

OPERATIONS | Policy: Plan to Protect

In order to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, MCEC and their ministry partners, must provide an environment in which children and youth can grow physically, emotionally and spiritually. We recognize that this requires providing an environment in which the risk of physical, sexual or emotional harm is absolutely minimized through policies that outline expectations of positive relational boundaries between MCEC Staff and/or volunteers and the children or youth at MCEC events.

ABUSE

Healthy relationships are of utmost importance, and include conscientiously modeling healthy physical, sexual and emotional boundaries in which the safety and well-being of children and youth are ensured. There will be no tolerance for abuse, harassment or neglect by Staff and/or volunteers working with minors at MCEC events. All allegations and/or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and handled with the utmost care. The suspected victims will be treated with dignity and respect.

Definitions

In order that it is clearly understood what constitutes unacceptable behaviour, definitions of abuse and related issues are essential. Abuse includes, but is not limited to, the types defined below.

Child Abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver of person in a position of trust (even though s/he may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health, or a child's welfare.¹

Physical Abuse is any deliberate physical force or action that results, or could result, in injury to a child. It can include punching, slapping, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. It is different than what is considered **reasonable discipline**.²

Emotional Abuse is a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's development and sense of self-worth. It includes, excessive, aggressive, or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity. Emotional abuse includes constant criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child.³

Sexual Abuse occurs when a child is used for sexual gratification of an adult or an older child. It can take many forms. This includes

- a. Intercourse

1 Faith Trust Institute 2006

2 The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex 2006

3 The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex 2006

- b. Exposing a child/youth's private areas
- c. Fondling for sexual pleasure
- d. Verbal comments
- e. Pornography, allowing a child to look at or perform pornographic pictures or videos
- f. Obscene phone calls
- g. Exhibitionism
- h. Allowing children and/or youth to witness sexual activity

Coercion (physical, psychological or emotional) is intrinsic to sexual abuse.

- a. **Neglect** is defined as the failure of those responsible for the care of children or youth to meet the physical, emotional or medical needs to an extent that the child's health, development or safety is endangered.⁴
- b. **Harassment** includes, but is not limited to, disturbing, worrying or unnerving, tormenting or distressing with annoying labour, care or misfortune. Harassment can take a variety of subtle or overt forms ranging from name calling to physical confrontation. The "accessory role," whether by silence, laughter, or non-intervention, implies indifference to a particular viewpoint or even tacit approval and is therefore also considered a form of harassment.
- c. **Bullying** occurs when a stronger, more powerful person hurts, frightens or threatens a smaller or weaker person deliberately and repeatedly. It is a series of repeated, intentionally cruel incidents, involving the same children or youth, in the same bully and victim roles. It can also consist of a single interaction.
- d. **Improper Touch and Discipline:** Corporal punishment (punishment administered by an adult to the body of a child ranging in severity from a slap to a spanking) is unacceptable. Touching a child or youth in any area normally covered by a **bathing suit** is unacceptable. Kissing a child or youth, coaxing a child or youth to kiss you, extended hugging and tickling all constitute improper touch. Unacceptable touch includes any touch a child or youth is uncomfortable with even if the touch is well intentioned.

Additional Definitions of Terms Found in this Policy

Adult - anyone 18 years of age and over

Youth - typically students in high school

Child(ren) - anyone under the age of 18, but usually refers to students in elementary school

Bathing Suit - for girls a bathing suit is defined as a one piece suit. In this definition, a bikini or "two piece" is not considered a bathing suit. For boys a bathing suit is defined as trunk shorts

Observed symptoms - any unusual cuts, bruises and/or lacerations on the body or abnormal behaviour unbecoming the child or youth in question

⁴ The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex 2006

Premises is defined as any location, inside or outside, at which an official MCEC event is being held. Premises can also include the period of transit between two locations, such as the bus ride to and from an event

Vulnerable people - includes adults with physical or mental challenges, children, and youth under 18 years of age

Reasonable Discipline - natural consequences for actions that are contrary to the stated rules or expectations of proper behaviour at MCEC events; will not involve physical contact or verbal or emotional abuse

Staff - any person at an MCEC event under the employ of MCEC (excludes people receiving honoraria)

Volunteer - any unpaid person, or person receiving an honorarium, who has been asked by an MCEC Staff person to assist at an MCEC event (e.g. in food preparation, parking, registration, worship, etc.)

