

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

ST JACOBS MENNONITE CHURCH

May 2016

Preamble

We believe that every person is made in the image of God and is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. At St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, we seek to ensure that all of our programs for children and youth create a safe and nurturing environment. We recognize that people involved in leadership positions in such programs are entrusted with this important responsibility. While we do not want to create an atmosphere of suspicion, we recognize that the potential for abuse exists within our church context.

A. General Policy Statement

SJMC is committed to ensuring that:

- A safe environment is created for children and youth who participate in programs and activities of the church; and
- Appropriate action is taken to ensure that children and youth are kept safe while participating programs.

To accomplish these goals, SJMC will:

- Promote and implement procedures and best practices that safeguard the well-being of children and youth;
- Carefully recruit, train, support and supervise staff and volunteers, in order to protect children and youth from abuse and to reduce risk to themselves;
- Expect staff and volunteers to adhere to the SJMC Child Protection Policy and the procedures to implement the Policy;
- Establish procedures for reporting and dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers; and
- Monitor and annually evaluate the SJMC Child Protection Policy and its procedures so they are in keeping with any significant changes in organizational or legal practices.

B. Terminology

Throughout this document, reference is made to children and youth. In this policy, children and youth are those individuals under the age of 16 years or individuals up to 18 years of age if under the care of Family and Children's Services.

In this policy, the term abuse refers to and includes any form of physical harm, emotional deprivation, sexual mistreatment or neglect which can result in injury or psychological damage.

C. Roles and Responsibilities for Child and Youth Protection

- a) Overall responsibility for adherence to this policy belongs to the SJMC Leadership Council. Practical implementation and regular monitoring will be undertaken by the appropriate Youth and Young Adult Ministry and Christian Formation Ministry leaders, together with the pastors.
- b) All members of SJMC have a collective responsibility to ensure the safety of the children and youth involved in SJMC programs as well as the responsibility to protect children and youth from bullying and all forms of abuse or neglect, whether physical, sexual or emotional.
- c) As required by the Child and Family Services Act, all complaints of physical or sexual abuse must be reported promptly to Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region. SJMC has a responsibility to report suspected abuse as soon as possible, not a responsibility to prove that abuse took place. In such instances, SJMC will cooperate fully with child protection authorities and will follow any steps or procedures required by such authorities.
- d) Confidentiality is a critical responsibility of all concerned. Inappropriate disclosure of information on a particular case can result in additional pain and suffering. Intention to report can be shared only within a circle of trust including pastors and the chair of Leadership Council.

D. Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children and Youth

a) Good practice

- Treating all children and youth equally, with respect, dignity and fairness.
- Offering constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- Involving parents or guardians wherever possible and reasonable.
- Being vigilant and aware of how actions can be interpreted, and always maintaining an open environment. Avoid private or unobserved situations with a child or youth.
- Ensuring the number of adults is appropriate to safely supervise an activity.

b) Practices to be avoided

- Spending time alone with a child or youth without the permission of the child or youth's parents.
- Having "favourites" that could lead to resentment and misinterpretation by others.
- Doing things of a personal nature for children or youth that they can do for themselves.

c) Practice never to be sanctioned

- Allowing or engaging in rough physical contact or in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Allowing children or youth to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a child or youth, even in fun.

- Reducing a child or youth to tears as a form of control.
- Allowing allegations made by a child or youth to be dismissed, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Spending unwarranted amounts of time alone with children or youth away from others.
- Asking children or youth to keep any type of secret from peers, SJMC staff/pastors or their parents.

d) Electronic Communication

Contact with children or youth will always contain appropriate language and be communications in the context of church related programs or relationships.

e) Photography/Videos/Recordings

Consent must be sought and received for any photographs, videos or recordings to be taken or used of children or youth from a parent/guardian. If consent is not given, the child or youth will not be included. All photos, videos and recordings will be securely stored and will be used for SJMC purposes only. No image of a child or youth will appear with a name attached unless consent is given.

