

# **Salford Mennonite Church**

## **Child/Youth Safety Policy**

We believe children are a gift from God and should be treated with respect and love. It is our responsibility as adults to do what we can to protect them. It is for this reason we have developed a Child/Youth Safety Policy.

This policy stems from our awareness that abuse has been, and continues to be, a major problem in society. The church is not immune to this problem; in fact, churches can be especially vulnerable because they are naturally trusting institutions. We desire all who attend Salford Mennonite Church programs to participate in a safe environment where abusive conduct is not tolerated, where staff and volunteers are protected from false allegations, and where reports are handled in a timely manner with a victim centered response.

This policy has been established to:

1. Promote a safe environment for children and youth who participate in Salford Mennonite Church programs.
2. Establish clear standards concerning the oversight and care given to all children and youth attending our programs.
3. Reduce legal risk and liability exposure for Salford Mennonite Church, its workers, and volunteers.
4. Operate in accordance with Pennsylvania Child Protective Service Laws.

### **Policies**

#### **Mandated Reporters**

**Any adult (18 years or older) who has direct contact with children is a Mandated Reporter.** This includes but is not limited to the care, supervision, guidance or control of children, or routine interaction with children as either volunteers or paid staff. This includes: all staff, Sunday School teachers, children's singing teachers, Peace Camp teachers and leaders, junior and senior youth leaders, kids' club leaders, youth mentors, and nursery volunteers; as well as any other role the Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team determines to have regular interactions with children.

**For instructions about mandated reporting, see the Mandated Reporting Procedure section.**

#### **Qualifications and Clearances**

**VOLUNTEERS: All adults who seek to volunteer with children and/or youth must:**

- a. Have the following on file with the Salford church office, dated within the past 60 months:
  - i. Criminal Records Check, clear of abuse allegations or convictions
  - ii. Child Abuse History Clearance
  - iii. Signed memo of understanding and disclosure statement
  - iv. If the person has been a permanent resident of another state at any point over the last 10 years, an FBI Fingerprint Records Check
  - v. *Costs related to the above are eligible for reimbursement from the church office.*
- b. Each volunteer must be a regular attendee of Salford Mennonite Church for at least six months prior to serving. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis by the Child and Youth Safety Ministry Team. Adults who volunteer or are hired from outside the congregation to supervise children/youth for special events must verify a current Criminal Records Check and Child Abuse Clearance.
- c. All volunteers must be 18 years old or older. Minor teens may assist adults, but they may not take the place of adult workers. Supervising staff will need to approve anyone younger than 18. Teen Helpers must be active members and/or regular attendees of Salford for at least six months before being eligible to assist.

**STAFF: All paid clergy, all paid full-time staff, and any paid part-time staff who supervise or who have routine interaction with children** are required to sign a memo of understanding, have a Criminal

Records Check, Child Abuse History Clearance, and FBI Fingerprint Records check on file with the church, renewed every 60 months. These documents must be reviewed and approved by the Church Board Chair. Additionally, they must obtain 3 hours of mandated reporter continuing education credits every 60 months.

**Training:** Every three years all staff and volunteers working with children/youth will participate in a child/youth safety training event. This event will be planned by the Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team.

**Records:** The church will keep confidential all documents including the Criminal Records Check, Child Abuse History Clearance, and FBI Fingerprint Records Check. Access will only be granted to the Church Administrator, Pastors, and Board Chair for the purpose of implementing the Child/Youth Safety Policy.

Non-renewal of required clearances or training will result in dismissal from serving in a children or youth ministry program role. Supervising staff will notify the person.

## **Procedures**

### **Approved Adult supervision**

In every church activity involving care/supervision of children/youth, at least two Approved Adults should be assigned to each class or space. Preferably these two adults would not be related.

During Sunday school, one approved adult may be assigned to a class. In that case, another approved adult must be assigned as a “roamer” to move in and out of Sunday school rooms throughout the session.

Approved Adults are responsible for creating a safe space. Windows and doors on rooms must remain unobstructed for easy view by passersby. When appropriate, doors shall remain open.

Any discipline must be restorative, non-violent, and age-appropriate. Touch must be for the purpose of furthering the activity or child safety, after obtaining the child’s consent whenever possible. Hugs must be initiated by the child.

### **Diapering and bathroom assistance**

In general, children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before and after classes or other activities so parents can assist as needed. Parents can also be recruited to assist during activities.

*Diapering:* Two Approved Adults must be present when clothes or diapers are being changed.

*Toileting:* For children younger than Kindergarten age and all others who may need assistance: an Approved Adult must accompany children to and from the bathroom, informing another adult when this takes place. The adult will assist the child only when necessary. If assistance is needed, the adult must leave the door open.

### **Entering and Leaving Classrooms, the Nursery, and Activities**

Children ages first grade and younger must be dropped off at the nursery, classroom, or activity. At the end of the activity they will only be released to a parent or a person designated by the parent or guardian.

### **Transportation**

When children/youth are transported for church activities, they will be transported in groups with at least one approved adult in each vehicle. Drivers must be 21 years of age or older. Drivers must be insured, have and use the appropriate number of seat belts, and have a valid driver’s license.

### **Overnight activities**

A permission form must be filled out by parents or guardians for children/youth to engage in overnight activities. Permission slips shall be reviewed by a member of the Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team before the event.

Overnight activities involving children/youth will be chaperoned by at least two approved adults. If the event involves children/youth of both genders, there must be at least one approved adult of each gender.

## **Mentors**

All one-on-one interaction between youth and adult will take place in a public setting such as a restaurant, store, sporting event, public park, etc. One-on-one interactions are not appropriate in private homes, overnight trips away from home, or secluded outdoor areas.

