

East Zorra Mennonite Church Safe Church Policy

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1 Overview

1.1 Introduction

As part of being Rooted in Christ, Growing Together in Faith, and Extending God's Love and as a community of faith at East Zorra Mennonite Church (EZMC), we seek to learn together what it means to love God, love each other, and love our neighbours. We are committed to walking together and learning how to faithfully follow Jesus. We are grateful that God's spirit is with us to empower us for this journey. We believe that our whole life is meant to be lived for God as an act of worship to God in service to the world that God loves.

EZMC seeks to nurture a community where people delight in one another and enjoy the gifts that God has given to them and to others at EZMC. Healthy and meaningful relationships within and beyond the EZMC community are supported by healthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries build awareness of and encourage the dignity and self-worth of each person, such that each person brings and fosters this dignity in their relationships. Healthy boundaries also nurture a community of trust and grace, making space for all to thrive in our community of faith.

1.2 Scope

This policy is intended to support safe spaces for all people of EZMC, including children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons, and to promote healthy boundaries for staff, volunteers, and persons who participate at EZMC.

Pastors at EZMC practice the principles of the safe church policy and maintain the related expectations as set out in their employment agreement with EZMC and as set out in the standards upheld by MCEC. Allegations of abuse, harassment or discrimination that involve persons who are not children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons are beyond the scope of this policy.

1.3 Definitions

The definitions in this policy are applicable to this policy only and may not reflect terminology used in other EZMC practices and committees.

1.3.1 *Persons referred to in this Document*

- *Active Participants* include anyone who regularly participates in the life of EZMC and who has been at EZMC for longer than 12 months. Regular participation is defined as engaging in at least two church sanctioned events per month.
- A *Child* is a person under 16 years of age.
- A *Youth* is a person who is 16 or 17 years of age.
- A *Vulnerable Person* is an adult (someone 18 years of age or older) who for reasons of their maturity, physical limitations, cognitive ability, life circumstance or other limitations is less able to advocate for their own well-being. Senior citizens and newcomers to Canada may fall into the category of Vulnerable Persons.
- *Volunteers* refers to persons (16 and over) lay people or community members serving in a Position of Trust in an EZMC program. Position of Trust refers to a person in position of authority

or responsibility in relation to others. Those in Positions of Trust by virtue of their position hold a larger amount of power in each situation.

- *Program Helpers* refers to unscreened persons who provide support to programs and activities. They cannot be left alone with children, therefore at least 2 other screened volunteers must always be part of the program/activity. They cannot provide transportation.
- *Witnesses* refers to people who observe and/or suspect abuse has occurred.

1.3.2 Committees referred to in this Document

- The *Safe Church Committee (SCC)* is responsible for the oversight of this policy and related procedures. The SCC reports to EZMC's Program Council. The SCC shall consist of at least four people. The names of members of the SCC will be posted (e.g., EZMC Ministry Positions (annual slate)).
- *Response Team* refers to a group that is brought together following an allegation of abuse to coordinate the response to the situation within the congregation. This group may be comprised of members of the SCC and/or the Pastoral Team. It may also be comprised of other members of the congregation. When the group is not made up of members of the SCC, the group reports to the SCC.

1.3.3 Abuse

Abuse is the misuse of power or authority.

Abuse can be single incident or happen in an on-going pattern.

Abuse can be intentional or unintentional.

Abuse is not acceptable and EZMC has a policy of zero tolerance.

Forms of abuse include (definitions provided by Creedence & Co.), but is not limited to the following:

- *Emotional Abuse* is a pattern of over rejection, belittling, blaming, accusing, finding fault or constant shouting. Emotional abuse sends the message of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care.
- *Harassment* includes repeated subtle or overt action which causes a person to feel attacked, threatened, demeaned, bullied, intimidated or manipulated. It can also include placing rigid or unrealistic expectations on a children, youth, and/or vulnerable person with threats of harm if they are not met.
- *Neglect* is a form of abuse in which a person endangers children, youth, and/or vulnerable person's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. It involves chronic inattention or omission on the part of a parent/guardian to provide for the basic emotional and/or physical needs of a children, youth, and/or vulnerable person including food, clothing, shelter, medical care, hygiene, safety, adequate supervision, affection and affirmation of a person's self-worth.
- *Physical Abuse* includes all acts in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a children, youth, and/or vulnerable person. Sometimes physical abuse is caused by over-discipline.
- *Psychological Abuse* is a pattern of intentional verbal or behavioural actions or lack of actions that convey to children, youth, and/or vulnerable person the message that they are worthless,

flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value to meet someone else's needs. This is an active refusal to respond to children, youth, and/or vulnerable person's needs.

