:17) through a commitment to establish and maintain inviting communities.

Missional congregations will, necessarily, encounter individuals with deep needs and special challenges including individuals who have committed sexual offenses. Although unsettling, these situations invite us to remember how Christ responded when the outcasts of his day came to him:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners. (Matthew 9:12-13)

So, the missional church will resist any impulse to close itself to people with special needs and maintain the sort of open communities that Christ modeled.

It is through such inviting and open congregations that "God's healing and hope can flow through us to the world" (Vision: Healing and Hope, Mennonite Church USA).

Protective Communities

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain. (Isaiah 11:9)

PROTECTION AND INCLUSION 2

God's will is that no child or vulnerable person be harmed. The church, especially, should be a safe community in which all are protected.

Congregations that are committed to safety and protection must work intentionally toward realizing those goals. Although it may be uncomfortable to do so, becoming informed about persons who commit sexual offenses and how children can be protected is essential for a congregation that seeks to "practice love, forgiveness, and hospitality that affirm our diversity and heal our brokenness" (Vision: Healing and Hope, Mennonite Church USA).

So the missional church must not ignore the harmful potential of sexual abuse or neglect to implement safeguards necessary to form the sort of safe communities that God desires.

It is through such safe and protective congregations that "God's healing and hope can flow through us to the world."

Open and Protective Communities

Being either an open congregation, or a protective congregation, is not so difficult. Many congregations are inclined to be open and inviting. If, however, they give inadequate attention to concerns of safety and protection, they will miss the goal imagined by the prophet Isaiah:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6).

Society sees openness and protection as competing values. As followers of Jesus Christ, the church is called to hold openness and protection in dynamic and creative tension that may lead us to more fully embody Christ's grace, joy, and peace.

Develop a Protective Environment

Missional churches will find it easier to deal with challenges in a matter-of-fact way if they educate themselves in advance and develop plans for safety and protection before a specific situation arises.

Dove's Nest recommends that each congregation take the following steps:

1. Learn about child abuse and neglect in general, and sexual abuse in particular. *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect* by Dr. Jeanette Harder (Herald Press) is an excellent book that will be helpful for congregations, Sunday school classes, small groups, leadership teams, and individuals.

2. Develop a comprehensive child and youth protection policy and assign specific people to be responsible for its implementation and maintenance. Dove's Nest (www.dovesnest.net) offers resources and sample policies.

3. Use a Christian safe environment curriculum, such as *Circle of Grace*, to educate children and youth about positive relationships with God and others and to help them identify and maintain appropriate boundaries. The *Circle of Grace* curriculum is currently available free to churches and schools affiliated with Mennonite Church USA and at modest cost to others. Visit the Dove's Nest website (www.DovesNest.net) for more information.

4. Respond to survivors. Given the prevalence of sexual abuse, congregations should assume there are survivors in their midst and be prepared to hear their concerns and minister appropriately.

PROTECTION AND INCLUSION 3

Robust protection policies and ongoing education and awareness will be invaluable to a congregation when a person who is known to have committed a sexual offense comes into the congregation. These best practices enable a congregation to maintain positive boundaries and work, in a positive way, with persons who are known to have committed offenses. More

importantly, they protect children and vulnerable individuals from those whose offenses have not yet come to light.

Become Aware of Needs of those who have Experienced Sexual Abuse

Experiences of sexual abuse have serious, long-term consequences, including overwhelming feelings of fear, guilt, and anger. Many survivors also experience depression, anxiety, and physical difficulties such as sleeplessness, eating disorders, and fatigue. Some experience post-traumatic stress disorder or recurring memories such as flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts. Many have difficulty developing positive relationships with others such as friends, spouses, and family members. Some turn to drugs or alcohol to lessen the pain, or may show suicidal or self-destructive tendencies.

If the abuse happened in the context of the church, there are also significant spiritual effects. Survivors may find it hard to trust church leaders and may even feel betrayed by God and the church. They may also feel sinful and question God's love for them.

Congregations can express hope and invite healing in many ways. For example:

1. Reach out to survivors, listen to their stories and validate their experiences.
2. Make sure worship services are sensitive to their needs. Do not emphasize suffering or push forgiveness too soon. Highlight God's desire for healing, wholeness, and life.
3. Allow them to grieve what has been taken from them, and help them in seeking repentance and justice from the offender.
4. Provide access to professional resources, as appropriate.
5. Remember that survivors do not all respond the same way and may be at different places on their healing journeys.

Needs of those who have Committed Sexual Offenses

Persons who have been convicted of sexual offenses are often stereotyped, stigmatized, and discriminated against by social and corporate policies. Unfortunately these practices may actually increase the likelihood of reoffending. Congregations can express hope and invite healing in many ways. For example:

1. Go beyond the stereotypes. Obtain accurate information. For example:
 - a. Persons who have committed sexual offenses are not all alike. Some have committed heinous crimes while some young adults are placed on an offender registry for being intimate with a girl or boyfriend who is only a few years younger.
 - b. Despite stereotypes, the recidivism rate is lower than commonly believed. It varies depending upon type of offense.
 - c. Appropriate treatment does reduce recidivism.
2. Learn how your community deals with sexual offenses and the people who commit them. Invite treatment program staff members, parole or probation officers, and others involved with those who have committed sexual offenses to talk about their work and programs. Learn from survivors about the impact of sexual offenses on their lives and relationships. If possible and appropriate, arrange a visit with one or more individuals who have committed sexual offenses and are seeking to avoid reoffending.

3. Learn about Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), a restorative-justice based program that assists people to re-enter society after a period of incarceration for a sexual offense. The program was originally established by Mennonites in Canada and is now being used in many countries. Its two-fold motto is, “No more victims. No one is disposable.” Consider volunteering as a member of a COSA circle or donating for the support of the program.

