

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Safe Space Policy

(Updated August 5, 2021)

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Safe Space Policy

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, vulnerable adults, and survivors who participate in church sponsored activities. We also commit to protecting our paid staff and volunteers. This policy provides procedures for reporting misconduct in a variety of situations. Eighth Street Preschool Safe Space policy and operating procedures may be obtained from the Preschool Director or Preschool Board Chair.

Definitions:

Youth/child: anyone under the age of 18

Vulnerable adult: an individual, age 18 or over, who requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently. This may be due to developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap.

Vulnerable person: Individuals in these and similar groups.

Credentialed: Credentialed individuals who have been authorized by a denominational organization for ministerial leadership. The Central District Conference Ministerial Committee is responsible for credentialing ministers in its member congregations.

Non-credentialed: Non-credentialed individuals are those who do not hold a credential within an MC USA conference - both paid staff and unpaid volunteers. This category includes anyone who participates and/or attends congregational activities.

Executive Committee: The leadership of Eighth Street Mennonite Church includes the pastors and the other members of the Executive Committee: the Chair of the Congregation, the Vice-Chair, and the Past Chair. Any member of the leadership team may be contacted with regard to this policy. Information is shared within the leadership team and will lead to the procedures outlined in this document.

1. All persons, paid or volunteer, who work with vulnerable persons at Eighth Street Mennonite Church complete and turn in an *Eighth Street Mennonite Church Covenant of Understanding for Those Working with Vulnerable Persons* (COU) prior to working with children or youth. The pastor responsible for administration manages this process. The covenants are kept in the church office and are updated every three (3) years. A regular attender who leaves the church for any reason and then resumes attending waits to volunteer for the same amount of time as a new attender, (See 4 & 5 below.) and fills out a new covenant even if fewer than three years have passed since the previous covenant was filed.
2. All paid staff, youth sponsors, and mentors are required to give permission for a police/criminal records check. The pastor responsible for administration reviews the

Section A

reports in consultation with the Vice-Chair of the Congregation. The reports are kept in a locked file in the church office and are updated every three (3) years. If the criminal records check shows a criminal history which the applicant did not disclose, his or her services are not accepted. If the criminal records check reveals criminal convictions which were already disclosed on the covenant form, the Executive Committee determines whether an individual's services will be utilized. Someone who has a history of sexual abuse and/or is a registered sex offender is not permitted to work with vulnerable persons.

3. All youth workers attend an annual training session led by the Pastoral Team. This training covers the church's policy and procedures for reducing the risk of child sexual abuse as outlined in this document. At this session, participants complete the COU and return it prior to working with vulnerable persons.
4. Volunteers are permitted to work with children or youth as a Christian Education teacher or in the nursery after they have been regular attenders of the church for a minimum of six (6) months.
5. Volunteers are 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. To provide safe spaces for children and youth, all classrooms and offices have at least one door with a window.
7. The church encourages an "open door" culture in which parents are free to drop in at any time to observe activities.
8. The church reports and responds to allegations of abuse by credentialed and non-credentialed individuals with the procedures outlined in Section C and D.
9. The church follows the principles and commitments in Section E. when an individual identified as credibly accused is involved in congregational activities.

Section A

Procedures for Reporting and Responding: Children and Youth

All allegations of abuse and possible evidence of abuse are taken seriously. A person may either willingly or unintentionally indicate that he or she has been abused. This indication may be received through their words or by noticeable harm to their body. See Appendix A.

The procedures below are followed when abuse is suspected of a person under the age of 18. When abuse is suspected of a person aged 18 and older, the procedures in Section C or D are followed.

1. The person suspecting abuse calls the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 800-800-5556. The Hotline is managed by the Indiana Department of Child Services. (https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Hotline_Process.pdf) *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.* (Indiana Code 31-33 (IC 31-9-2))
2. On the Hotline call, the person suspecting abuse will be asked to provide the information listed on the Incident Abuse Report Form (Appendix C). The person may request support from one of the pastors or another member of the Executive Committee to prepare for the call.
3. If there has not been contact with church leadership before the call, the person informs one of the pastors or another member of the Executive Committee that call has been made.
4. Church leaders immediately attend to the victim and his or her family's safety and needs. The victim's needs are kept at the center of the process, prioritized over those of the alleged offender.
5. A church leader informs the conference minister, confmin@mcusacdc.org. Central District Office, 574-534-1485.
6. The pastoral staff ensures that the Incident Abuse Report and all actions to handle the incident are documented. This includes the hotline call and subsequent contact with the Department of Child Services.
7. A designated church spokesperson responds to all inquiries from law enforcement, social services, the media, and the congregation.
8. If the accused person is a part of Eighth Street Mennonite Church, the individual is treated with dignity and is immediately removed from church involvement with children and youth until the situation is resolved. The Executive Committee determines if additional restrictions from congregational participation are needed.
9. The Executive Committee creates a communication plan for the congregation. All parents whose children may have encountered the alleged offender are notified as soon as possible. They are told that allegations have been reported to the Indiana Department of Child Services.

