



Child / Youth Protection Policy

Swamp Mennonite Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices of this policy, our primary goal is to protect the children and youth of Swamp Mennonite Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, while also protecting our staff and volunteers from false accusations. It designates a Child Protection Leadership Team (CPLT) to oversee the policy.

INTRODUCTION TO CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

SECTION ONE

SELECTION OF WORKERS

- A. SIX MONTH RULE
- B. AGE OF VOLUNTEERS
- C. CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS
& CHILD ABUSE HISTORY CLEARANCES

SECTION TWO

PROVISIONS REGARDING CHILD PROTECTION

- A. TWO ADULT RULE
- B. OPEN DOOR POLICY
- C. SICK CHILD POLICY
- D. MEDICATIONS POLICY
- E. DISCIPLINE POLICY
- F. RESTROOM GUIDELINES
- G. ACCIDENTAL INJURIES TO CHILDREN
- H. OTHER CHURCH EVENTS

SECTION THREE

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

SECTION FOUR

TRAINING

APPENDIX A

FAQ REGARDING MANDATED REPORTING

FORMS

- A.1) UNUSUAL INCIDENT FORM
- A.2) PASTORAL REPORT OF
SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE
- A.3) CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER
COVENANT

INTRODUCTION TO CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Jesus tells us that when we welcome children we welcome God into our lives.
(Matthew 18:5)

God's love for young people is inviting, welcoming, empowering, and safe.

As persons who work with children at Swamp Mennonite Church, we desire to create an environment of safety and nurture for them so that they:

- ✎ feel free to come among us as they are (inexperienced, immature and vulnerable)
- ✎ can expect that they will not be harmed
- ✎ will find healing if they have been harmed

We seek to create a place where:

- ✎ we cultivate healthy attitudes and relationships among us as our children and youth interact with us
- ✎ we can teach them to celebrate God's grace in their lives and begin to own their faith in Christ
- ✎ we all learn to be vulnerable and to approach life as children, with curiosity and openness

As we are faithful to our children and youth, who are among the most vulnerable in our church community, we hope to together find healing as we make deeper connections with each other and work towards our mission:

Growing

Together

In Christ

SECTION ONE

SELECTION OF WORKERS

For the purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” or “youth” include all persons seventeen (17) years of age and under. A “Leader” or “Program Leader” includes all paid staff or volunteer persons working with children or youth.

All employees and all volunteers who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

A) SIX MONTH RULE

No volunteer will be considered for any position involving contact with minors until he/she has regularly attended Swamp Mennonite Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the volunteer allows for better evaluation and suitability of the individual for working with children.

If a volunteer from another church cooperates with our Christian Education or youth program a written recommendation from that congregation and a criminal background check is needed.

B) AGE OF VOLUNTEERS

Approved volunteers who work with children or youth must be eighteen (18) years of age or older. Youth (ages 13-17) may be approved as assistants to adult leaders but not in charge of any group of children or youth. All leaders must be at least three (3) years older than the children or youth for whom they have assigned responsibility.

C) CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK AND CHILD ABUSE HISTORY CLEARANCE

All employees age 14 and older, except for custodial service employees, and all volunteers over the age of 18 who have “direct contact” with a child or children are required to complete and submit:

- ✔ Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check (SPA-164)
- ✔ Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
- ✔ Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Background Check with fingerprinting (unless you have lived in PA for the entirety of the past 10 years and are applying for a volunteer position)
- ✔ Children’s & Youth Ministry Volunteer Covenant (for volunteers only- Appendix A.3)

Volunteers needing clearances include:

- ✔ Sunday School Teachers and assistants
- ✔ Nursery volunteers
- ✔ Any childcare worker during special events or service times
- ✔ Youth sponsors/ leaders
- ✔ Chaperones for events

For assistance in acquiring these checks and clearances (hereafter referred to as “records”) please visit <https://mosaicmennonites.org/church-safety/>

State law requires that these records are never more than five years old. The CPLT will review our current records every year and ask anyone whose records are four or more years old to complete and submit new records.

