

**SAFETY IN CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS AMONG CHILDREN, YOUTH AND ADULTS POLICY:
Creating a Safe Environment for Children, Youth and Adults¹**

Toronto United Mennonite Church
Approved by the congregation May 26, 2013

Preamble

We believe that every person is made in the image of God, and is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect and integrity. At Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC) we seek to ensure that all of our programs for children and youth provide a safe and nurturing environment. We recognize that people involved in positions of trust in such programs have an 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.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help ensure that TUMC is a safe place for children and adults in their relationships together. The intent of the policies and procedures outlined herein is to help protect children and youth from harm and abuse, adults who work with them from false allegations, and the church from unnecessary litigation.

Beyond these obligations, the faith and practices of TUMC are also shaped by the following documents, all of which can be found in the church office and library:

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective²
Mennonite Vision Statement, Vision: Healing and Hope³
A Plan to protect Our Children, Youth and Leaders⁴

Section I - Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children and Youth

Important aspects of the TUMC community are promoting peace, both inside and outside the church, and caring for one another. Human warmth expressed through appropriate touch can foster a sense of acceptance, belonging and significance. However, inappropriate touch can create feelings of violation, confusion and isolation, which can leave lasting scars. It is the responsibility of adults to maintain appropriate boundaries. This is not the responsibility of children or youth.

The following are examples of ways in which adults can show warmth to children while protecting their own integrity.

¹ For the purposes of this document, a child is considered to be 0-11 years of age, a youth 12-17 and an adult 18 and older.

²Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Herald Press, 1995.

³ Vision: Healing & Hope – “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us into the world.” (Mennonite Church, General Conference Mennonite Church, 1995) This statement was affirmed by Mennonite Church Canada in 1995.

⁴ A document prepared by Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada.

- a. Make a point of showing affection in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. In determining whether the touching is of a sexual or inappropriate nature, ask yourself the question, “How would a reasonable observer interpret this touch?”
- b. Classrooms and meeting places should be managed to create a feeling of public space, yet be conducive to good teaching. Leave the windows in the room uncovered and the door standing open whenever possible.
- c. If you and a child need to talk to each other in confidence, avoid isolating yourselves. Have another adult present or stay within view of the group. If you and a child must be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d. If a child is hurting physically or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same gender as the child is present in the room with you. Do not force the child to remove clothing for an examination.
- e. If a child is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with the child’s permission, show support by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug.
- f. Be cautious about any conversations that involve sex. Children may ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening, with respect for the child, is appropriate.
- g. When responding, be sensitive to the values and standards taught in the congregation and that may be taught in the child’s home, and avoid discussion that may cause conflict or confusion with those standards.
- h. Mentoring activities are frequently one-on-one between an adult and a child or youth. Mentoring program expectations require mentors and families to choose activities that take place in public or in a home when others are present, and require mentors and parents to work out other details (i.e. transportation). Parents who give written consent for their child to participate in the mentoring program agree to these terms.⁵
- i. When supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards. Ensure that congregational awareness and parental consent of the activity is clear. Under no circumstances shall an overnight event be supervised by fewer than two adults. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks. If sleeping space is to be shared, adults and children must have separate beds.
- j. Be cautious about situations in which you or a child may have to change clothing, such as swimsuits or sports clothes, in the other’s presence.
- k. Always respect the integrity of the child. Allow the child to back away from your well-intentioned affection if s/he so wishes. Some children may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact.

⁵ See Mentoring Program, Toronto United Mennonite Church, Section III, g

- I. Use your common sense and good judgment to guide you in protecting the personal space and well being of the children and youth in your care.

Section II – Creating a safe environment at TUMC

TUMC will take the following steps toward creating a safe environment for children and adults at TUMC:

1. Communication and Training:

TUMC will communicate with and train the congregation by:

- a. Distributing copies of this policy to all households in the congregation;
- b. Distributing copies of this policy to new members and those who receive a mailbox;
- c. Introducing this policy at an initial workshop for all youth and adults of the congregation;
- d. Training key members such as the Christian Education Committee so they have a thorough understanding of their responsibility in maintaining this policy;
- e. Having the Christian Education Committee conduct meetings at the beginning of each new Sunday School year to review this policy and to educate volunteers about the symptoms of abuse;
- f. Keeping a copy of this policy in the TUMC office and library for easy accessibility;
- g. Having this policy available on the TUMC website;
- h. Having other educational resource materials available in the TUMC library.

2. A Safe Church Policy Committee:

TUMC will ensure this policy is implemented by establishing a Safe Church Policy Committee (SCPC) to implement and oversee all aspects of this policy. The SCPC consists of a Pastor, and two additional members who have been active at TUMC for more than five years. The TUMC Board and Gift Discernment Committee will work together to select and recruit members for the SCPC. The Pastor will represent the committee on the Board.

The TUMC Office Administrator will provide office support as required. The Committee members will meet regularly, communicate with volunteers, complete the background checks, develop and implement the initial workshop and training, develop policies and procedures for file storage, and generally oversee church activities vis-à-vis SCP guidelines and procedures.

