

Living Light Mennonite Church

Child Protection Policy and Training Manual

I. Introduction

- A. As a church community, we recognize the seriousness and sinfulness of sexual and physical abuse. This type of mistreatment violates the very image of God. It causes serious damage to the mind, body and spirit of the one abused. It also causes harm to the mind and soul of the abuser.
- B. In all our policies and procedures, we seek to make our church environment a safe place for all who seek to worship and fellowship with us. We attempt to prevent abuse by adopting safeguards and will address charges of abuse seriously. Where abuse does occur, we will seek and support healing measures for both the abused and the abuser.
- C. We seek to follow the above in the manner of our Lord who addressed evil clearly with the ultimate goal of bringing wholeness and healing to all.

II. What Constitutes Child Abuse?

There are three kinds of child abuse: physical, sexual and emotional.

- A. **Physical abuse** is inflicting bodily injury on a child. Physical intervention to protect a child from harming self or others does not constitute physical abuse but intervention may be necessary.
- B. **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual contact or interaction (touch or non-touch) with a child. Using a child for sexual photographs, videos, etc. or exposing a child to them is considered sexual abuse. Force, threats, bribery, and misrepresenting right and wrong are some of the ways this abuse is perpetrated. Even if a child (out of ignorance, innocence or fear) does not resist, it is still abuse.
- C. **Emotional abuse** is defined as a pattern of diminishment of another, as in demanding more than the child is able to do, severely criticizing or humiliating him/her for not living up to a demand, or placing upon him/her such unreasonable requirements that the child cannot understand what he/she is supposed to do.

III. Application of Policy and Procedure

- A. This policy and procedure applies to all church activities in which children/youth participate regardless of location. Such activities include: Nursery, Sunday school, Junior High and Senior High youth group events, Women's Ministry, and any other church activity that involves children and youth.

IV. Requirements for Workers involved with ministry to children or youth

- A. Attend the congregation at least six months before participating in ministry to children or youth.
- B. *Submit to a Criminal Record Check (to be completed every 3 years).*
- C. *Submit to a Child abuse clearance check (to be completed every 3 years)*
- D. *Submit to an FBI fingerprint check if required (to be completed every 3 years)*
- E. Read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedure and sign a Child and Youth Protection Covenant.
- F. Know how and when you must report abuse and handle charges of abuse.

V. Appropriate Behavioral Guidelines for Children and Youth Workers

A. Guidelines for Child Protection at Living Light.

- 1. In situations where participants are not readily visible to each other, there will be no fewer than two adults present with children (including the nursery). Youth over the age of 13 may assist in supervising children and youth activities; however, such assistance does not alter the requirements that at least two adults be present. *(Youth Sunday School exception - if 2 or more youth are in the class with a teacher, they can hold class upstairs in the youth room.)*
- 2. **Open Door Policy:** The windows in the classroom doors shall remain unobstructed so that a person passing by can observe inside. If there are no windows in the doors, the door will remain open.

B. Guidelines for Child Protection for events away from Living Lights Building.

- 1. **Chaperones:** All adult chaperones (supervisors, sponsors, parents and helpers) must be cleared through the screening process.
- 2. If there is someone outside the congregation helping with an event, they must have the appropriate clearances.

C. Release Forms: Parental permission and medical release forms shall be obtained for and kept with groups traveling off-site. For groups meeting away from the Church regularly (i.e. youth groups, etc) this release form shall be completed on an annual basis. For one-time or occasional trips, specific signed release forms would be obtained in advance.

D. Guidelines for Child Protection in all Settings

- 1. **Appropriate Expressions of Affection:** True expressions of affection contribute to a warm, healthy relationship. Don't stop loving and hugging children; just remember to place reasonable limits on physical affection.

2. **Refusal of Affection:** Respect a child's/youth's refusal of affection. Be aware and sensitive to what makes a child feel uncomfortable.
3. **Touching or observation** of private areas (areas covered by a bathing suit) except as necessary when changing diapers is inappropriate.
4. **Potty Care:** *Men who serve in the nursery may change diapers of their own children only. An adult or a family member must accompany children needing help going to the restroom. The adult checks the bathroom for clearance before a child enters alone. The stall door or bathroom door should remain open a crack when assistance is required.*

E. Discipline policy: Those working with children should explain the discipline policy and inform the child needing discipline that this is the way improper behavior will be handled.