In Specific Situations

Open and Protective Relationships

Congregations that seek to be inviting and open while protecting children and vulnerable people may become aware of people who have committed sexual offenses (or whose behavior raises concerns) in several ways:

1. A person who is known to have committed a sexual offense inquires about participation in the congregation.
2. A past sexual offense of a person in the congregation is disclosed or comes to light.
3. A person who is already active in the congregation commits an offense. (Note that such offenses or suspected offenses must be immediately reported to the police or child protective services.)
4. A person in the congregation behaves in ways that raise concern. Regardless of how the congregation encounters such a person, it must carefully consider how it can minister to the individual while protecting children and vulnerable individuals.

Get Information

Direct and open communication with the individual who has committed an offense or whose behavior raises concerns (and with his or her parents, in the case of a minor) is the best first step. The suggestions offered in *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love* (Mennonite Church USA) offer helpful guidance for the conduct of such conversations.

Each situation is different, but some basic things to discuss are:

1. Nature and details of offense(s).
2. Behaviors that raise concerns.
3. Court or other orders pertaining to contacts.
4. Treatment history.
5. How the offense is regarded by the individual.
6. Steps being taken to avoid reoffending.
7. Ways the congregation can be supportive.
8. Ways the congregation may help the individual avoid offending.

With the individual’s cooperation and consent, similar information and recommendations should be sought from probation, parole, mental health, or other involved professionals and authorities. Congregational leaders will also want to assess the individual’s:

1. Level of honesty in reporting offenses – what the individual shares, omits, or minimizes.
2. Motivation for being part of the congregation – why involvement is desired, what level of involvement is desired.

PROTECTION AND INCLUSION 5

1. Willingness to recognize the needs of sexual abuse survivors and to respect and accept their needs for safety and healing.

2. Willingness to comply with guidelines as a sign of his/her level of healing and willingness to take responsibility for his/her actions.

If the individual is not open to communication, congregational leaders will need to proceed with information that is available to them.

Care for Survivors

If survivors of offenses committed by the individual (or their close family members) are present within the congregation, special care must be taken to assess the impact of the presence of the person who committed the offense in the congregation and to avoid additional traumatic impact upon them. In such cases, it may be necessary to exclude the individual from the congregation to allow the survivor and his or her family to recover from the abuse they experienced. The advice of survivor's advocates and other professionals experienced in working with survivors of sexual abuse should be sought when dealing with such situations.

Given the prevalence of sexual abuse, congregations should assume that there are other survivors present.

1. The congregation should be ready to care for them, listen to their concerns, and tend to their needs.
2. The congregation needs to sensitively and confidentially allow voices of survivors to be heard.
3. Services of professional counselors and facilitators should be engaged, as needed.

Develop a Written Plan

The person who has committed a sexual offense may be motivated to avoid reoffending. He or she may welcome compassionate help and accountability. In such cases, the individual (and his or her parent, if a minor) may be involved in developing a positive written plan to guide their involvement in the congregation.

In cases in which an individual is uncooperative, defensive, or hostile, a plan will need to be developed unilaterally, using the best information and advice available.

Regardless of whether the plan is developed with the individual's participation or independently by the leaders of the congregation, the following topics should be considered for inclusion:

1. Supervision – Should the individual be required to be accompanied by designated persons while in church facilities or attending church activities?
2. Limitations – Will the individual be excluded from specific responsibilities, activities, or areas of the church building?
3. Notification – Will notification of the individual's participation be made? If so, to whom (i.e. parents, teachers, youth sponsors, new participants, survivors, etc.)?
4. Support – How will the congregation be supportive of the individual as he or she seeks to be restored to the community and participate in the congregation in a positive way? (See COSA resource below.)
5. Noncompliance – How will the congregation respond if the individual violates the terms of the agreement? What changes might be imposed (i.e. warnings, additional restrictions, exclusion from the congregation, etc.)?

PROTECTION AND INCLUSION 6

1. Implementation – Who will monitor adherence to the plan? How will they relate to the individual? How often will reviews be conducted? How will changes be made, if they are required?
2. Acceptance – The plan should be signed by the individual (and parents, if a minor) and congregational leaders. Any involved supervising or treatment professionals (probation, parole, mental health, treatment staff, etc.) should also receive copies of the plan.

Final Cautions

Protection is the first priority. Keeping children and other vulnerable people from harm is essential. If guidelines are violated or policies are ignored, measures must be taken to insure their safety. In such cases, it may be necessary to bar the individual from participation.

Reporting child abuse is required. Regardless of congregational process or policy, reporting of any suspected child abuse, including sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, or physical abuse, *must* be reported to the police or child protective services at once. This is the law, and it is the best way to protect children in our congregations and communities.

Know your limitations. The congregation may be a supportive and caring community, but it is not able to replace professional counseling or treatment. Each congregation differs in their ability to include individuals who have committed sexual offenses. Not every congregation will be able to include every individual.

Practice child protection. Guidelines for those who are known to have committed sexual offenses should never take the place of robust child protection policies and ongoing education and awareness. These maintain positive protective boundaries for all.

Resources

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Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Child Protection Policy. (2010). Retrieved from http://dovesnest.net/files/Blossom_Hill_Lancaster_policy.pdf

The Church and Sex Offenders. (n.d.). The Methodist Churches. Retrieved from http://methodism.org.uk/static/news/papers/church_and_sex_offenders.htm

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Haffner, Debra W. (2005). *A Time to Heal: Protecting Children and Ministering to Sex Offenders*. Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest

Harder, Jeanette. (2010). *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press

Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Resource Team (SMARRT). (2012). Retrieved from <http://ontario.mcc.org/restorative/smarrrt> (Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, Eileen Henderson at MCC Ontario.)

Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver (2nd ed.). (2011). Retrieved from <https://resources.mcc.org/content/understanding-sexual-abuse-church-leader-or-caregiver>

V. JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR POSITIONS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A. Employed Staff

1. Job description of employed staff is available in the church office.

B. Child Protection Leadership Team Job Description

1. Members of the Bethesda Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Team Commit to:
 - a. Becoming well-versed in the language, issues, policies and procedures of child protection and child abuse recovery.
 - b. Meeting as needed monthly for 6 months for training, planning, and team building. (Frequency of regular meetings will likely lessen as the team and the Child Protection Initiative becomes established.)
 - c. Complete pledge/covenant with volunteers, keep a list of volunteers, and complete background check if necessary.
 - d. Monitoring all activities at Bethesda Mennonite Church involving children to ensure policy compliance.
 - e. Check Nebraska State Sex Offenders Registry monthly.
2. Members of the Child Protection Leadership Team may also wish to:
 - a. Plan trainings and implement them in coordination with the Board of Education (ie. VBS/Sunday school teacher training night).
 - b. Organize and offer worship services with special themes related to children's ministries, abuse recovery, and child abuse prevention.
3. Desired traits of team member:
 - a. Respected in the congregation and community
 - b. Team player
 - c. Good listener
 - d. Compassionate/empathetic
 - e. Courageous and calm in crises
 - f. Perseveres through challenging situations and resistance
 - g. Demonstrates self-care in times of stress
 - h. Has clear criminal and child abuse background checks within the past year
4. The following qualifications of team members are preferred:
 - a. Professional experience dealing with children's issues.
 - b. Teachers, daycare providers, after school program staff, social workers, youth ministers, pediatricians, and others with work experience serving children.
 - c. Anyone who has experience creating/implementing child protection plans in a congregation or other child-serving organization.
 - d. Personal experience as a survivor of child abuse or concerned friend or family member of an abuse survivor. Adequate progress in recovery and social support should be demonstrated to ensure continued personal safety and healing.

VI. FORMS

Form A – Children/Youth Volunteer Form

Name _____

Home Address _____

Cell Phone _____ Home Phone _____

Experience:

Special training, skills, hobbies:

Prior experience not previously mentioned specific to working with children and youth:

Personal history and motivation

Why do you want to volunteer for this position?

Please answer the following questions:

1. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to observe and abide by all policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?

Yes No

2. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to observe the “two-adult rule” based on the description on page 2 of this form?

Yes No

3. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?

Yes No

4. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor?

Yes No

5. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to inform a minister of Bethesda Mennonite Church if you are ever convicted or accused of child abuse?

Yes No

6. As a volunteer in Bethesda Mennonite Church, do you agree to not abuse drugs or alcohol?

Yes No

Form A Cont. – Children/Youth Volunteer Form

Read carefully before signing this form:

Bethesda Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by Bethesda Mennonite Church. The following policy statements reflect our commitment to be a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. Anyone who has been named as a perpetrator of a “founded” report of child abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) shall not work with children or youth in any activity sponsored by Bethesda Mennonite Church.
2. Volunteers who work with children and youth shall observe the “two-adult rule,” with the exception of Sunday School, Midweek, and Bible School in which case the doors will be open. No young leader (age 14-18) is left to supervise children or youth without the presence of an adult.
3. Volunteers who work with children and youth shall attend annual training provided by the church Board of Education to keep volunteers informed of church policies on child safety and state laws regarding child abuse.
4. Volunteers shall immediately report to their pastor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate and call the hotline.

The covenants between persons seeking sanctioned volunteer positions in Christian community require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the church. To that end, I certify that the answers given by me to all questions on this form and any attachments are, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true and correct and that I have not knowingly withheld any pertinent facts or circumstances. I hereby consent to permit Bethesda Mennonite Church to contact anyone it deems appropriate to investigate or verify any information provided by me to discuss my suitability for a volunteer position, including my background, volunteer experience, education or related matters. I voluntarily waive all rights to bring an action of defamation, invasion of privacy, or similar case of action against anyone providing such information. I further authorize all persons, schools, companies, organizations, and law enforcement agencies to supply all information concerning my background and to furnish reports thereon and I hereby release them and any organization affiliated with Bethesda Mennonite Church from any and all liability and responsibility arising from their doing so.

Applicant’s Signature

Date

Parent/Guardian signature if applicant is under 18

Date

Form B – Van Policy

Usage and Fees

1. The van is NOT available for non-church related use.
2. The driver is to fill the van with gas and check the oil.
3. Camp usage has priority.
4. Summer Camp Policy:
 - a. Each camper will pay a one-way Transportation Fee of \$12.50 (a \$25.00 total Transportation Fee for the camp) to Bethesda Mennonite Church.
 - b. When parents drive (Bethesda van/personal vehicle) and their child is a camper, they will be exempt from the Transportation Fee. This will be policy for up to 2 parents per vehicle.
5. For uses other than summer camp, the driver and/or passenger's ONLY COST is for gas.

Procedure

1. Sign up for use of the van in the church office. Use of the van is on a first come, first serve basis, with priority given to camps.
2. The person driving the van must be 21 years of age or older.
3. The van keys/van packet are to be checked out from the church office.
4. It is the driver's responsibility to get and return the van to the storage garage.
5. **Bethesda Mennonite Church requires all passengers in the church van wear their seat belts at all times.**
6. Prior to returning the van to the garage, the gas tank should be filled by the user of the van. The cost of the gas is the responsibility of the user, unless they are driving the van to camp, in which case they would turn in gas receipts for reimbursement from Bethesda.
7. On long trips, it is the driver's responsibility to check the oil.
8. Mileage is to be written in the mileage log located in the van packet.
9. The van keys/van packet are to be returned promptly to the church office.
10. The inside of the van is to be cleaned after each use.
11. Wash outside of van if needed.

