

## MISSION HILLS COMMUNITY CHURCH

### STANDARD POLICY & PROCEDURE

**Subject:** Prevention of Abuse

**Revised:** January, 2023

**Approved by:** Council February 6, 2023

#### A. Introduction

Living with abuse and neglect is a reality for many people, young and old. Studies and statistics today indicate an incidence of abuse within the church is equal to that of the general population.

“it has become fairly well accepted that approximately one in four girls and one in five boys have experienced some type of sexual abuse before their eighteenth birthday.”  
*(Safe Place Handbook Guidelines With Focus on Safety and Abuse).*

“people with disabilities report sexual and emotional abuse at rates double, even triple those of persons without disabilities” *(Report 28, Synod, 1992 CRC Committee).*

Sadly, in our society, people with disabilities are not given enough credibility when/if they do disclose. The Church’s desire must be to educate ourselves and others around the issue of abuse so as to recognize the signs, respond appropriately, support the survivor and remain accountable to one another for our actions.

Above all, we must be seriously concerned with the need of protection for the victim of abuse. It may also be required that the situation reported may involve criminal charges in order that the victim may be protected and that the perpetrator be brought to justice.

#### B. Purpose

The Church has a spiritual, moral and legal obligation to provide a secure, safe environment for adults and children participating in the Church’s programs.

This policy is intended to assist the Church’s staff and volunteers in:

- » protecting the vulnerable person from abuse
- » protecting the workers from false accusation, litigation, loss of ministry/career
- » protecting the Church from litigation and loss of testimony

It is hoped that the policies will further the reality of the Church as a “sanctuary” and a place of ministry. Abuse of anyone must be condemned and eradicated from the Church’s organization.

### C. Definitions of Abuse

1. **“Physical abuse”** is any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a person whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.
2. **“Physical neglect”** is not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a person’s normal development.
3. **“Sexual abuse”** is the exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a person for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a person who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a person for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, “peeping Toms,” and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact include fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.
4. **“Emotional abuse”** is attempting to control a person’s life through words, threats, and fear, destroying a person’s self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a person’s mental and physical ability to resist, cut off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.
5. **“Children, youth or minors”** are individuals under the age of 19 years.
6. **“Volunteers”** are non-paid individuals who serve in a child, youth or adult program and/or who have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.
7. **“Staff”** are individuals paid by the church who serve in a child, youth program and/or who have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.

8. **“Child, Family and Community Services Act”** is the legislated law of British Columbia that speaks to Child Protection (Part 3).

#### **D. Ministry Personnel**

1. All staff and volunteers (17 years and up) are required to complete an application form, as prescribed by executive ministry team.
2. All applicants will be required to give the names of two references to complete a Personal Reference Information Form in a format prescribed by the executive ministry team.
3. All staff and volunteers will be subject to a personal interview with such persons as designated by executive ministry team.
4. All adult staff and adult volunteers who work on a regular basis with children and youth shall complete a Criminal Record Check. Criminal checks must be reviewed every 5 years.
5. Volunteers must be members or adherents for a minim of 6 months of the church and agree to be subject to the authority of the church as set out in the Church’s policy.
6. All volunteers and staff must agree to comply with the church’s abuse prevention policy and, if non-compliant, the individual will be required to relinquish his/her responsibility in the child or youth program.
7. The Church will reduce the risks of one-to-one contact by:
  - (a) Ensuring the two-person rule during a session for any child and, as much as possible, for youth and adult programs, at least two volunteers or staff must be present with minors.
  - (b) Notifying a parent before a planned one-to-one contact with a minor and ask his/her permission to meet alone.
  - (c) Requiring two volunteers/staff to transport children and, as much as possible, youth in a church vehicle and/or in a volunteer/staff vehicle. If this is not possible, volunteer must have parent’s permission in writing to transport child alone and must keep detailed log of children in vehicle and of pick up and drop of times.
  - (d) Establishing hall monitors to observe volunteer/staff activities in a child or youth program and to monitor the facility for any suspicious behavior.

- (e) Requiring a volunteer/staff person, while in the church facility, to observe one-to-one contacts between a volunteer/staff person and a minor. Outside of the church facility, require that one-to-one contacts occur in a public place or require a volunteer/staff person to observe one-to-one contacts.
- (f) Meeting the requirements of Appendix A: Transportation Policy when transporting children or youth in a church vehicle and/or in a volunteer/staff vehicle.

## **E. Education**

- 1. All staff and volunteers, involved in ministries shall participate annually in the Abuse Prevention Training Session, led by a qualified individual, directed at issues of abuse, identification and reporting obligations.
- 2. All staff and volunteers shall read resource material as prescribed by council directed at issues of abuse.