Activities in the home (cooking, game nights, watching movies, etc.), or trips away from home (fishing, camping, etc.) can appropriately be conducted in combination with one or more other mentoring pairs.

At times it will be necessary for mentoring pairs to travel alone by car. The following guidelines are to be followed for this situation:

- a. The mentor will personally inform a parent or guardian where the pair will be traveling to, when they will leave, and when they will return.
- b. Any delays or change in travel plans will be relayed to parents immediately.

When mentors and mentees gather online, the mentor is responsible to personally notify a parent/guardian in advance and youth should be in a common area of the home where adults can monitor the meeting. Online meetings must be planned in advance and take place during normal waking hours.

## **Online communication and online gatherings**

Mandated Reporting expectations apply to all online interactions just as they do for in-person interactions.

When feasible, include a parent or other approved adult in any communication. When adults communicate one-on-one with children/youth via text, email, or any other online communication, save all messages and notify a parent unless specific permission has already been given.

For all online gatherings, two Approved Adults must be present. In Zoom breakout rooms, one adult may be present in each breakout room with one additional adult “roaming” between rooms. All online gatherings should use a password and/or a waiting room.

Families should make an effort to have children and youth in a common area of the home when participating in online gatherings so that adults in the home can be aware of what is happening. When gathering online or recording videos for children and youth, attention should be given to camera placement, to the visible background, and to appropriate attire.

## **Videos and photos**

Photos and other identifying information of children under 18 will not be shared or posted publicly without a parent or guardian’s permission. This includes videos of minors for worship or Sunday school.

## **Persons with Intellectual Disabilities**

In situations of care or teaching of adult persons with an intellectual disability, the above procedures and requirements must be followed.

## **Mandatory Reporting Procedure**

Church staff and volunteers will follow these guidelines if there is suspected abuse or if approached by a child about an incident:

- **Stay calm and listen to the child.** Write down what the child says.
- Take the child’s word seriously and secure the child’s safety. If the child is in imminent danger, seems fearful to return home after disclosure of abuse, has evidence of physical trauma or needs immediate medical attention, call 911.
- Give emotional support, reminding the child that he/she is not at fault and that he/she did right in telling you about what happened. Assure the child you will do everything you can to help.
- **Do not** tell the child you will not tell anyone.

- Do not ask leading questions of the child and do not make any suggestions to the child about what may/may not have occurred. Do not conduct an investigation. Simply write down what the child says.
- Do not share information with anyone beyond what is necessary to ensure the safety of the child.
- Report the suspected incident, orally and in writing:

***When there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child/youth involved in any church program or activity, has been abused by anyone (including but not limited to the child/youth's family, guardians, an approved adult staff or volunteer):***

*Mandated Reporting to the State:*

- Immediately call ChildLine (1-800-932-0313) to report the suspected incident, **AND**
- Submit an electronic report via the Child Welfare Portal [www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis) within 48 hours

***You do not need proof in order to make a report. ChildLine will conduct any necessary investigation.***

*Mandated Reporting within the Institution:*

After reporting to the state, the Mandated Reporter will report the incident to a pastor or a member of the Salford Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team. If the alleged offender is a pastor, report to a member of the Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team, who must contact the Mosaic Mennonite Conference contact person. Reporting should be done in a discreet and confidential manner. It should be understood by all involved that reporting reflects care and concern rather than disloyalty or recrimination. The Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team will meet to determine what measures to take after a report is made.

## **Definitions**

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

- **Preschooler, child, children, youth, and minor** shall mean any person under the age of 18.
- **Teen helper** shall be defined as children at least 13 years old and under the age of 18 years old.
- An **approved adult** is anyone 18 years of age or older who has satisfied the requirements of this Child/Youth Protection Policy and who has been approved for work with children by the Child and Youth Safety Ministry Team. An approved adult can be an employee or non-employee of the congregation.
- **Child abuse**, (according to the PA Child Protective Services Law), means intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:
  1. Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
  2. Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
  3. Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
  4. Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
  5. Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
  6. Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
  7. Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
  8. Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:

  9. Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
  10. Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
  11. Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
  12. Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
  13. Interfering with the breathing of a child.

14. Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
15. Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.
16. "Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine. Sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect and deaths have no time limit.

### **Child/Youth Safety Ministry Team**

**Anyone who has concerns regarding either the safety or well-being of children or youth or this policy itself can contact a member of the Child and Youth Safety Ministry Team. This contact does not replace the responsibility of Mandated Reporting.**

The Child and Youth Safety Ministry Team includes the Director of Children's Faith Formation, one Associate Pastor, and the Church Administrator. One nursery ministry team member and one at large member may be included. As of 7/2023, members include Maria Hosler Byler, Jennifer Svetlik, Karen Zehr, Erica Smith-Grasse and Brad Alderfer.

The committee will:

1. Implement, enforce, review, and revise this Child/Youth Safety Policy every year.
2. Provide continuing education training on mandated reporting every three years for all staff and approved adults regarding child safety and this policy.
3. Review all applications for approved adults and maintain a list of approved adults.
4. Monitor approved adults to ensure that policies are being followed.
5. Receive and process reports of suspected abuse.
6. Be accountable to the Lead Pastor through the Associate Pastor.

Portions of this document have been quoted or paraphrased from other church child safety policies. Used by permission: Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, College Mennonite Church, Plains Mennonite Church, and Silverwood Mennonite Church. For more resources, contact the denominational minister for Church Safety in the Mennonite Church USA Church Vitality Office.

**Approved by the Salford Church Board, July 2023**