

Safe Church Policy

Toronto United Mennonite Church

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 provide a safe and nurturing environment, whether for children, youth or vulnerable adults. We recognize that people involved in positions of trust in such programs have important spiritual, moral, legal and societal responsibilities to minimize the risk of abuse of those who are vulnerable. While we do not want to create an atmosphere of suspicion, we recognize that the potential for abuse exists within our church context, and we design, implement, and value this policy accordingly.

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

Format: This policy includes the following sections:

- i. Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults
- ii. Creating a Safe Environment at TUMC
- iii. Responding, reporting, and recording
- iv. Definitions

Section I - Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

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 and those in positions of authority to maintain appropriate boundaries. This is not the responsibility of children or youth or vulnerable adults.

The following are examples of ways in which adults, or youth caring for children, can show warmth to children while protecting their own integrity. These guidelines should be shared with children and youth and discussed in family and age groups as appropriate, so that people of all ages are aware of the standards of behaviour expected in our community.

- a) Prioritize verbal forms of affection where that is possible. If showing affection, do so in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. Model appropriate seeking of consent by never hugging a youth or child without asking first and waiting for an answer. In determining whether any instance of touching is appropriate, ask yourself the question, "How would a reasonable observer interpret this touch?". Be conscious of different cultural and family norms that may be present.
- 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 youth or 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 must be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d) If a youth or child is hurting physically or is feeling ill and needs to be examined, contact one of their caregivers. If there is a need for you to offer care, ensure that another adult acceptable to the child or youth is present in the room with you. Do not force them to remove clothing for an examination.
- e) If a child or youth is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with their permission, show support by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug. Be aware of very different levels of comfort with physical touch. Allow them to back away from your touch if they so wish. Some youth, children and adults may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact.
- f) Be cautious about any conversations that involve sex. Youth and children may ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening, with respect for the person, is appropriate. Consider your own comfort level in answering questions and suggest other appropriate adults that the person asking questions could consult. Remember that there is a diversity of values and standards taught within the congregation, and encourage openness and curiosity rather than seeking to offer definitive answers.
- g) 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 (e.g. transportation). Parents who give written consent for their child to participate in the mentoring program agree to these terms. (See TUMC Mentoring Program, Section III)
- h) 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 (one room or cabin), everyone must have separate beds. Privacy for changing must be provided and respected.
- i) An adult and child should not change clothing (e.g. swimsuits or sports clothing, etc.) in one another's presence. (Some exceptions may be made in the case of children with physical challenges who need support getting changed, while promoting autonomy and privacy as much as possible. If there are exceptions, they should be communicated with caregivers.)
- j) 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. In the event that any of these guidelines are crossed, whether by adults, youth, or children, it is important to be honest and transparent. Communicate with parents, pastors, sponsors or other responsible adults.

Section II – Creating a safe environment at TUMC

TUMC will take the following steps toward creating a safe environment for children, youth and vulnerable 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) Training key members such as the Christian Education Committee so they have a thorough understanding of their responsibility in maintaining this policy;
- d) Having the Safe Church Committee conduct meetings at the beginning of each new Sunday School year to review this policy and to educate volunteers;
- e) Keeping a copy of this policy in the TUMC office and library for easy accessibility;
- f) Having this policy available on the TUMC website;
- g) Having other educational resource materials available in the TUMC library.
- h) Establishing a Safe Church Committee (SCC).

2. A Safe Church Committee:

TUMC will ensure this policy is implemented by appointing a Safe Church Committee (SCC) to oversee all aspects of this policy. The SCC 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 SCC. The Pastor will represent the committee on the Board.