Screening

MCEC determines the suitability of all leaders representing MCEC involved with each of its events involving children and/or youth. Depending on this responsibility assessment, various screening procedures are necessary. Any Staff person or volunteer with power or authority over children and/or youth will be subject to the screening assessment and procedures laid out below.

1. Responsibility Assessment

Low Responsibility

- a. MCEC Staff/volunteers have administrative responsibilities only
- b. events where children and/or youth do not attend
- c. events where there are no planned activities for children and/or youth

Medium Responsibility

- a. events where children and/or youth are in groups with more than one adult at all times

High Responsibility

- a. events with an overnight component
- b. events where personnel would have an opportunity to be alone with children and/or youth
- c. includes any Staff persons or volunteers who are in a position of power and/or trust

2. Screening Procedures

All volunteers and Staff who represent MCEC at junior youth and youth events, without exception, must be screened. All event settings will have two leaders in place who are fully screened and trained.

Recruitment and screening steps will be completed prior to volunteers and Staff being placed a position of trust. However, should calendar pressures or mid-year vacancies make it impossible for MCEC to have volunteers or Staff complete all steps prior to serving, the individual will have limited access to children and youth and will not be placed in a position of trust.

Individuals who have been accused, or convicted, or are under the suspicion of crimes against children and/or youth, or who have been convicted of violent crimes or other relevant crimes will not have any involvement in ministries or programs where children or youth participate.

Depending on the responsibility assessment, the following screening procedures will be employed to qualify Staff and/or volunteers for medium and high responsibility ministry service.

Medium Responsibility

- a. targeted or voluntary recruitment
- b. volunteer application form, and release of information and declaration of intent
- c. background reference checks

High Responsibility

- a. targeted recruitment
- b. volunteer application form, and release of information and declaration of intent
- c. background reference checks
- d. minimum waiting period
- e. police vulnerable sector checks

Targeted Recruitment

Personnel for volunteer positions will be recruited by MCEC or representatives because of their specific skills. Targeted volunteers are placed in positions following successful screening.

Application Form and Release of Information and Declaration of Intent

All volunteers must complete a Volunteer Registration Form (Appendix A), providing personal information, education, employment and volunteer history, congregational involvement and references. The form will determine an applicant's suitability to work with children and youth. A signed and witnessed Release of Information and Declaration of Intent (Appendix B) must be submitted with the registration form. Completed forms will be kept on file in the fire proof filing cabinet, indefinitely.

Background Reference Checks

Volunteers and paid Staff who fall under the high and medium responsibility category must give the name of their minister as a reference, plus two additional references. All references will be contacted by telephone or email and record of the conversation will be signed by the person who made the contact. MCEC Staff will keep record of contact with these references using the Reference Check Form (Appendix C).

Minimum waiting period

Any volunteer who falls under high responsibility and who is not known to an MCEC congregation for at least six (6) months will not be placed in a position of trust.

Police Vulnerable Sector Checks

All Staff and volunteers who fall under the high responsibility category will need to supply police checks. Costs for the police checks will be covered by MCEC (Template letter for reduced cost – Appendix D). Volunteers and Staff with ongoing involvement in MCEC events and programs will be

required to get a police vulnerable sector check every two years. All police checks are kept indefinitely by MCEC.

