

Introduction

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church values children and youth as beloved members of the family of God. We are committed to nurturing them for a growing faith in Jesus Christ, learning from them and caring for their health, safety and well-being. Jesus invites all of us to become as children when we approach God (Matt 18:1-5), and he blessed children and declared that it is to children that the kingdom of heaven belongs (Matt 19:13-14). We value this invitation and example, knowing that the children we worship with now will become the church of God in the future.

The purpose of the covenant and the practices it prescribes:

- We wish to provide an environment for trust, learning, worship and fun for children and the adults who work with them.
- We wish to provide an environment where parents feel comfortable and confident letting their children be involved.
- We wish to protect children from the possibility of abuse or harm while they are involved in church activities.
- We wish to provide guidelines for how to respond consistently and appropriately should there be accusations or situations of abuse.
- We wish to protect staff and volunteers from the risk of unfounded accusations.
- We wish to educate ourselves so we can be advocates for ending neglect and abuse of children in our church and communities.
- The congregation's insurance policy requires careful attention to protection of children and youth.

This covenant is based on Hively's mission and vision:

- We strive to know and make known God's love so all can grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We strive to demonstrate God's hospitality and healing.
- We are called to a deep concern for peace and justice in our relationships, which requires open and honest communication and precludes harmful secrets and alliances.

This covenant guides the vigilance and actions of everyone in the congregation

All members and attenders of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church are responsible to help create a healthy environment that reflects God's intent for human relationships. Thus the care and protection of children is the responsibility of everyone. All members and attenders have access to this covenant, should review it periodically and should follow its policies and practices as they have opportunities to interact with children and youth. All members and attenders are encouraged to pray for the children in the congregation along with their families and neighborhoods.

Additional responsibilities belong to leadership groups in the congregation:

The Leadership Council: Provides oversight for implementation of this covenant, assessing compliance and reporting to the congregation annually at a congregational meeting. Appoints one or two people to take responsibility for monitoring compliance with the covenant. Oversees the process of obtaining background checks.

Pastor and staff: Keeps regular awareness of compliance, maintenance of records, and awareness of resources and opportunities for education about and responses to issues of child safety and protection.

Education Commission: Monitors compliance in all areas of the educational program, including selecting and training volunteers, working with Leadership Council to obtain background checks, selecting curriculum and initiating communication within the mentor program among parents, mentors and youth. Maintains ongoing awareness of concerns, resources and opportunities related to child protection.

Worship Commission: Monitors compliance for childcare during worship services. Seeks opportunities for including an emphasis on care of children in worship services.

Stewardship Commission: Monitors building and playground for safety and security. Monitors spaces within the building to assure compliance with this covenant. Maintains compliance in reporting as required by the congregation's insurance policies.

Witness and Caring Commission: Monitors compliance in its areas of responsibility, such as small groups and service projects.

Deacons Council: Provides or secures pastoral care as noted in the covenant. Monitors compliance for childcare during Spiritual Emphasis events. Takes responsibility for reporting as stated in the covenant. Maintains ongoing awareness of concerns and opportunities related to child protection.

Definitions

Adult: A person who is 18 years of age or older and who has the mental capacity of someone 18 years of age or older

Child: a person under the age of 16 or someone older who has the mental capacity of someone under the age of 16

Youth: A person between the ages of 16 and 18, with mental capacity of someone between 16 and 18

Abuse: Physical, mental or emotional harm or neglect; or sexual abuse¹

Neglect: Failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision to the degree that the child is threatened with harm.

Physical abuse: Non-accidental physical injury to the child.

Sexual abuse: Sexual touching, intentional exposure or sexual manipulation between an adult and a child.

Emotional and psychological abuse: Injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.

Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or verbal or physical conduct or written or oral communication of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive nature.

Touch and displays of affection: All verbal and physical displays of affection shall be non-sexual in nature and intent and shall have the prior consent of the recipient.

Discipline: Discipline shall not be physically or emotionally abusive or harmful. Examples include redirecting the child's activities and removing the child from the group with supervision by another adult.

¹ Definitions excerpted from resource materials used at the Protecting Our Children Workshop presented by Dove's Nest speaker Brenda Yoder at North Goshen Mennonite Church, September 17, 2016.

Abuse prevention

The primary emphasis in preventing abuse is for all activities to be observable and interruptible. This rule provides a minimum level of protection for both the children and the adults in charge of the program or activity.

1. All rooms where activities occur will have visibility from outside the room. Doors of classrooms and offices will have unobstructed windows. When there is no window, the door will be left open while a room is in use.

2. Two approved adult volunteers (see Selection and preparation section below) should be present during church-related activities involving children and youth, whether inside the building or in another location.