- *Sexual Abuse* refers to incidents of sexual contact between children, youth, and/or vulnerable person and persons in a position of trust. Sexual Abuse may involve the use of children, youth, and/or vulnerable person for sexual gratification. Sexual abusive acts include exposure, fondling, masturbation, intercourse, incest, exploitation of and exposure to pornography and prostitution, and engaging children, youth, and/or vulnerable person in sexual activity through threats, bribes or force.
- *Spiritual Abuse* refers to the use of religious beliefs and values to threaten, harm or wound a children, youth, and/or vulnerable person.
- *Verbal Abuse* involves constantly belittling, shaming, ridiculing or verbally threatening a Vulnerable Person.

2 Prevention

2.1 Education

Honouring EZMC's commitment to follow this Safe Church Policy is the responsibility of all members of the EZMC community. Monitoring the policy falls to the individuals called to serve on EZMC's SCC. The SCC upholds the EZMC community by ensuring that the community understands this policy and follows its procedures to build and promote healthy boundaries. The SCC is responsible to ensure there are educational opportunities for volunteers, staff and the congregation at large.

EZMC's Safe Church Policy will be made available to all community members. A printed copy of the Safe Church Policy will be available in the church library and can be requested at any time from a member of the SCC, Christian Education and Nurture Team (CENT) or from EZMC's Office Administrator.

Annually the SCC will provide educational materials and opportunities regarding Safe Church practices and/or healthy boundaries for staff, volunteers and/or the congregation at large. This may include:

- Guest speakers with expertise on particular subject matters;
- Worship themes and topics that include opportunities for discussion during the education hour;
- Policy and practice review and discussion;
- Meetings with volunteers of programs provided to children, youth and/or vulnerable adults (e.g., meeting with VBS volunteers, etc.);
- Supporting and encouraging people to participate in external training opportunities.

A summary of the Safe Church Policy will accompany the Volunteer Commitment Form.

2.2 Volunteers

EZMC celebrates the time and talent that volunteers offer to the church community. To support these volunteers who work with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons and to support the principles of a safe church environment, EZMC selection and screen practices include the following:

- Volunteer Registration Form & Reference Checks

- Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSC)

2.2.1 Volunteer Selection Processes

Volunteers with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons are identified through a variety of practices. Selection is done in keeping with the skills and responsibilities identified on the job description.

Selection practices include:

- The EZMC Gift Discernment Committee and process.
- Program-specific coordinators identify volunteers for a specific program. For example, Junior Christian Education Team (JCET) are identified by the Gift Discernment Committee, the JECT team is responsible for selecting and screening program-specific volunteers in keeping with this policy.
- Congregational nomination and commissioning of people for Lay Minister and Care Team roles.

EZMC staff selection processes are beyond the scope of this policy.

2.2.2 Volunteer Screening

There are two steps to EZMC's screening of volunteers with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons. The two steps include:

1. Vulnerable Sector Checks (VSC):
 - Pastors, the Parish Nurse, and all volunteers with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons must provide a VSC.
 - The VSC must be the original and no less than 6 months old.
 - A new VSC must be provided every 5 years.
2. Verification of Suitability:
 - Active Participants - Screening occurs through the selection processes noted above.
 - Non-Active Participants - Volunteer Registration Form which includes reference checks.

2.2.2.1 Vulnerable Sector Checks Procedures

1. When a potential volunteer is identified, the Office Administrator is notified.
2. The Office Administrator provides the VSC package, which includes instructions and details obtaining a VSC for each local geography.
3. The potential volunteer follows the steps outlined in the package.
4. Potential volunteer returns the VSC to the Office Administrator. The Office Administrator will document the date of the VSC (and within 6 months) and that an original was seen. VSC documentation (original or copy) is filed in a locked cabinet and maintained indefinitely.
5. If the VSC identifies anything, the VSC is reviewed by the SCC. SCC must document discussion and any decision. The SCC will consult with pastors as needed.

6. SCC is responsible to communicate with the volunteer the outcome of the discussion.
7. If the potential volunteer is not suitable for volunteering with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons due to the VSC, the SCC will communicate this to the appropriate program leader/coordinator.

2.2.2.2 Verification of Suitability Procedures for Non-Active Participants

1. When a potential volunteer is identified, the Office Administrator is notified.
2. The Office Administrator provides the Volunteer Registration package to the potential volunteer, which includes the Volunteer Registration Form.
3. The potential volunteer follows the steps outlined in the package.
4. Potential volunteer returns completed package to the Office Administer.
5. The Office Administrator forwards the package to the appropriate Lay Minister (e.g., CENT Lay Minister) or SCC (where there is no Lay Minister that oversees that particular role/program).
6. The Lay Minister (or designate) contacts the references provided by the potential volunteer. And documents the contact using the Reference Check Questions form.
7. The Lay Minister (or designate), makes the decision regarding the suitability of the potential volunteer, seeking support from the SCC and pastors as needed.
8. The Lay Minister (or designate) is responsible to communicate the suitability of the potential volunteer to the appropriate program leader/coordinator.
9. Volunteer Registration Forms and Reference Check Questions forms are stored in a locked cabinet and maintained indefinitely.

