

# *Houston Mennonite Church*

## *Policy on Prevention of Abuse of Children & Youth*

As part of the mission and purpose of Houston Mennonite Church, we recognize the need to establish guidelines for appropriate behavior for all people who have dedicated themselves to working with children and youth. In order to bring "...God's love, healing and hope to all..." our church should be viewed as a safe haven for all who enter here.

Houston Mennonite Church will not tolerate any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse – whether it occurs on or off the church campus.

Abuse is defined as: The willful infliction of injury, intimidation, or punishment with resulting physical harm or pain or mental anguish.

Verbal abuse is defined as: Any use of oral, written, or gestured language that includes disparaging and derogatory terms to persons attending our church.

Sexual Abuse is defined as: Abuse in which sexual contact occurs between a person of lesser power and a more powerful person (e.g. adult to child, youth to younger, etc.). Examples of sexual abuse may include but are not limited to: fondling, intercourse, incest, and exploitation of and exposure to pornography or prostitution.

### *Prevention of Abuse*

1. All forms of abuse (as defined and stated above) are forbidden.
2. Activities and/or meetings will take place in rooms with windows in or by the door, or doors will be left open.
3. Children who are able to do so are to use the bathroom themselves. Children who need assistance in the restroom must be helped by their parents or primary caregivers. All diaper changes must be done by parents or primary caregivers.
4. Annual age-appropriate education for abuse prevention (provided by Dove's Nest) will be offered to all HMC children ages 1 and up.
5. All volunteers involved with children or youth must have been regular attendees of the congregation for at least 6 months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
6. All individuals who work with children and youth shall be required to complete education regarding the issues of abuse and exploitation of children and youth.
7. All individuals who work with children and youth shall be required to read the church policy on prevention of abuse and read and sign a covenant agreement.
8. Any persons who have been convicted of a felony, including but not limited to:  
Assault, sexual abuse, rape, incest, indecency with a child, possession or promotion of child



pornography, abandonment or endangerment of a child, possession of illegal drugs and/or illegal drug abuse, shall not be eligible to work with children or youth. Persons who have been accused of such incidents shall not be permitted to work with children or youth until they have been exonerated or rehabilitated, at which point consideration will be given to their continuing work with children or youth.

- 9. Persons under the age of 18 who work with children and/or youth shall work with an adult.
- 10. A background check, including child abuse and sex offender registries and criminal history, will be conducted on all church staff, including the pastor and custodians, before hiring. A background check will also be run on all S.S. teachers, youth leaders, and nursery workers. These background checks must be conducted in all the states the individual has lived in the previous 7 years.

### *Covenant for Children & Youth Workers & Volunteers*

Houston Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by our church.

The policy statements above and below reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church community and campus as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter, and as a place in which all people can experience God’s love, healing, and hope through relationships with others.

Please answer each of the following questions:

- 1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working with children and youth?  Yes  No
- 2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to abide by the six-month rule before beginning a volunteer assignment?  Yes  No
- 3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?  Yes  No
- 4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the pastor and/or Care Team?  Yes  No

I have read this policy and covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

.....  
Full name of applicant – please print

.....  
Signature of applicant Date