Exceptions:

Sunday morning Christian education classes may have only one teacher as long as another adult is available in the education wing to observe and assist as needed.

Childcare that is provided during congregational gatherings (worship services, enrichment sessions, meetings, etc.) may be provided by an approved adult with assistance from one or more older children or youth.

3. Using the bathroom: Parents should encourage children to use the bathroom before or after scheduled activities. Parents should also be encouraged to do diaper changes before and after nursery care time. If a young child uses the bathroom during an activity or session, an adult will stand outside the door of the bathroom and will assist only if asked by the child. The ideal is for two adults to be present or an adult and youth assistant (as noted in 2 above). While not as ideal, but as an alternative, a second child can be present. If this is not possible, the adult responsible for the care will report this to the parent and Sunday School coordinator at the earliest convenience. In the case of older children or youth with handicaps who may need assistance, the adult in charge will discuss in advance with the child's parents how assistance should be provided. If there is an accident, the caregiver will get a parent to take care of the child.

4. Mentoring program: The congregation strongly encourages open communication among the parents, mentors and mentees and encourages all activities to occur in public places. Parents of a mentee should be given information about activities of the mentor-mentee pair and should give permission for any activity. Parents may request further practices, such as asking the youth to check in by text or phone at certain times or requesting that activities be done in connection with another mentor-mentee pair. At the beginning of a mentor-mentee relationship, the parent(s), mentor and mentee will talk about these recommendations and will sign a form indicating they agree on how activities and transportation will be handled. Parents, mentors and mentees will review this form annually.

5. Before any one-to-one activities or transportation involving a child/youth and an adult, the parent/legal guardian is to be informed and permission obtained. If this is not possible, circumstances will be explained to the parent/legal guardian as soon as possible following the incident.

6. No child or youth is transported from the church building without the knowledge and consent of a parent or legal guardian.

Selection and preparation of teachers and leaders who work with youth

1. All people working with youth (teachers, mentors, child-care providers) will be given a copy of this covenant, will sign a memo of understanding indicating they have read and will comply with the covenant, and will be required to participate in training and refresher sessions. (This does not include people who lead the children's time during worship services.)
2. Police background checks will be secured for all paid staff and all volunteers working with children and youth. These will be updated every five years. The Leadership Council will oversee the process of obtaining background checks. The pastor's background check will be read by the senior deacon and moderator; all other background checks will be read by the pastor and senior deacon. All documents are filed confidentially in the pastor's office. A list of people for whom background checks have been completed and the date of the checks is kept by the administrative secretary.
3. Adult volunteers will be regular participants at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church for a minimum of six months before they become involved in programs and activities involving children. Before giving someone responsibility as a mentor or leader for activities that take place outside of Sunday morning worship and classes, the congregation will take additional diligence in learning to know that person. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis with approval from one of the church commissions or the Leadership Council.
4. Any person under 21 who works with children and/or youth is paired with someone older than 24.
5. Children and youth may volunteer to help lead children's programs as long as other leadership in that setting complies with this covenant. A general rule is that if a child or youth wishes to help lead an activity (along with an adult), this leader-assistant will be at least five years older than the children or youth with whom they are working.

Safety in our church building

1. First aid kits are available in the foyer and on the lower level of the education wing in the kitchen. These kits are checked every six months to make sure they are up-to-date and adequately stocked.
2. A list of people in the congregation who are medical personnel and/or who are trained in CPR, universal precautions, and/or first aid is posted on the bulletin board by the kitchen serving window.
3. Before any adult allows children to enter the playground, the adult will check for safety and cleanliness of the playground. While children are in the playground, the gates are to be kept closed.
4. Matches and lighters are stored in places where children will not find or reach them. They are not left in classroom cupboards or next to candles and lanterns that are accessible to children.
5. The door to the kitchen will be kept closed and locked at all times when the kitchen is not in use. The door to the downstairs furnace room will be kept closed at all times, with the upper latch in place.