Volunteer Covenants will be signed by volunteers at the time of acceptance as a fully screened MCEC volunteer. (Appendix E)

Adults at events other than those recruited specifically by MCEC

Youth sponsors and other responsible adults from congregations normally attend events along with their youth. Each congregation will be responsible for screening their own sponsors/leaders; a letter will be sent to churches outlining their responsibilities. (Appendix F)

Responsibility Categorization

| Type of Event | Example | Personnel | Responsibility Level | Screening Responsibility |
|--|---|---|----------------------|--|
| Youth and Junior Youth Events with Overnight Component | Youth and Junior Youth Retreats; Bus Trips | MCEC Staff attending event, planning committee | High | MCEC |
| | | Staff from partner agencies | High | Partner agency |
| | | Youth ministers/sponsors/parents | High | congregation |
| | | Workshop leaders, guest speakers, bus captains, music bands, cooks | Medium | MCEC unless screened by their congregation or ministry partner |
| Youth and Junior Youth Day Events | Junior Youth Make a Difference Day; Bible Quizzing | MCEC Staff attending event, planning committee | High | MCEC |
| | | Staff from partner agencies | High | Partner agency |
| | | Youth ministers/sponsors/parents/congregational volunteers | High | congregation |
| | | Workshop leaders, guest speakers, quiz volunteers, music bands, cooks/servers | Medium | MCEC unless screened by their congregation or ministry partner |

1. Protocol and Guidelines

Suspicions of potential child abuse may be raised in a number of ways, including actual witnessing of an abusive incident, observing physical or psychological signs; symptoms of abuse with no actual report by the child/youth; hearing a report from the victim or another child/youth. In the case of any suspected child abuse, the following procedures shall be observed in the order enumerated below

- a. While it may, at times, be appropriate to ask a child/youth how an **observed symptom** appeared, it is never appropriate to ask any leading questions which might suggest to a child/youth that s/he has been abused or suggest names, places or methods of abuse. Further, no person shall conduct any investigation or question any individuals regarding suspected child abuse unless otherwise authorized by the appropriate authorities. Such investigations can be undertaken only by the Family and Children's Services or the police.
- b. Any MCEC volunteer or employee having reasonable suspicion of the abuse of a child/youth attending a MCEC sponsored event must advise a MCEC or Ministry Partners Staff person responsible for the event before reporting the suspicion to the local Family and Children's Services (Appendix I for contact information) or the police. If none of these persons are available, the volunteer or employee must not delay the reporting of the concerns to the authorities. Reporting must be done immediately.

This report may initially be on a consultative basis without revealing the identity of any person involved, but if the police or the Family and Children's Services representative indicates that an investigation must be undertaken, then all pertinent information must be provided. Any delay in reporting or providing the appropriate information may place the child/youth at further risk.

- c. It is expected that any witness(es) to **observed symptoms** or events raising concern regarding abuse of children and/or youth will document their observations in an Incident Report Form (Appendix G), according to the Incident and/or Accident Reporting Policy (Appendix H), including
 - i. specific signs of **observed symptoms**
 - ii. any report of abuse made by the child/youth or others, and/or any witnessed event that raised the suspicion
 - iii. the date and time relating to any of the above
 - iv. any response the child/youth made to any of the above

This report is to be written and signed as soon as possible after the appropriate reporting to MCEC Staff, Ministry Partners and/or the authorities. The report will then be kept by the MCEC Staff person responsible for the event as well as a log of all follow-up involvements regarding the concern.