3. General Operating Procedures:

To minimize the risk of harm coming to children in the care of TUMC, programs and personnel will abide by the guidelines outlined below.

- a. A team approach is to be used in children's and youth ministries. There are to be at least two adults present for all activities organized for kids' club, junior youth and youth where reasonable.
- b. With regard to the Mentoring Program, mentors are to ensure they limit their one-on-one activities to public places or to a home where others are present, and to ensure they discuss other details, such as transportation, with the parents of the child or youth.
- c. A Consent form (See Appendix C) wherein parents give written permission for their children or youth to participate in off-site and/or overnight TUMC group activities will be gathered where reasonable and kept on file.
- d. Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- e. There will be at least two volunteers in the nursery where reasonable when TUMC is providing childcare including at least one screened adult. The other volunteer must be at least 12 years old.
- f. Parents/guardians will be responsible for their child's diaper changes and bathroom care. When a child needs assistance with bathroom care and a parent/guardian is not easily accessible, the volunteer will leave the bathroom door open. If possible, the volunteer should be the same gender as the child.
- g. Nursery and activity period volunteers will ensure that all children are safely delivered to their parent or guardian.
- h. If any person suspects abuse or harassment, it is their responsibility to follow procedures set out in Section III of this document.

4. Facilities:

TUMC will seek to provide facilities which foster safety by the following:

- a. Windows in all doors to classrooms, offices, and the nursery;
- b. Locked supply closets;
- c. Adequate lighting inside and outside the church building.

5. Screening:

All persons in positions of trust or who regularly work with children or youth in TUMC programs will be asked to complete a Volunteer Registration Form (Appendix B). This process will occur on a one time basis for each individual, unless information surfaces that warrants further consideration.

This includes all:

Pastors
Caring Team
Church board members
Children and youth Sunday School teachers
Youth and Junior Youth sponsors
Youth mentors and mentor coordinator
Nursery/child care supervisors and attendants
Office Administrator

The following guidelines will be utilized for screening of volunteers who work with children and youth at TUMC:

- a. Everyone who works as a volunteer with children and youth at TUMC will be asked to complete a Volunteer Registration form (See Appendix B).
- b. Volunteers who are new to our congregation will not be invited to serve in positions of trust with children or youth until they have been active participants at TUMC for at least one year.
- c. For volunteers working with children or youth, who have been active at TUMC for more than one year and less than five years, the SCPC will conduct a reference check. The reference check will include consultation with at least two references, including former pastors or supervisors. A summary of the reference check consultations will be recorded on the 'Toronto United Mennonite Church Confidential Record of Contact' form (See Appendix A). If two references are not available or sufficient, then a criminal records check will be requested.
- d. For volunteers who have been at TUMC for five years or more, references will be checked at the discretion of the SCPC.
- e. All Volunteer Registration Forms and reference check materials will be stored in a locked cabinet.
- f. TUMC will not allow any person with a known child abuse conviction to serve in any capacity where s/he could be in a position of care or trust with children or youth.
- g. If a pastor is aware of individuals in the congregation who, based on previous behaviour, should not be invited to serve in positions of trust with children or youth, they will inform the people responsible for recruiting volunteers about these individuals in advance. These persons will not be assigned to any positions involving working with children or youth. If a member of the congregation becomes aware of such a situation s/he should inform a pastor.

Section III – Responding

Any incident in which there is a concern for the safety or well-being of a child or youth under the care or supervision of our church staff or volunteers will be taken seriously and will be investigated.

Anyone who becomes concerned that a child or youth in the church has been treated in a way which violates this policy, is urged to express his/her concerns to a person in a position of trust at TUMC. This can include a member of the SCPC, a Pastor, a Caring Team member, a board member, or a member of TUMC's Pastor Congregation Relations Committee.

In the event that a complaint regarding the abuse of a child or youth at TUMC is received, the SCPC will:

- a. Adhere to guiding principles of safety, accountability, truth, justice and restorative healing.
- b. Investigate and discern if there are reasonable grounds to report the suspicion to the local Family & Children's Services and/or the police as appropriate.⁶
- c. Avoid intrusive or leading questions with the child(ren) or youth, since such questioning could interfere with an investigation and/or cause undo stress.
- d. Assess conflict of interest within the SCPC and appoint additional members as appropriate.
- e. Maintain the confidentiality of all involved throughout and following the process.
- f. Carefully document the alleged abuse, including dates, times and content of relevant conversations on the Abuse Incident Report form (See Appendix D).
- g. Express TUMC's concern to the complainant.
- h. Suspend the alleged offender from duties involving children and youth, pending outcome of the investigation.
- i. Refrain from admitting liability or making public statements to the media or from the pulpit without obtaining formal legal counsel.
- j. Contact TUMC's insurer, to satisfy the statutory conditions of our liability policy, and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.
- k. Contact TUMC's lawyer for consultation as appropriate.
- l. Approach MCEC's Area Church Minister for additional advice and support.
- m. Coordinate care and support for all directly involved, and develop plans to offer pastoral and possibly clinical support to all parties involved, including family members.