2.2.3 Children Volunteering

Children can volunteer with EZMC. They are considered in the category of Program Helpers (see definitions above).

2.2.4 Volunteer Commitment

1. One aspect of prevention and education is that all volunteers commit to ensuring the community of faith at EZMC is a safe space for the nurture and faith development of children, youth and/or vulnerable persons. This personal commitment is documented annually on the Volunteer Commitment Form.
2. The Office Administer distributes the Volunteer Commitment Form, at least annually (e.g., in September) or prior to volunteering with a particular program (e.g., VBS).
3. The completed and signed Volunteer Commitment Forms are returned to the Office Administer.
4. The Office Administer will work with the appropriate Lay Minister regarding incomplete and missing forms.
5. It is the responsibility of the Lay Minister to follow up on incomplete or missing forms.
6. Volunteer Commitment Forms are stored in a locked cabinet and maintained indefinitely.

7. Should the SCC or pastors become aware of a potential or current volunteer who may not be suitable to volunteer with children, youth and/or vulnerable persons, they will consider this information and make a decision.

2.3 Premises

Most, but not all, EZMC events take place in the EZMC church building or on the church premises. To ensure that EZMC promotes a safe church environment, the following expectations will be upheld.

2.3.1 Windows, Locks and Open-Door Policy

All rooms in the church building used for programming have windows in the doors (this includes classrooms, offices, and the nursery).

Furnace rooms and supply or storage closets and rooms are to be kept locked and not to be used for programming.

When off-site facilities are being used for group events, rooms with windows in the doors will be preferred. If no windows exist in doors for rooms being used, an open-door policy will be employed.

2.3.2 Monitoring

All EZMC community members share responsibility for monitoring people coming in and out of the building.

Volunteers responsible for any given event/program will monitor, as best as possible, any people coming in and out of the building.

2.3.3 Lighting

EZMC will ensure that adequate lighting is installed and functioning both inside and outside of the church building.

3 Practices

3.1 Healthy Relationships & Healthy Boundaries

All persons are valued and are treated with respect, dignity and fairness. Open dialogue is encouraged among all participants at EZMC and we acknowledge that constructive feedback is important to create a healthy faith community. Love and caring fosters a sense of acceptance, belonging, and significance. It is important to confirm that the other person is comfortable with expressions of physical caring. Appropriate expressions of physical caring generally include: showing affection in open spaces where others can see and share the warmth, putting an arm around a person's shoulder (i.e., side hug), touching a person's hand, making eye contact and speaking kindly and listening carefully.

Volunteers in Positions of Trust will be vigilant and aware of how their actions can be interpreted. Parents/guardians will be involved in care decisions wherever possible and reasonable.

Healthy relationships are supported by healthy boundaries. The following behaviours and practices undermine efforts to create a safe and welcoming place for all:

- rough physical contact
- use inappropriate language
- sexually suggestive comments, even in fun
- inappropriate and unwanted touch
- having “favourites” that leads to resentment and misinterpretation
- doing things of a personal nature that people can do for themselves
- bringing a person to tears as a form of control
- bullying
- dismissing and not responding to allegations

3.1.1 Discipline

1. Physical forms of discipline are not acceptable.
2. It is recommended that each group create a covenant to guide behavior while participating in the program at the beginning of each season.
3. Parent/caregivers should be involved when a child, youth and/or vulnerable adult exhibits a behaviour which does not reflect the covenant document or where it is disruptive to the participation of other children in the group.
4. If staff or a volunteer needs to talk with an individual child or youth in confidence, the conversation will be held in the presence of another adult or in view of at least one other adult. If this is not possible, the staff or volunteer must be accountable to another adult for any time spent with an individual child or youth one on one. This will be done by indicating to another adult the amount of time that will be spent with the individual child or youth and where the conversation will take place.

3.2 Programs at EZMC

3.2.1 Ratios

Ideal practice is to always have a minimum of 2 volunteers regardless of age and number of children/youth.

