

MEADOWBROOK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES, RULES AND PROCEDURES

The members of Meadowbrook Congregational Church recognize and deplore the disturbing rise in reports of child abuse and neglect and seek to prevent its occurrence within our community.

Meadowbrook Congregational Church intends to provide a safe environment for the youth who participate in its programs and use its facilities.

We are strongly committed to protecting the youth in our care from abuse, neglect and inappropriate behavior by employees and volunteers and in responding appropriately to allegations of misconduct.

Consistent with this commitment, we formally adopt these Youth Protection Policies, Rules and Procedures, which include and address the following:

- Definitions of child abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, inappropriate behavior, and inappropriate relationships
- Policies for Youth Protection
- Screening of Employees and Volunteers
- Youth Supervision Rules
- Reporting Rules
- Responding to Reported Misconduct
- Confidentiality
- Training
- Employee/Volunteer Certification

All church employees and volunteers who work with or around children are required to review these policies, rules and procedures and certify in writing that they understand and will comply with them.

A. DEFINITIONS¹

1. “Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.
2. “Child” means a person under 18 years of age.
3. “Child abuse” means harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment by a church employee, volunteer or other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare.
4. “Child neglect” means harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare by a church employee, volunteer or other person responsible for the child’s health or welfare that occurs through either of the following:
 - (a) Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
 - (b) Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child’s health or welfare by failing to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.
5. “Inappropriate behavior” means intentional or non-accidental speech, expression or behavior by an adult directed at a child, or done in a child’s presence, that: (1) is sexually or morally indecent, obscene, or grossly offensive; or (2) may be reasonably interpreted to encourage or lead to an inappropriate relationship.
6. “Inappropriate relationship” means a sexual or romantic relationship between the adult and a child, whether or not consensual on the part of the child.
7. “Sexual abuse” means engaging in sexual contact or sexual penetration with a child.
8. “Sexual exploitation” includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution, or allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in photographing, filming, or depicting of a child engaged in a sexual act.

¹ The definitions of child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation as stated in this section are consistent with the definitions for the same terms as set forth in the Michigan Child Protection Law and Penal Law. *See* MCL § 722.622(f) (child abuse); MCL § 722.622(j) (child neglect); MCL §§ 722.622(w) and 750.520a (sexual abuse); and MCL §§ 722.622(x) and 750.145c (sexual exploitation).

B. POLICIES FOR YOUTH PROTECTION

1. **Abuse, Exploitation and Inappropriate Behavior Prohibited.** It is the policy of Meadowbrook Congregational Church that child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, inappropriate relationships, and inappropriate behavior toward children by persons employed by or volunteering services to the church are contrary to Christian principles and will not be tolerated.
2. **Compliance with Laws, Policies and Procedures.** All employees and volunteers of the church must comply with applicable state and local laws regarding child abuse and neglect and the Meadowbrook Congregational Church Youth Protection Policies, Rules and Procedures.
3. **Reporting Abuse Incidents** It is a moral responsibility and church policy whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation at the church or during church activities for employees, volunteers and other persons having knowledge or information about it to report it immediately by telephone to the Michigan Department of Human Services and an appropriate law enforcement agency.
4. **Screening Clearances.** The church shall not hire a person or allow a person to volunteer for youth activities unless the person: (1) has been subject to background screening; (2) is given screening clearance; and (3) agrees in writing on the appropriate form to follow these policies, rules and procedures.
5. **Grounds for Exclusion.** The church shall not hire, employ or allow to volunteer for youth activities any person who has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to child abuse, child neglect or any criminal charge that resulted in placement of the person's name on the Michigan Public Sex Offender Registry. The church also shall not hire, employ or allow to volunteer for youth activities anyone it determines from the screening process to be unsuitable for working with or around children, even in the absence of a criminal conviction or placement of the person's name on the Michigan Public Sex Offender Registry.
6. **Grounds for Dismissal/Removal.** Any of the following actions or occurrences on the part of an employee or volunteer shall constitute a basis for dismissal from employment² and removal from youth volunteer activities: (1) commission of child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or inappropriate

² This policy does not change or modify the "at will" employment status of church employees as provided for in the church bylaws; it merely reflects recognition of the serious nature of the matter addressed and consequences for a violation.

behavior towards a child; (2) involvement in an inappropriate relationship with a child; (3) engaging in significant or repeated disregard of youth supervision rules; and (4) making material misstatements on an employment or youth activity volunteer screening application form.