(Revised by Board of Business 03-30-2017)

Form B Continued – Driving History/Record Release Form

(For Applicants over age 21)

Driver Name _____

License Number _____ State _____

Have you been involved in any of the following over the past 7 years?

Major violations

- Manslaughter or negligent homicide using a motor vehicle
- Driving while license is suspended or revoked
- Operating a motor vehicle for the commission of a felony
- Aggravated assault with a motor vehicle
- Permitting an unlicensed person to drive
- Reckless driving
- Fleeing or evading police or roadblock
- Resisting arrest
- Racing
- Hit and run (bodily injury or property damage)
- Failure to report an accident
- Illegal passing of a school bus
- Having a license suspended related to moving violations
- Other violations considered serious by state law, specifically:

Moving violations

- | | |
|--|----------|
| • Speeding | Quantity |
| • Improper lane change | _____ |
| • Failure to yield | _____ |
| • Failure to obey traffic signal or sign | _____ |
| • Careless driving | _____ |
| • Accidents | Quantity |
| • No fault | _____ |
| • At fault | _____ |

Driver Agreement

If approved as a driver for Bethesda Mennonite Church, I agree to:

1) Require the use of seatbelts by all occupants, 2) refrain from the use of cell phones while driving, 3) report any incident involving my car/church vehicle or its passengers during activities sponsored by Bethesda Mennonite Church within 24 hours of the incident, using an Unusual Incident Form, 4) children will be transported with car seats (provided by their parents) according to state car seat laws.

I certify that all information on this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I give permission to representatives of Bethesda Mennonite Church to obtain my motor vehicle record from state authorities to verify the contents of this form. I expressly give my consent to any discussions regarding the foregoing and I voluntarily and knowingly waive all rights to bring an action for defamation, invasion of privacy, or similar causes of action, against anyone providing, or seeking such information.

Driver's Signature

Date

Cell Phone Number

Unusual Incident Report Form

Date of Incident: _____

Time of Incident: _____

Name of child/youth involved in incident: _____

Age: _____

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Date/time contacted: _____

Method of contact (phone call, verbal report in person, etc): _____

Emergency contact information used (i.e. phone number): _____

Incident Details

Location of Incident: _____

Witnesses:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Description of Incident:

Vehicle Accident Procedures:

- Record the name, address and driver's license number of the other involved drivers.
- Record the license plate(s) and make(s) of any vehicle involved in the accident.
- Record the police report number, police officer's badge number.
- Record the addresses of any witnesses.

Signature of person completing form

Date/Time submitted

Pastoral Report of Suspected Child Abuse

1. Name and title (e.g. SS teacher, church member, paid staff) of person observing or receiving disclosure of possible child abuse: _____
2. Child's name: _____
3. Child's age/ date of birth: _____
4. Name of person accused of abuse of child: _____
5. Relationship to child (e.g. church staff, church volunteer, family member, other): _____
6. Reported to Pastoral Staff _____
7. Date/time of report _____

Summary:

8. Call to child's Parent/Guardian:
 - a. Date/Time of call: _____
 - b. Summary:

9. Initial conversation with child and parent/guardian:
 - a. Date/place of conversation _____
 - b. Child's statement (if appropriate, give detailed summary):

10. Call to local Children and Youth social service agency:

- a. Date/Time of call: _____
- b. Name and title of person contacted: _____
- c. Recommendations made by agency worker: _____
- d. Summary:

11. Call to legal counsel:

- a. Date/Time of call: _____
- b. Name and title of person contacted: _____
- c. Recommendations made by agency worker:

- d. Summary:

12. Call to insurance company:

- a. Date/Time of call: _____
- b. Name and title of person contacted: _____
- c. Recommendations made by agency worker:

- d. Summary:

13. Other contacts:

a) Date/Time of call: _____

b) Name and title of person contacted: _____

c) Recommendations made by agency worker:

d) Summary:

14. Name and title of person completing this form: _____

a) Signature: _____

b) Date/Time: _____

Meeting Summary Care Team for the Alleged Offender

1. Date of meeting_____
2. Name of alleged offender_____
3. Address_____
4. Age/birthdate_____
5. Name of child and relationship to alleged offender_____
6. Date and Summary of report from Pastoral Team/other persons

7. Summary of the meeting
 - a. Accountability plans

 - b. Needs of alleged offender and family

 - c. Referrals/recommendations

 - d. Response of alleged offender

e. Plans for future meetings

Signatures of persons at the meeting

Relationship to alleged offender

Bethesda Mennonite Church Youth Permission/Waiver Form

Name of Youth Participant _____

Parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of youth _____

Address _____
(Street) (City) (State) (Zip)

Home Phone (____) _____ Work Phone (____) _____ Cell (____) _____

E-mail Address _____

Age of Youth _____ Birthdate _____ Grade _____

Functions & Activities

It is my understanding that participating in the programs and activities of Bethesda Mennonite Church is a privilege. I acknowledge that there are certain risks associated with the activities including activity-related accidents and physical injury due to transportation-related accidents.

Release of Liability

By signing this Permission/Waiver Form, I assume all risks of the above named youth participating in the activities. I further release Bethesda Mennonite Church and its ministries, leaders, employees, volunteers and agents from any claim that my child may have against them as a result of injury or illness incurred during the course of participation in the activities.

First Aid & Emergency Medical Treatment

I recognize that there may be occasions where the youth named above may be in a need of first aid or emergency medical treatment as a result of an Bethesda Mennonite Church accident, illness or other health condition or injury. I do hereby give permission for agents of Bethesda Mennonite Church to seek and secure any needed medical attention or treatment for the youth named above including hospitalization. If in the agent's opinion such need arises, in doing so, I agree to pay all fees and costs arising from this action to obtain medical treatment.