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Swamp Mennonite Church Child Protection Leadership Team (CPLT) on a case-by-case basis. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children.

The background check and clearance forms and results, as well as the volunteer covenants will be maintained in confidence in a secure file in the Church Office accessible only to the pastors, church secretary and the CPLT.

SECTION TWO

PROVISIONS REGARDING CHILD PROTECTION

A) TWO ADULT RULE

It is our goal that a minimum of two (2) adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. An exception would be if there is one adult teacher in a classroom with several youth, in which case, the door(s) to the classroom must remain open. We do not allow an individual minor to be alone with one adult on our premises unless in a counseling situation with prior parental approval. We encourage group or one-on-one activities to be observable and interruptible.

B) OPEN DOOR POLICY

Classroom doors will remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors will never be locked while persons are inside the room.

C) SICK CHILD POLICY

Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not be dropped off:

- 🌿 Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- 🌿 Green or yellow runny nose
- 🌿 Eye or skin infections
- 🌿 Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parents or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up.

D) MEDICATIONS POLICY

It is the policy of Swamp Mennonite Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Parents are reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted for overnight trips, and parents of children with potentially life-threatening condition (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the Program Leader to develop a plan of action.

E) DISCIPLINE POLICY

It is the policy of Swamp Mennonite Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, verbal abuse, humiliation, or physical discipline of children. Workers should consult with another adult/program leader if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

F) RESTROOM GUIDELINES

Children five (5) years of age and younger should utilize a classroom bathroom, if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the hallway bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then escort the child inside. If it is not empty the worker should remain in the bathroom, but outside the stall. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance the workers should prop open the bathroom door and leave the stall door open as s/he assists the child.

For children over the age of five (5), the "Buddy System" will be implemented. A "buddy" is another child in the same age range and sex. Youths age twelve (12) and older are permitted to visit the bathroom alone if there are no other people/groups utilizing our church facility.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom prior to each class.

G) ACCIDENTAL INJURIES TO CHILDREN

In the event that child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

For minor injuries, scrapes and bruises workers will provide First Aid (Band- Aids,

etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parents or guardian of the injury at the time child is picked up from our care. Universal precautions should be followed. (i.e., gloves when in contact with any bodily fluid.) See First Aid kit in each room.

For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.

Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report (Appendix A.1 Unusual Incident Report Form) will be completed in the case of all injuries. A copy of this report will be kept in confidence in a secure file in the Church Office.

H) OTHER CHURCH EVENTS

If children are in attendance at an event held by the church, where there are no planned children's activities or the event is for adults only, parents shall assume the responsibility for the supervision and safety of their children while they are at the event or on church property.

SECTION THREE

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

For the purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) which endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development.

Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- ✎ **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child which is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burning and biting observed by a leader or disclosed by a child or youth
- ✎ **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling, persistent teasing, isolating or ignoring
- ✎ **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, pornography, oral sex, or "sexting"
- ✎ **Neglect** – depriving a child of essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter or medical care

Children's workers or youth ministry leaders may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of a child. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at this church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, this individual is required to report it immediately to ChildLine and then to the Pastor and the CPLT Designated Representative for further action, including additional reporting to authorities as may be mandated by law (see numbers 1,8 below). Take appropriate action if the child is in

imminent danger.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. We will comply with the Pennsylvania requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists (see FAQ in Appendix). This includes making an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313.
2. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
3. The person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.
4. Our insurance company (Sovereign Insurance) will be notified, and we will complete an incident report, if required.
5. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities a team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with children or youth.
7. All involved individuals should refrain from speaking with the media. The CPLT Designated Representative is the official spokesperson for Swamp Mennonite Church. If anyone has questions they should reach out to the CPLT Designated Representative or Lead Pastor.
8. The person first made aware of the suspected abuse is required to report it immediately to ChildLine and then to the Pastor and the CPLT Designated Representative for any further action including additional contact with ChildLine and the County Children & Youth Services.
9. The Lead Pastor will arrange for a pastoral visit to those involved who desire it. The Lead Pastor will also initiate the completion of the Pastoral Report of Suspected Child Abuse to be filled out by the Lead Pastor or another designated member of the pastoral team (Appendix A.2).
10. Mosaic Mennonite Conference desires to be notified of incidents involving church volunteers or employees.