- d. Any report and subsequent documentation of suspected child abuse is to be considered and treated as confidential. Access to this information will be limited to specified persons in MCEC

- responsible for providing leadership in this area, Family and Children's Services, and police. When required, an MCEC-appointed attorney and/or insurance carrier will also have access.
- e. The notification of the child's and/or youth's parents/guardian of the suspicion of abuse will be carried out only in consultation with the Family and Children's Services or the police.
 - f. It is recognized that the witness(es) to any suspicions of child abuse will require support, especially once a report is made to the authorities. Appropriate pastoral support is key to their well-being, and they should also be instructed on how to respond if the child/youth, parents, or other interested parties contact him/her. Such instructions should include
 - i. refraining from sharing any statement made by the child/youth with anyone other than the authorities until the authorities have determined whether or not the child/youth needs to be protected from contact with the person in question
 - ii. refraining from sharing information with the parent, or any other person that has not been reported to the authorities. All information must be promptly reported to the Family and Children's Services
 - iii. refraining from attempting to convince a parent that the alleged abuse happened or did not happen
 - iv. listening to any information a parent or other party may offer about the suspected abuse, recording it immediately after the conversation, and ensuring that the additional information is reported in a manner consistent with the original report of the suspected abuse
 - v. assuring parents of the confidential nature of the report and the need to maintain confidentiality
 - g. Appropriate precautions must be undertaken to ensure that the victim of abuse and other children at the event or subsequent events are kept safe during the ongoing investigation by authorities. Such precautions should include the following
 - i. If the accused is an employee or volunteer of the event s/he will immediately be suspended from his/her office or duty, pending the outcome of the investigation
 - ii. The suspension will be carried out with full pay (for paid personnel) and without prejudice
 - iii. Suspension shall be given in such a way that the investigation by the Family and Children's Services or police will not be jeopardized
 - iv. The suspension from duties will not be viewed or accepted as the "guilt" of the accused, but only as an indication of the priority given to protect the victim(s)
 - v. An official will be designated to disclose to MCEC Staff and the congregations involved the facts, as known at the time, without disclosing any names of persons involved
 - vi. All of the above steps will be carried out in consultation with the authorities
 - h. Plans for pastoral and possibly clinical support of all parties involved will be developed as soon as the investigation is under way.
 - i. The decision whether or not to reinstate the accused to his/her previous position or duty will be dependent on the outcome of the investigation. Reinstatement will be done only if it is deemed safe and proper to do so; therefore, in consultation with the police, Family and Children's Services, legal counsel and child abuse experts. If the accused is reinstated, efforts will be made to restore strained relationships and facilitate a healing process.

- j. In the event of prosecution resulting in conviction, the abuser will not be restored to his/her previous position or duty within MCEC.

2. Team Approach

At all MCEC sponsored events involving children and/or youth, a team approach will be employed to ensure that there are always two or more adults present. In rare circumstances, an MCEC Staff member who has undergone the appropriate screening outlined in the “Screening” section may be in a situation where s/he will be alone with a group of children and/or youth. To guarantee accountability in this situation, the following points will be adhered to

- a. The Staff member will ensure that at least one Staff member is fully aware of the nature and location of the event
- b. The Staff member with the group will be clear to at least one other Staff member about beginning and end times for meetings
- c. The appropriate administrative assistant will have clear information concerning location and schedule for the meeting.

All youth and junior youth events will have an adult sponsor:youth ratio of 1:5 for events with an overnight component, including bus trips, or 1:7 for day events. Both male and female MCEC Staff or reps must be present at overnight events where there are participants of both genders.

3. Out of Program/Off-Premises Contact

- a. Out of Program Contact: MCEC Staff and **volunteers** running MCEC programs are strongly discouraged from social contact with children and/or youth outside of the program.
- b. Off-Premises Contact: Contact between MCEC Staff and adults running MCEC programs with children and/or youth off of the **premises** is not allowed. Children and/or youth are required to stay on the **premises** of an MCEC event at all times unless a specific part of the program requires groups of people to leave together and there is more than one adult present. (e.g. a hike at a youth retreat).

4. Discipline

Physical forms of discipline are not acceptable. Corporal punishment as a form of discipline is prohibited. Physical restraint of an out-of-control vulnerable person is appropriate if it is necessary to ensure the safety of the person or the safety of other participants at the event.