I give permission for attending physician(s) and other medical personnel to administer any needed medical treatment, including surgery and again, I agree to pay for the medical treatment.

Medical History

Special medical needs or concerns (allergies, conditions, dietary needs, medications, etc.)

Health Insurance Information

(Insurance Co.)

(Policy Number)

(Medical Doctor)

(Phone Number)

Emergency Contacts

Names of persons and telephone numbers to call in case of emergency:

I represent that I am the parent/guardian of _____, who is under 18 years of age. I have read the above Permission/Waiver Form and am fully familiar with the contents thereof.

I give permission for the youth named above to participate in the activities of Bethesda Mennonite Church. In consideration for allowing the participation of the youth in the activities of Bethesda Mennonite Church, I hereby consent to the Permission/Waiver Form, including the Release of Liability above, on behalf of the youth, and agree that this Permission/Waiver Form shall be binding upon me.

(Signature of Parent/Guardian) (Date)

Photo permission: I also give permission for photos of the youth named above to be used in written and Internet publications.

(Signature of Parent/Guardian) (Date)

Trip Permission Form

Event _____
Date _____
Time _____ Cost _____
Location _____
Method of Transportation _____
Leader's Cell Phone Number _____

Release of Liability

By signing this permission/waiver form, I expressly warrant that the child named above or I, if I am a participant, am capable of withstanding both the physical and mental demands of the activities discussed above. I also expressly assume all risks of the child or me participating in the activities, whether such risks are known or unknown to me at this time. I further release *Bethesda Mennonite Church* and its ministers, leaders, employees, volunteers, and agents from any claim that my child may have or that I may have against them as a result of injury or illness incurred during the course of participation in the activities. This release of liability shall include (without limitation) any claims of negligence or breach of warranty. This release of liability is also intended to cover all claims that members of the child's or my family or estate, heirs, representatives, or assigns may have against *Bethesda Mennonite Church* or its ministers, leaders, employees, volunteers, or agents.

I further agree to indemnify and hold harmless *Bethesda Mennonite Church* and its ministers, leaders, employees, volunteers, or agents from any and all claims arising from my participation in its activities and programs, or as a result of injury or illness of my child during such activities.

I represent that I am the parent/guardian of _____, who is under 18 years of age. I give permission for the child named above to participate in the special event/activity described above. In consideration for allowing the participation of this child in the activities of *Bethesda Mennonite Church* I hereby and consent to the Release of Liability above, on behalf of the child, and agree that this Trip Permission Form shall be binding upon me, my family, heirs, legal representatives, successors, and assigns.

Photo permission: I also give permission for photos of the youth named above to be used in written and Internet publications.

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian _____

Date _____

Print Name _____

Emergency Contact Phone Number _____

Facility Safety Audit Checklist

Entrance

- All stairs have handrails.
- Entrance and exit are at sidewalk level or onto same-level landing.
- All elevated areas (porches, landings) are fenced with vertical pickets less than four inches apart.

Hallways and Stairways

- Areas are kept clean and unobstructed.
- Lighting is adequate.
- Exits are well-marked, lighted, and unobstructed.
- All sharp edges on corners or counters are covered.
- Safety glass is used in doors and windows.
- Stairways are carpeted and have a child-height railing on the right side for descending.
- Smoke detectors are working
- There is no visible peeling paint or lead-based paint.

Rooms and Storage Units

- Electrical sockets are height and out of reach or securely covered.
- No electrical cords are dangling or covered.
- Cabinets or file boxes that contain cleaning solutions are locked.
- All hardware on cribs, tables, and bookcases is checked monthly to make sure certain screws and bolts are tight.
- Hot plates aren't used.
- Chairs or tables aren't used as ladders to hang items.
- No sharp corners are exposed on tables or other furniture.
- Toys are safe: no sharp areas, pinch points or small parts.
- Fire exit from room requires only one turn or pull-down action to open door.
- Accessible above-ground-level windows are protected with grills or screens.
- Hot surfaces, hot pipes, heaters, and vents are out of reach of children; space heaters aren't used.
- Lighting is adequate in all rooms.
- Trashcans are covered and secured.
- Floors are smooth, clean, and not slippery.

Kitchen

- Sharp utensils are kept out of reach of children.
- All containers are clearly marked and have secure lids.
- Fire extinguishers are easily accessible.
- Items on shelving units are neatly organized, secure and not piled high.

Bathrooms

- Cleaning supplies aren't accessible.
- Toilets and sinks are appropriate for use by children; step stools are provided.

- Water temperature for hand washing is maintained at 120° F or less.
- Floors are nonskid.

Outdoor Playground

- Equipment is checked monthly for sharp protrusions.
- Bolts are covered; swings have soft seats.
- Ground is covered with loose-fill surface material.
- Play area is fenced; gate can be secured.
- Equipment is age appropriate; there are no spaces 3.5-9 inches where a child's head, leg, or arm could be trapped.
- Constant supervision is provided.
- No poisonous plants, trash or sharp objects are in the area surrounding the playground.

Toxic Chemicals

- Kitchen and cleaning supplies have their own locked storage unit.

Computers, TVs, and Electrical Equipment

- The equipment is flush against the wall, covering the electrical outlet.
- Only authorized people service the equipment.
- Liquids aren't allowed near equipment.
- Children are supervised while equipment is in use.

Supplies

- Nontoxic art supplies, such as natural dyes and water-based products are used.
- Aerosol sprays and solvent-based glues are avoided.

Equipment

- First aid kit is kept appropriately stocked and easily accessible.
- Sports equipment is safe and soft.