SECTION FOUR

TRAINING

Swamp Mennonite Church will provide training on this Child Protection Policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

APPENDIX A

FAQ REGARDING MANDATED REPORTING

FORMS:

A.1) UNUSUAL INCIDENT FORM

A.2) PASTORAL REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

A.3) CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER COVENANT

FAQ REGARDING MANDATED REPORTING

(Copied from Bucks County website- <https://www.buckscounty.gov/faq.aspx?qid=338>)

1. What is child abuse?

Child abuse, according to the CPSL, means intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:

- Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.
- Engaging a child in a severe form of trafficking in persons or sex trafficking, as those terms are defined under section 103 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (114 Stat. 1466, 22 U.S.C. § 7102).

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:

- Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
- Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
- Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
- Interfering with the breathing of a child.
- Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
- Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent.

"Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine. Sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect and deaths have no time limit.

2. Are you a mandated reporter?

The following adults are considered mandated reporters and are required to report suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse:

- A person licensed or certified to practice in any health-related field under the jurisdiction of the Department of State.
- A medical examiner, coroner, or funeral director.
- An employee of a health care facility or provider licensed by the Department of Health, who is engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of individuals.
- A school employee.
- An employee of a child-care service who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.
- A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization.
- An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, is a person responsible for the child's welfare or has direct contact with children.
- An employee of a social services agency who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.
- A peace officer or law enforcement official.
- An emergency medical services provider certified by the Department of Health.
- An employee of a public library who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.
- An individual supervised or managed by a person listed above, who has direct contact with children in the course of employment.
- An independent contractor who has direct contact with children.
- An attorney affiliated with an agency, institution, organization or other entity, including a school or regularly established religious organization that is responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or control of children.

- A foster parent.
- An adult family member who is a person responsible for the child's welfare and provides services to a child in a family living home, community home for individuals with an intellectual disability or host home for children which are subject to supervision or licensure by the department under Articles IX and X of the Public Welfare Code.

3. When must a mandated reporter make a report?

A mandated reporter must make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.
- The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.
- A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse. This specific circumstance includes when a mandated reporter is "on" or "off" the clock.
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

4. Must I report suspected abuse if I learn of the abuse from someone other than the child who was allegedly abused?

Yes. Nothing requires the mandated reporter have direct contact with the child in order to make a report.

5. How does a mandated reporter make a report if they suspect child abuse?

Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313.

6. Do I need to notify anyone within my institution, school, facility or agency after I make a report?

Yes, after making the report to ChildLine, you are required to immediately thereafter notify the person in charge of the institution, school, facility or agency or the designated agent of the person in charge.

7. What if a mandated reporter fails to follow the law?

The penalties for a mandated reporter who willfully fails to report child abuse range from a misdemeanor of second degree to a felony of the second degree.

8. Can you report suspected child abuse if you are not a mandated reporter?

Yes. Anyone who is concerned about the safety of a child is encouraged to make a report. Individuals who are encouraged, although not required by law, to make a report of suspected child abuse, can make a report to ChildLine by calling 1-800-932-0313.

9. Am I protected from civil and criminal liability if I make a report of suspected child abuse?

Yes, persons making a report of suspected child abuse are immune from civil and criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith. The good faith of a mandated reporter is assumed.

10. If I make a report is my identity protected?

The identity of the person making the report is kept confidential with the exception of being released to law enforcement officials or the district attorney's office. Law enforcement and district attorney's office must treat the mandated reporter as a confidential informant.

