

Eighth Street Mennonite Church Safe Congregation Policy and Procedure Manual

Eighth Street Mennonite Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for all people. The following policy reflects our commitment to provide protective care of children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in church sponsored activities as well as to protect our adult staff and volunteers. Eighth Street Preschool policy and operating procedures are separate. These can be obtained by contacting the Preschool Director or Preschool Board Chair.

State and Local Laws

Though our primary commitment to vulnerable persons is rooted in the Gospel, the following definitions from state and local law may be helpful. For the purpose of this policy, **youth/child** shall mean anyone under the age of 18; and **vulnerable adult** shall mean an individual, age 18 or over, who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently. The term **vulnerable person** will be used to include individuals in these and similar groups.

The state of Indiana defines **abuse** as:

- 1) intentional or willful infliction of physical injury;
- 2) unnecessary physical or chemical restraints or isolations;
- 3) punishment with resulting physical harm or pain;
- 4) sexual molestation, rape, sexual misconduct, sexual coercion, and sexual exploitation;
- 5) verbal or demonstrative harm caused by oral or written language, or gestures with disparaging or derogatory implications;
- 6) psychological, mental, or emotional harm caused by unreasonable confinement, intimidation, humiliation, threats of punishment, or deprivation.

Neglect is the failure to provide supervision, training, appropriate care, food, medical care, or medical supervision to an individual. **Exploitation** is 1) the unauthorized use of personal services, the property or the identity of an individual; 2) any other type of criminal exploitation, including exploitation under IC 35-46-1-1, for one's own profit or advantage or for the profit or advantage of another.

In addition to these definitions, it is important to name that according to Indiana Code 31-33 (IC 31-9-2): "Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect must make a report to Child Protective Services or the local law enforcement agency."

Policy

1. All persons, paid or volunteer, who work with vulnerable persons at Eighth Street Mennonite Church will complete and turn in an Eighth Street Mennonite Church Youth Worker Covenant of Understanding prior to working with children or youth. The Pastoral Team and Vice Chair of the Congregation will review these memos. They will be kept in a locked file in the church office and will be updated every three (3) years. If a regular attender leaves the church for any reason and then resumes attending, they will be handled as a new attender, waiting the sufficient amount of time to volunteer (see #4 & #5) and filling out a new memo even if it has been less than three years since a previous memo was filed.
2. All paid staff, youth sponsors, and mentors will be required to complete a police/criminal history check. These reports will be reviewed by the Pastoral Team and Vice-Chair of the Congregation and will kept in a locked file in the church office and will be updated every three (3) years. If the criminal records check shows a criminal history which the applicant or volunteer did not disclose, his or her services will not be accepted and applicant will be charged for the cost of the background check. If the criminal records check reveals criminal convictions which were already disclosed on the screening form, the church will use its discretion in determining whether an individual's services will be utilized. No one with a criminal history of abusing or neglect will be permitted to work with vulnerable persons.
3. All youth workers will attend an annual training session led by the Pastoral Team and Executive Committee to include teaching the church's policy and procedures to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse as outlined in this document. At this training session, the Eighth Street Mennonite Church Youth Worker Covenant of Understanding will be distributed to be completed and handed back prior to working with vulnerable persons.
4. Volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth as a Christian Education teacher or nursery worker after they have been regular attenders of the church for a minimum of six (6) months.
5. Volunteers will be permitted to work with children or youth as youth sponsors or mentors after they have been regular attenders of the church for a minimum of one (1) year.
6. Volunteers will provide a safe space for children and youth by keeping doors open at all times in classrooms and offices if there are no windows in the doors.
7. Volunteers will cultivate an "open door" culture in which parents are encouraged at any time to drop-in and observe or participate in activities.

Procedure

I. Understanding and Identifying Abuse

i. Physical Signs of Abuse

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.

ii. Behavioral Signs of Abuse

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.

iii. Verbal Signs of Abuse

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)".

II. Reporting and Responding to Allegations of Abuse

- i. When abusive or unhealthy activities are suspected, a report should be documented in writing and brought immediately to the attention of a member of the Pastoral Team or a member of the Executive Committee.
 1. All allegations will be taken seriously.
 2. It is possible that a person will either willingly or unintentionally indicate that he or she has been abused. This indication could be received through their words, or by noticeable harm to their body. If you suspect abuse, do the following:
 - A. Ask another adult to assist in listening to what the person has to say or in observing the physical evidence. This process should never happen with just one adult present.
 - B. If both adults feel it is appropriate to pursue the matter, follow the reporting guidelines described below:
 - a. Provide a written report for the church files (see *Incidence Abuse Report* form on file in church office)
 - b. Pastoral Staff will be responsible for contacting the proper civil authorities immediately. This may be done through Division of Family and Children (DFS) for Elkhart County at (574)293-6551 or Child Protective Services (CPS) at (800) 800-5566.
 - c. All efforts at handling the incident will be documented, including steps taken in response to allegations.