E. Recruitment, Selection and Orientation of Staff and Key Volunteers

All SJMC volunteers who regularly work with children or youth in structured programs will be advised that they have been appointed to a position of trust and asked to sign the **Volunteer Commitment to Create a Safe Environment for Children and Youth at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church** (see attachment). This includes all:

- Children and Youth Sunday School teachers
- Junior Youth sponsors
- Youth Mentors
- M.Y.F. sponsors and volunteers
- Nursery/child care attendants
- Trip sponsors

Recruitment will include questions designed to determine suitability for working with children and youth and provide an opportunity for questions regarding SJMC policies. In particular, volunteers will be required to acknowledge if they have ever been the subject of CAS investigation and/or convicted of a criminal offense.

Individuals who are new to the congregation will not be invited to serve in positions of trust with children or youth until they have been active participants in the congregational life for at least six months, unless they are transferring their active membership from another congregation. In this case, a pastor will consult with a pastor from the previous congregation.

If pastors become aware of any individuals in the congregation who, on the basis of previous behaviour, should not be invited to serve in positions of responsibility with children or youth, they will ensure that these persons will not be assigned to such positions. If a member of the congregation becomes aware of such a situation he/she will inform a pastor.

F. Responding to the Disclosure or Suspicion of Abuse

- a) Anyone with reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is being mistreated or is receiving inadequate care and supervision is required to report such suspicions to Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, 200 Ardelt Avenue, Kitchener, 519-576-0540.
- b) The call must be made immediately by the person who is making the allegation.
- c) A pastor may be informed before reporting, but if not available, then the call must be made and a pastor informed following the call. The chair of Leadership Council will also be informed that a report has been made.
- d) Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region has the exclusive mandate to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect and provide child protection services. An official will be assigned and will investigate the allegations, involving other authorities as needed.
- e) The Family and Children's Services official will guide the process and will advise whether and when it is appropriate to speak with the parent or guardian as well as what steps SJMC is required to take.
- f) Any person suspected of the abuse will not be told of the suspicion or the intention to report. Only under the direction of Family and Children's Services will the information be disclosed to the alleged person.
- g) Incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect should be documented. Documentation must be prepared by the person who reported the suspected abuse, must be factual and must be signed and dated. It should be released at such time that there is a legal requirement to do so.
- h) All information related to disclosure or an allegation of abuse will be treated confidentially to the extent possible.
- i) If an allegation is made against an SJMC pastor, staff at Mennonite Church Eastern Canada will also be contacted at the time of reporting. Additional MCEC guidelines for resolution and support will be followed.

G. Review

SJMC Leadership Council mandates the Youth Ministry Team to review the Child Protection Policy and its related procedures on an annual basis. In addition, any issues related to the Policy's procedures that require attention will be reviewed as the issues arise.

Volunteer Commitment to Create a Safe Environment for Children and Youth at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church

As a leader of a church program involving children and youth:

- I have read first two pages of the MCEC policy, “A Plan to Protect” and understand what constitutes abusive behaviour.
- I have read the St. Jacobs Mennonite Church “Child Protection Policy” and understand it.
- I accept the responsibility to speak and act in ways that honour the image of God in the individuals in my care.
- I will not use words, electronic communications or actions that constitute abusive behaviour.
- I acknowledge that it is necessary for me to seek parental permission to be alone with a child or youth who is part of a church program. (Ex. take a youth out for lunch for a birthday celebration.)
- I acknowledge that program events should take place in public spaces or spaces equipped with windows in the doors.
- I acknowledge that if I have a reasonable suspicion of the abuse of a child within the congregation or at a church sponsored event I must report the suspicion to Family and Children Services Waterloo Region.

Have you ever been the subject of a Children’s Aid Society investigation?

YES ___ NO ___

Have you ever been convicted of a Criminal Offense?

YES _____ NO _____

Volunteer’s Name (please print)_____

Volunteer’s Signature_____

Date_____

Pastor/Supervisor_____