Appendix B

Procedures for Reporting and Responding: Non-Credentialed Individuals

Eighth Street Mennonite Church is committed to a survivor-centered approach when responding to allegations of sexual misconduct between adults. This includes privileging the victim's voice and needs.

When a lay person in the congregation has been accused of sexual misconduct, the procedures below are followed. These procedures are based on *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-Credentialed Individuals*. Mennonite Church USA, 2018, pages 11 - 13. <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/prevention-and-response-sexual-abuse-and-non-credentialed-individuals/>. The Executive Committee is responsible for following these steps:

1. An adult victim is encouraged to contact a qualified local person or group that can help them think through their options and serve as an advocate. Eighth Street pastors are prepared to make suggestions.
2. If the victim wishes to report to law enforcement, ensure that the victim has support in making the report.
3. At least two Executive Committee members of different genders contact the conference minister together.
4. Provide support to the victim in finding therapy, advocacy, etc. Offer to walk with the victim and support their decisions. Avoid making decisions for them or taking on responsibilities outside of the leadership role. Respond to the victim wishes for continued contact.
5. Suspend congregational responsibilities of the individual who has been accused. Inform the named perpetrator to stop attending events at Eighth Street during the investigation.
6. Inform the congregation that the accused person has been suspended. Open the call for other victims to come forward.
7. Work with Central District Conference to identify an investigative team/person using CDC's pool of trained investigators.
8. Establish a timeline for the investigation and keep the victim informed of the investigation progress.
9. At the end of the investigation, inform the victim and the offender of the results in writing, by phone, and in person.
10. Inform every regular attender of the congregation of the outcome. Do this in writing indicating the nature of the misconduct and including only essential details. Do not identify the victim without explicit permission. Inform the conference pastor.
11. Follow all recommendations from the investigative team. Offer pastoral care to all involved. Prioritize the needs of the victim over those of the offender.
12. Pay attention to the need for healing/processing by the congregation through informational meetings, circle processes, naming a task force to solve problems or address future concerns.

Section C

Procedures for Reporting and Responding: Ordained Ministers

Eighth Street Mennonite Church is a congregation of the Central District Conference (CDC) and Mennonite Church USA. The procedures below are based on *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure*. Mennonite Church USA.

https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MinisterialSexualMisconductPolicy_FINAL2018.pdf

A person who believes that a minister has engaged in misconduct or ministerial sexual misconduct contacts one of the following:

1. The CDC Ministerial Committee following directions on the CDC website <https://mcusacdc.org/misconduct>
2. The CDC conference office (800-662-2264).
3. The CDC conference minister confmin@mcusacdc.org

“The Ministerial Committee of CDC is committed to providing a safe place for persons who have been victims of pastoral sexual misconduct to report that misconduct. Once the initial ‘misconduct report’ has been received, an experienced, trained individual will listen to you, provide helpful resources, and walk with you through the initial part of the process. Conversations are confidential!”

Central District Conference. “Misconduct” (<https://mcusacdc.org/misconduct>)

The CDC “Misconduct” page provides additional resources from Mennonite Church USA and other related organizations.

Responding to an Individual Credibly Accused of Sexual Misconduct

Eighth Street Mennonite Church is committed to a survivor-centered approach when responding to allegations of sexual misconduct. This includes privileging the victim's voice and needs.

As soon as the Executive Committee becomes aware that an individual has been identified as credibly accused, they initiate a response that includes the following actions.

1. Notify the individual in writing that they may not participate in any congregational gatherings until further notice.
2. Inform the Conference Minister that the individual has received the above mentioned notification.
3. Check with other congregations/institutions/organizations to determine if there are completed or on-going investigations of this individual. Obtain any outcomes and recommendations.
4. Inform the congregation including the name of the individual and the Executive Committee's action to bar the person from church gatherings until further notice.
5. Support survivors by:
 - a. Providing ways for survivors to share their concerns.
 - b. Prioritizing the concerns of survivors in creating a congregational response to the individual.
 - c. Providing support for survivors to connect with services in the community.
6. Make decisions regarding the credibly accused individual's participation based on the recommendations of prior investigations and the concerns of survivors.

Definitions and Signs of Abuse

State of Indiana Definitions

Abuse

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.
7. communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.

Neglect is the failure to provide supervision, training, appropriate care, food, medical care, or medical supervision to an individual.

Exploitation

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.

State of Indiana Requirement to Report

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."
(Indiana Code 31-33 (IC 31-9-2))

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.

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.

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)"

Appendix A

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Covenant of Understanding for Those Working with Vulnerable Persons

Thank you for your willingness 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.

Policies

These policies have been established to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in our congregational programs. The pastor responsible for administration implements and monitors these policies.

1. All individuals who seek to volunteer with vulnerable persons sign a Covenant of Understanding. COUs are reviewed by the pastor and are kept in the church office. COUs are updated every three (3) years.
2. All paid staff, youth sponsors, and mentors are required to give permission for a police/criminal records check. These checks are reviewed by the pastor with responsibility for administration and the Vice-Chair of the congregation. The reports are kept in a locked file in the church office and are updated every three (3) years.
3. Volunteers will have attended Eighth Street Mennonite Church regularly for at least six (6) months prior to supervising 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 regular off-grounds supervision of groups of youth (youth sponsors) or one-on-one activities with individuals (youth mentors).
5. Any person convicted of physical and/or sexual abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker.
6. The church cultivates an "open door" culture in which parents are free to drop in at any time to observe activities.