Activity	Age	Ratio
Nursery	0 – pre-JK	1 volunteer to 5 children
Sunday School, VBS	JK – SK	1 volunteer to 8 children
Sunday School, VBS, Girl/Boys Club	Grades 1-5	1 volunteer to 8 children Off-Premise & Overnight: 1 volunteer to 5 children (Can not be fewer than 2 volunteers regardless of number participants)
Sunday School, VBS, Girl/Boys Club, Junior Youth	Grades 6-8	1 volunteer to 10 children Off-Premise & Overnight: 1 volunteer to 5 children (Can not be fewer than 2 volunteers regardless of number participants)
Sunday School, Youth	High School Youth	1 volunteer to 10 youth

		Off-Premise & Overnight: 1 volunteer to 5 youth (Can not be fewer than 2 volunteers regardless of number participants)
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3.2.2 Child and Youth Sunday School Practices

1. The desired best practice is that at least two adults are present. Having one adult present is an acceptable good practice in the following situations: door is open, supervisor notified, a floater volunteer is present, the adult is comfortable with the situation, the age and ratio information as noted in this policy is maintained.
2. Floater volunteers are available to provide additional support.
3. Children under but not including grade one, must be signed in and out.
4. Children will be encouraged to use bathroom facilities before/after programs rather than during these programs.
5. In cases where a child needs assistance toileting, the bathroom stall door shall be kept ajar.
6. Volunteers who provide assistance to a child with toileting should identify to another volunteer that they are providing support.
7. Waivers (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are to be completed for all participants, prior to participating.
8. Volunteers must be aware of information from the waiver forms that is relevant to keeping participants safe and healthy.

3.2.3 VBS, Girl’s Club, Boy’s Club, & Junior Youth Practices

1. The desired best practice is that at least two adults are present. Having one adult present is an acceptable good practice in the following situations door is open, supervisor notified, a floater volunteer is present, the adult is comfortable with the situation, the age and ratio information as noted in this policy is maintained.
2. Children should not be dropped off or remain after the program without a volunteer present.
3. It is recommended that each group create a covenant to guide behavior while participating in the program at the beginning of each season.
4. Volunteers shall ensure appropriate security of the premises (e.g., controlled building access, safe classrooms, etc.).
5. During VBS, floater volunteers are available to provide additional support.
6. Children under but not including grade one, must be signed in and out.
7. Waivers (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are to be completed for all participants, prior to participating.
8. Volunteers must be aware of information from the waiver forms that is relevant to keeping participants safe and healthy.

9. Volunteers are responsible for implementing safe washroom practices (e.g., using washrooms in the main area, children asking to go to the washroom, children using the washroom in pairs).
10. In cases where a child needs assistance toileting, the bathroom stall door shall be kept ajar.
11. Volunteers who provide assistance to a child with toileting should identify to another volunteer that they are providing support.

3.2.4 Youth Activities

1. The desired best practice is that at least two adults are present. Having one adult present is an acceptable good practice in the following situations door is open, supervisor notified, a floater volunteer is present, the adult is comfortable with the situation, the age and ratio information as noted in this policy is maintained
2. Volunteers shall ensure appropriate security of the premises (e.g., controlled building access, safe classrooms, etc.).
3. Waivers (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are to be completed for all participants, prior to participating.
4. Volunteers must be aware of information from the waiver forms that is relevant to keeping participants safe and healthy.
5. It is recommended that each group create a covenant to guide behavior while participating in the program at the beginning of each season. Youth specific practices that are part of this document may include transportation, sharing information with parents, clarifying start and end times and locations, youth contribution expectations, etc..

3.2.5 Nursery

EZMC has a dedicated nursery space. This space is available for a caregiver to watch or care for their child. Most of the time this space is not supervised by a volunteer. A sign is posted stating that when the room is not supervised by a volunteer, caregivers are responsible for their own children.

Supervised nursery services may be provided during Sunday morning worship and some special events. When volunteer supervised nursery services are provided:

- To meet the criteria of a supervised nursery, two volunteers must be present.
- The volunteers will check to determine that the space/toys/equipment/diaper change area is appropriately clean and in safe condition.
- Volunteers will summon a parent/caregiver if a child's diaper needs to be changed.
- In cases where a child needs assistance toileting, the bathroom stall door shall be kept ajar.
- Volunteers who provide assistance to a child with toileting should identify to another volunteer that they are providing support.
- Food is not provided as part of the nursery service.
- Children should not be dropped off or remain after the program without a volunteer present.
- Children under but not including grade one, must be signed in and out.

- Parents/Caregivers are responsible to identify child specific needs when they drop of their child (e.g., allergies, health conditions).

3.2.6 Playgroup

Playgroup is a community-based program coordinated by EZMC that runs one morning a week from September to June. During playgroup children and parents/caregivers enjoy time together in a large common space. Parents and caregivers are responsible for their children during the program. The playgroup leadership team is responsible for creating a welcoming space, set-up, clean up, snack, and leading a circle time.

