

# Policy for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

## Salem Mennonite Church

### Salem, Oregon

*Updated August 2022*

#### *Rationale*

Salem Mennonite Church (SMC) stands in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church tradition. We are committed to providing a safe environment for all who share in ministries and activities sponsored by the church, including all participants and members, their children, all who volunteer as church leaders, and all employed by the congregation including ministers and staff.

Following Christ's example of giving respect and honor to all persons, SMC believes every person of every age and gender is highly valued. Crossing established sexual boundaries, whether in the life of the congregation or in the homes of participants, needs to be addressed.

Salem Mennonite Church implements a policy and procedural steps to discourage/prevent child abuse. Child abuse can be in the form of physical, emotional, sexual, or ritual abuse and includes neglect. While the primary focus of this policy is sexual abuse, our congregation wants to be an advocate for children in any instance of abuse when the health and well-being of a child is at stake. For these, as well as legal reasons, child abuse and sexual harassment by church staff or volunteers will not be tolerated.

#### *Congregational Commitment*

1. We will seek to follow Jesus' mandate to "Let the children come to me," (Luke 18:16) and "Not place a stumbling block before one of these little ones." (Matthew 18.6).
2. Salem Mennonite Church will screen individuals working with children by conducting background checks. A current license or certificate from professions requiring background checks will be accepted in lieu of a background check (i.e., teachers, nurses, etc.).
3. We will conduct regular training and review of policies and procedures.

#### *Definitions*

Child sexual abuse occurs when individuals expose children physically, verbally, visually, or psychologically to sexual activity inappropriate to their age, their psychological development, or their role in the family. An abuser may be an adult but can also be an adolescent or another child.

Types of abuse that involve touching include:

- Fondling or other sexually inappropriate touching
- Oral or genital touch and/or anal sex acts
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments, sexualized language
- Sexual harassment (unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks)
- Pornographic videos or pictures
- Obscene phone calls or communication through texts or social media
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing or forcing children to witness sexual activity

### *Policy:*

Our policy reflects our commitment to these principles:

- A. Decrease Isolation and Secrecy
  - B. Increase supervision and accountability
  - C. All activities with children and youth should be observable and interruptible
1. All attendees at SMC who wish to work with children/youth programs and ministries will be asked to complete background check, conducted using Criminal Information Services Inc. (CRIS) in Beaverton, OR. A current license or certificate from professions requiring background checks will be accepted in lieu of a background check. A pass / fail record of the background check results will be kept on file. Background checks will be funded from the Children's Education budget and need to be updated every three years. A designee of the Leadership Board will manage the background checks.
  2. The church reserves the right to conduct periodic reviews of all paid and unpaid workers.
  3. All adults involved with children or youth of our church must be regular in attendance in the congregation for at least six months before beginning the assignment. Persons employed as church staff are exempt from this expectation.
  4. All staff/volunteers will be given orientation and training for their work with children and youth at SMC prior to their work. This orientation and training shall consist of information regarding:
    - a. the nature of physical or verbal sexual abuse of children

- b. the congregational policy on child sexual abuse
  - c. education on safe touch
  - d. possible symptoms which can alert one to abuse
  - e. instructions for reporting suspected child sexual abuse
  - f. completion of screening and background check forms as well as review and signing of the covenant.
5. Individuals working in or volunteering for higher risk positions (overnights, camps, retreats, etc.) involving JYF and MYF will be interviewed by the youth ministries leader or the youth committee prior to the event. The interview shall consist of a review of the policy and signing of the covenant if not previously completed. When there are overnights for the JYF and MYF an adult of each gender represented is to be present with a minimum of two adults present if the event is for one gender only.
  6. In the case of a special event at the church or when a youth(s) is taken off the church grounds, the leader of the event will provide advance written notice to parents or caregivers. The notice will include starting and ending time for the event; cell phone numbers will be provided for the leader; details of who is supervising the children and youth and how (if any) transportation is provided. If the event is an overnight event, this is a higher risk situation and the ratios of adults to children / youth; genders of all adults present and sleeping arrangements need to be specifically spelled out for accountability.
  7. Two Adult Rule. Best practice is that at least two adults must always be present during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth. Risk will be further reduced if the two adults are not related. This applies to the nursery, JYF, and MYF.
    - a. Sunday School classes may only be held in rooms with a viewing window. Other settings, such as the sanctuary or outdoors, are acceptable if the class is observable. NOTE: Because Sunday School is held only in observable locations when other people are present in the building, it is permissible to have one adult leading a Sunday School class.
    - b. Sunday School classes, as well as the nursery, must have at least one adult age 18 or older who has been screened according to the guidelines above. However, volunteers need to be at least five years older than the youth and children they are caring for. For example, an 18-year-old cannot supervise a 14-year-old.
    - c. Adults may be assisted by volunteers under the age of 18. However, the adult needs to be at least five years older than any volunteers under the age of 18. For example, a 16-year-old cannot assist a 20-year-old.
    - d. Adults, other than parents or guardians, may not assist children in the nursery bathroom unless the door remains open.