The Committee's duties will include:

- a) Meeting regularly, and being accessible (listed in the church directory) as a contact point.
- b) Communicate with volunteers and offer training in this policy,
- c) Collect Volunteer Registrations, complete background checks (references and/or Criminal Records checks)
- d) Maintain a confidential and locked file. This will include:
 - All Volunteer Registration forms.
 - Reference check records.
 - Criminal Record Checks.
 - Minutes of SCC meetings
 - A log of any incidents or concerns reported to the SCC, as well as actions taken.
 - A log of SCC events (annual trainings, etc)
 - Full records of any investigations and their conclusions.
 - Safety plans and individual-specific instructions.
- e) Resource the church around Safe Church policy and procedures.

The TUMC Office Administrator will provide office support as required.

3. General Operating Procedures:

To minimize the risk of harm coming to children, youth and vulnerable adults 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 children and youth.
- b) Regarding 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) Planning an event where children or youth will participate in off-site and/or overnight activities requires the use of a consent form (See Appendix A) for parents to give written permission. These will be kept on file (see TUMC Privacy Policy).
- d) Corporal punishment is prohibited as well as any disciplinary actions meant to humiliate.

- e) When TUMC is providing scheduled childcare there will be at least two volunteers in the nursery where reasonable including at least one screened adult. The other volunteer must be at least 12 years old. In other circumstances, people are responsible for their own children.
- f) For children in the nursery, 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 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 in the care of a parent or guardian at the end of the activity.
- h) To minimize the risk of harm coming to vulnerable adults at TUMC, programs and personnel will abide by the guidelines outlined below. They will:
 - Respect the legal and civil rights of the vulnerable adult, and address the need for support, assistance, or protection in practical ways;
 - Seek consent before sharing a vulnerable adult's personal information or taking action on their behalf (see TUMC's Privacy Policy);
 - Create an environment where everyone, including vulnerable adults, can express themselves freely and safely while supporting them in voicing feelings of unease or fear about harm or abuse;
 - Treat the vulnerable adult with dignity in a person-centred approach, while also respecting the needs of the other participants and adopting an attitude and behaviour that supports all participants in feeling safe and secure within the process;
 - Observe the behaviour of the vulnerable adult and of all the participants and their interactions, looking for signs of anxiety, fear or shame on the part of the vulnerable adult, and for signs of harm done or of abuse. These can include verbal, physical, and cognitive or emotional signs;
 - Intervene in order to ensure, as far as possible, the safety and dignity of the vulnerable adult if signs of harm or abuse or lack of dignity or safety become visible and apparent.

4. Facilities:

TUMC will seek to foster safety by providing the following facilities:

- a) Windows in all doors to classrooms, offices, and the nursery;
- b) Locked supply closets;
- c) Adequate lighting inside and outside the church building;
- d) A confidential, locked cabinet for SCC materials to be permanently and safely stored.

5. Screening:

All persons in positions of trust or who regularly work with children, youth or vulnerable adults in TUMC programs will be asked to complete a Volunteer Registration form (Appendix B) and read the current Safe Church Policy in its entirety. The Volunteer Registration form authorizes two forms of screening: in the first place the checking of references, and if necessary, a Criminal Records check as part of the process of welcoming volunteers. Each year that a person continues in this (or an equivalent) role they will complete a new registration or confirm the information on file has not changed.

This includes all:

- a) Pastors
- b) Members of the Ministry Team for Youth and Children
- c) Caring Team members

- d) Church board members
- e) Children and youth Sunday School teachers
- f) Youth and Junior Youth sponsors
- g) Youth mentors and mentor coordinator
- h) Refugee sponsorship volunteers
- i) Volunteers and board members of affiliated programs working with vulnerable populations.
- j) Nursery/child care/activity period supervisors and attendants
- k) Office Administrator

Employment offers for positions that require screening under this policy are considered to be conditional on successful completion of the process. This list of positions may be amended at any time by the Safe Church Committee. In the case that someone has an equivalent Criminal Records or Vulnerable Sector Check from volunteering or work another organization, they can submit that for the file.. In the event that a TUMC volunteer requires a Criminal Records Check, TUMC will make that available for the use of other organizations on request of the volunteer.

