



MOUNT BETHEL CHURCH

A CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Adopted March, 2015

Introduction

To help protect children, Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church (MBLBC) has adopted the following Child and Youth Protection Policy. It is important that all MBLBC paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent abuse against children. The policies and procedures outlined in this manual are designed to facilitate effective monitoring and supervision in order to protect children from abuse and staff and volunteers from false allegations of abuse. The following includes definitions for these guidelines, the outlines for Protection and Prevention, and an acknowledgement to be signed by paid staff and those people working with children.

Training

MBLBC will provide training on this child protection policy to all staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers must attend these training events.

Purpose

These procedures are designed to;

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist MBLBC in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and staff members with a screening process for paid staff and volunteers.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.
5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

Definitions

The following terms used herein and are defined as follows:

1. *Paid Staff*: Any pastor, minister, leader, or employee who is paid.
2. *Children/Youth/Minor*: Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday.
3. *Adult*: Any person who has reached his/her 18th birthday.
4. *Volunteer*: Any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors or adults.
5. *Sexual Abuse*: The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any minor or adult to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of minor or adult, or incest with a minor or adult, or as defined by federal and state law. This includes and is not limited to unwelcome sexual remarks, jokes, advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures; sexual touching, fondling, molestation, assault, or other intimate physical contact; compelling another person to engage in a sexual act by threats or fear or undue influence; and providing or displaying pornographic materials to another person.
6. *Child Emotional Abuse*: Verbal or nonverbal conduct including mental exploitation, degrading communication, or humiliating or threatening conduct that may or may not include bullying or as defined by state law. Emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
7. *Physical abuse*: Any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
8. *Neglect*: Depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Protection and Prevention Volunteer and Employee Screening Procedures

The following qualification/screening procedures are to be used with paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors. All information collected will be maintained in confidence. We recognize that there are times when it is desirable and/or necessary for those who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. Volunteers under the age of 18 must be approved by the respective ministry leader.

1. Qualifications for Volunteers and Staff Members
 - a) Confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and adhere to Mount Bethel Church's Statement of Faith.
 - Required for paid staff, ministry leaders, Bible study hosts, and teachers.
 - Preferred for volunteers and helpers; if prospective volunteers or helpers are not believers, the ministry leader can approve them upon consultation with the senior pastor or Board of Elders. The communication must take place prior to service within MBLBC.
 - b) Be a member of MBLBC in good standing, be a regular attendee of MBLBC for at least six months, or have the approval of the ministry leader and the senior pastor or Board of Elders.
 - c) Have no history of being an abuser.
 - d) Have completed all child safety & volunteer forms, including but not limited to the Volunteer Application, this Policy booklet, and a Criminal Background search within the past three years.
2. Employment Application and Volunteer Application: All paid staff and volunteers who will work with a minor must complete the Employment Application and/or the Volunteer Application. The release statement attached to the Application must be signed by the individual completing the Application to apply for and qualify for service.

Our Employment Application may include questions regarding:

- Current and previous residence addresses.
- Current and previous employment, including addresses, dates, duties, titles, and reasons for leaving.
- Names and addresses of schools attended and degree(s) earned.
- References from previous employers and organizations that serve children.
- Pending criminal charges (where not prohibited by state law).
- Criminal history information.

Our Volunteer Application may include questions regarding:

- Current address
- Volunteer experience
- Criminal history information
- Personal references

Applications include a statement, which the applicant should acknowledge in writing, certifying that statements provided in the application are true and complete, and any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of the applicant or for dismissal if he or she is employed. This statement authorizes MBLBC to contact any individual or organization listed in the application.

3. Conduct interviews with qualified applicants. If detrimental information is uncovered but the applicant remains desirable, discuss this information with the applicant. In the event the applicant is ultimately hired or accepted as a volunteer, document the reasons for overriding the prior information. Whenever possible, MBLBC will have an associate participate in the interview.
4. Contact all listed references and employers for paid staff. Inquire as to the reason the applicant left and ask for any information that might help determine the applicant's suitability for the position. If a response is not received within a reasonable period of time, follow up and keep notes if possible.
5. Sex Offender Registry search and Criminal Background search - MBLBC will conduct a National Sex Offender and National Criminal Database search on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over minors (examples below). All background checks will be updated periodically.
 - Those who will be involved in our school/preschool/daycare center;
 - Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;
 - Those counseling children;
 - Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children; and
 - Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children (such as, MBLBC youth sponsored events and vehicle drivers)

Any persons found to have a criminal record disclosed or identified through our Criminal Background search program will undergo a review by the Board of Elders. Our intent is to welcome all persons willing to serve God through the ministries of Mount Bethel Lutheran Brethren Church. In so doing, we affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming an individual's whole being. That said, we also recognize that certain sins, though forgiven through and in Christ, have certain lasting consequences that may limit volunteering in certain areas. The extent of such limitations will be handled by the Board of Elders on a case-by-case basis.