Fire and Severe Weather

- Smoke detectors and alarm system are in place and working
- Fire evacuation instructions are posted visibly.

VII. RESOURCES

Understanding Physical Abuse

Physical abuse includes scalding, beatings with an object, severe physical punishment and violent shaking, according to *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect* by the National Research Council. Physical abuse also includes human bites, slapping, shaking and burning with cigarettes or other objects.

Behavioral indicators of physical abuse

- Signs of childhood stress. [See page 46 of this manual.]
- Conflicting or changing stories about how the injury occurred.
- Delayed or inappropriate treatment of the injury.

Physical indicators of physical abuse

A child who has been physically abused may exhibit suspicious injuries. The injuries attributable to normal childhood “wear and tear” are usually found on the leading edges of the body – shins, elbows, and forehead. Injuries associated with physical child abuse may be located in the oft tissues of the abdomen or on the back, or on backs of arms and legs – places not usually affected by normal childhood mishaps.

- Burns – Burns that may indicate a child has been abused include cigarette or cigar burns on the soles of the feet, palms of the hands, the back or genital areas. Other burns associated with abuse are friction or tether burns on the wrists, ankles or around the neck caused by rope used to tie the child. Wet burns on the hands and feet that appear glove-like or sock-like are caused by forcing the child to bathe in water that is too hot. Dry burns leave distinctive marks in the shape of the instrument used to inflict them, commonly electric irons, radiator grates and kitchen range heating elements.
- Bruises – Bruises of a variety of colors (black, blue, yellow, and green) that point up different stages in healing and thus infliction at different times often indicate abuse. Varied colored bruises on the abdomen, back or face are especially suspicious. Bruises, similar to burns, may also reflect the shape of the weapon used to inflict them.
- Lacerations and abrasions – Children usually have scraped knees, shins, palms or elbows – injuries that are very predictable. Cuts and abrasions in soft tissue areas on the abdomen, back, backs of arms and legs, or on external genitalia are strong indicators of physical abuse. Human bite marks, especially when they are recurrent and appear to be adult-sized, strongly suggest abuse.
- Fractures – Unexplained fractures generally signal abuse. A child with multiple fractures occurring at different times is almost certain to be a victim of abuse. Other signs include swollen or tender limbs and spiral fracture caused by jerking of the arms.¹

¹ Nonprofit Risk Management Center, *The Season of Hope: A Risk Management Guide for Youth-Serving Non-Profits*, 52-53.

Understanding Emotional Abuse²

Emotional abuse may be the most common form of abuse in youth-serving organizations. Although emotional abuse can seriously harm a child, it leaves no physical scars and very little other evidence. The abuse is most often verbal, making it very difficult to detect. Children themselves may simply quit a program, if they can, rather than submit to the abuse or report it.

The five forms of abuse listed by James Garbarino in “Emotional Maltreatment of Children” cover a wide range of actions. Each can hurt a child and some can lead to lawsuits.

- Rejecting – belittling, degrading and other forms of overtly hostile or rejecting treatment; shaming and/or ridiculing the child for showing normal emotions such as affection, grief or sorrow; consistently singling out the child to criticize, punish or to perform most of the household chores; publicly humiliating.
- Terrorizing – placing the child in unpredictable or chaotic circumstances, such as witnessing domestic violence; placing a child in a dangerous situation. Setting unrealistic expectations and threatening harm or danger if they aren’t met; exploiting a child’s fears and vulnerabilities; threatening violence against the child, the child’s loved ones or objects.
- Isolating – confining the child or placing unreasonable restrictions on the child’s freedom; placing unreasonable restrictions on the child’s social interactions within the home or in the community or with another person responsible for the child’s welfare.
- Corrupting – encouraging antisocial behavior such as criminal activities, prostitution, pornographic performances, or corrupting others.
- Ignoring – failure to express affection, caring and love for the child; being emotionally unavailable or uninvolved.

In most cases of emotional abuse, there are no physical signs of abuse.

Behavioral indicators of emotional abuse:

- Developmental disorders – deficits in growth or development
- Habit disorders – thumb-sucking, head-banging, or rocking
- Conduct disorders – antisocial or destructive behavior
- Reactive behaviors – hysteria, phobias, compulsions and hypochondria
- Adaptive behavior – inappropriately adult or infantile behavior
- Neurotic behaviors – speech disorders and sleep disturbances
- Dramatic changes in school performance – drop in grades, attendance problems or general functioning.
- Suicidal behavior – talking about, threatening, or attempting suicide

As with indicators for general childhood stress, these behaviors are indicators of a problem. The behavior may be caused by emotional abuse, or it may be induced by problems other than abuse. One way of checking is to call the parents’ or caregivers’ attention to the problem behavior and evaluate the reaction. If the parents/caregivers

² Nonprofit Risk Management Center, The Season of Hope: A Risk Management Guide for Youth-Serving Non-Profits, 53-55.

reject efforts to help the child or their response is apathetic or indifferent there may be grounds to make a report of suspected abuse.

Understanding Sexual Abuse

“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 that is sexually stimulating to the perpetrator and which the victim does not fully comprehend or to which [he or] she is unable to give informed consent. The imbalance of power between victim and perpetrator is critical in the determination of abuse. The power imbalance may result from the perpetrator’s greater age, size, position, experience, or authority.

Most sexual abuse does not involve physical violence. It usually involves some form of coercion and a misrepresentation of the activity. Coercion is fueled by the perpetrator’s desire for secrecy, which is necessary to prevent intervention and also to allow him [or her] continued access to the victim.”³

Sexual abuse occurs with children as early as infancy. This abuse isn’t limited to penile penetration and encompasses acts that many of us have difficulty imagining. Nonetheless, molesters may commit any of the acts listed, which are based on the research of Kathleen C. Faller, a University of Michigan social work professor and a prosecution consultant on child molestation, who has been studying victims and perpetrators for 22 years.