8. A signed Parental Consent/Medical Release form must be on file in the church office for any JYF or MYF activities. If pastoral staff or volunteer is meeting individually with a youth or child parental consent will be obtained.
9. It is recommended that this form be sent to parents by youth leaders annually in late summer with a brief letter of explanation to be returned prior to the first fall meeting.
10. This consent form will be held at the church office.
  - a. Staff or Volunteers with criminal child abuse or sexual abuse violations, whether charges pending, convicted, or pled guilty to *shall not work with children or youth through high school* in the church.
  - b. A signed agreement will be in the church office for each volunteer stating that he/she has read the policies and covenant statement and will abide by them, refraining from the behaviors identified as child sexual abuse. He/she will promptly report an incident(s) of abuse as it is either witnessed or suspected.
  - c. Any child sexual abuse involving staff, volunteers, attendees, or visitors to SMC will be confronted immediately and reported directly to law enforcement (call 911) or the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) child abuse hotline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233).
  - d. Everyone who cares about children and youth are regarded ethically as mandated reporters.
  - e. We endorse the Protection and Inclusion: *Guide for Faith Communities on Safely Including Persons Who Have Committed Sexual Offenses* as found on the Dove's Nest site: [https://dovesnest.net/sites/default/files/Protection\\_Inclusion\\_2018.pdf](https://dovesnest.net/sites/default/files/Protection_Inclusion_2018.pdf)

## Steps to take if you suspect child or youth sexual abuse in our congregation

1. If you come upon an incident, make your presence known and become an advocate for the child or youth being victimized.
2. Once the victim is safe, determine whether it is safe and best to engage the person of alleged misbehavior for an explanation of his/her action or if it is best to let others do the confronting.
3. Make notes immediately of what you witnessed. Note date, time of day, the names of the persons involved (or a description of height, hair, clothes if the person is unknown) and the action or behaviors witnessed.
4. Report the incident immediately and directly to law enforcement (call 911) or the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) child abuse hotline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233). Then report to the pastoral staff or elders.
5. If you do not witness abuse but have cause to believe that it is taking place, report it directly to law enforcement (call 911) or the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) child abuse hotline at 1-855-503-SAFE (7233). Then report to the pastoral staff or elders.
6. The congregation will be made aware of any legal accusation of abuse.

See next page for Participation Covenant

## Participation Covenant Statement for Volunteers and Employees Working with Children and Youth

Salem Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through healthy relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adults involved with children or youth of our church must be regular in attendance in the congregation for at least six months before beginning the assignment. Persons employed as church staff are exempted from this expectation.
3. All adult volunteers and staff working with youth shall follow the two-adult policy unless an exception is outlined in the guidelines.
4. Adults working with children and youth shall attend regular training and education events provided by the church to keep informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult persons shall follow the steps in immediately report to pastoral staff or elders any behavior that seems inappropriate. If the abuse is of a criminal nature, they shall directly contact law enforcement or DHS.

*Please answer each of the following questions*

1. As a volunteer / employee in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?  yes  no
2. As a volunteer / employee in this congregation, do you agree to always observe the Two Adult Rule?  yes  no
3. As a volunteer / employee in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your assignment?  yes  no
4. As a volunteer / employee in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior?  yes  no
5. As a volunteer / employee of this congregation, do you agree to inform the pastor (before beginning your assignment) if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?  yes  no

I have read this Participation Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Applicant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date