

Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

regarding the prevention of sexual and other abuse

Portland Mennonite Church / Portland, Oregon

Rationale

Portland Mennonite Church stands in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church tradition. It is 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, PMC 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.

Portland Mennonite Church is implementing 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 also 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. **Prayer.** "For our struggle ...is against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Eph. 6:12.
2. **Screen individuals working with children:**
 - Check secondary references
 - keep records of information on each volunteer
 - do a background check.
3. **Conduct training and in-service workshops.**

Definitions:

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when individuals expose children physically, verbally, visually, or psychologically to sexual activity that is 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
- Oral, genital and anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments
- Pornographic videos or pictures
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It consists of inappropriate verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's sense of well-being by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment from the viewpoint of the affected individual.

It is commonly defined as follows: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Although in a legal sense, the term "sexual harassment" deals with the workplace, the sexual harassment of anyone – including all adults and children – is prohibited in this church.

Appropriate touch

Children need love. At times, this can be appropriately expressed through physical touch, such as hugging, a pat on the back, an arm around the shoulder, holding an infant or toddler, etc. If an adult working with children shows physical affection, it must occur with another adult present and should accompany a verbal request. (Example: "You look sad. May I give you a hug?")

Adult staff and volunteers should not force affection on any child. If a child pulls away, even with another adult present, the child's wishes will be respected at all times.

At no time should a child, even if fully clothed, be touched on or near the breasts, genitals or buttocks.

Policy:

- 1) All persons paid or volunteer, who work with minors at Portland Mennonite Church will be screened by a pastor and designee of the Elders Council prior to contact or supervision with the children or youth. Any designee of the Elders Council shall be orientated to the Policy and shall be someone who has screening and communication skills. Confidential forms will be submitted to a Pastor responsible for processing these forms.
- 2) A job application and background check will be completed and submitted by all new paid workers.
- 3) All attendees at PMC who wish to volunteer with children/youth programs and ministries will be asked to complete a Permission to Obtain a Background Check form.
- 4) Only persons who have been known to the church for more than six months will be permitted to be screened and participate in a volunteer capacity with the sole supervision of children or youth through high school. Individuals not known this long may work with our youth and children provided another known volunteer or employee is present.
- 5) All new volunteers will be interviewed via the screening form and given orientation and training for their work with children and youth at PMC 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) possible symptoms which can alert one to abuse
 - D) instructions for reporting suspected child sexual abuse
 - E) completion of screening and background check forms as well as review and signing of the covenant.

- 6) Individuals working in or volunteering for higher risk positions (overnights, camps, retreats, etc.) involving children or youth through high school will be interviewed by a pastor and a designee of the Elders Council to the event. The interview shall consist of a review of the policy statements, the screening questions and the covenant (we have asked for more information on this from Salem) if these have not been previously completed. When there are overnights for the Jr. High and High School age 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.
- 7) When a classroom door is closed or there is no viewing window, a minimum of two persons, one of whom is age 16 or older, the other not younger than 12, will share the supervisory responsibility of children under Middle School age at all times. Youth under age 11 can help if accompanied by their parent. This rule applies at all times when the nursery is in use or when children's activities or Sunday School are in progress whether on the church premises or in any other location. An alternative to the two adult rule is a viewing window or open door into the classroom.
- 8) If there is a legitimate need for an adult to be alone with a child or youth, the staff or volunteer worker shall obtain the consent of the child's or youth's parent or guardian before proceeding to be alone with the child or youth. An example of this occurs frequently as part of our Pastoral Ministry. Annually the church must have on file a Signed Parental Consent form for ministerial staff to be alone with their youth. It is recommended that this form be sent out by the Youth and Children's Ministry teams in late summer with a brief letter of explanation in order to be returned prior to the first fall meeting.
- 9) Volunteers with criminal child abuse violations, whether charges pending, convicted, or pled guilty to abuse shall not work with children or youth through high school in the church.
- 10) There must be a signed agreement in the church office for each volunteer stating that he/she has read the policies and covenant statement (see above note) 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.
- 11) Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult volunteer or staff member and a member of the youth group or a child will be confronted immediately and reported to a church staff person. As needed the inappropriate conduct will be further investigated and reported to the proper community authorities.

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 to your supervisor or a pastoral staff person for further investigation.
5. If you do not witness abuse but have cause to believe that it is taking place, report it to your supervisor.