Non-Contact Acts - Sexual comments to the child on the telephone, in notes and letters, in person or through computer online services.

- Exposure, such as the offender exposing his or her genitals to the child and masturbating in front of the child.
- Voyeurism, in which the offender secretly observes the child for sexual gratification.
- Showing pornographic material to the child
- Inducing the child to undress and masturbate in front of the offender.
Note: Some readers may find the next few lists offensive – and they are. Imagine your discomfort at reading them and compare this to the discomfort of a child who experiences any of them.
- Sexual contact (above or beneath clothing)
- Sexual contact includes: fondling or touching the child’s genitals, breasts or buttocks; inducing the child to touch the offender’s intimate parts; or rubbing his or her genital against the child’s clothing or skin (called frontage).

Penetration

- Penetration includes: digitally (finger) penetrating the child’s vagina or anus; inducing the child to place his or her finger in the offender’s vagina or anus; placing an object into the child’s vagina or anus; or having the child place an object into the offender’s vagina or anus.

Oral Sex

- Oral sex includes: tongue kissing; breast sucking, licking, and/or biting; cunnilingus or the licking, kissing, sucking, or biting of the vagina, or placing the

³ Heggen, Carol Holderread. Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches. 20-21.

tongue in the vaginal opening; fellatio or licking, kissing, or sucking the penis; or anilingus or licking or kissing the anal opening.

Penile Penetration

- Penile penetration includes: vaginal intercourse; anal intercourse, or intercourse with animals by offender in front of victim.

Physical Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse

- Physical evidence of sexual abuse, if present at all, tends to be temporary. These signs could include the following:
 - Difficulty in walking
 - Torn, stained, or bloody underwear
 - Pain or itching in the genital area
 - Pregnancy
 - Bruises or bleeding of the external genitals
 - Sexually transmitted diseases

Behavioral Signs of Sexual Abuse

The behavioral signs of sexual abuse are likely to be present longer and more conspicuously than physical signs. Many sexually abused children exhibit the signs of childhood stress [see page 46 of this manual] in addition to the behaviors associated with child sexual abuse.

- Exhibiting apprehension when sexual abuse is brought up
- Wearing lots of clothing, especially to bed
- Unwillingness to be left alone with a particular person
- Inappropriate understanding of sex for the child's age
- Fearing touch
- Drawing pictures with genitals
- Abusing animals
- Persisting in inappropriate sex play with peers or toys
- Cross-dressing
- Masturbating in public
- Engaging in prostitution

The presence of any of these indicators signals the possibility that sexual abuse has occurred. The indicators alone aren't conclusive evidence that a child has been molested.⁴

⁴ Nonprofit Risk Management Center, [The Season of Hope: A Risk Management Guide for Youth-Serving Non-Profits](#), 55-57.

Signs of Childhood Stress⁵

- Dramatic changes in school performance: a sudden drop in participation or grades, a punctual child becoming tardy or skipping school.
- Changes in behavior: either regressive, in which the child reverts to behavior typical of a younger age, or precocious, in which the child acts much older than his or her chronological age.
- Sleep disturbances: nightmares, insomnia, fear of the dark, fear of sleeping alone or excessive sleeping.
- Changes in eating behavior: anorexia, bulimia, and sudden increases or decreases in appetite.
- Inappropriate fears: fear of a person, familiar place, or activity.
- Hostile language or aggressive behavior: swearing, verbally wishing harm to others; or tripping, pushing, hitting, biting.
- Overly compliant behavior: willing to do whatever is asked, even if it is harmful to the child.
- Depression: hopelessness, withdrawal from family or friends, threats or attempts at suicide.
- Delinquency or running away from home: stealing from friends, shoplifting, spray-painting graffiti on buildings.

⁵ Nonprofit Risk Management Center, The Season of Hope: A Risk Management Guide for Youth-Serving Non-Profits, 50.

Nebraska Child Protective Services Law

Code Section	28-710-717
What Constitutes Abuse	Knowingly, intentionally or negligently causing or permitting a child to be: placed in a situation endangering life or physical or mental health, cruelly confined or punished, deprived of necessities, child under 6 years left unattended in vehicle, or sexually abused or exploited
Mandatory Reporting Required By	Physician, medical institution, nurse, school employee, social worker, or other person
Basis of Report of Abuse/neglect	Reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect or observes child being subjected to conditions and circumstances which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect
To Whom Reported	Department of Health and Human Services or law enforcement agency (also a state-wide toll-free number)
Penalty for Failure to Report or False Reporting	Class III misdemeanor

Note: State laws are constantly changing -- contact an attorney or conduct your own legal research to verify the state law(s) you are researching.

ABUSE HOTLINE: 1-800-652-1999

What to do When Someone in Bethesda Mennonite Church Is Accused Of Abuse

1) Remain open-minded.

The natural human instinct is to recoil from alleged horror, and to immediately assume that the allegations are false. But the overwhelming majority of abuse disclosures prove to be true. In every case, the proper and Christian response is to remain open-minded.

2) Pray for all parties involved.

Every person involved deserves and needs prayerful support.

3) Let yourself feel whatever emotions arise.

You may feel angry, betrayed, confused, hurt, worried and sad. These are all natural, "typical" responses to an allegation of sexual abuse. None of these feelings are inappropriate or "bad." Don't "kick yourself" for feeling any of these emotions.

4) Remember that abuse, sadly, is quite common.

It's far more widespread than any of us would like to believe. Experts estimate that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused in their lifetimes.