⁶ Ontario Law, through the Child and Family Services Act, requires that anyone who suspects on reasonable grounds that a child or youth is in need of protection, must report the suspicion and information on which it is based to the local child protection agency - Ontario Child and Family Services Act, Section 72.1 Duty to Report: http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90c11_e.htm#BK113

Section IV – Definitions:

The following statements are considered general definitions for the purposes of this policy:

Child abuse: to use wrongly, to maltreat, to injure. Child abuse is the misuse of power by a person in a position of trust. Child abuse may take various forms:

Physical abuse: deliberate physical force or action that results, or could result, in non-accidental injury to a child or youth. It can include punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. It is different from what is considered reasonable discipline.

Emotional abuse: a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity. Examples include constantly criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child.

Sexual abuse: any sexual exploitation of a child, whether consensual or not, by an adult or older child. Physical, psychological or emotional coercion is intrinsic to sexual abuse. It is against the law to touch a child for a sexual purpose; to encourage or force a child to touch another person in a sexual way; to encourage or force a child to participate in any sexual activity; or tell a child to touch him or herself for an adult's or older child's sexual purposes. Sexual abuse can take many forms – for example, sexual intercourse, exposing a child's private parts, indecent phone calls, fondling for sexual purposes, watching a child undress for sexual pleasure, allowing a child to look at, or perform in, pornographic pictures or videos; or to engage in prostitution.

Child neglect: the failure to meet a child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education, and protection from harm. Young children should never be left unattended.

Harassment: repeated subtle or overt action, particularly by a person in a position of authority, which causes the recipient to feel attacked, demeaned, intimidated or manipulated.

Improper touching: touching which creates feelings of violation, confusion or isolation. It may include kissing a child, coaxing a child to give a kiss, extended hugging or tickling, touching a child in any area that would be covered by a swim suit, carrying older children or having them sit on an adult's lap.

Improper discipline: inappropriate and harmful attempts to control a child. Improper discipline includes yelling or screaming at children, threatening them or physically hurting them. By contrast, proper discipline involves establishing clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour and maintaining such behavioural expectations with firm and kind expressions of authority.

Assault: to cause bodily harm by inappropriately applying force to another person; to attempt or threaten to apply force; or, to accost or impede another person while openly carrying a weapon.

APPENDIX A

**Toronto United Mennonite Church
Confidential Record of Contact with Volunteer References**

Name of Applicant: _____

Reference/Church Contacted	Date of Contact	Person Contacting Reference/Church	Method of Contact (telephone, letter, personal conversation)	Summary of Contact

APPENDIX B

**Volunteer Registration Form for Ministries to Children and Youth
Toronto United Mennonite Church (TUMC)**

INFORMATION RECEIVED WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

In our desire to reduce the risk of abuse within our church ministries, we believe this information is necessary to protect our children and to protect our volunteers. Thank you in advance for your understanding.

A. Personal Information:

Full Name _____ Home Phone _____

Address _____ Business Phone _____

How long have you attended TUMC? _____ Are you a member of TUMC? _____

B. References – Use the reverse side of this page as needed.

1. If you have attended TUMC for less than five years, please provide the name, address, and phone number of your previous church(es) as well as the years you attended.

2. List all previous church work involving children or youth. Please give the name and address of the church.

3. List all non-church work involving children or youth. Please give the name and address of the organization, supervisor, type of work and dates.

4. Name of another reference who is not a relative _____

Relationship to you _____ Phone Number _____

C. Volunteer's Statement

I affirm that every person is made in the image of God, and is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect and integrity, and I accept responsibility to speak and act in ways that honour the individuals in my care. I have read and I understand TUMC's Safe Church Policy and I agree to comply with the policies and procedures as outlined therein.

I hereby acknowledge that the information contained is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give any information they may have regarding my character and fitness for ministry with children or youth. Except in the case of the conscious giving of false information, I release all such references from liability for any damage that may result from furnishing such evaluation to TUMC. I give permission for TUMC to request a criminal records check if deemed necessary by the SCPC.

Printed Name Volunteer's Signature

APPENDIX C

**Consent Form for Ministries to Children and Youth
Toronto United Mennonite Church**

Name of youth: _____

Health Card #: _____

Emergency Contact & Phone #: _____

Family Email Address: _____

I give permission for _____ to participate in this retreat/event with Toronto United Mennonite Church. I give the adults responsible for supervising this retreat permission to make any necessary medical decisions and to inform me, or the emergency contact person indicated above, as soon as possible in the event of any incident.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

**Abuse Incident Report
Toronto United Mennonite Church**

Date of incident:

Time of incident:

Location of incident:

Details:

Other Persons Present:

Name of Person Making This Report:

Signature:

Date of Report: