

# THE PROTECTION AND ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY FOR MERIDIAN FRIENDS CHURCH

## I. BACKGROUND PRINCIPLES

Safeguarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of children, youth and disabled adults is one of the most important responsibilities for ministry organizations. We, at Meridian Friends Church, are deeply aware of that responsibility. Abuse of all types damages trust. It inflicts deep spiritual, physical and/or emotional wounds. Abuse results in lies that are destructive, especially emotionally.

As a caring church, sensitive to the needs of our families, it is of utmost importance to establish a policy for all persons, paid or volunteer, who minister to/with children, youth, and disabled adults under our care and supervision. Meridian Friends Church will take necessary steps, both legally and morally, to prevent and report the abuse of children, youth, and disabled adults with/to whom we minister.

This policy reflects the commitment of Meridian Friends Church to provide:

- A. Protective care for all children, youth, and disabled adults.
- B. Guidance and protection for paid and volunteer workers who minister to/with children, youth, and disabled adults.
- C. Protection for the various ministries of Meridian Friends Church.
- D. Information and instruction regarding policies and procedures relating to the protection of children, youth, and disabled adults, and prevention of child abuse.
- E. This policy does not negate the responsibility of the parent to protect their children, nor does this policy allow an individual to evade responsibility for their own action.

## II. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions will be used for the purposes of the Protection and Abuse Prevention Policy of Meridian Friends Church:

- A. **Abuse**: Abuse means any case in which a child has been the victim of
  1. conduct or omission resulting in skin bruising, bleeding, malnutrition, burns, fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, soft tissue swelling, failure to thrive or death, and such condition or death is not justifiably explained, or where the history given concerning such condition or death is at variance with the degree or type of such condition or death, or the circumstances indicate that such condition or death may not be the product of an accidental occurrence; or
  2. sexual conduct, including rape, molestation, incest, prostitution, obscene or pornographic photographing, filming or depiction for commercial purposes, or other similar forms of sexual exploitation harming or threatening the child's health or welfare or mental injury to the child; or

3. neglect, meaning a child who is without proper parental care and control, or subsistence, education, medical or other care or control necessary for his well-being because of the conduct or omission of his parents, guardian or other custodian or their neglect or refusal to provide them.

NOTE: The above three statements are quoted from Idaho Code 16-1602.

- B. **Child/Youth:** An unmarried person under the age of eighteen (18) who is not an emancipated minor.
- C. **Disabled Adult:** A cognitive, emotional, or physical impairment for a person over the age of eighteen (18); an adult who is vulnerable (unable to protect himself/herself from abuse).
- D. **Staff:** A person who is paid by the church to perform a specific function, e.g., Assistant Pastor, Youth Coordinator, Children's Coordinator, Senior Pastor, or Nursery Worker.
- E. **Volunteer Worker:** A person who does not receive pay and performs some sort of ministry or work, e.g. Sunday school teacher or small group leader.
- F. **Occasional Worker:** A volunteer who does not have a regular assignment and serves as a substitute when needed.
- G. **Primary Leaders:** Primary leaders of Meridian Friends Church include all paid staff, the Presiding Clerk, clerks of all Ministry Teams, all youth and children's workers, people working with the disabled, and the entire Christian Education Ministry Team
- H. **Church Officer:** Persons who are duly elected or appointed to fill an office in the church.
- I. **Two Adult Rule:** Adults working with children, youth, and disabled adults should observe the Two Adult Rule during all church sponsored events where feasible (Rule of Three if the Two Adult Rule is not feasible). This suggests that an adult is never with a child up to age 13 without another person being present, except in public places in view of others and with parental/guardian permission. It is recommended that the second person be of the opposite sex. For children thirteen years of age and older, adults should never meet with a child or a group of children without another adult present, except in public places in view of others and with parental permission. (See Section III.E. for more information).
- J. **Rule of Three:** At least three individuals (at least one being a previously screened adult) must be present at every function and in each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area during all activities involving children, youth, or disabled adults.

### III. **SPECIFIC POLICIES**

- A. **Screening Requirements for New Applicants.** In order to adequately protect our children, these are the procedures for screening paid and volunteer children's, youth, and disabled adult worker as well as all primary leaders of MFC. This includes all paid staff, the Presiding Clerk, clerks of all Ministry Teams, all youth and children's workers, people working with the disabled, and the entire Christian Education Ministry Team.

1. Church Attendance. All workers, paid and volunteer, who minister to/work with any ministry, program or event generally should have attended Meridian Friends Church for

at least six (6) months on a regular basis (average 3 times/month) before they will be considered for ministry to/with children, youth, or disabled adults. Exceptions might be made for people who are well-known, e.g. local teachers, police, etc., for people with special expertise, or who have attended another Friends Church for at least six (6) months, or on a case-by-case basis as approved by the Christian Education Ministry Team or Spiritual Life Ministry Team.

2. **Screening Form.** All primary leaders will complete a *Screening Form for Ministry Workers*. These forms are confidential and will be kept in a locked file.
3. **Applicant Interview.** A follow-up interview with the Education Clerk or a member of the Pastoral Staff will be scheduled. The results of the interview will be kept in a locked file with the person's completed Screening form.
4. **Criminal History Check.** All applicants must be willing to submit to a criminal history check, which will be repeated at least every three (3) years. Any volunteer candidates with a prior conviction of child abuse or currently under investigation by the State will not be selected as a volunteer worker. He/she will be encouraged to minister in other areas of the church under the guidance of the Senior Pastor and Spiritual Life Ministry Team. All documents, including the application and criminal history check, will be kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet.
5. **Training.** All primary leaders will sign the *Meridian Friends Church New Applicant Statement* form every three (3) years, agreeing in writing to follow church policies in order to work with children, youth, and disabled adults. Child abuse information will be a part of annual training meetings or policy review meetings of children, youth or disabled adult workers including definition, prevention, reporting, and victim support. Attendance at these trainings is strongly encouraged.

**B. On-Going Training and Education.** Continuing ministry involvement at Meridian Friends Church is contingent on the following:

1. All primary leaders must submit to a criminal history check, which will be repeated at least every three (3) years.
2. Primary leaders will be required to sign the Continuing Ministry Statement agreeing in writing to follow church policies in order to work with children, youth and disabled adults.
3. Primary leaders must complete the Northwest Yearly Meeting approved training at least every three (3) years provided by MinistrySafe.com.

**C. Locked File.** Contents of the "locked file" should be kept **CONFIDENTIAL AT ALLTIMES.**

Access to these records will be restricted to:

1. The Clerk of the Christian Education Ministry Team.
2. Pastoral Staff.

**D. Restrictions.** Any person who may pose a threat to children, youth, or disabled adults will be prohibited from working in any ministry involving children, youth, or disabled adults. Persons who have a founded report of abuse against another person of any age, have a criminal record which includes any crime of violence, or are under investigation for a crime are NOT eligible for any type of volunteer or paid work with children, youth, or disabled adults in Meridian Friends Church or activities. If there is a previous conviction of another crime not including abuse against another person or any crime of violence, there must be a lapse of one year from the time of conviction before serving with children, youth, or disabled adults. If there are more than one previous criminal convictions, not including abuse against

another person or any crime of violence, applicants will need to be approved by the Christian Education Ministry Team or Spiritual Life Ministry Team.