## **F. Handling Discipline**

- 1. Children and youth engage in behaviors that adults find unacceptable and contrary to their wishes. These behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs as well as in the family home. When these behaviors occur in church-sponsored programs, however, it is often a church volunteer/staff person who must intervene, especially when the child/youth is under his or her supervision. An adult can interrupt or stop an unacceptable behavior by teaching the child/youth which behaviors are acceptable and which behaviors are not. By example and over time, the adult teaches the child/youth how to behave in a socially acceptable way and in a manner that is Christ-like.
- 2. An adult can also interrupt or stop an unacceptable behavior by intervening with a mild form of discipline to the child/youth. The discipline is intended to “catch the child’s attention” and thus act as a deterrent and a reminder that a certain behavior is unacceptable. Discipline can turn into abuse when pain, injury, or humiliation results from discipline, or it is used excessively in a short span of time.

Some examples of excessive or abusive discipline are listed below:

### *Abusive Physical Discipline (corporal punishment)*

- (a) Slapping, kicking, punching, hitting, choking, pushing, shoving, hair-pulling, twisting, pinching
- (b) Discipline that leaves a bruise, mark, wound, or cut

- (c) Discipline administered with any device or object (such as a paddle, spoon, stick, book)
- (d) Discipline followed by a request/threat to the child/youth not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline, or not to show anyone a mark or bruise

*Abusive Verbal Discipline*

- (e) Shouting or yelling, threatening hurling insults or obscenities
- (f) Discipline that is intended to humiliate a child/youth
- (g) Discipline by refusing to speak to a child
- (h) Discipline that involved bribery, coercion, or threats
- (i) Discipline followed by a request/threat to the child not to tell anyone what happened, not to report the discipline

**G. Discipline Policy**

1. Corporal punishment (slapping, hitting, pushing) is not permitted.
2. Abusive verbal discipline (yelling, hurling insults, threatening) is not permitted.
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction, or if a pattern of misbehavior increases.
4. Concerns about a child's behavior or the appropriate response to a child's behavior should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehavior is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children/youths' behavior must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behavior that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.

8. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.
9. Whenever possible, leaders should try to avoid having to discipline a child/youth by choosing one or more of the following options:
10. Distract the child/youth with another activity.
11. Help the child/youth focus on another more acceptable behavior.
12. Isolate the child/youth from others if another volunteer/staff is available to assist.
13. For young children, time-outs should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. For example, a three-year-old should not have to sit for a time-out any longer than three minutes.
14. When nothing seems to be working, staff/volunteers/leaders should get help before “losing their cool.”

## **H. Policies for Specific Child/Youth Programs**

### ***NURSERY PROGRAM***

1. Minors, age 13 and older, may volunteer for service, provided that an adult is present. Minors may not care for the child(ren) without adult supervision.
2. One adult attendant must be in the infant nursery with no more than four infants before an additional attendant is required. One adult attendant must be in the toddler nursery for every four children before an additional attendant is required. At least two attendants must serve in nursery whenever it is scheduled.
3. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as to use the bathroom or in case of illness. Any significant medical problem should be reported immediately to the child’s parent(s). For children who require assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Diapering of infant or toddler should be done by the parent of the child.
4. A couple (husband and wife) or 2 adult family members may serve in the nursery at the same time provided a 3<sup>rd</sup> non-related adult is also present.

5. An adult or minor who is not scheduled as a nursery attendant for that particular service may not spend time in the nursery room(s) during or after the service unless approved by the nursery supervisor.
6. Proper use of security tags must be followed as described in Nursery handbook.
7. Nursery door must stay fully open at all times and gate must be securely in place.
8. The Discipline Policy applies to nursery programs.

### ***SONSHINE HILLS (CHILDREN'S MINISTRY)***

1. A couple (husband and wife) or 2 adult family members may serve at the same time provided a 3<sup>rd</sup> non-related person is also present.
2. Whenever Sonshine Hills is in session, two volunteers, including at least one adult, should be present in each room.
3. Leaders (minimum age of 15 years) and helpers may assist a minimum of two children with bathroom needs. For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, the adult attendant must remain outside the bathroom. For children who require assistance, the adult attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Children will be encouraged to use bathroom facilities before and after class.
4. Children should not leave the center or classroom except for illness, bathroom assistance, or other compelling reason.
5. Whenever Sonshine Hills is in session, the worship center or classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room. The Little Lights door must be fully open at all times and the gate must be securely in place.
6. The Discipline Policy applies to children's church school programs.

### ***Bible School, Coffee Break Story Hour and Other Ministries Involving Children***

1. All classes and activities will be conducted with at least two volunteers/staff, at least one of whom is an adult. Volunteers/staff should not meet alone with a child without another adult or leader nearby to observe.

