

Shalom Mennonite Fellowship

Ethical Treatment of Children: Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse

Policy and Procedure Manual

Adopted by the elders and pastor of Shalom (August 2012)

Shalom Mennonite Fellowship recognizes that child sexual abuse is a serious problem in today's world. Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal, or non-verbal, including unwanted touching, comments about a person's body or offensive gestures. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. For the safeguarding of our children and all Shalom participants we will work at preventing child sexual abuse through the procedures contained in this document.

I. SCREENING PROCESS

Screening is to be used with all applicants and church workers, full-time, part-time, compensated or volunteer, including clergy, according to the guidelines set forth below prior to working with children or youth. Workers will be thought of in two categories: 1) Staff, which includes clergy, youth sponsors, MVS local program coordinator, nursery caregiver/coordinator and all persons working with Zuni Avenue Peace Center programs 2) Volunteers, which include Shalom and other unpaid workers.

A. Signing forms

All workers and Shalom participants will read this document and sign the attached forms before beginning work for the church.

B. Reference Checks

All applicants and church staff (see above), compensated or volunteer who will work with children or youth will be required to provide reference information which will be checked at the discretion of Shalom and Zuni leadership. A written record of the contact will be kept on file in the church office.

C. Approvals

Volunteers will be permitted to work with youth or children only after they have been approved for work by the pastor and one of the elders.

D. Completion of a Criminal Records Check Authorization Form

All volunteers and employees who will work with children or youth will be required to complete the attached Worker criminal background form and authorization.

E. Employees or Volunteers with Certain Criminal Violations Will Not be Accepted

If the criminal records check shows a criminal history which the applicant or volunteer did not disclose on the screening form or during the interview, his or her services will not be accepted. If the criminal records check reveals criminal convictions which were already disclosed on the screening form and in the interview, the Church will use its discretion in determining whether the individual's services will be utilized. No one with a criminal history of abusing or neglecting children will be permitted to work with children or youth.

F. Adult survivors of child abuse are strongly encouraged to meet with a pastor and an elder prior to working with children. This is to encourage open conversation about experiences which could affect the participant's ability to work well with children.

II. GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH WORKERS AND FACILITIES

A. Use a Team Approach -- The Two Person Rule

Preferably, two approved workers (at least 18 years of age) should be present during any church activity involving minors. When working with high school or junior high youth, both workers must be at least 21 years old, unless approved by church leadership

B. Obtain Parental Permission

Church workers should obtain the consent of the child's parent or guardian before going out alone with that child, or spending time with the child in an unsupervised one-on-one situation. Workers should notify an appropriate church leader of such meetings in advance. Children and youth should also have parental permission for involvement in church sponsored programs or activities.

C. Discuss Suspicious Behavior Immediately

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a church worker or volunteer and a member of the youth group or a child should be reported immediately to the pastor or an elder. Any suspicious behavior will be immediately investigated. Inappropriate behavior

of an employee will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Inappropriate behavior of a volunteer will result in the volunteer being dismissed from the program or his or her services no longer being utilized. (See section IV.B.) Depending on the circumstances, the Church may also report the offending person's behavior to the proper authorities.

D. Classroom Doors

All classrooms and other areas used by minors must have a window in the door or the door must be left partially open during use. Room must be illuminated.

E. Provide Adequate Personnel

Programs that involve children and youth should always include adequate supervisory personnel. Supervision should be maintained before and after the event until all children are in the custody of their parents or legal guardians.

F. Observe an Overnight Rule

On all overnight occasions, a minimum of two screened workers will be in attendance.

G. Use a Church Nursery Identification Procedure

Nursery personnel should clearly identify the child and the child's parent or legal guardian. Children should only be released to a properly identified and pre-authorized adult.

III. UNDERSTANDING AND IDENTIFYING ABUSE

A. Behaviors

Child Sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects. Examples include fondling; oral, genital, and anal penetration; intercourse; forcible rape; verbal comments; pornographic videos; obscene phone calls; exhibitionism; allowing children to witness sexual activity.

B. Physical Signs

Physical signs of abuse include but are not limited to lacerations and bruises; nightmares; irritation, pain or injury to the genital area; difficulty with urination; discomfort with sitting; torn or bloody underclothing; venereal disease.

C. Behavioral Signs

Behavioral signs of abuse include but are not limited to anxiety when approaching the church or nursery area, nervous or hostile behavior towards adults, sexual self consciousness, "acting out" type sexual behavior, withdrawal from church activities and friends.

D. Verbal Signs

Verbal signs of abuse may include phrases like, "I don't like ...(particular church worker)"; "(A church worker) does things to me when we're alone"; "I don't like to be alone with (A church worker)"; "(A church worker) fooled around with me."