Education and training

1. All adults in the congregation will receive a copy of this covenant.
2. We will offer educational opportunities for all adults in the congregation related to awareness of the risks of abuse, preventing abuse and providing safe space for everyone in the church. This may be during a Christian education session, a spiritual emphasis session or a special meeting. All members and regular attenders will be encouraged to participate.
3. Adults who are involved with youth and children (including Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, mentors, nursery caregivers, Bible School teachers and leaders, etc.) must attend training sessions designed for their work. This may focus on issues such as preventing abuse, providing safe space, child development, identification of risk factors and signs of abuse.
4. The Education Commission will offer education related to child abuse and child safety in the children's and youth Sunday School classes. The schedule and curriculum will be determined by the Education Commission, and content will be appropriate to the age of the children and youth. Parents may review the curriculum and/or participate in the sessions on request.
5. We encourage the pastor and other church staff to stay up-to-date on laws and practices for preventing abuse and reporting abuse if there are accusations and to stay informed about resources for education about and responding to situations of abuse.
6. We encourage the pastor and worship commission to include issues of care for children and prevention of abuse in corporate worship.
7. Resources available for education and training:
 - Dove's Nest, an organization that began among concerned Mennonites in 2009. Their website, DovesNest.net, is a source for recommendations of resources, speakers, curriculum, newsletters and blog posts. Included are links to many additional sources of helpful materials.
 - *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*, by Jeanette Harder, published by Herald Press, 2010. Cataloged at 261.8 in the Hively library. (With a gift from a donor, Dove's Nest provided a copy of this book to all Mennonite congregations.)
 - Mennonite Central Committee: mcc.org/media/resources/more/abuse-prevention
 - Mennonite Church USA: mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/peacebuilding/discernment-group-on-sexual-abuse-and-the-church/resources-on-sexual-abuse-response-and-prevention/

Response to suspected or reported abuse

A general principle in responding to suspected or reported abuse is to draw on appropriate resources that are not part of the congregation. This principle insures the protection of everyone involved. Within a congregation, it may be too easy to attempt secrecy, to form unhealthy alliances or to miss addressing significant needs. Having outside resources will bring appropriate and needed care to difficult situations. It also will minimize the possibility of later being viewed as covering up or inappropriately protecting someone involved in the situation.

Several additional principles guide this section of the covenant:

- Accusations of abuse will be taken seriously and investigations and appropriate responses will be pursued diligently.
 - The congregation and congregational leaders will follow all laws pertaining to reporting and responding to situations or accusations of abuse.
 - Any person who learns of abuse or who suspects abuse will seek others with whom to work in following these steps—either the pastor and a deacon or a deacon and the moderator.
1. When a child discloses abuse to you or you suspect child abuse, you must notify Child Protective Services (800-800-5556) or the police (911) as soon as possible. The adult who is aware of or suspects abuse may ask the pastor or deacon to support him or her in making the call.
Investigation of abuse that is disclosed or suspected is the responsibility of the authorities; congregational members are required **only to report** what is suspected or may already be known.
 2. When a child discloses abuse or child abuse is suspected, notify the pastor or a deacon as soon as possible. This should not delay or hinder reporting required in item 1 above.
 3. If abuse is disclosed or suspected, the pastor or deacon will use his or her judgment about informing the non-offending parent(s) or guardian(s) that this has been reported to authorities. The best interests of the child will be the most important factor in whether to inform the parent(s) or guardian(s). If the child is old enough, the pastor or deacon can consult with the child to hear his or her concerns about informing the parent(s) or guardian(s) and should be sensitive to these concerns when talking with the parent(s) or guardian(s).
 4. If the alleged offender is involved with children at the church, the individual will be removed immediately from all responsibilities involving children until the conclusion of the investigation. All parents whose children may have come into contact with the alleged offender will be notified within 48 hours that allegations have been made and reported to authorities.
 - a) In the time immediately following the alleged abuse, one of the deacons will monitor the alleged offender's interaction with children during congregational activities.
 - b) The deacons will develop a plan for ongoing monitoring of the alleged offender while he/she is involved in congregational activities until the situation is resolved and decisions for future involvement can be made. (See also #14)
 5. All church staff and all members and other participants in Hively activities will cooperate with investigations carried out by authorities, both public authorities and church/conference leaders.
 6. If the alleged offender is a pastor, report the abuse or suspected abuse to authorities as noted in #1 above and also to a deacon and/or the moderator. The deacon or moderator will notify the Central

District Conference conference minister. The moderator and deacons, in consultation with the conference minister and Leadership Council, will make decisions about what steps to take for the pastor's ongoing ministry in the congregation.

7. If the alleged victim and alleged offender are both part of the congregation, the deacons will minister to the needs of both the alleged victim and the alleged offender and their families, with different deacons responding to each but communicating clearly and completely within the Deacons Council. The pastor, as part of the Deacons Council, will be kept fully informed and will minister to the congregation as a whole.

8. Appropriate and timely referrals for professional counseling will be made. This includes care and counseling for the accused, the accuser and their family members, and also staff, teachers and volunteers involved in the situation. This also includes appropriate care for anyone accused of but cleared of wrong-doing with children under their care at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church. The Central District Conference conference minister will be informed of situations or accusations of abuse to help assess the need for care for the pastor and other congregational leaders.

9. Details regarding the accusation and following steps will be limited to those who need to know within the congregation. General information will be shared with parents and the congregation as a whole so that all can play a part in supporting each individual involved and in being vigilant to keep the congregation and space safe for everyone.