2. Volunteers/staff ordinarily should not physically restrain a child in their care. Leaders should ask for assistance if a child behaves in a manner that seems to require restraint. If the leader determines that restraint is needed, the child's parent will be notified immediately and the child may be removed from the class until the parent arrives.
3. Children should not leave their classrooms except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reason.
4. Classrooms held in off-site facilities such as a person's home, activity building, or school should adhere to the same safety considerations as classrooms in the church building. Children should not meet in a confined space or without adequate supervision.
5. Church volunteers or staff transporting a child in a church vehicle must abide by the expectations of the Transportation Policy.
6. In the event that church members use their homes/yards for neighborhood clubs, a child's parent must give consent for the child to meet in the home/yard. Two volunteers (at least one adult) must conduct in-home programs. Children attending in-home programs must be able to use bathroom facilities without assistance. If transportation is needed to bring children, it should be provided according to number 5 above.
7. The Discipline Policy applies to the above programs.

### ***Gems/Cadets***

1. Gems/Cadet leaders should identify abusive behavior among minors in their program and have a policy of zero tolerance to these behaviors.
2. Leaders should provide adequate supervision of the youth. Each Gem/Cadet function should be supervised by at least two persons, an adult leader and another volunteer at least four years older than the oldest Gem/Cadet.
3. If a child needs significant medical attention, the parent(s) should be notified immediately.
4. Gem's/Cadet's should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of the class, nor should they stay longer than ten minutes after the class.
5. Gem/cadet activities planned away from the church facility, out of town, or overnight should be conducted in general compliance with aforementioned policies.
6. While the appropriate display of affection between leaders and the youth is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. For that reason, displays of affection should be limited to such actions as a

brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. Each leader or TIGER has the right to refuse any of these displays and will be respected.

7. The Discipline Policy applies to Gem/Cadet programs.

### ***MHCC YOUTH***

1. Each year youth group leaders should hold a session about abuse for members of the youth group. Topic for this class might include date violence, biblical guidelines for dating relationships, awareness of the signs of abuse, a teenager's response to a teenage victim or abuser, or prevention of abuse.
2. Youth group leaders may meet privately with a youth group member only with the permission of a parent. Any such meeting should occur in public.
3. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other. Similarly, a youth group leader should not date a close friend of a member of the youth group.
4. Youth group leaders may be single or they may be married couples. Couples and 2 adult family members can attend a youth group function provided that either a 3<sup>rd</sup> non-related adult is also present or that signed consent of the parent is given. Otherwise only one spouse may attend a youth group function but there will always be a minimum of 2 adults per function.
5. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders should provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders should not hold a youth group function without appropriate or sufficient supervision and/or signed consent of the parent/legal guardian.
6. While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Therefore, displays of affections between youth leader and youth group member ought to be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulders, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict these displays to a public area. A youth group leader's or member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
7. No gifts, phone calls, emails, texts or letters of a non-church ministry (ie., personal) nature should be directed to a youth group member by a youth group leader.

### **I. New Programs**

Any new church program that is developed to benefit minors will be subjected to this policy.

#### J. References

1. Child Abuse Prevention Program, Beth Swagman, CRC Publications
2. "How to Avoid Claims for Sexual Abuse and Harassment", David G. Thwaites, CCCC
3. Chief, Family and Community Services Act – Ministry for Children & Families, BC

#### K. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every **2 years by the safe ministry team.**

**Last reviewed: February 5, 2023**

## Appendix A

Mission Hills Community CRC

### TRANSPORTATION POLICY

This procedure applies to adults who may transport non-related children or youth in the course of Church-sponsored programs.

There will be no **one-to-one** driving of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

In the **rare occasion** that one-on-one driving must occur, all of the following procedures must be in place:

- a) Children and/or youth are seated in the back seats of vehicles. All road safety regulations must apply.
- b) Drivers shall call ahead, via cell phone, advising parents of their arrival time.
- c) Drivers log in each pick-up and drop off; logs are turned into the Program Supervisor.

Adults must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance before transporting children or youth; drivers who routinely transport children and youth must provide a copy of their driver's

abstract and proof of 3rd person liability. Their drivers' record will be reviewed by the Safe Ministry Team.

Drivers need to abide by provincial requirements for car seat use, seatbelt use and air bag safety.

- a) Except for school busses, children and youth must wear seatbelts whenever the vehicle is in motion. Drivers of private vehicles may not transport more children and youth than seatbelts installed in the vehicle.
- b) Car seats must be available for younger children who require them by law.
- c) Children and youth under 12 years of age may not sit in the front seat where there is a passenger-side airbag installed.

Adults or minors who transport related children and youth to church-sponsored events do so without the implied approval of the Church and at their own initiative and risk. By taking such a voluntary initiative, they hold the church harmless from all liability.

Parents or guardians who permit minors to transport non-related minors to church related events do so at their own risk and without the implied approval of the Church. They agree to hold the church harmless from any and all liability.