7. **Policies, Rules and Procedures Available to Employees and Volunteers.** A copy of these policies, rules and procedures shall be made available to all employees and youth activity volunteers so that they are familiar with the problems involving abuse and inappropriate behavior regarding children, church rules and procedures directed to minimize risks, and what should be done if a suspected incident arises. A binder containing these policies, rules and procedures and related forms and information shall also be kept in the church office.

C. YOUTH PROTECTION OVERSIGHT TEAM

A Youth Protection Oversight Team shall be responsible for monitoring, providing recommendations and assistance, and facilitating implementation of these policies, rules and procedures. Members of this team shall consist of the Moderator, Vice Moderator, Director of Christian Education and not more than three church members recommended by the Moderator, subject to approval by the Board of Trustees, at least one of whom has background or experience in law enforcement, personnel administration, conducting security clearances, or investigating complaints about harassment, abuse or similar misconduct. All members of Youth Protection Oversight Team shall be subject to background screening clearance in the same manner as required for employees and youth activity volunteers in high risk positions and shall agree in writing to follow these policies, rules and procedures.

D. SCREENING OF EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

We intend to avoid selecting persons and volunteers for youth activities who pose a risk to children. To this end, the church shall screen all employees in high risk positions and youth activity volunteers to determine their suitability for working around or with children.

The screening process for employees and youth activity volunteers shall include the following:

1. **Written Applications.** Employees and volunteers shall complete a written youth activity screening application form.
2. **References.** Employees and volunteers shall provide at least two references who are not relatives of the applicant. All references provided shall be contacted and a written record of the responses placed in the subject individual's screening file before the individual's screening is completed and screening clearance is given.

3. **Background Check.** Employees and youth activity volunteers in high risk positions shall additionally be subject to a criminal background check through the Michigan State Police Internet Criminal History Access Tool (or a similar available screening data base) and the Michigan Public Sex Offender Registry. Employees in high risk positions include the Senior Minister, Minister of Music, Director of Christian Education, Custodian, Youth Choir Director, and all other employees who work with or around children. Youth activity volunteers in high risk positions include Pilgrim Fellowship (youth group) advisors and any adults who participate in overnight church-sponsored activities.³
4. **Screening Clearance.** When an applicant's references (and background check in the case of employees and volunteers in high-risk positions) have been verified as favorable, the applicant may be given screening clearance unless other available information gives rise to reasonable concerns about the person's suitability for involvement in youth activities.
5. **Follow Up Review.** When an applicant does not receive screening clearance after a check of his/her background and references, further review, screening and investigation may be done by or at the direction of the Youth Protection Oversight Team.
6. **Screening Files.** The application form, references and background check verifications, along with any related information, shall be kept in a screening file for the subject employee/volunteer in a secure location in the church office.
7. **List of Screened Positions.** The Board of Trustees shall maintain a current list of all employee and volunteer positions subject to the screening and clearance process. Positions subject to screening and clearance shall be added to the list on the recommendation of the Youth Protection Oversight Team.
8. **Screening Responsibility.** The responsibility for ensuring that screening is conducted and that responses are recorded and filed rests with the Director of Christian Education, who may discharge this responsibility with assistance from church members who have had screening clearance that includes a criminal background check and been approved to assist in the screening process by the Youth Protection Oversight Team.

E. YOUTH SUPERVISION RULES

³ Other volunteers who work with or around children may also be subject to similar background checks, at the discretion of the Youth Protection Oversight Team, in addition to employees and volunteers in high risk positions, in accordance with Section D.7, below.

We can reduce the risk of child abuse, along with the risk of unfounded accusations of abuse being brought against youth activity workers, by following rules intended to provide a safe environment for children. These rules, which focus on reducing opportunities for abuse to occur, include all of the following:

1. **Two Adults.** Two screened adults, one of whom is at least 21 years of age, shall be present during all children's and youth activities.
2. **Visibility.** Whenever an adult is involved in an activity one-on-one with a child, the adult and child must remain in view of other adults.
3. **Classrooms.** The door of Sunday school classrooms that do not have windows into a hallway shall remain ajar while children are in the classroom unless noise becomes a problem.
4. **Building Monitor.** An adult shall be assigned to monitor the building during church services and when children's and youth activities are being conducted at different locations within or around the church.
5. **Nursery Attendants.** Two screened attendants shall staff the nursery when child care is provided during church services or church-sponsored events open to the community. At least one of these attendants must be 21 years or older.
6. **Nursery Identification.** The nursery shall institute an identification procedure. A child shall be released only to a person who has been designated by the person leaving the child.
7. **Diapering.** Only approved volunteer and staff workers may change a child's diaper (other than the child's parent). Diaper changing must take place in a designated area in full view of the rest of the nursery area.
8. **Six-Month Rule.** Volunteers shall not teach Sunday school, work in the nursery, or help with PF and children's choir activities until they have attended the church regularly or been involved in church activities for at least six months. An exception to this rule may be allowed, but only if: (1) a church member has known the applicant for at least one year and supports granting the exception in writing; (2) the exception is approved by both the Youth Protection Oversight Team and the church Board supervising the subject youth activities; (3) the reason(s) for granting the exception are documented and placed in the volunteer's application file; and (4) the applicant has been subject to background screening, is given screening clearance, and agrees in writing on the appropriate form to follow these policies, rules and procedures.
9. **Written Permission for Off-Site Youth Activities.** All youth under the age of 18 years must obtain written parental permission for all off-site church-sponsored

activities. Parents must receive a written description of the activity including location, times and emergency phone numbers for reaching participants. A signed permission slip must accompany participants and must include information regarding emergency contacts if needed.

10. **Written Permission Required for Unsupervised Contact.** Employees and volunteers should avoid situations that lead to unsupervised and unobserved contact with youth. In exceptional cases when an adult is to transport a single youth or spend time alone with a youth the written consent of that child's parent or guardian must be obtained.
11. **Driving.** Two unrelated screened adults should be present in vehicles transporting children whenever possible. If a volunteer or staff worker will be transporting children without an unrelated adult present, the leader must receive written permission from the parent or guardian of each child. The leader must let the parents know when he or she and the children will be leaving, how they will be traveling, when they expect to arrive at their destination and when they will return. Three or more individuals should be in the vehicle at all times. Drivers must furnish to the church a copy of a valid driver's license, proof of current automobile insurance and cell phone number for emergencies. No children other than siblings will be allowed to ride with drivers under the age of 25 to a church sponsored event.
12. **Church/Sunday School Attendance.** Persons under the age of 18 shall not be permitted to wander the church during service. All children in the building who are not with a parent or guardian must be in the Meeting House listening to the service, in their assigned Sunday school class or taking part in an adult-supervised activity. Adults who are not teaching Sunday School or working fellowship hour should be in the Meeting House, office, library, or narthex.
13. **Non-Compliance.** Significant or repeated non-compliance with youth supervision rules undermines our goal of creating a safe environment for children and provides a basis for removal from involvement in youth activities.

F. REPORTING RULES⁴

⁴ Under Michigan law any person, including a child, who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect may report the matter to the Department of Human Services or a law enforcement agency. With limited exception, the identity of the reporting person is confidential, subject to disclosure only with the consent of that person or by judicial process. A person acting in good faith who makes a report or cooperates with an investigation is immune from civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be incurred by that action. See MCL §§ 722.624 and 722.625.

1. **Reporting.** Persons with knowledge or suspicion of child abuse, neglect, an inappropriate relationship or inappropriate behavior involving an adult and child at the church or during church activities shall report it immediately to the Moderator, Vice Moderator or other member of the Youth Protection Oversight Team. If there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation as prohibited by law, it shall also be reported immediately to the Michigan Department of Human Services and a local law enforcement agency.
2. **Incidents on Church Premises or Elsewhere in Oakland County.** For incidents that occur at the church or elsewhere in Oakland County, notification should be made immediately by telephone to the Department of Human Services through the Oakland County Child Protective Services Hotline at (886) 975-5010, and to the Novi Police Department at (248) 348-7100, the Oakland County Sheriff's Department at (248) 858-5000, or in the case of an emergency by calling 911.
3. **Incidents Outside Oakland County.** For incidents that occur during an activities away from the church outside Oakland County, notification should be made immediately by telephone to the nearest available law enforcement agency.
4. **Reporting Assistance.** If a person with knowledge or suspicion about abuse, neglect or other inappropriate behavior is, for any reason, uncomfortable reporting an incident directly to the Moderator, Vice Moderator or other member of the youth protection oversight team, he or she should seek assistance in reporting the incident from the Senior Minister, the Minister of Music, and/or any member of the Board of Deacons or Board of Trustees with whom the person is comfortable confiding.
5. **Follow Up Review and Reporting.** Upon the receipt of a report of child abuse, neglect or inappropriate behavior involving an adult and child, the Moderator shall consult with the Youth Protection Oversight Team and Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, and a determination shall be made about whether the incident should also be reported to the church's insurance agent, legal counsel, or some other appropriate person or entity.
6. **Documentation.** Written documentation of all reporting activities, including agencies and persons notified, shall be made and placed in a file regarding the subject incident and kept in a secure location in the church office.