All playgroup leadership team members are screened volunteers. Each week there are two volunteers responsible to fulfil the leadership team responsibilities. A program specific registration and waiver form is completed for this program.

3.2.7 Visiting & One-to-One interactions

Out-of-program or off-premise contact and socializing between volunteers and children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons is normally discouraged.

EZMC recognizes the value that comes from connecting one-to-one with each other. Providing care can be a rich blessing both for those providing and receiving support and encouragement. This can happen in the context of EZMC’s care team and visiting team, youth ministry team, refugee committee, etc..

The desired best practice is that one-to-one visiting occur as part of intentional support or plan. When support is offered on a one-on-one basis, visits typically take place in a public area either inside or outside the organization’s facilities, where both people can be seen by others.

If the visit will not occur in a public place, the following practices should be followed:

- Seek consent from the person to visit and in the case of children, youth or vulnerable adults seek consent from parent/caregiver prior to visiting.
- Let someone else know prior to the planned visit.
- Document the visit.

When visiting or one-to-one interaction involves social media, texting, emails, etc., the Social Media Policy should also be followed.

Those providing one-to-one support or visiting shall work within the limits of their abilities and training.

Should you find yourself in a one-to-one visiting situation, it is recommended that you let someone know immediately (using technology) or as soon as possible following.

3.2.8 Off Premise Activity

Generally church programs and activities take place on church premises. When off-premise activities occur, the following apply:

- Parents / guardians / caregivers must be notified prior to the off-premise activity.

- Waiver forms (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are completed for all activities. As applicable, activity specific waiver forms are also completed prior to the event (e.g., tubing).
- When considering an off-premise activity, volunteers should consider the need for the activity to be off-premise, the location, and additional precautions to be taken. This information should be discussed with the appropriate Lay Minister prior to the offering the activity to participants.
- Volunteers must have a copy of each child, youth and/or vulnerable persons emergency contact information with them when off-site, following the procedures established by the Office Administrator.

3.2.9 Overnight Activities

Generally church programs and activities are not overnight. When overnight activities occur, the following apply:

- Parents / guardians / caregivers must be notified prior to the overnight activity.
- Waiver forms (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are completed for all activities. As applicable activity specific waiver forms are also completed prior to the event (e.g., tubing).
- When considering an overnight activity, volunteers should consider the need for the activity to be overnight and additional precautions to be taken. This information should be discussed with the appropriate Lay Minister prior to the offering the activity to participants.
- When you are supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks.
- Ideally volunteers and children, youth, vulnerable adults should sleep in separate rooms/spaces. When all participants are sleeping in a large common area, volunteers and children should sleep in separate areas of the room/space.
- Volunteers and children must never share a bed.

3.2.10 Transportation

1. EZMC must be clear about the location where the activity happens and where it stops and starts (e.g., meet at church to go to an activity vs meet at the off-premise activity location).
2. When transportation will be provided to an off-premise activity, parents and caregivers will be notified in advance.
3. Waivers (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form) are completed by participants about transportation.
4. When transportation of children, youth and/or vulnerable persons is needed for an off-premise activity, all drivers must have a valid driver's license, valid automobile insurance and must be volunteers or paid staff.
5. The number of persons per vehicle must never exceed the number of seat belts or car seats.

6. The desired best practice is that at least two volunteers are present in the vehicle. Having one volunteer present is an acceptable good practice in the following situations: more than one child, youth and/or vulnerable person is in the vehicle, supervisor notified. Should a volunteer ever find themselves alone in a vehicle with a child, youth, and/or vulnerable person, technology should be used (e.g., call someone) and the supervisor informed as soon as possible.

3.2.11 Photos/Videos (see also EZMC Social Media Policy)

1. At EZMC photos/videos are taken at church activities and events. Some of these photos are used to celebrate our church family and to promote specific programs and activities. This includes website, slideshows, bulletin boards, and the church newsletter.
2. EZMC will not share any of these photos/ videos beyond the church community (with other agencies or publications) without explicit consent.
3. EZMC seeks formal consent regarding sharing of photos/videos from parents/caregivers for all children, youth and vulnerable persons as part of the waiver form (Child/Youth Participant Registration & Waiver Form).
4. Any other church members who do not want their photos/videos to be used must inform the Office Administrator.
5. Program-specific volunteers should not share photos/videos taken during church activities on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.).
6. All church participants should be aware of when they take and share photos/videos.

3.2.12 Communication & Technology

To build and nurture healthy relationships, EZMC encourages communication between members of its community. Communication, whether it be in person, on the telephone, in written, or in digital form, should reflect a commitment to follow Jesus faithfully and shall uphold the principles set out in this policy.

The specific policies and procedures regarding communication and technology are outlined in EZMC's Social Media Policy.