- E. **Two Adult Rule.** Supervision:
1. Adults working with children, youth, and disabled adults should observe the Two Adult Rule where feasible (Rule of Three if the Two Adult Rule is not feasible. See definitions.) during all church sponsored events.
  2. Limited Exception: Limited exception to the Two Adult Rule include Emergency Situations (e.g., isolation of a child during illness for the safety of the child and other children and workers).
- F. **Physical Contact.** Staff and volunteers working with children, youth or disabled adults must use only appropriate physical contact at all times including, but not limited to, touching a child's hand; no tickling and/or no touching of private body areas. Appropriate touching takes into account the situation and location. For example, a hug may be appropriate in a public place, but not in a private location in the church.
- G. **Discipline.** Staff and volunteers working with children, youth or disabled adults are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, threaten violence or otherwise physically discipline anyone. Physical restraint should only be used in a situation where it is deemed necessary to prevent harm. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the appropriate coordinator or supervisor and/or parent or guardian.
- H. **Immediate Reporting.** Staff and volunteers working with children, youth, or disabled adults must immediately report to the specific program supervisor any behavior that appears to be abusive or potentially inappropriate. This does not affect or replace any requirement for a report of child abuse under state law or any other law.
- I. **Occasional Workers.** There may be situations where “occasional” volunteer workers are required to fulfill a specific ministry with children, youth, or disabled adults in order to meet the Two Adult rule. Occasional workers may serve as a substitute worker though they may not have been through worker screening or training, but must serve alongside a worker who has been through the screening and training. Occasional workers must be regular attenders (avg. 3 times/month) for at least six (6) months. Exceptions may be made by the approval of the Education Ministry Team. For example: college students home for the summer, winter travelers home for the summer, interns, or newly hired staff people. They will be asked to complete a *Screening Form for Occasional Ministry Workers*, the criminal history check and the Ministry Safe training.
- J. **Classroom Observation.** It is strongly recommended that windows be present in all classroom doors or other areas used by children, youth, and disabled adults. The Christian Education Ministry Team Clerk and Pastoral Staff may regularly observe all activities and visit all areas.
- K. **Restroom Visits.**
1. When taking young children to the rest room, be especially careful to give them as much privacy as possible. Diapers can be changed by an approved individual and must follow the Two Adult Rule.
  2. When using the restroom, children and disabled adults shall be accompanied by a

screened adult to and from the restroom. Before any child or disabled adult enters the restroom, the screened adult will enter the restroom to make sure that it is safe. If assistance is required, the screened adult will assist the individual with the door propped open so that a second screened adult can visually monitor the assisting adult. It is required that two screened adults be present when assistance is needed in the restroom.

3. When restrooms are directly accessible to children from the room where children's activities are taking place and not accessible to the general public, children can be allowed to utilize the restroom alone.

L. **Nursery Policies.** Establish and follow strictly a sign-in/sign-out system for all nursery age children. Nursery workers are encouraged to know the adults who will be picking up the children.

M. **Transportation.**

1. Transportation to Meridian Friends Church sponsored activities is to be provided only from the church to the activity and from the activity back to the church. Transportation between the home and the church and return is the responsibility of the parents or guardians to arrange.
2. Transportation of children, youth, and disabled adults for a church sponsored activity is to be provided by drivers that are at least 21 years of age, are authorized by Meridian Friends Church, have a current driver's license and proof of insurance. Event sponsors are responsible for making copies of this information prior to the activity. This photocopied information should be given to the Pastoral Staff or Education Ministry Team Clerk. In addition, each driver will complete a screening form that will authorize a criminal history check. All driver information, screening form, and results of the criminal history check will be kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet.
3. The Activity Coordinator will carry permission slips and liability waivers for each child, which have been duly signed by the child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s). These slips may be signed annually and kept in an appropriate file.
4. The "Two Adult Rule" is especially important when providing transportation. It is *also* advisable for two or more children to be present in each vehicle. A caravan of vehicles is a unique case where multiple screened adults are rotating drivers, e.g. three vehicles with five drivers. See also definition for Rule of Three.
5. The use of 15-passenger vans to transport individuals under age 19 is prohibited unless signed parental or guardian consent is obtained.

N. **Sexual Offender Chaperone Policy.** In the event that a registered sex offender is attending Meridian Friends Church, the following steps must be taken to manage risk:

1. Obtain a record of the sex offender's prior criminal convictions.
2. If the sex offender is on probation, identify his/her probation officer and assess the conditions that have been imposed. In some cases, sex offenders are not allowed to attend church. If the probation officer says the offender is free to attend church, ask the officer if he/she recommends the offender attend church, and if so, under what conditions. Obtain this information in writing, or create a detailed written account of the officer's response. This information will be kept in a locked file.
3. Condition the sex offender's right to attend church services and activities by having him/her sign a "conditional attendance agreement" that imposes the following conditions:
  - a. The sex offender will always be in the presence of a designated chaperone while on church property.

- b. The sex offender will not attend any youth or children's functions while on the church property, except for those involving his or her own child/children, and only if in the presence of a chaperone.
- c. A single violation of these conditions will result in an immediate termination of the sex offender's privilege to attend the church.