1. When a child is disruptive, defiant, harming or attempting to harm others, inform the child that their behavior is not acceptable and if they continue they will be placed in "time out".
2. If the child remains defiant, the child is to be taken to the parent /guardian for the remainder of the activity.

All exceptions to the above policy, guidelines and procedures must be pre-approved by the appropriate supervisor on a case by case basis.

VI. Caring for and Reporting an Injury or Accident

- A. **Administer first aid.** Kits are available in the nursery and outside the office. Get further help for the child if needed.
- B. **Fill out an Incident Report.** *Forms are available in the nursery and church office. Things that need reported are obvious bruising or bump or when the skin is broken.*
- C. **Inform the coordinator or director of the ministry area (i.e. youth leader, children's ministry director, nursery supervisor, etc) and the parent(s)/guardian and obtain their signatures.**
- D. **Inform the parents.**

VII. Guidelines for Reporting Suspected Abuse by Staff or Volunteers in the Church Setting or Suspected Abuse of Children/Youth participating in our church programs.

A. All children/youth workers have the personal responsibility and moral obligation (BY LAW) to report any suspected abuse to Child Line orally and written (mandatory reporter). *If a situation is observed where abuse is occurring follow these practical guidelines:*

1. *If the child is in imminent danger or needs immediate medical attention, call 911.*

2. *After reporting the abuse, contact the pastor or elder team.*

B. Anyone observing or learning of suspected abuse, sexual or otherwise, will report this immediately to *Child Line*. This disclosure shall be done both orally and in writing. The suspected incident should not be discussed with anyone else.

VIII. Response Plan To Suspected Child Abuse

A. *Response following investigation:*

1. *If allegations substantiate sexual abuse:*

a. *Ministry to the Victim:*

- i. *Ministry will be done with sensitivity and care.*
- ii. *Pastoral care and spiritual support will be provided.*
 - (a) *One person will be named and offered to the victim to serve as an advocate and support and interpreter of the process.*
 - (b) *A list of qualified counselors/therapists will be provided.*
 - (c) *In the case of multiple victims, opportunity will be made for these persons to meet together for mutual support and prayer.*

b. *Ministry to the Offender:*

- i. *Specialized counseling will be required.*
- ii. *Individual will be permanently removed from susceptible positions in the church's ministry.*
- iii. *Pastoral care and spiritual support will continue for the offender and family during rehabilitation.*
- iv. *Rehabilitation will be monitored by the committee members; a buddy system will be used if offender wants to continue attending LLMC.*
- v. *Living Light Mennonite reserves the right to revoke membership and attendance privileges depending on the circumstances.*

c. *Ministry to the congregation:*

- i. *The Pastor will report to the Elder team confirmed abuse, follow-up, including disciplinary action taken.*

- ii. *Trained people will be made available to assist any in the congregation in addressing their concerns to bring healing.*

- d. *Ministry to the accused/offender's family:*
 - i. *Ministry will be done with sensitivity and care providing support and prayer.*

 - ii. *One person will be named and offered to the family to serve as an advocate, support and interpreter of the process.*

 - iii. *A list of qualified counselors/therapists will be provided.*

- 2. *If the allegations/investigations demonstrate poor judgment or unwise behavior but not sexual abuse:*
 - a. *The committee will hold the offender responsible and accountable for this behavior. Grace and mercy will be extended in the context of repentance, accountability and justice.*

 - b. *Education and/or counseling will be required to correct behavior patterns.*

 - c. *Person will be removed from susceptible church ministry settings for a period of at least 6 months.*

 - d. *Actions taken will be communicated to the complainant/s and congregation as necessary.*

 - e. *Living Light Mennonite Church reserves the right to take other action as deemed appropriate.*

- 3. *If allegations are unsubstantiated:*
 - a. *Investigations will cease.*

 - b. *Every effort will be made to exonerate, reconcile and restore said member.*

 - c. *A public statement by the committee will be made if said member so chooses.*

 - d. *The committee will respond with love, care and concern to the complainant/s, to the congregation, and to the accused and his/her family.*