4 Responding

EZMC will comply with all statutory requirements, related to responding to allegations of abuse.

Participants at EZMC may find themselves in one of two different situations with respect to incidents of suspected abuse:

- (1) Suspected abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable persons that is NOT connected to an EZMC program or activity (e.g., EZMC participant or volunteer suspects abuse of a child is or has occurred in the home)
- (2) Suspected abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable persons that is occurred within the context of an EZMC program or activity (e.g., EZMC alleges abuse of a child is or has occurred at the EZMC activity)

Citizens of Ontario have a legal responsibility to report all incidents that fall into situation 1 above directly to the appropriate authorities (i.e., FACS or police).

With the exception of the statement above, the scope of this policy is specific to situation 2 above.

In working to nurture a community of trust and grace, the SCC is responsible for *coordinating* the processes related to responding to reports of abuse within EZMC. If any member of SCC is named in the report of abuse, they shall step back from the committee until the related processes is complete.

Abuse or suspected abuse may be identified in the following ways:

- Abuse, past or present, may be reported by a child, youth and/or vulnerable person or their confidant to a Pastor, a member of the SCC or member of the congregation.
- A Pastor, member of SCC or member of the congregation may believe that Vulnerable Person is being Abused and in need of protection.

All abuse or suspected abuse must be documented and be submitted to the SCC.

An individual may suspect abuse for a number of reasons including: witnessing an abusive incident, observing physical or psychological signs or symptoms of abuse with no report by the child, youth and/or vulnerable person, or hearing a report from the victim or another child, youth and/or vulnerable person. If in doubt what constitutes as abuse, the individual should consult with a representative of the SCC.

It is never appropriate to ask leading questions which might suggest to a child, youth and/or vulnerable person that they have been abused or suggest names, places, or methods of abuse. At times, it may be appropriate to ask a child, youth and/or vulnerable person how an observed symptom appeared (e.g., a bruise on the body).

Investigations into suspected abuse can only be undertaken by Family & Child Services (FACS) or the police.

4.1 Confidentiality when Responding

In recognition of the dignity of each person all reports of suspected abuse are confidential. All written documentation of abuse, including the witness' initial documentation, shall be placed in a locked file in the church office. This file is only accessible by SCC member(s) interacting with FACS and police officials, and, when required, a church-appointed lawyer and/or insurance carrier.

It can be difficult for children, youth and vulnerable persons to come forward with allegations of abuse. To nurture a community of trust, the child, youth and vulnerable persons' identity and their allegation are confidential. Information, including names, will be shared with the following: Pastor(s), external professionals/advisors who may be consulted by the Pastor(s), those immediately involved in receiving and resolving the complaint, and members of the SCC. Information, including names, is only shared beyond the above-mentioned people/groups with written permission from the child, youth and/or vulnerable person or by an order of the court.

It can be difficult for witnesses to come forward with allegations of abuse. To nurture a community of trust, the witness' identity and their allegation are confidential. Information, including names, will be

shared with the following: Pastor(s), advisors who may be consulted by the Pastor(s), those immediately involved in receiving and resolving the complaint, and members of the SCC. Information, including names, is only shared beyond the above-mentioned people/groups with written permission from the witness or by an order of the court.

Allegations of abuse can be difficult for the alleged abuser. To nurture a community of trust, the alleged abuser's identity and their allegation are confidential. Information, including names, will be shared with the following: Pastor(s), advisors who may be consulted by the Pastor(s), those immediately involved in receiving and resolving the complaint, and members of the SCC. Information, including names, is only shared beyond the above-mentioned people/groups with written permission from the alleged or by an order of the court.

4.2 Reporting and Documenting Suspected Abuse with Reasonable Grounds

Any witness who believes, on reasonable grounds, that a child, youth, and/or vulnerable person is or may be in need of protection must document their suspicion, in writing, as soon as possible.

The witness must directly report the suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities (FACS or the police):

- If the Vulnerable Person is a child or youth, the Witness has a duty to report suspicions of abuse to FACS.
- If the Vulnerable Person is a vulnerable adult the Witness is advised to call the police.

The witness may speak with a Pastor or a member of the SCC for support before and/or after making a call to FACS or the police.

The witness must immediately document the suspected abuse and submit the documentation to the SCC. If a Pastor is not a member of the SCC, the Pastors share this information with a member of the SCC.

The child, youth and/or vulnerable person's parents/guardians/family members shall only be notified of the suspicion of abuse in consultation with FACS or the police.

There is an obligation under law to report abuse to provincial authorities. If such an allegation is made about a person who functions under the scope and jurisdiction of EZMC, EZMC will cooperate with provincial authorities and follow their directives.

Both MCEC and EZMC's insurance carrier will be informed of the allegation.

