

**New Minas Baptist Church
Next Generations**

Abuse Prevention Policy

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For information about this policy please contact our Next Generations Pastor at either office@nmbc.ca or 902-681-7683.

Introduction

Children, declare the Scriptures, are a gift from the Lord. In a sense, we are all children and need the protection and nurture of one another to grow and mature in Christ. Leaders in ministries need to know that they are protected and as safe as possible from harm while they minister. Little children and youth in our church and under our care also need the ministries they are part of to be a place where they can feel safe and loved, as God loves them, without the fear of being used or damaged by those in position of authority over them. The local church is an extension of the family, and for some, it is the only real family they know. This document is written with the hopes that the New Minas Baptist Church will do everything in its power to ensure the ministries, leaders, children and youth in it's care can rest in the confidence that their church family is providing a safe community for them.

Children and youth are very vulnerable to being abused by people in power and authority. It should be recognized that the way our church functions may create opportunities for the vulnerable to be damaged by people in power or authority over them within the context of ministry. Today, the sexual, physical or emotional abuse of children/youth in the church is a reality that is being looked at closely by the general public.

We need to acknowledge that there are people who prey on children and youth and that on the outside, they do not look any different than anyone else. Our church has a responsibility to protect the children, youth and leaders to whom we minister and offer an environment and community that is safe and consistent with the Word of grace and truth we proclaim.

Policies and procedures around safety in ministries to children and youth are vitally important and every reasonable effort must be made to make the church facilities and church programs places of safety for all children, youth and leaders. It cannot be overstated that clear policies and procedures will serve to protect not only the children and youth, but also those who work with them, the church as a whole and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The devastation that follows an allegation of abuse reaches far beyond the one single event regardless of whether or not the allegation proves to be true. Clearly, prevention is the best defense. However, in the event that an abusive situation occurs - despite every effort to prevent it - the existence of, and adherence to clear policies and procedures will be an important factor in determining whether or not due diligence was exercised in protecting a person in our care.

Child Abuse Prevention Policy Adoption

WHEREAS we acknowledge that the abuse of children or youth (sexual, physical, and emotional) can happen anywhere, including at New Minas Baptist Church or in other facilities used by our church ministries;

And WHEREAS we understand that the effects of such abuse have a profound short-term and long-term impact on the victim;

And WHEREAS we understand that, as members of New Minas Baptist Church, we must seek to ensure that children, youth and those who work with them, who participate in any programs offered through our church, may do so without fear of abuse or mismanagement of allegations;

And WHEREAS we acknowledge that a person who would prey upon children or youth may see New Minas Baptist Church as a place where they may have access to children or youth;

And WHEREAS we understand that any abuse, or allegation of abuse, especially if it is not dealt with carefully and properly, can seriously compromise our witness for Christ within our community and beyond;

We, the members of the New Minas Baptist Church, agree to adopt the following abuse prevention policy.

Abuse Prevention Policy & Procedures

1. We will interview and appropriately screen all paid employees and all volunteers who work with children or youth.
2. We will require that all paid employees and volunteers [leaders] who work in ministries for children and youth complete both a Nova Scotia Child Abuse Register check and a Criminal Records Check every three years. Anyone on the child abuse register or with a criminal record relating to children, youth, violence or abuse will not be allowed to work with children or youth. These applications, references and screening forms will be kept in confidence. Records will be kept in a locked file cabinet at New Minas Baptist Church for at least five years.
3. All teaching volunteers will complete an application form which will include personal experience and testimony.
4. We will regularly train all who work with children or youth, both paid and volunteer, to understand the nature of abuse, how to prevent abuse, and how to carry out our policies to prevent abuse. This training will be reviewed and updated regularly in order to stay current and also to adapt to changes in our ministries.
5. We take our policies to prevent sexual abuse seriously and will see that they are enforced.
6. We have adopted a basic "two-leader" rule. This rule is the summary statement for all of our abuse prevention policies and procedures. This rule states that there must be two fully screened leaders in all ministry environments where children and youth are present. This rule reduces the risk of abuse, and also reduces the risk of misunderstanding or false accusations. At no time will a young child be left in an individual's care behind closed doors or in an isolated and private location.
 - a. In reference to this rule, two leaders in children's programming are either two adults [post-high school] or a trained high school youth and an adult, but not only two high school youth. In reference to this rule, two leaders in youth programming are two post-high school adults.
7. In general, we will follow a six month rule. All people who have just recently become Christians and people without internal references (having strong references from within New Minas Baptist Church) will be assigned to the role of "helper" and not "leader" of a ministry for at least six months after either becoming a Christian or attending New Minas Baptist regularly. This point is flexible and is up to the discretion of a Pastor. Such a policy gives the church an additional opportunity to evaluate applicants and volunteers and will help to repel persons seeking immediate access to children or youth.