The following guidelines will be utilized for screening of volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults 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 unknown to our congregation will not be invited to serve in positions of trust with children, youth or vulnerable adults until they have been active participants at TUMC for at least one year.
- c) Prospective volunteers who have been active at TUMC for fewer than five years give permission for the SCC to conduct a reference check drawing on the Volunteer Registration Form (Appendix B). 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 C).
- d) For volunteers who have been at TUMC for five years or more, references will be checked at the discretion of the SCC.
- e) If two references are unavailable or insufficient, the SCC may request a Criminal Records Check.
- f) All Volunteer Registration forms, reference check, and Criminal Records Check materials will be stored in the SCC's locked cabinet.
- g) TUMC will not allow any person known to have an abuse conviction to serve in any capacity where they could be in a position of care or trust with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- h) 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, youth or vulnerable adults, they will inform the people responsible for recruiting volunteers about these individuals in advance. These persons will not be invited or assigned to any positions involving working with a vulnerable population. If a member of the congregation becomes aware of such a situation, they should inform a pastor or SCC member. The SCC will maintain a confidential file of such cases.
- i) In a case where a pastor or SCC member becomes aware of an individual in the congregation whose history or behaviour indicates concerns about appropriate

boundaries, whether or not this constitutes abuse and whether or not a conviction is recorded, they will design an appropriate Safety Plan with the individual to guide their ongoing participation in the congregation. Any such signed and dated Safety Plan will be part of the SCC's confidential files, with a copy also shared with the pastor(s) and the individual in question. The Safety Plan will always include a plan for passing on the Safety Plan appropriately when SCC membership changes.

Section III – Responding, reporting, and recording

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. Similarly, any incident in which a concern for the safety or well-being of a vulnerable adult at TUMC has arisen will be taken seriously and investigated.

Duty to report:

Anyone who knows or suspects that a child or youth is in danger has a legal and ethical responsibility to report that concern.

Under section 125 of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, every person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child needs or may need protection must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society. There is a particular responsibility for persons who perform professional or official duties with respect to children, such as health care workers, teachers, social workers and family counsellors, religious officials, youth and recreation workers (not volunteers), police and lawyers, as well as directors, officers or employees of a corporation. In 2018, the age of protection was raised to include youth up to 18 years of age. Youth who are 16 and 17 years of age are now eligible to receive protection services from Children's Aid Societies. While reporting for 16 and 17-year-old youth is not mandatory, please contact your local Children's Aid Society if you have concerns about a youth (416-924-4646 or 1-866-527-0833).

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

If a complaint regarding the abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable adult at TUMC is received, the SCC will take the following steps, or recommend these steps to other church bodies as appropriate:

- a) Adhere to guiding principles of safety, accountability, truth, justice and restorative healing.
- b) Report the facts to the local Children's Aid Society and/or the police as appropriate, or ensure that a report has been made by the original complainant.
- c) Assess conflict of interest within the SCC and appoint additional members or seek additional support as appropriate.
- d) Maintain the confidentiality of all involved throughout and following the process, and inform only those who are required to know the relevant information. The Safe Church Committee or the Pastors can assist in determining who must receive and process the information.
- e) Carefully document the alleged abuse, including dates, times and content of relevant conversations on the Safe Church Policy Incident Report form (See Appendix D). Keep physical documentation on file indefinitely in paper form – all Police Criminal Record Checks, including expired ones and updates, and all Safe Church Policy Incident Report Forms. (see TUMC Privacy Policy).

- f) Avoid intrusive or leading questions with the children, youth or vulnerable adult(s) in question, since such questioning could interfere with an investigation and/or cause undue stress.
- g) The SCC will ensure that an appropriate investigation is completed, seeking out external resources and advice from MCEC. The investigation outcome will be communicated to those involved within a reasonable timeline.
- h) Contact TUMC's insurer, to satisfy the statutory conditions of our liability policy, and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.
- i) Communicate to the alleged offender the information that has come to TUMC's attention and steps taken.
- j) Suspend the alleged offender from duties involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, pending the outcome of the investigation.
- k) Contact a lawyer for consultation as appropriate.
- l) Refrain from admitting liability or making public statements to the media or from the pulpit without obtaining formal legal counsel. Ensure that parties involved are given advance notice before any statement is made.
- m) Approach MCEC's Area Church Minister for additional advice and support at any time during the process.