For any situations of sexual misconduct by Pastors, EZMC will follow the policies and procedures as set out by Mennonite Church Canada/Mennonite Church USA Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure.

4.3 Reporting and Documenting Suspected Abuse when Reasonable Grounds are Unclear

Witnesses who are unsure whether there are reasonable grounds to believe a child, youth and/or vulnerable person is in need of protection shall document their suspicion, in writing, as soon as possible.

The witness must immediately submit the documentation to the SCC committee. If a Pastor is not a member of the SCC, the Pastor will share this information with a member of the SCC.

A meeting between the witness and at least two members of SCC will be held as soon as possible after the initial suspicion is shared with the SCC. The content of this meeting will be documented by the SCC.

If, after reviewing documentation and meeting with a witness the SCC, concludes that no reasonable suspicion of abuse exists, SCC shall take steps to keep a written log of any future signs, symptoms or events that may indicate that the child, youth and/or vulnerable person is in need of protection.

If, after reviewing documentation and meeting with the witness and/or if after further observations that confirm Reasonable Grounds, the SCC concludes that there is reasonable suspicion of abuse, the concern becomes a Suspicion with Reasonable Grounds (see above process).

4.4 Reporting and Responding to Allegations that are not investigated by External Authorities

Some situations are a misuse of power by a person in a position of trust and meet the definition of abuse as outlined in the policy, but do NOT require reporting to FACS or police (e.g., a youth leader who is going to the movies with a few specific youth).

Any witness who believes, on reasonable grounds, or suspects that a child, youth and/or vulnerable person has experienced treatment that is a misuse of power by a person in a position of trust and meets the definition of abuse as outlined in this policy but that does require reporting to external authorities, must document their suspicion, in writing, as soon as possible.

The witness must immediately submit the completed documentation to the SCC committee. If a Pastor is not a member of the SCC, the Pastors will share this information with a member of the SCC.

A meeting between the witness and at least two members of SCC will be held as soon as possible after the initial suspicion is shared with the SCC. The content of this meeting will be documented by the SCC.

The SCC or a Response Team identified by the SCC will explore the situation by speaking with the witness, accused and/or children, youth or vulnerable persons who may be impacted. The purpose of this exploration is to determine if a misuse of power is or has occurred (which may or may not have been intentional).

This exploration is not an investigation to prove guilt or innocence, but its intent is to ensure a safe space for all people of EZMC, including children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons, and to promote healthy boundaries for staff, volunteers, and persons who participate at EZMC.

This internal exploration process by SCC or a Response Team may also occur in situations where FACS or police indicate they will not be investigating an allegation, but SCC has concerns about the safety and/or well-being of children, youth and/or vulnerable persons.

4.5 Response and Restoration

Investigations into accusations of abuse are led by FACS, the police and/or, in cases of credentialed ministers, by MCEC.

When a report is made to the appropriate authorities (FACS or the police), the witness shall receive the following instructions on how to respond if the Vulnerable Person, parents, or other interested parties contact them regarding their report. The witness, SCC committee members, and Pastor(s), shall:

- refrain from discussing the specifics of the situation with anyone;
- refrain from sharing any statements made by the child, youth and/or vulnerable person with anyone other than the authorities until the authorities have determined whether or not the child, youth and/or vulnerable person can be protected from contact with the alleged abuser;
- refrain from sharing with any person (including, spouses, parent(s)/guardian(s)) information that has not been reported to the authorities;
- refrain from attempting to convince a parent/guardian that the alleged abuse happened or did not happen;
- listen to any information a parent, guardian or other party may offer about the suspected abuse, recording it immediately after the conversation, and ensuring this additional information is reported in a manner consistent with the original report of suspected abuse;
- assure all people of the confidential nature of the report and the need to maintain confidentiality.

The SCC and the Pastoral Team will designate a group to lead the response in the congregation. This group, called the *Response Team*, may include a member of the SCC and the Pastoral Team. Members of the Response Team may include other members of the congregation in keeping with the situation and the skills and supports required. In cases where a member of the SCC or Pastoral Team are accused, they will withdraw from any leadership of this process.

The Response Team will establish a care plan for the alleged victim and their family. Resources to help people cope with the event will be offered, this may include a referral for counselling.

The Response Team will establish a care plan for the accused person(s) and their family. Resources to help people cope with the event will be offered, this may include a referral for counselling.

Appropriate precautions shall be undertaken to ensure that the alleged victim and other children, youth, or vulnerable persons at EZMC are kept safe during the ongoing investigation by the authorities. Such precautions shall include the following:

- When the accused is an employee of EZMC, the Response Team may, in consultation with MCEC (if the person is a Pastor), and EZMC's leadership body, place the employee on a non-disciplinary leave of absence with pay, pending the outcome of the investigation. The leave of absence shall be given in such a way that no investigation by FACS or the police will be put in jeopardy and it

shall be given in consultation with the authorities. The suspension from duties is not viewed or accepted as the “guilt” of the person, but only as an indication of the priority given to the need to protect children, youth and/or vulnerable persons.