11. How do I know whether I have "reasonable cause to suspect" that a child is a victim of abuse?

Reasonable cause to suspect is a determination you make, based on your knowledge of circumstances, observations, familiarity with the individuals, and feelings about the incident.

Knowledge of circumstances would include:

- Who
- What
- How
- When

Observations would include:

- Indicators of abuse or "red flags" present
- Behavior and demeanor of the child
- Behavior and demeanor of the adult.
- Are there any other behaviors or other observations important to notice?

Familiarity would include the knowledge you have about:

- The individuals
- The family situation
- Relevant history or similar prior incidents

Think about your feelings and personal biases and consider how they influence your conclusions and actions.

UNUSUAL INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Date of Incident: _____ Time of Incident: _____

Name of Child/Youth involved in incident _____ Age _____

Name of Parent/Guardian _____ Date/Time contacted _____

Method of contact (phone call, verbal report in person, etc.): _____

Emergency contact information used (i.e. phone number) _____

Incident Details

Location of Incident _____

Witnesses Name _____ Phone _____

 Name _____ Phone _____

 Name _____ Phone _____

Description of Incident:

Signature of person completing form

Date/Time completed

- | |
|---|
| <p>Vehicle Accident Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Record the name, address and driver's license number of the other involved drivers.○ Record the license plate(s) and make(s) of any vehicle involved in the accident.○ Record the police report number and the police officer's badge number.○ Record the names and addresses of any witnesses. |
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PASTORAL REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

1. Name and title (e.g. SS teacher, church staff, church member) of person observing or receiving disclosure of possible child abuse: _____

2. Child's Name: _____

Child's age/ Date of birth _____

3. Name of person alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse _____

Relationship to the child (e.g., church staff, church volunteer, family member)

4. Reported to Lead Pastor

Date/Time: _____

Method of contact (phone call, verbal report in person, etc.): _____

Summary:

5. Reported to Parent/Guardian:

Name of Parent/Guardian _____

Date/Time contacted _____

Method of contact (phone call, verbal report in person, etc.): _____

Summary:

6. Initial conversation with child and parent/guardian

Names of those present at the meeting: _____

Date/Place of conversation: _____

Child's statement: (if appropriate, give detailed summary)

7. Call to local County Children & Youth services agency:

Date/Time of Call: _____

Name and title of contact _____

Recommendation by agency worker:

Summary:

8. Call to legal counsel:

Date/Time of Call: _____

Name and title of contact _____

Recommendation by agency worker:

Summary:

9. Call to Insurance Company

Date/Time of Call: _____

Name and title of contact _____

Recommendation by agency worker:

Summary:

10. Other Contacts

Date/Time of Call: _____

Name and title of contact _____

Recommendation by agency worker:

Summary:

11. Name and title of person completing this form: _____

Signature :

Date/Time: _____

CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER COVENANT

Name: _____

Volunteer Role(s): _____

As a volunteer working with children or youth through Swamp Mennonite Church, I affirm the following:

- I have never been charged with or convicted of child abuse of any criminal conduct related to children, or I have disclosed this information to the CPLT Designated Representative.
- I will not engage in any inappropriate or abusive conduct with children while on SMC property or as a SMC ministry volunteer.
- I understand and will comply with my duties as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse under Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law.
- I affirm that I have undergone the following background checks within the last 48 months:
 - **The Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance**
 - **The Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check**

FBI Background Checks (please check one):

- I have not lived in the state of Pennsylvania for the entirety of the past ten years, and **I am required to submit an FBI Fingerprint Record Check.**
- I have lived in the state of Pennsylvania for the past ten years and I affirm that I have not been convicted of any crime, in another state, similar to the convictions disqualifying a person in Pennsylvania. Therefore, **I am not required to submit an FBI Fingerprint Background Check.**

I understand that I must **1) submit this signed page, 2) submit copies of the required checks**

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please contact us with any questions