10. If needed, one member of the congregation will be appointed as spokesperson to the media. Only this person will be authorized to speak on behalf of the congregation.

11. All steps taken in response to a reported or suspected situation of abuse will be documented and the report will be maintained in confidence in the pastor's office.

12. If congregation members or participants become aware that someone in the congregation has been accused of child abuse in another setting, the deacons will determine what steps to take, including the above as appropriate.

13. An individual who is known to have been convicted of child sexual abuse or child abuse will not be allowed any unsupervised contact with children and may not be involved in children's or youth ministry, either formal or informal.

14. If it becomes known that a registered sex offender is attending church activities or services, a member of the Deacons Council or Leadership Council will notify parents of children and youth. For ongoing participation of this individual in the congregation, the Deacons Council and Leadership Council will share basic information about the offense and take these steps:

- Assess the congregation's readiness to accept the individual in the congregation, to be educated about prevention of abuse, and to be involved with the individual's needs and activities in the congregation.
- Assess the individual's need for and readiness for limited-access participation in the congregation, including his/her need to comply with court-ordered limitations in what kinds of activities and situations in which he/she may be present.
- Establish a care team and care and safety plan for working with and monitoring the individual. The plan will include ways to support the individual and hold him or her accountable.

- If the individual refuses to participate in the plan or breaks one of the commitments in the care and safety plan, that individual will no longer be able to attend or participate at Hively Ave.

15. The Stewardship Commission will take responsibility to report accusations and situations of abuse to the congregation's insurance providers as required by the policy/policies.

Covenant details

Developed by a committee consisting of Melody Claassen, Mary Klassen, Tyler Klassen, Rich Preheim, Linsey Vandrick

Adopted (date)

Implemented (date)

Reassessed and updated (how often)

Copies of this covenant will be available as follows:

Each member will receive a copy with encouragement to read it occasionally

A copy will be posted on the congregation's website

A copy will be easily accessible in the church office

An abridged version will be posted on the bulletin board next to the kitchen serving window

Application of this covenant to other groups

The congregation encourages Hively Avenue Preschool to follow this covenant, adapting it as needed for their ministry.

The congregation encourages Rios de Agua Viva and all other groups using this facility to follow this covenant.

ADDENDUM

(To be posted in public places in the building)

Reporting child neglect or abuse

If you suspect neglect or abuse of a child at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church or in relation to one of the congregation's activities, or if abuse has been reported to you, here are steps to take:

1. If needed, attend to the child's immediate safety.
2. Make notes of what you have heard or observed.
3. Talk with the Hively pastor or a deacon.
4. As soon as possible, report to Child Protective Services (800-800-5556) or the police (911). If you wish, ask the pastor or deacon to support you in making this call.

Have this information available when you report:

- Child's name, gender, age, address
 - What the child said, if anything
 - What you observed about the child and the situation
 - Your concerns
 - Your name and phone number (This is optional; it will not be reported to the child or family.)
 - What you have said to the parents or guardians, if anything.
5. Continue attending to the child's safety as well as the safety of other children who may be affected.

(taken from *Let the Children Come: Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*, p 134)

Who should report child abuse?

According to Indiana Code, Juvenile and Family Law

Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect must make a report to Child Protective Services or the local law enforcement agency.

Further information

Covenant for the Safety and Protection of Children and Youth, Hively Avenue Mennonite Church

ADDENDUM

**Memo of Understanding
For Child and Youth Workers
(Volunteer and Staff)**

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all children and youth who participate in its ministries and activities.

The Covenant for Care and Protection of Children and Youth is our congregation's commitment to providing an environment that is safe and that fosters trust, learning, worship and fun for children and youth.

As a volunteer or staff member in this congregation:

- 1) Do you agree to promptly report to the pastor or a deacon any incident of abuse by Hively Avenue Mennonite Church members, attendees or visitors, including emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse or ongoing bullying/intimidation? yes no

- 2) Do you agree to allow Hively Avenue Mennonite Church to conduct a background check on you, including a police report? yes no

- 3) Have you ever been investigated for, charged with or convicted of a crime involving sexual abuse, child abuse, neglect, domestic violence or other violence? yes no

- 4) Is there anything in your past that would limit your work with children or youth?
 yes no

I have read the Covenant for Care and Protection of Children and Youth, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth therein. I commit myself to respect and treat well the children and youth of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church and to refrain from any conduct in my work for the church that would be un-Christ-like or unlawful.

Please return this form to the pastor or the senior deacon. Please choose a confidential manner to return this form if you have answered yes to question 3 and/or 4.

Signature Date

Print Full Name

Volunteer Position