Disqualification

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control or oversight over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or has presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

1. Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
2. A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy incest, drug-related offenses, or family violence.
3. A prior criminal history of an offense against minors.

Confidentiality

Information obtained through the screening, application, reference check, interview, and criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All information discovered or obtained through the above-referenced means will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted to the Board of Elders. These materials will be archived.

BEHAVIORAL SUPERVISION PROCEDURES FOR PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Unless an extenuating situation exists, MBLBC:

- Will have adequate number of screened and trained paid staff or volunteers present at events involving minors. Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity.
- Will monitor facilities during activities involving children.
- Will obtain written parental permission, including a signed medical treatment form and emergency contacts, before taking minors on trips and should provide information regarding the trip.
- Will use trained paid staff or volunteers when transporting minors in vehicles.
- Will require that young children be accompanied to the restroom and the paid staff or volunteer wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the minor.
- Will encourage minors to use a "buddy system" whenever minors go on trips off of MBLBC property.
- Will screen all paid staff and volunteers and approve those individuals in advance for any overnight activities.
- Will, to the fullest extent possible, have both male and female chaperones for events that are co-attended.

One-on-One Interactions

Most instances of inappropriate behavior and/or abuse occur when an adult is alone with a child or youth. MBLBC aims to eliminate or reduce these situations and prohibits private one-on-one interactions unless approved in advance by the Elder board. In those situations where one-on-one interactions are approved, staff and volunteers should observe the following additional guidelines to manage the risk of abuse or false allegations of abuse:

Additional Guidelines for One-on-One Interactions

- When meeting one-on-one with a child, always do so in a public place where you are in full view of others.
- Avoid physical affection that can be misinterpreted. Limit affection to pats on the shoulder, high-fives, and handshakes.
- If meeting in a room or office, leave the door open or move to an area that can be easily observed by others passing by.
- Inform other staff and volunteers that you are alone with a child and ask them to randomly drop in.
- Document and immediately report any unusual incidents, including disclosures of abuse or maltreatment, behavior problems and how they were handled, injuries, or any interactions that might be misinterpreted.

Physical Contact

MBLBC has implemented a physical-contact policy that will promote a positive, nurturing environment while protecting children, staff, and volunteers from misunderstandings.

The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all staff and volunteers working with children:

<i>Appropriate Physical Interactions</i>	<i>Inappropriate Physical Interactions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side hugs • Shoulder-to-shoulder hugs • Pats on the shoulder or back • Handshakes • High-fives and hand slapping • Verbal praise • Pats on the head when culturally appropriate • Touching hands, shoulders, and arms • Arms around shoulders • Holding hands (with young children in escorting situations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Hugs • Kisses • Showing affection in isolated area • Wrestling • Tickling • Allowing a child to cling to an employee’s or volunteer’s leg • Any type of massage given by or to a child • Any form of affection that is unwanted by the children or the employee or volunteer • Compliments relating to physique or body development • Touching bottom, chest, or genital areas

Suspicious or Inappropriate Behavior

In the event that suspicious or inappropriate behaviors or policy violations from an employee or volunteer in the context of church ministry are witnessed by or disclosed to a volunteer, the individual is instructed to do the following:

<i>Guidelines for Responding to Suspicious or Inappropriate Behavior</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report the incident to the Ministry Leader. • The Ministry Leader will report to the senior pastor or an elder board member and together determine both the appropriate response to the situation and the appropriate leader (e.g. Pastor, Elder, Ministry Leader) to respond to the concern. • The appropriate leader will speak with the employee or volunteer regarding the alleged incident. • If at any point in gathering information about a report of suspicious or inappropriate behavior, a concern arises about possible abuse, contact the state authorities listed below (p. 9) and complete, with a pastor or elder, form CY-47. • Advise the person who reported the behavior that the report is being taken seriously.

Based on the information gathered, the following may be required:

- Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee, volunteer, or program.
- If policy violations with children are confirmed, the employee or volunteer must be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination and prosecution. Disciplinary action will follow the Progressive Disciplinary Process outlined in this manual (p. 11).

Suspected Abuse

All staff and volunteers of MBLBC, as required by mandated reporting laws, must report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child whether on or off church property or whether perpetrated by staff, volunteers, or others to state authorities. Mandated reporters must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at <http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis> or by calling 1-800-932-0313. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. A person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice.

After making the report to ChildLine, you are required to immediately thereafter notify the ministry leader or pastoral staff. That ministry leader or pastor will in turn report to the Board of Elders who will take immediate and proper steps to ensure the safety of alleged victims and others who may be at risk.

