

A Church Policy to Protect Children, Youth and Adults

approved by Leadership Team Jun/2/2004

implemented October 24, 2004.

Condensed Policy Handout for SA Time Leaders

Section I - STATEMENT OF POLICY

a) Purpose

The purpose of this document is to ensure that Hanover Mennonite Church (HMC) is a safe place for all people. The intent of the policies and procedures outlined below is to protect children and youth from harm and abuse, adults who work with them from false allegations, and the church from unnecessary litigation.

b) Basis of this policy

The church has spiritual, moral, legal and societal obligations to ensure a safe environment for children and youth participating in church programs.

Spiritual and moral obligations are reflected in various scriptures ¹. It is clear that God embraces children with love and places their nurture and care in our hands. As a congregation we accept this call, but recognizing the human capacity for evil, we also accept our responsibility to implement clear policies and procedures to minimize the risk of abusing those who are vulnerable.

There are also legal and societal obligations which demand that we protect children and youth. As secular organizations are called to clarify and enforce procedures to ensure safe environments, so too must the church. Indeed, the church can provide positive testimony to the community by adhering to standards that are equal to or exceed society's requirements.

Beyond these obligations, the faith and practices of HMC are also shaped by the following documents:

- Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective ²
- Mennonite Vision Statement, Vision: Healing and Hope ³
- MCEC document – “A Plan to Protect our Children, Youth and Adults”

¹ for example: "...Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me..." Matt 18:2-6; "...Let the children come to me and do not hinder them..." Mark 10:14; Luke 17:1-2; Micah 6:9; Ephesians 5:3; I Thess. 5:22; 2; II Cor. 8:9

² Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Herald Press, 1995; or, see Appendix I of Congregational Guidelines/or Leaders in Youth and Children's Ministry, May, 2000.

³ Vision: Healing & Hope 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.

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Section II-DEFINITIONS

HMC hereby adopts a policy of zero tolerance of behaviors defined below. Further, all workers should be aware that Ontario law requires, through the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)⁵, that abuse and neglect of children⁶ must be reported to civil authorities.

- a) **Abuse:** to use wrongly, to maltreat, to injure. It is the misuse of power by a person in a position of trust. Abuse may take various forms⁷
- I. **Physical abuse:** deliberate physical force or action that results, or could result, in non-accidental injury to a child or youth. It can include punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. It is different from what is considered reasonable discipline.
 - II. **Emotional abuse:** a pattern of behavior that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity. Examples include constantly criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child.
 - III. **Sexual abuse:** any sexual exploitation of a child, whether consensual or not, by an adult or older child. Physical, psychological or emotional coercion is intrinsic to sexual abuse. It is against the law to touch a child for a sexual purpose; to encourage or force a child to touch another person in a sexual way; to encourage or force a child to participate in any sexual activity; or tell a child to touch him or herself for an adult's or older child's sexual purposes. Sexual abuse can take many forms - for example, sexual intercourse, exposing a child's private parts, indecent phone calls, fondling for sexual purposes, watching a child undress for sexual pleasure, allowing a child to look at, or perform in, pornographic pictures or videos; or to engage in prostitution.
- β) **Child neglect:** the failure to meet a child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education, and protection from harm. Young children should never be left unattended.
- χ) **Harassment:** repeated subtle or overt action, particularly by a person in a position of authority, which causes the recipient to feel attacked, demeaned, intimidated or manipulated.
- δ) **Improper touching:** touching which creates feelings of violation, confusion, isolation. It may include kissing a child, coaxing a child to give a kiss, extended hugging or tickling, touching a child in any area that would be covered by a swim suit, carrying older children or having them sit on an adult's lap.
- ε) **Improper discipline:** inappropriate and harmful attempts to control a child. Improper discipline includes yelling or screaming at children, threatening them or physically hurting them. By contrast proper discipline involves establishing clear boundaries of acceptable behavior and maintaining such behavioral expectations with firm and kind expressions of authority.
- φ) **Assault:** to cause bodily harm by inappropriately applying force to another person; to attempt or threaten to apply force; or, to accost or impede another person while openly carrying a weapon.

⁵ For more details, see the CFSA, especially section 72 (1), on the internet at http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/90cl1_e.htm#P1828_142873

⁶ The terms "children" or "child" refer to any person under the age of eighteen.

⁷ The definitions which follow are based on those published by The Children's Aid Society of Grey/Bruce on their website, (www.greycas.org)

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Section IV - OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

To minimize the risk of harm coming to children in the care of HMC, programs and personnel will abide by the guidelines outlined below.

General Guidelines

- α) A team approach is to be used in children's and youth ministries. Normally there are to be at least two adults present for all kids' club, junior youth and youth activities.
- β) Consent forms ¹² wherein parents give written permission for their children or youth to participate in off-site HMC group activities will be gathered and kept on file.
- γ) During children's and youth activities at the church, only one entry door is to be unlocked.
- δ) Sunday School supervisor(s) shall circulate throughout the designated Sunday School area.
- ε) Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- φ) Activities that could easily lead to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as unsupervised internet access, vehicle transportation by workers alone with unrelated youth, or improperly supervised sleepovers, are to be avoided.
- γ) When a person suspects abuse or harassment, she/he will follow procedures set out in Section VII of this document.
- η) HMC discourages abuse through the use of adequate lighting inside and outside the church building. HMC has windows on doors to all meeting rooms.
- ι) Distribute copies of this policy to all households in the congregation;
- φ) Have the Leadership Team remind the congregation about this policy at the beginning of each new Church year and educate the congregation about the symptoms of abuse. Also, teacher training takes place third week of August before the church year begins, and all teachers sign the offence declaration.
- κ) Keep a copy of this policy in the church office and library for easy accessibility;
- λ) Have other educational resource materials available in the church library.

¹² see Appendix C

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Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children and Youth

Human warmth expressed through appropriate touch can foster a sense of acceptance, belonging and significance. Inappropriate touch can create feelings of violation, confusion and isolation which leave lasting scars. It is the responsibility of adults to maintain appropriate boundaries; this is not the responsibility of children or youth.

The following are examples of ways in which adults can show warmth to children while protecting their own integrity:

- a) Make a point of showing affection in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. In determining whether the touching is of a sexual or inappropriate nature, ask yourself the question "How would a reasonable observer interpret this touch?"
- b) Meeting places should be managed to create a feeling of public space, yet be conducive to good teaching. Leave the windows in the room uncovered and the door standing open whenever possible.
- c) If you and a child need to talk to each other in confidence, avoid isolating yourselves. Have another adult present or stay within view of the group. If you and a child must be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d) If a child is hurting physically or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same gender as the child is present in the room with you. Do not force the child to remove clothing for an examination.
- e) If a child is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with the child's permission, show support by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug.
- f) Be cautious about any conversations that involve sex. Children may ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening, with respect for the child, is appropriate. When responding, be sensitive to the values and standards that are taught in the child's home and to a discussion that may cause conflict or confusion with those standards.
- g) When supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards. Ensure that congregational awareness and parental consent of the activity is clear. Under no circumstances shall an overnight event be supervised by fewer than two adults. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks. If sleeping space is to be shared, adults and children must have separate beds.
- h) Avoid situations in which you or a child may have to change clothing, such as swimsuits or sports clothes, in the other's presence.
- i) Always respect the integrity of the child. Allow the child to back away from your well-intentioned affection if she/he so wishes. Some children may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact. Use your common sense and good judgment to guide you in protecting the personal space and well-being of the children in your care.

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