If Staff or a volunteer person needs to talk with an individual child or youth in confidence, the conversation will be held in the presence of another adult or out of earshot but in view of at least one other adult. If this is not possible the Staff or volunteer person 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.

5. Acceptable and Unacceptable Touching

- a. Acceptable Touching: Love and caring can be expressed in the following acceptable ways
 - i. Bending down to the child’s eye level and speaking kindly to him or her carefully
 - ii. Putting an arm around the shoulder of a child who needs quieting or comforting

- iii. Patting a child on the head, hand, shoulder or back to affirm him or her

All touch must be done in view of others.

- b. Inappropriate Touching not only includes instances where touching is initiated by the adult, but also when initiated by a youth or child to an adult. Staff and volunteers must avoid the following
 - i. Kissing a child or youth, coaxing a child or youth to kiss you, extended hugging and tickling
 - ii. Touching a child or youth in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit
 - iii. Carrying older children or having them sit on your lap
 - iv. Being alone with a child or youth
 - v. Massaging a child or youth

6. Documentation for Staff, Volunteers and Events

Documentation pertaining to Staff, volunteers, and events will be kept on file indefinitely.

Documentation includes the following:

- a. Most recent Police checks
- b. Reference Checks
- c. Volunteer Registration Form (see section 2.B. - Volunteer Registration)
- d. Ministry Covenant
- e. Accurate lists of participants and contact information, made up for each event and kept in a safe place during the event

Parental Consent

Congregations will be responsible for obtaining parental consent for children and youth who are attending MCEC events.

Premises

Most, but not all, MCEC events take place in rented facilities, MCEC church buildings or camps.

- a. **Open Door Policy:** Facilities with windows in doors will be preferred. If no windows exist in doors for rooms being used, an open door policy will be employed unless two or more adults are present in the room.
- b. **Monitor Designation:** MCEC Staff and/or volunteers responsible for any given event will monitor all rooms periodically.
- c. **Access/Entry:** If possible only one outside door will be unlocked during the event. Once registration is over this door will be locked if possible.
- d. **Cabins:** A minimum of two adults will be assigned to each cabin. Individual adults are never to be alone in a room with a child or youth. At no time should personnel sleep in the same bed with a child or youth. Any individuals who are not sponsors or have been screened by MCEC for medium responsibility or less should have separate sleeping arrangements.
- e. **Outdoor Venues:** Children and youth may not wander off on their own. They must remain in sight of at least two adults at all times. If a child needs to leave the site (i.e. washroom), they must advise an

adult.

Responding

- a. Staff and volunteers will take seriously any report from a child or youth of perceived abuse.
- b. Legal steps and procedures as outlined in Operational Procedures (section C), will be followed.
- c. We will refrain from admitting liability or from making public statements without obtaining formal legal counsel. Assurance of confidentiality will be provided for both the alleged victim and perpetrator.
- d. We will immediately contact our insurance broker to satisfy the statutory conditions of our liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.
- e. Incident and/or Accident Report Form: Unusual experiences that occur at MCEC events will be recorded. A report (Appendix G) must be completed as soon as possible following the incident, according to the Incident and/or Accident Reporting Policy. (See appendix H)

Safety

MCEC and ministry partners will take every precaution to ensure children and youth remain safe and uninjured. Emergency contact information will be collected for every participant in accordance with Mennonite Church Canada Privacy Policy and taken to the event. If participants require ongoing medical supervision during the event, the sponsor/adult leader for that congregation will be responsible.

- a. Fire - If a fire breaks out, all event participants will follow the evacuation procedures outlined by the premises. All MCEC Staff and Ministry Partners must be aware of the procedures and escape routes.
- b. Photos – No photographs of children and youth will be taken without prior approval. No photographs will be posted on Facebook, MCEC website or other online social networks without approval from parents/guardians.
- c. Transportation – When transportation is being provided by MCEC, such as a bus, MCEC will choose a credible carrier with highly qualified drivers.

