

Child Protection, and Abuse Response Policy

[Shalom Mennonite Fellowship, Tucson, AZ]

Introduction

Each child is a special gift from God. Jesus placed high value on children during his earthly ministry. We seek to make all our church activities and facilities safe, especially for children. It is the responsibility of adults to do all we can to protect children.

Sadly, child* abuse is prevalent. It is hurting children, families, churches and societies everywhere.

What is child abuse and neglect?

1. *Physical abuse* exists when a child has a non-accidental injury.
2. *Emotional abuse*--examples include verbal assault, consistent or harsh blaming or shaming of a child, flirtatious behavior, asking a child to hold the adult's secrets, treating a child as more special than other children...
3. *Sexual abuse* exists when an adult uses a child as a part of any type of sexual act.
4. *Emotional neglect* is when the child suffers from an adult failing to give chances for feeling loved, wanted, secure, and worthy.
5. *Physical neglect* is when an adult does not provide basic needs. Examples: not providing the necessary supervision; not providing needed liquid to drink in hot weather.

Child abuse prevention within our church community

We seek to prevent all types of child abuse and neglect and to strengthen families. Shalom aspires to offer learning opportunities for both adults and children to this end. We also aspire to be part of the healing of abuse beyond Shalom.

This policy applies to all church ministries and activities, including but not limited to Sunday school, youth activities and nursery. Shalom commits to:

1. Make our church facility safe for children.
 - 1.1. Assure that there is easy visual access into all rooms where children or youth ministry is conducted (e.g. windows in doors...).
 - 1.2. A first-aid kit is available in the church building.
2. Provide safe and adequate supervision to children.
 - 2.1. Except where Shalom leadership approves an exception, Shalom will avoid situations where a child or children are alone with one adult who is not their parent or guardian. Children's programming will be conducted with the presence of two approved workers. This is especially important at overnight activities and when activities are in private locations.
 - 2.2. With high school or junior high youth, both workers must be at least 21 years old. A person under eighteen years should not teach/care for children without a supervising adult.
 - 2.3. A parent/guardian must be notified ahead of time and give consent before their child is transported away from church facilities.
 - 2.4. No physical discipline (e.g. hitting, slapping) may be used. When a child misbehaves, use redirection and/or verbal means to guide the child's behavior. If this does not work, the child will be taken to their parent. Very young children who endanger themselves or others may be briefly, gently physically restrained from that danger.

2.5. Children need love. At times, this can be appropriately expressed through physical touch, such as hugging, a pat on the back, an arm around the shoulder, holding an infant or toddler, etc. Touch should be age appropriate, never private parts (except as needful for diaper changing/wiping) and only as a response to the child's need. Touch should not be based on the adult's emotional need, nor ever forced on a child.

3. Attend personnel issues.

3.1. Before starting to work with children with Shalom, a person will receive this policy, fill out, sign and return the form below. Before hiring/starting, a background check, including nationwide search of criminal history, child abuse and sex offender registries, will be run for all church staff and volunteers who will have contact with young people (e.g. pastors, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, MVS local program coordinators, nursery workers...).

3.2. In addition, individuals must have either regular involvement in Shalom for at least four months, or consistently positive references before starting to work with Shalom children.

4. Deal appropriately with offenders and allegations of abuse.

4.1. If abuse or neglect is witnessed, or if a child discloses, Shalom child workers will act quickly to:

4.1.1. Ensure the child's safety.

4.1.2. Make a report to Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4ACHILD, or the Arizona hotline 1-888-SOS-CHILD (767-2445), or the police (911), and

4.1.3. Notify a Shalom pastor or elder knowledgeable in the area of child abuse.

Note: It is not Shalom's role to require evidence or proof. Shalom will not do an investigation. Shalom will cooperate with professionals who conduct an investigation.

4.2. When notified, Shalom leadership will follow these steps:

4.2.1. Assure that a report has been made to the child protection authorities.

4.2.2. Immediately attend to the victim and their family's safety and needs within Shalom and through referral to an outside agency, like a child advocacy center. Keep the victim's needs at the center of any process.

4.2.3. Immediately relieve the accused from all responsibilities involving leadership or contact with children until the conclusion of the investigation.

4.2.4. Inform PSMC leadership and Shalom's insurance company within 24 hours of the report.

4.2.5. Keep victim(s) and accused separated during the investigation. Support child victim(s) to engage in age-appropriate activities. If accused is a child/youth, find alternate activities for them.

4.2.6. Consider the possibility that there may be more than one child harmed. Within 48 hours, notify all parents, whose children may have encountered the accused in a Shalom context, that allegations have been made and reported.

4.2.7. After the investigation, if abuse is confirmed, follow all legal implications for the offender. Inform the entire church. Secrecy not only makes children unsafe, it also does not help offenders.

- 4.2.8. If abuse is not confirmed, attend to the dynamics that prompted the allegations and carefully consider the degree to which victim(s) and accused need to remain separated.
- 4.2.9. Make pastoral care available to all involved. Prioritize the needs of the victim over the offender.
- 4.2.10. Tend to the healing of the congregation as a whole (e.g. informational meetings, gatherings to hear harms and feelings, problem-solving for the future.).
- 4.3. If there is uncertainty as to whether a situation requires reporting to authorities, it will be referred to a pastor, a church child program leader, or an elder knowledgeable in the area of child abuse.
 - 4.3.1 If someone who has a history of abusing a child and/or is a registered sex offender should attend Shalom, the congregation will be notified at the time this information becomes known to Shalom leadership. Families with children who are new to Shalom will be notified of this information within two months of beginning to attend. Shalom will take steps to see that the person has no unsupervised contact with children. They will not be part of children/ youth ministry. Shalom leadership will seek to establish a covenant with that person including that they will avoid interaction with children and will not abuse.

*In this policy “child” and “children” refers to persons under the age of 18.

We wish to acknowledge Dove’s Nest’s assistance in developing this policy.

Policy approved congregational meeting August 2017

Background Check Form for Shalom Mennonite Fellowship

First Name _____ Middle Name _____ Last Name _____

Suffix: _____ Other names you have been known as: _____

Social Security Number*: _____ Date of Birth*(MM/DD/YYYY): _____

Gender Identity*: Underline one: *Female, Male, Opt not to disclose* Preferred pronouns*:

Date of Birth* (mm/dd/yyyy) _____

*This information will not be used as hiring criteria. If you do not have a social security number, to complete background check we need a full history of where you have lived (city, state, mail code, country) and dates moved (month/year) for the last 20 years.

(If driving children) Driver’s License State: _____ Number: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Current Physical Address: (not P.O. Box) _____ Apt: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Country _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Time Resident in Arizona _____ If less than 5 years, list Previous State(s) of Residence and dates of moving between states:

References:

1. Current or Most Recent Employer Name: _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Position/Title: _____ Dates of Employment: _____

Supervisor Name: _____ Supervisor Telephone: _____ Supervisor Email: _____

2. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

3. Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Reasons for leaving your last 3 work places

Have you ever abused or been accused of abusing a child? (mark one) No _____ Yes _____

If an accusation was not founded and you were not found guilty of abuse by authorities, attach detailed explanation.

Are there any other things in your background that we should consider in determining your suitability for working with children at Shalom? (Including but not limited to things that may come up in your background check): No _____ Yes _____

I _____ (print name) affirm all the information that I have provided in the Background Check Form is complete and accurate. I have read Shalom's Child Protection and Abuse Response Policy and I agree to follow it. I authorize Shalom Mennonite Fellowship and their agents to engage in a criminal background check on me. I understand that this can include, but is not limited to, motor vehicle records, social security number verification, national and local criminal databases. I understand that the resulting report will be maintained for the period of my time at Shalom plus five additional years. I also give Shalom Mennonite Fellowship my permission to contact employer(s) and other references I have listed above. I extend permission to my references to share with Shalom information about any concerns they have about me working with children and about the quality of my work and life including both strengths and weaknesses. I will not hold Shalom, Shalom's leaders, the company that does the background check on Shalom's behalf, nor my references at fault for their part in fulfilling the requirements of Shalom's child protection policy.

Signed _____ Date _____