8. With regard to our church building, all programming for children and youth will take place in open spaces or in rooms with a window in the door if the door must be closed.
9. We will strive to ensure that parents are made aware of the precautions being taken to protect their children or youth. Parental consent forms will be used for all off site trips, and for any event which requires an overnight stay.
10. In the event that any allegation of abuse of a child or youth is made, it will be reported immediately to the appropriate police authorities as detailed below. Any incident in which there is a concern for the safety or well being of a child youth in the care or supervision of our church will be taken seriously and may be investigated.
11. Efforts will be made periodically to inform the congregation of the dangers of child abuse and to remind everyone of the importance of upholding this policy for the protection and well being of everyone involved.

Specific Guidelines for Off Site, Overnight, and Travel Related Events

From time to time next generations ministries at New Minas Baptist Church may hold events which are either at alternative locations or which involve travel or overnights. Here are some specific guidelines with regard to these events.

Off Site Events

- Proper written consent and medical release forms are required for each child or youth participating off site events.
- All trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved, unrelated adult leaders.
- If there are both male and female children or youth participating in the event there will be both male and female approved and unrelated adult leaders.
- At no time are children or youth to be left unsupervised.

Overnight Events

- Proper written consent and medical release forms are required for each child or youth participating off site events.
- All overnight activities should have a minimum ratio of one leader for every six children or youth and a minimum of two leaders at all times. When only two leaders are required, they must be unrelated.
- If there are both male and female children or youth participating in the event there will be both male and female approved and unrelated adult leaders.
- Each leader should have an assigned group of children for whom they will be responsible during the overnight event. All supervising adults must be approved volunteers or staff.
- At no time shall the youth or children be left unsupervised.

Travel

- When the transporting of children or youth is involved in an activity, all drivers must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance and a copy of those must be on file at New Minas Baptist Church.
- Any vehicle used for an event at New Minas Baptist Church must be registered and inspected and thus legal to drive on roads in Nova Scotia.
- The number of persons per car must never exceed the number of seat belts.

Incident Reporting Procedures

If someone has any concerns regarding the safety of a child or youth, they should consult with Family and Children's Services. They should also contact the Next Generations Pastor who will ensure that the church's senior pastor and, if appropriate, governance team and legal advisor is contacted. If a pastor is involved in the allegation, the office of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada will also be advised.

If there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child or youth is in need of protection because of what someone has disclosed or because there is suspect abuse, it is legally required that issue be reported as soon as reasonable possible to the local Family and Children's Services office. A person who knowingly fails to report in these circumstances is in violation of the law and may be found to have committed an offense. Abuse or neglect need not have already occurred for a child or youth to be in need of protection; it is not necessary to wait until a child or youth has been harmed to intervene. When abuse or neglect can be reasonably anticipated and there are reasonable grounds to believe a child or youth is in need of protection, the legal obligation to report applies.

Historical abuse or neglect, that is, abuse or neglect which occurred in the past, must be reported wherever there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child or youth may be in need of protection. If the alleged offender is in regular contact with a child or youth, irrespective of whether it is the same child or youth abused in the past, there may be grounds to believe that the child or youth are at risk based on the offender's past behaviour. It is particularly vital to report these cases where the alleged abuser is in a position of trust concerning children or youth.

Suspicious Behaviour Must Be Addressed Immediately

Any inappropriate conduct or relationships between an adult (volunteers or paid staff) and child or youth must be addressed immediately. Prompt warnings must be issued when appropriate, and the situation monitored very closely. If it is deemed that a report to Child and Family Services is necessary, the worker's role must be reevaluated or suspended. This will enable the persons involved to focus on dealing with the issue at hand. If the worker is cleared of wrong doing, they may be reinstated to their previous position.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

Any person who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child or youth is in need of protection is legally required to report the matter as outlined in this document. The Children and Family Services Act, Section 23 states: *“every person who has information, whether or not it is confidential or privileged, indicating that a child [of youth] is in need of protective services shall forthwith report that information to an agency.”* A person who knowingly fails to report in these circumstances is in violation of the law and may be found to have committed an offense.

If An Allegation Occurs

- It is important to document all efforts of handling the incident, however not to attempt any kind of investigation. Investigation must be left to those in authority to do so.
- The incident must be reported immediately to Family and Children’s Services.
- The senior pastor must also be notified who may in turn draw in the church's lawyer if required. The accused should also consider legal counsel.
- This process must be implemented as soon as reasonably possible after the allegation comes to light.
- It is important to not prejudge the situation, but instead to take the allegations seriously and following the investigation by the agency, on the advise of the social worker, reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt, extending whatever pastoral resources are needed. Care and safety of the victim is the first priority.
- It is important to keep all information restricted to only those who have a need to know. Therefore, all suspicions of abuse should be directed only to Family and Children’s Services. It is the responsibility of the individual who receives the allegation or suspects abuse to contact the local office of Family and Children’s Services.
- Church staff and volunteers are required to immediately report to Family and Children’s Services any suspected case of abuse. It is not a breach of confidence between church staff or volunteers and the child or youth involved.
- The senior pastor or his designate will be the spokesperson for the church. They will speak to the media and the congregation regarding the matter in a discreet, informed, truthful and diplomatic way. All people other than the pastor or his designate who are contacted by the media must give no information but refer them to the spokesperson

- In an allegation of abuse, the statement below [or similar] is to be used for a public response until all of the facts are uncovered and the case reviewed:
- “It is always tragic when children are abused or exploited. The staff and congregation of New Minas Baptist Church is aware of the ever growing nature of abuse. We have taken careful precautions to protect the children and youth entrusted to our care. We are distressed by any accusation of abuse. We will do everything in our power to address any needs in this situation. For the welfare of those involved, all information has been directed to the Family and Children’s Services.”