Training

This policy and procedures will be made available to all Staff and volunteers working with children and youth for each event at the time of employment, first meeting, or other designated time. The policy will be reviewed at the start of events with all Staff and volunteers. The policy will be posted at www.mcec.ca.

4. How long have you attended the congregation named in question 2 of this form?

Church _____ Years Attended _____

Church _____ Years Attended _____

5. In order to provide a safe and secure environment for children and youth, we believe it is necessary to ask the following questions as part of our screening process. All information collected will be kept in confidence by MCEC and will not be disclosed unless required by law.

Have you ever been charged with a criminal offense? Yes No

If yes, please list offence(S) and the date(s) of conviction (use the back of this page as needed).

Have you ever been investigated for suspected child abuse? Yes No

If yes, please list date(s) and outcomes of investigation (use the back of this page as needed).

Please use your minister as a reference and provide two (2) additional references who are not family members

Full name: _____ Relationship to you: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Full name: _____ Relationship to you: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Full name: _____ Relationship to you: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

6. Volunteer Statement: I acknowledge that the above information is correct to the best of my knowledge and acknowledge that I have read and understood MCEC's Plan to Protect and agree to comply.

Signature _____ Date _____



Appendix B
Release of Information and Declaration of Intent

I hereby give MCEC consent to verify the information provided by me in the Volunteer Registration Form and to contact the references provided and obtain and verify any information from them (and any other persons that MCEC determines might be able to provide relevant information) that may be relevant to my application.

I will provide a police records check when requested.

I grant MCEC permission to perform an internet search on me, if deemed necessary, and to review and consider any information found about me on the internet.

I understand that if MCEC approves my volunteer application and later determines, in its discretion, or any time that I am not suitable for volunteer service in MCEC or for the volunteer position for which I am applying, MCEC may terminate my volunteer service or volunteer position for any reason without advance notice.

If MCEC approves my application for a volunteer position, I will sign any documents that MCEC requires and will at all times cooperate fully with the Staff of the church in the fulfillment of my duties and will keep all confidential information I encounter in my role as a volunteer, confidential.

If at any time I determine that for any reason I am unable to support or adhere to or follow the policies, procedures or doctrine of MCEC, I will inform MCEC and will resign my volunteer position.

I hereby acknowledge that, to the best of my knowledge, the information contained in this Volunteer Registration Form is true and correct.

Signature of Applicant _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Information received is confidential and is being gathered for the purposes of considering your application for volunteer ministry with MCEC and for determining what, if any MCEC ministries, you may be suited for in the future.

Appendix C
Reference Check Form
(Confidential)

Record of contact with a reference identified by applicant for ministry with children or youth.

Name of applicant _____

| Date of contact | Name of reference | Person contacting reference | Method of contact. (e.g. E-mail, letter) | Summary of contact |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Questions to ask References

Explain that you are calling in regard to an applicant who has identified them as a reference.

Explain what the applicant is applying for.

Explain MCEC’s Plan to Protect Policy and why reference checks are necessary.

1. What is the context of your relationship with the applicant?
2. Would you have any reservations with this person being around youth?
3. What are this person’s strengths and weaknesses?
4. Would you describe this person as someone who follows through with commitments s/he makes?
5. Any other comments?

Appendix D

Date

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to verify that a Vulnerable Sector Check is required for first and last name of volunteer, address of volunteer. First name will be volunteering as a volunteer position for MCEC's name of event. Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) is the denominational office for Mennonite Churches in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. Describe the event, what the volunteer's position would be, and the volunteer's responsibilities towards children/youth.

I, name of supervisor, am an employee of MCEC and by signing below am certifying the information provided is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sincerely,

Supervisor's Name

Position

Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

201-50 Kent Ave.

Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

P: 226-476-2500 / 1-855-476-2500 (ext. _____)

E: _____

W: www.mcec.ca