5) Don't try to "guess" or figure out who the accuser is.

Sexual abuse victims need their privacy to recover from their trauma. Openly speculating about who is alleging abuse is essentially gossiping, and helps to create a hostile climate that will keep other victims from coming forward.

6) If you do know the victim(s), protect his/her/their confidentiality.

There are many good reasons why abuse victims are unable to publicly come forward. Often, the person wants to keep other friends or family members from suffering too. Don't compound the pain he/she is in by disclosing his/her identity to others.

7) Understand that abuse victims often have "troubled" backgrounds (i.e. drug or alcohol problems, criminal backgrounds, etc.)

Instead of undermining the credibility of accusers, these difficulties actually enhance their credibility. (When someone is physically hurt, there are almost always clear signs of harm; so too with sexual abuse. The harm, in this case, however, is reflected largely in self-destructive behaviors.)

8) Don't allow the mere passage of time to discredit the accusers.

There are many good reasons why abuse victims disclose their victimization years after the crime. In most instances, victims come forward when they are emotionally able to do so, and feel capable of risking disbelief and rejection from precious loved ones, including family members, church leaders, other authorities, and fellow Christians. Sometimes, they are psychologically able to do so only after they have become adults, or their perpetrator has died, moved or been accused by someone else. Sometimes, they have been assured that their perpetrator would never be around kids again, but have learned that this isn't the case. In other cases, it takes years before victims are able to understand and/or acknowledge to themselves

that they have been sexually violated. This is a common defense mechanism.

9) Ask your family members and friends if they were victimized.

Many times, abuse victims will continue to "keep the secret" unless specifically invited to disclose their victimization by someone they love and trust. Even raising this topic can be very uncomfortable. It must be done, however, if there is a chance that the alleged offender had access to children besides the one(s) accusing him/her. It may be very awkward and your family members may even act resentful at first. But soon they will remember that you really care about them and will see your question as a sign of that care.

10) Mention the accusation to former members/attendees of the Bethesda Mennonite Church and former leaders now living elsewhere.

They may have information that could prove the guilt or innocence of the person facing allegations. This is especially important because sometimes abuse victims or their families move away after experiencing abuse.

11) Contact the police or prosecutors.

If you have any information (even if it's "second hand" or vague) that might help prove the guilt or innocence of the accused, it can be helpful if you disclose that information to the authorities. This is one way that as a Christian you can help seek justice and protect others from harm. Remember: abuse thrives in secrecy. Exposing sexual crimes is difficult, but ultimately healing.

12) Don't allow other members/attendees of Bethesda Mennonite Church to make disparaging comments about the person(s) making the allegation.

Remember, the sexual abuse of children has terribly damaging effects. Critical comments about those who make allegations only discourage others who may have been hurt. Such remarks prevent those who need help from reaching out and getting it. Show your compassion for abuse victims. Tell your fellow members/attendees of the *Bethesda Mennonite Church* that hurtful comments are inappropriate. Remind them that they can defend the alleged offender without attacking his/her accuser.

13) Educate yourself and your family about sexual abuse.

There are many excellent books and resources on the subject.

14) If you want to show support to the accused offender, do it PRIVATELY.

Calls, visits, letters, gifts, and prayers - all of these are appropriate ways to express your love and concern for the accused offender. Public displays of support, however, are not. They only intimidate others into keeping silent. In fact, it is terribly hurtful to victims to see people openly rallying behind an accused offender. Even if the accused offender in a particular case is innocent, somewhere in the community is a young girl being molested by a relative or a boy being abused by his coach or youth leader. If these children see adults they love and respect publicly rallying around accused perpetrators, they will be less likely to report their own victimization to their parents, the police, or other authorities. They will be scared into remaining silent, and their horrific pain will continue.

15) Don't be blinded by the pain you can see.

The trauma of the accused offender, and those who care about him/her, is obvious, especially if this person is a well-known person in *Bethesda Mennonite Church* or the community. Please try to keep in mind the trauma of the accuser too. Because you rarely see his/her pain directly, it's important to try and imagine it. This helps you keep a balanced perspective.

16) Try to put yourself in the shoes of the alleged victim.

In the gospels, Jesus calls us to identify with the hurting, the vulnerable, the innocent, and the hurting. Try, as best you can, to imagine the shame, self-blame, confusion and fear that afflict boys and girls (and the men and women they become), who have been victimized by trusted adults in their lives.

17) Use this painful time as an opportunity to protect your own family.

Talk with your children about "safe touch," the private parts of their bodies, who is allowed to touch those parts, what to do if someone else tries, and who to tell. Urge your sons and daughters to have similar conversations with your grandchildren.

18) Turn your pain into helpful action.

In times of stress and trauma, doing something constructive can be very beneficial. Volunteer your time or donate your funds to organizations that help abused kids or work to stop molestation.

19) Keep in mind the fundamental choice you face.

On the one hand, at stake are the FEELINGS of a grown up (the accused offender). On the other hand, at stake is the PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, SPIRITUAL AND SEXUAL SAFETY of potentially many children. If one has to err in either direction, the prudent and moral choice is to always err on the side of protecting those who can't protect themselves: children. Remember too that it's easier for an adult to repair his reputation than for a child (or many children) to repair his/her psyche and life. Another way to look at this: Being falsely accused of abuse is horrific. But actually, being abused, then being attacked or disbelieved is far worse.

20) Ask your pastor to bring in an outside expert or a therapist who can lead a balanced discussion about sexual abuse.

Therapists understand and can answer the questions you and other members of Bethesda Mennonite Church are facing, and help you deal with the emotional impact of this trauma, too.

*Adapted from "What to do when your priest is accused of abuse,"
by SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests)*

http://www.snapnetwork.org/links_homepage/when_priest_accused.htm