Section IV – Definitions:

The following definitions are used for the purposes of this policy:

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

Vulnerable Adult: Any adult aged 18 or over who, because of their age, a disability, mental function, illness, trauma or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, are (a) in a position of dependence on others or (b) are otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by person(s) in a position of authority or trust to them.

The following are useful definitions to assist in discussion:

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.

Bullying is repeated and targeted aggression and does not need to be physical in order to be hurtful. Physical bullying may be more present during the elementary school years, while more covert forms such as social and cyber-bullying can take precedence during high school and beyond.

Physical Bullying: Includes hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing or damaging property.

Verbal Bullying: Includes name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, insults, slurs, humiliating or threatening someone, racist comments, and verbal forms of sexual harassment.

Social Bullying: Includes rolling your eyes or turning away from someone, excluding others from the group, getting others to ignore or exclude, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging reputations and friendships.

Racial Bullying: Includes treating people badly because of their racial or ethnic background, saying bad things about a cultural background, calling someone racist names or telling racist jokes, and wearing clothing reflecting racial slurs or stereotypes.

Religious Bullying: Includes treating people badly because of their religious background or beliefs, making negative comments about a religious background or belief, and calling someone names or telling jokes based on their religious beliefs in an effort to hurt them.

Sexual Bullying: Includes leaving someone out, treating them badly, or making them feel uncomfortable because of their gender; making sexist comments or jokes; spreading a sexual rumour; touching, pinching or grabbing someone in a sexual way; and making comments about someone's sexual orientation, sexual expression or gender identity.

Disability Bullying: Includes leaving someone out or treating them badly because of a disability, making someone feel uncomfortable, or making jokes to hurt someone because of a disability.

Electronic or Cyber bullying: Includes the use of email, cell phones, text messages, any form of social media and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships.

Consent is to permit, approve, or agree to something that is done or proposed by another. However, anyone working or volunteering with children, youth and vulnerable adults is considered to be a person in a position of trust. Any relationship of a sexual nature, between a person in a position of power and congregant of any age is **never** considered consensual, due to the power differential.

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 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 themselves 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 sex work. Furthermore, all sexual contact with children is considered abuse since a child is not old enough to provide consent.

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. A bystander's silence, laughter, or non-intervention is also considered a form of harassment.

Improper touching: touching which creates feelings of violation, confusion, or isolation. It may include kissing a child, coaxing a child to give a kiss, hugging, or tickling, touching a child in any area that would be covered by a swimsuit, 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.

Misconduct/Inappropriate Behaviour can cover a wide range of activities which erode or push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and duty of care. Some examples include:

- Private communication by adults volunteering with children that goes beyond their role with a child/youth and is not occurring within the context of their volunteer duties and responsibilities.
- Inappropriate interactions with a child/youth, such as; favoring a child/youth and giving them personalized gifts, inappropriate physical boundaries, touch and sexualized behaviours, telling sexual jokes, showing sexually explicit or sexist material or displaying such material in plain view.
- Behaviour that embarrasses, humiliates or shames. Physical contact that makes them feel uncomfortable, violates reasonable boundaries, or is not appropriate for the context of the situation. Inappropriate boundaries, sexualized behaviours (e.g. sexual talk, leering, flirting) or touching that makes someone feel uncomfortable.

Sexual harassment is unwanted attention of a sexual or gender related nature. This includes verbal, non-verbal, and physical elements such as jokes, touching, suggestive remarks, leering, demands for sexual favours, and threats.