O. **Social Networking Practices.** With the increasing number of people using new media communication over traditional forms, it is important to maintain healthy boundaries and practices for adults communicating with children, youth, or disabled adults. All communication across all platforms (email, text, social media, etc.) between an adult and a minor must include a 2<sup>nd</sup> adult. If a parent or child reports inappropriate communication from any adult, a report to the education clerk or pastoral staff should be made.

P. **Media Publication**

- 1. All volunteer workers should take care to secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of children, youth, and disabled adults who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- 2. Any time the church intends to distribute video of its services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media, the church will post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
- 3. Church services and activities are not considered public space and therefore the church must inform participants when they are being videoed.
- 4. Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for children, youth, or disabled adults.

Q. **Policy Review.** All policies, procedures and guidelines with respect to The Protection and Abuse Prevention Policy should be reviewed each year to make certain they are up to date. The Christian Education Ministry Team is responsible to see that this is done.

#### **IV. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE, SUSPECTED OR WITNESSED**

A. **Guidelines for Dealing with Child Abuse:**

If a child reports abuse or improper touching:

- 1. Believe the child.
- 2. Protect the child.
- 3. Report the abuse in compliance with state law (see the procedure below).

Note: If abuse is disclosed it is important to limit the amount of follow-up questions asked of the child, youth, or disabled adult to not interfere with a further investigation by trained interviewers.

B. **How Should the Report be Made?**

- 1. When a volunteer worker witnesses child abuse, or is told of child abuse by a party involved, that person must promptly contact the Education Clerk or a member of the Pastoral Staff and make a report, or cause a report to be made to the appropriate child protection services and local police agency. This is not to be discussed with the child in question.
- 2. When a staff member or volunteer worker has cause to believe that abuse has occurred, but has not observed the abusive conduct, that person must report the information to the Education Clerk or a member of the Pastoral Staff and make a report to the local

authorities. Discussion with the child should be kept to a minimum. Suspected individuals should not be contacted at this time.

3. Witnessed or suspected child abuse shall be recorded on the *Suspected Child Abuse Report Form*. The form shall be completed as soon as possible following the verbal report, and should be in as much detail as possible. Special attention should be given to time, place, what was witnessed or suspected, person making the report, indicators of abuse, visible signs of any injury on the child, and/or any volunteered information given by the child (without interviewing the child), etc.
4. The Senior Pastor shall report all relevant information concerning suspected or observed abuse to the Yearly Meeting Superintendent. Otherwise, all aspects of the report, verbal and written, shall be maintained confidential except to the extent required for reporting purposes to avoid mistaken accusation. The written reports shall be maintained in a locked church office.

## **V. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE**

- A. Meridian Friends Church is obligated to follow and be in compliance with all state reporting laws.
- B. Proper responses to allegations of child abuse can minimize the pain and liability for all parties involved in a given situation. It is the goal of Meridian Friends Church to respond to allegations in a manner that people's rights to privacy and confidentiality is maintained at the highest possible level. Adequate care and support for both the alleged victim and the accused shall be considered mandatory at all times.
- C. In the case of an allegation of child abuse against a worker serving in the ministry of the church, the following steps shall be taken:
  1. The Education Clerk or the Pastoral Staff shall document all efforts used when dealing with the allegation.
  2. The allegation will be reported as soon as possible to the Senior Pastor.
  3. The Senior Pastor shall report the incident as soon as possible to the applicable insurance company and/or attorney and to Northwest Yearly Meeting Superintendent.
  4. The accused shall be relieved of duties until the prompt investigation of said accusation is completed.
  5. Follow the counsel of an attorney and/or insurance company representative when reporting to Services for Children and Families (within 24 hours as required by State law).
  6. Parents or guardians of the alleged victim shall be notified as soon as possible.
  7. If the accused is under the age of 18, his/her parents or guardians shall be notified as soon as possible.
  8. The alleged victim must be supported by all the love and care that is reasonably possible.
  9. The accused must be treated with dignity, support and Christian love.
  10. All means must be taken to ensure confidentiality at all levels of this process. Disclosure of information regarding the abuse or suspected abuse is prohibited, except as required for reporting purposes.