IV. REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR CHURCH WORKERS

A. Reporting Obligations

Child and youth workers or volunteers should be considered mandatory reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. Arizona Revised code 13-3620 details who is a mandatory reporter and that the report should be made “immediately” which would mean at least within 48 hours. There are criminal penalties for failure to report. The individual reporting the conduct is protected from legal and civil liability if the report is made in good faith. Even if a church worker or volunteer is not a “mandatory reporter” by statute of child abuse or neglect, any such person may make a report to the local social services department, or minimally discuss their suspicions with church leadership, either locally or at the conference level.

B. Line of Reporting For Allegedly Abused Child/Youth

1. When possibly abusive or unhealthy activities are suspected, a report should be brought immediately to the attention of the pastor and an elder, who will determine whether to contact authorities or to handle the situation internally. All reports should be documented by the church in writing.
2. The pastor or elder should encourage the complainant to contact a trustworthy adult advocate of their choice to report inappropriate behavior. This adult advocate will ensure that Complainant's parent or guardian is immediately informed that possible abuse or molestation has occurred. The adult advocate shall work with complainant to document the particulars of the situation to then be shared with the pastor or elder. A written statement with the Complainant's signature is required. The pastor or elder will see that an attorney is immediately contacted to provide a written opinion as to whether the church should report the abuse or molestation to law enforcement authorities. The written opinion should be obtained within 24 hours of when the pastor or elder first becomes aware of the abuse or molestation. The attorney's advice should be followed. If the attorney recommends that an incident be reported, the advice should be acted upon immediately.
3. The Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Executive will be in communication with the accused utilizing the resources of outside professional and/or legal advisors.
4. The pastor or elder must contact the church's insurance company within 24 hours of the report.
5. If the accused person has ministerial credentials, the Conference Minister shall report to the chair of the Pastoral Leadership Committee of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference and the pastor or elder will contact the conference executive and follow their guidelines.
6. The accused will be suspended from responsibilities during the investigation of alleged abuse.

7. The PSMC Conference Executive shall cooperate fully with state and legal entities for resolution and restitution.

V. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

A. Maintain Adequate Records

Up-to-date worker's applications, references, and screening forms will be on record in a confidential locked file and should be kept up to date.

B. Spokesperson

To protect the child and the accused, information regarding the complaint and the investigation will be limited to only those with a need to know in the Church organization. One person will be designated as the church spokesperson who will have the responsibility to respond to inquiries from law enforcement, social services, the media and the congregation.

C. Prepare a Position Statement

A clear position statement of our church regarding child sexual abuse will be developed in consultation with legal counsel for public use when an allegation occurs. It will include our policies and established safeguards.

D. Emotional Response

The church will avoid inappropriate responses to allegations including denial, accusations and minimizing the events.

E. Use an Attorney

The church's legal counsel will be present when the spokesperson is answering any investigational questions from the police or social service agencies.

F. Congregational Notification

The pastor or elder will notify the congregation of attenders with a history of perpetrating sexual abuse should it be disclosed or discovered by any of the above procedures.

We wish to acknowledge:

Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church, Hammer, Richard R., Klipowicz, Steven W., Cobble, James F. Jr. Christian Ministries Resources, Matthews, NC, 1993.

Springdale Mennonite Church, whose policy was borrowed and adapted.

The law firm of Wharton, Aldhizer & Weaver who reviewed this policy.

Virginia Mennonite Conference who distributed this policy for use by sister conferences and churches

Shalom Mennonite Fellowship/Zuni Avenue Peace Center

Worker Criminal Background Check Authorization

I, the undersigned, authorize Shalom Mennonite Fellowship Inc. and Zuni Avenue Peace Center and their agents to engage in a criminal consumer background check on me as an individual. I understand that this can include, but is not limited to, motor vehicle records, national and local criminal databases, and consumer credit reporting. I understand that the resulting report will be maintained in a confidential file for the period of my time at Shalom plus five (5) additional years.

This is done in compliance with the child protection policies of the organization. Any undisclosed incidents will be cause for discussion and possible disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from my position. Should disciplinary action be taken against me due to what is found in this report, I am entitled to be provided with a copy of the report and to dispute that report with the reporting agents.

I further will not hold Shalom Mennonite Fellowship or Zuni Ave Peace Center, any agency providing information in this background check, their employees, members, or agents at fault for the unintentional disclosure or misuse of the information obtained from this background check.

Signed _____ **Date** _____

Have you ever been charged with a felony? **Yes No**

If Yes, What charge, where, and when _____

Have you ever been convicted of a felony? **Yes No**

If Yes, What charge, where, and when _____

Have you ever been charged or convicted of a misdemeanor? **Yes No**

If Yes, What charge, where, and when _____

Have you ever been accused of any type of sexual misconduct with a minor? **Yes No**

If yes, where, when, what circumstances and to what result (attach a sheet)

Are there any other things in your background that we should consider in determining your suitability for this job?

Names and contact information for 2 references

I hereby certify that everything above is stated correctly, accurately and completely:

Signed _____ Date _____