G. RESPONDING TO REPORTED MISCONDUCT

1. All reports of child abuse, child neglect, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, involvement in an inappropriate relationship by an adult, and inappropriate

behavior toward a child shall be confronted immediately.

2. When child abuse or neglect is alleged or suspected the safety of the child is paramount and shall be secured before any other steps are taken.
3. The parents or guardians of any affected child shall be notified immediately, unless they are believed to be involved in the suspected abuse/improper behavior and that such notification will place the child at risk, in which case parental notification shall be done at the direction of the Department of Human Services and/or local police department to which the incident is reported.
4. Persons accused of suspected abuse, neglect or other inappropriate behavior concerning a child shall be suspended from all involvement in youth activities while the incident is investigated. If the accused is an employee, the suspension may also include a suspension of all or part of the employee's assigned duties, with or without pay. The type and nature of any suspension of employment will be decided by the Board of Trustees, which may act in consultation with the Moderator, legal counsel or other persons whom the Board deems it advisable to consult with about the matter.
5. Investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse shall be turned over to the appropriate civil authorities; however, the pendency of such an investigation shall not preclude the church from conducting its own internal inquiry and review.
6. Any inquiry into or review of a reported incident with the church shall be done under the direction of the Youth Protection Oversight Team.
7. During the pendency of an outside investigation, the Youth Protection Oversight Team shall cooperate with civil authorities.
8. The Moderator⁵ shall designate a spokesperson to deal with questions directed to the church from the congregation, the media and any investigating officials.
9. A single file shall be established and maintained in the church office documenting all information and communications related to an alleged incident and any actions taken by the church in responding to it.

H. CONFIDENTIALITY

1. The application and screening process, interviews and activities relating to reporting and responding child abuse and misconduct charges shall be done in a professional and discrete manner, respectful of the privacy of all individuals

⁵ In Moderator's absence, the Vice-Moderator shall make the designation.

involved in the process.

2. Screening files, abuse and harassment complaints, and related documents, reports and other information shall be kept in a secure location in the church office.
3. The Youth Protection Oversight Team shall develop additional procedures and forms to facilitate confidentiality with respect to application and implementation of these policies, rules and procedures.

I. TRAINING

All employees and volunteers who work with youth or in youth programs shall attend an orientation meeting and periodic reviews sessions which will cover, among other things, the following topics:

- Church youth protection policies, rules and procedures
- The definitions of child abuse and sexual abuse and exploitation
- What constitutes an inappropriate relationship and behavior
- Sexual and physical abuse signs and symptoms
- The rationale behind screening procedures
- Responding to observed and suspected misconduct

J. EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER CERTIFICATION

All church employees who work with or around children, and youth activity volunteers, shall be required to review these policies, rules and procedures and to confirm that they understand and agree to comply with their content by providing the church with the following signed certification, which shall be dated and witnessed by an adult church member who is not related to the subject employee/volunteer:

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church
Youth Protection Policies, Rules and Procedures
Certification of Understanding and Agreement**

I have read and been provided a personal copy of the Meadowbrook Congregational Church Youth Protection Policies, Rules and Procedures. I have also been given a fair opportunity to ask questions about these rules, policies and procedures. I understand the intent and expectations stated these policies, rules and procedures, and I agree to strive in good faith and to comply with them.

The foregoing policies, rules and procedures have been reviewed and approved by the individuals, in their respective capacities, as set forth below:

Paul Brown, Moderator

Date

Dave Wonnacott, Chairperson, Board of Trustees

Date

Michele Fecht, Chairperson,
Board of Christian Education

Date

Art Ritter, Senior Minister

Date

Colleen Foster, Director of Christian Education

Date