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Covenant

The personal information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed above to provide information they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with vulnerable persons. 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: _____

Appendix B

The personal information that you provide allows 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.

1. Personal Information

Full Name: _____

Address: _____

Birthdate: _____

Phone: _____

2. 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.

3. References (not relatives)

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

4. 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: _____

Incident Abuse Report

Date of this Report and Time: ____/____/____ ____:____ a.m. or p.m.

Date Incident Occurred: ____/____/____ ____:____ a.m. or p.m.

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: _____

Parent/Guardian of Victim (if applicable): _____

Home Address of Victim: _____

Phone Number 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: (note here what the victim said that made you aware of the need to report – do not ask for more information from the person)

Witness Report: (how did you become aware of the need for reporting)

BEST PRACTICES

Touch:

Children need love. At times, affection can be appropriately expressed through physical touch that is in the view of others.

1. Appropriate touch should be **a response to the child's need** for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based on the adult's emotional need.
2. Volunteer workers or employees **should not force affection** on any child. Physical contact should always be with the child's consent. For example, the approved adult might ask, "May I give you a hug?"
3. Physical touch should generally be **limited to side hugs** and contact with the child's hand, shoulder, or upper back.
4. A child's verbal or nonverbal **"no" should always be respected**. If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, respect the child's wishes at all times.
5. When holding toddler or preschool-aged children on your lap, do not hold them up against your chest. If possible, have the child sit toward your knees so their buttocks are not in contact with your torso or sit sideways across your lap away from your torso.
6. Physical **touch should be appropriate for the age** of the child or youth. For example, while it is often appropriate to hold a toddler on your lap, it is inappropriate for a teenager to sit on the lap of an adult. For older youth, opt for a side hug, touching their hand, or other forms of affection that do not involve excessive body contact for extended periods of time.
7. At no time should a child or youth, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals, or buttocks.
8. If an approved adult or approved youth worker shows physical affection toward a child or youth, **it must occur with another adult present**. An "approved adult" is anyone over 18 years of age who has satisfied the requirements of the church's protection policy.
9. Anyone observing inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a minor should immediately begin the process for reporting suspected abuse or neglect.

[Appropriate Touch Guidelines | Dove's Nest](#)

Electronic Communication

1. Approved adults must consult the youth's permission form and always follow parent/guardian requests for electronic communication and photo releases.
2. All electronic communication will occur between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. unless it is an emergency situation in which case the parents/guardians will be notified.
3. Minors will never be referenced by name or labeled with other identifying information on any social media or other website locations.
4. Any photographs taken of minors taken at youth events can only appear on the church's website page and Facebook page, in e-mails sent by the church, and in the church newsletter that is posted online with parental permission from the signed Parental Permission Form.
5. All communication between adults and minors must be traceable. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, e-mail, and texting are traceable. Snapchat and other such communications are not traceable, and thus are prohibited.
6. All writers are urged to be cautious about autocorrect and encouraged to always proofread electronic communications before sending.

[7 Tips on Electronic Communication for Churches | Dove's Nest](#)

Child-on-child Abuse Recognition

Using the traffic signal colors of green, yellow, and red, please find outlined behavior on a continuum, from what is considered normal behavior to problematic and abusive behaviors.

For children under 12:

- Normal or “green light” behaviors include curiosity that is limited, intermittent, and balanced with other exploration, as well as feelings that are lighthearted and spontaneous. Here caregivers can teach and affirm consent and respect for boundaries.
- Problematic or “yellow light” behaviors can include exploration that is different from the child’s peers, increases over time, and/or the child is unable to stop. There can also be efforts to bribe or coerce children who are younger or more vulnerable. At this point, it is very important that parents speak up or do something! They can talk with the child about the behavior in a calm, nonjudgmental way, and/or ask for help.
- Sexually abusive or “red light” behaviors are even more extreme and can include sexual behavior that is frequent, pervasive, and compulsive. It can also include the use of force, manipulation, and threats, as well as provocative behavior toward adults.

For teenagers (ages 13–17):

- Natural, healthy sexual behaviors include more intensified interest in sex and evolving consensual exploration, along with attention to social attitudes and religious teaching. Here it is essential for caregivers to talk about their values as well as model healthy sexual behavior.
- Problematic behaviors include being preoccupied with sexuality and using online porn. There is repeated misconduct or a major one-time event. The teen may be fixated on younger or more vulnerable children and use coercion or manipulation with them.
- Sexually abusive behavior is repeated behavior that escalates and uses violence and coercion with others. Usually, there is a significant age difference with the other child, typically more than four years.

In terms of how to respond to such a situation, please refer to [Child-on-Child Abuse: How to Recognize It and How to Respond | Dove's Nest](#)