Within 48 hours of reporting to ChildLine, a required reporter shall make a written report to the county where the alleged abuse occurred. Forms are located in the church office. Written reports must be sent to Northampton County, 2801 Emrick Blvd, Bethlehem, PA 18020. To complete form CY-47 online, go to <https://reportsuspectedabuse.com>.

Guidelines for Staff or Volunteer Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse

- If you witness suspected abuse, interrupt the behavior immediately.
- Protect the alleged victim from intimidation, retribution, or further abuse.
- If suspected abuse is disclosed to you, assure the individual disclosing the information that he or she was correct to tell to you.
- Be sure to document the incident (whether witnessed or disclosed) or circumstances causing your suspicion of abuse.
- Remember that it is NOT your job to investigate the incident but it IS your job to report the incident.
- Report the incident to ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313 (see above for further information).
- If at any point you need or desire assistance, involve the ministry leader or a member of the pastoral staff.
- Beyond your reporting requirements outlined above, confidentiality must be maintained throughout the process. Only the ministry leader or member of the pastoral staff should be informed of any suspected abuse.

Elder Board Response to Suspected Abuse by a Volunteer or Staff Member

In addition to the above response procedures, the Elder Board should ensure the following:

Guidelines for Elder Board Response to Incidents or Allegations of Abuse

- Determine the immediate needs of the victim.
- Ensure that the incident has been reported to the proper state authorities.
- Contact Mount Bethel Church's legal counsel, Peter Layman of *McFall, Layman & Jordan*, 610-588-0484.
- Suspend the accused and remove from access to children.
- Review the file of the accused.
- Gather and document information surrounding the incident.
- Communicate with the authorities as to who will perform the internal investigation. When administrators contact the authorities, the authorities may advise the church to perform an internal investigation, or authorities may perform their own investigation. MBLBC will decide how the internal investigation should be completed. If authorities request that the church not take action, document the request and proceed in accordance with it. If authorities do not request that MBLBC take no action, proceed with an internal investigation and call legal counsel listed above to assist with the investigation.
- If abuse is confirmed, terminate the employee or volunteer.
- Prepare a media response.
- Notify parents if appropriate.

ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS REGARDING CHILD PROTECTION

Child & Youth Discipline

It is the policy of MBLBC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children.

Restroom Use (To be implemented both on church grounds and off)

Children must be capable of using the bathroom on their own to attend MBLBC supervised classes or events. Participation in the Infant and Toddler Nurseries are the only exceptions. In these nurseries, parents should be asked upon drop-off if the volunteer is to change diapers. Children in kindergarten and under must be escorted to the restroom. The volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty. The volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the child(ren) back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the volunteer should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the volunteer should prop open the bathroom door, and/or leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For the protection of all, volunteers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child.

Sick Child

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the children at MBLBC. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the service or day.

Medications

It is the policy of MBLBC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to any children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent. Parents should be informed and reminded of our sick child policy.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) or overnight functions requiring prescription medications. Parents of such children should address their situation with ministry leaders to develop a plan of action. A written release will be required for administering of all prescription or non-prescription medications.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES FOR STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

When performance or conduct by an employee or volunteer does not meet the expectations of MBLBC, it is the responsibility of administrators to address the problem(s) in a timely manner. The procedure would normally include three steps: 1) Verbal Communication, 2) Formal Warning, and 3) Termination. MBLBC reserves the right to skip steps in its sole and absolute discretion.

Steps in Progressive Discipline

VERBAL COMMUNICATION – A large portion of performance and conduct deficiencies can be addressed and resolved through intentional verbal communication between the ministry leader and the employee or volunteer. Effective communication in this case includes the following:

- Clear identification of the problem with specific examples.
- A mutually agreed upon action plan to resolve the problem.
- Documentation of the communication, which then should be kept in the file of the counseled individual.

FORMAL WARNING – Formal warnings will be initiated when verbal communication fails to resolve the problem, or the problem is of such a serious nature that immediate and formal resolution is required.

- Formal warnings should be presented at a meeting with the ministry leader.
- Staff and volunteers should be required to sign the formal warning document.

TERMINATION – Any of the instances below will result in termination, although MBLBC reserves the right to terminate for other reasons as well in its sole and absolute discretion:

- Failure to improve conduct during the steps of progressive discipline.
- Serious and major offenses, including but not limited to violations of the organizational policies for the protection of children.

Workers should consult with the Board of Elders if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

These guidelines have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. **IT IS EXPRESSLY ACKNOWLEDGED AND AGREED THAT EMPLOYMENT WITH MBLBC IS “AT WILL.”** MBLBC reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this policy and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the policy and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with the MBLBC or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received a copy of the MBLBC's Child and Youth Protection Policy. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained therein.

Print Name

Signature

Date