- The Response Team will ensure that there is limited and no unsupervised contact between the accused and other children, youth and/or vulnerable persons within EZMC. In cases of extreme allegations, the accused may be asked not to attend any EZMC events, nor to have contact with any child, youth and/or vulnerable persons associated with EZMC until the outcome of the investigation is known.
- If the person placed on leave is an EZMC Pastor, the Response Team will share with the congregation that a leave with pay has been granted to the Pastor. In cases of extreme allegations, the congregation may become aware of the allegations through media reports. To support the congregation in these cases, the Response Team will consult with MCEC and other experts (e.g., lawyer) regarding what information can be shared with the congregation. Steps will be taken to provide pastoral care to the congregation to cope with the grief and pain these allegations cause.

Regardless of their outcome of an investigation by authorities, investigations can be deeply troubling for congregations. It is EZMC’s desire to promote restoration and healing for the EZMC community while ensuring that EZMC is a safe and welcoming space for all, including children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons.

In all cases, the Response Team will help ensure all parties receive support. This may be provided directly or by referral other services and resources. The Response Team may also have a role in identify appropriate coaching, support or re-training for volunteers and or the temporary or permanent removal from positions of trust.

The Response Team may consult with MCEC and/or another external service provider to navigate the actions of the congregation at this time (if appropriate, information sharing, disciplinary action, conflict resolution, healing work, restoration, etc.).

As required, the Response Team will also identify supports and resources to help the entire congregation. If the investigation finds substantiation of the allegation(s) made against the accused, the following will occur:

- depending on the nature of the allegation, the allegation and the finding may be shared with the congregation as a whole, as well as any disciplinary action to be taken.
- the accused may be asked to resign their previous position or duty within EZMC, dependant on the nature and severity of the offence(s);
- the SCC with support from the Response Team will identify the learning required to limit the likelihood that this situation will occur again; and
- the Response Team will oversee actions to support healing for the individuals involved and EZMC as a whole.

If the investigation finds the accused innocent of the allegations made against them and the accused is a lay person at EZMC, the Response Team will oversee actions to support the restoration and healing of

each of those involved in the situation. If the accused is innocent of the allegations made against them is an EZMC Pastor or staff person, the feasibility of continued work within the present congregation will be ascertained, in consultation with EZMC's leadership and MCEC.

4.6 Non-retaliation

This policy prohibits retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, has:

- invoked this policy on behalf of oneself or another individual;
- participated or cooperated with any exploration, formal investigation, and/or response under this policy;
- been associated with a person who has invoked this policy or participated in these procedures.

5 Records Management

5.1 Volunteer File Retention

1. The Office Administer maintains a list of current and past volunteers.
2. Volunteer records and file maintained indefinitely in a locked cabinet at the church.
3. Volunteer files may be viewed by the office administrator, the Safe Church Committee, Lay Ministers of Christian Education and Nurture, and pastors.

5.2 Waiver/Consent Forms

1. Wavier/Consent forms may be viewed by the Office Administrator, pastors, and volunteers of relevant programs.
2. Copies of the current year's, completed waiver/consent forms are maintained in program specific binders. The relevant binder is accessible to volunteer leaders during programs. At all other times, the binder is stored in a locked cabinet at the church.
3. Annually, the Office Administrator creates summary documents for volunteers. The summary documents created are:
 - a. Lists of Contact Numbers
 - b. Medical Information by program/Sunday school class
4. The original copies of historical completed waiver and consent forms are maintained indefinitely in a locked cabinet at the church. At the end of the year, all duplicate copies are shredded.

6 Confidentiality

In recognition of the dignity of all people, EZMC seeks to maintain the confidentiality and privacy in all matters.

In keeping with this philosophy, EZMC members, participants, volunteers, Safe Church Committee members, Response Team members and pastors and staff will abide with existing privacy laws and regulations, regarding safe church matters, including details about allegations, reviews, external

investigations, potential victims and any responses. This may mean that information will not be shared with the wider congregation.

Pastors, response teams, and external professionals (as applicable) will provide pastoral and congregation support and care while maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of those directly involved.

Information collected on waivers and medical forms is kept confidential and only shared with those volunteers who directly need the information.

7 Policy & Practice Review

The SCC will document the review of this Policy and its related procedures on an annual basis. If issues are identified related to the policy and/or the implementation of its procedures that require attention an action plan will be created, documented and implemented.