Appendix 1: What is Abuse?

The following definitions have been adapted from the World Health Organization. Please refer to www.who.int/en for complete definitions.

Child maltreatment constitutes all forms of child abuse including physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligent treatment and exploitation of children, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Physical Abuse of a child results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust. There may be one, or repeated incidents.

Emotional Abuse includes the failure to provide a supportive environment for the child, and actions towards the child that cause or have a high chance of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. These actions may include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, putting down and insulting, scape-goating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

Neglect is the failure to provide for the development of the child in all areas relating to the child's well-being: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. This failure to provide causes, or has a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is possible.

Sexual Abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully understand, is not able to give informed consent to, or is against the laws or social taboos of society.

Appendix 2: Touch

Touch is an essential responsibility in nurturing lives. Volunteers need to be aware of, and sensitive to, differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Physical contact with children should be age and developmentally appropriate. The following guidelines are recommended as pure, genuine and positive displays of God's love:

Appropriate Touch. Love and caring can be expressed in the following appropriate ways:

- Bending down, to the child's eye level and speaking kindly; listening to him or her carefully.
- Taking a child's hand and leading him or her to an activity
- Putting an arm around the shoulder of a child or youth who needs quieting or comforting.
- Looking a child or youth in the eye and speaking words of encouragement.
- Patting a child or youth on the head, hand, shoulder or back to affirm them.
- Holding a young child who is crying or needing to sleep.

Inappropriate Touch. You must avoid:

- Kissing a child, coaxing a child to kiss you
- Extended hugging and tickling.
- Touching a child in any area that would be covered by a bathing suit (except when assisting a young child with toileting [See appendix 4].
- Carrying older children or youth or having them sit on your lap.
- Being alone with a child.

Appendix 3: Possible Symptoms of Abuse

Church staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioural and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit. A one-time event may not necessarily constitute a potential abuse case; sudden unexplained changes, however, may warrant investigation. While this list is not exhaustive, here are some of the more common signs or symptoms of abuse:

Physical signs may include:

- Cuts and bruises
- Nightmares
- Irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody underclothing

Behavioral signs may include:

- Nervous or hostile behaviour toward adults
- Acting out sexual behaviour
- Withdrawal from church activities and friends

Verbal signs may include the following types of statements:

- I don't like (names a particular person)
- (Particular person) does things to me when we're alone
- I don't like to be alone with (particular person)

Appendix 4: Washroom Policy

Parents are to be encouraged to take their young children to visit the washroom prior to each class or service.

General Guidelines:

- Never be alone with a child in an unsupervised washroom and never go into a washroom cubicle with a child and shut the door.
- In light of the fact that there is a perception that most abusers are male, and for the protection of our male volunteers, it would be wise for men to avoid assisting boys or girls of any age in the washrooms. We suggest that only women assist children in the washrooms.

Nursery Children [Age 0-2:

- Nursery volunteers may be required to change diapers. (Some parents may specify that they would like to be called to do this themselves.) The following rules will apply:
- Diaper changing must always take place in such a way that another nursery worker can easily see the child that is being changed, as well as the other children and workers in the room.
- Only screen leaders and not helpers may change diapers. This means that youth volunteers must be in high school before being permitted to change infant's diapers.

Preschool Children [Age 2 - School Age, Including Pre-Primary]:

- For preschool children, two adults must be able to see a child who is being taken to a washroom.
- The volunteer should then remain outside the washroom and wait for the child before escorting them back to the classroom. The volunteer should call the child's name if they are taking longer than seems necessary.
- When preschool children need assistance in the washroom, an adult may enter the washroom or cubicle to assist only when another adult is within visual contact.

Grades 1-6:

- Children must not be sent to the washroom alone. They must be accompanied by a leader and within visual range of a second leader.
- The leader will escort the child to the washroom, will open the door to ensure no one is inside, and will then wait outside while the child uses the washroom.

- If the child requires help or is taking a long time the leader will prop the door open to make sure that everything is in order. This will only take place with another leader in visual range.
- The volunteer should then remain outside the cubicle door and wait for the child before escorting him or her back to the classroom.

Youth:

- Youth in grades 6+ may be sent to the washroom alone. However, there would not be a situation where only two youth or a leader and a youth are in the washroom alone together.
- A volunteer should call the youth's name from outside of a washroom if they are taking longer than seems necessary.