- d. A report to a member of the Pastoral Team or a member of Executive Committee is not a report to Child Protective Services. Consequently, the individual who is making that report may not have discharged their obligation by just reporting to the Pastoral Team/Executive and must therefore contact proper civil authorities (CPS and/or law enforcement) immediately.
- ii. 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.
- iii. 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.
- iv. The person accused will be treated with dignity, but will be immediately removed from further Eighth Street Mennonite Church involvement with vulnerable persons.

Eighth Street Mennonite Church
Covenant of Understanding for those Working with Vulnerable Persons

Youth Worker/Paid Staff:

Thank you for your consideration to work with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults of Eighth Street Mennonite Church. Vulnerable persons are an active and vital part of our congregation. As someone who has a passion for working with young people, you will understand the need and desire to maintain a safe environment and appreciate that Eighth Street has this policy to protect us all.

The information that follows will allow us to better know those who are working with vulnerable persons (children/youth/vulnerable adults). Our desire is to be proactive in protecting the vulnerable persons as well as the adult volunteers who participate in activities at Eighth Street.

Sincerely,

Eighth Street Executive Committee

**Eighth Street Mennonite Church
Covenant of Understanding
For Those Working with Vulnerable Persons**

I. Personal Information

Full Name: _____
Address: _____

Birthdate: _____

Phone: _____

II. Church History and Prior Children/Youth/Vulnerable Persons

Experience Please list (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

Please list all previous church work involving children/youth/vulnerable adults. List church name, address, type of work and dates.

Please list all other work involving children/youth/vulnerable adults. List organization name, address, type of work and dates.

III. References (not relatives)

Name: _____ Name: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Phone: _____ Phone: _____

Relationship: _____ Relationship: _____

IV. Confidential Information

Have you ever been investigated, charged with or convicted of sexual abuse? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain: _____

Have you ever been charged with a crime involving child abuse, neglect, domestic violence or other violence? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain: _____

V. Policies

To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our congregational programs the following guidelines have been established for those who want to work with our vulnerable persons. The pastoral team and Vice-Chair of the Congregation will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the Covenant of Understanding will all church employees and/or volunteers.

1. All individuals who seek to volunteer with vulnerable persons will sign a Covenant of Understanding. (COUs will be reviewed by the Pastoral Team and Vice Chair of the Congregation and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. COUs will be updated every three (3) years.)
2. All paid staff will agree to a police background check. (Background checks will be reviewed by the Pastoral Team and the Vice Chair of the Congregation and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the front office. Background checks will be updated every three (3) years.
3. Volunteers will have attended Eighth Street Mennonite Church regularly for at least six (6) months prior to volunteering for activities involving supervision of groups of children (i.e. Christian Education teachers, nursery workers, VBS teachers, etc.).
4. Volunteers will have attended Eighth Street Mennonite Church regularly for at least one (1) year prior to volunteering for activities involving regular off-grounds supervision of groups of youth (youth sponsors) or individuals (youth mentors). A background check will also be required and read by the Pastoral Team and Vice Chair of the Congregation.
5. Any person convicted of physical and/or sexual abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker.
6. Volunteers will provide a safe space for children and youth by keeping doors open at all times in all classrooms and offices if there are not windows in the doors.
7. Volunteers will cultivate an "open door" culture in which parents are encouraged at any time to drop-in and observe or participate.

VI. Covenant

The information provided above is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or church listed above to provide information they may have regarding my character and fitness for vulnerable persons work. I also authorize any further background checks to be made if thought necessary by the staff and Vice Chair of the Congregation.

I have read the policies of Eighth Street Mennonite Church regarding those who work with vulnerable persons. I agree to observe these policies while serving in this capacity.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Incidence Abuse Report

Date of this Report and Time: _____/_____/_____ :_____

Date Incident Occurred: _____/_____/_____ :_____

Location of Incident: _____

Incident Reported by: _____

Incident Reported to: _____ Pastor _____ Executive Committee member _____ Other (specify)

Alleged Type of Abuse/Neglect:

_____ Verbal _____ Physical _____ Sexual _____ Neglect _____ Other (specify)

Injuries Noted: _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, Describe: _____

Medical Attention: _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, action taken: _____

Name of Victim: _____

Name of Person(s) Accused: _____

Name of Witness(es) to the incident: _____

Person(s) accused is(are): _____ Church Employee _____ Teacher _____ Mentor

_____ Youth Sponsor _____ Church Member

_____ Other (specify)

Victim Report: (If able and willing – do not pressure) _____

Witness Report: _____

