

**Berkey Protection Policy**  
**Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship**  
**November 4, 2016**  
**Updated: November 2022; January 2023**

Note: Some sections of this document are adapted from materials available at [www.dovenest.net](http://www.dovenest.net), May 2020

We, Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, are committed to providing a church environment that is safe and healthy for our members, attenders, children and youth to learn about and experience God's love. In addition, we are committed to protecting the adults, children and youth of our community from abuse, and fulfilling our obligation to legally report abuse (see below for definitions) when there is a reasonable suspicion of such abuse.

Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship will report all incidents of suspected child abuse to appropriate authorities including, but not limited to, the Indiana State Department of Children and Family Services. The Indiana Child Abuse Hotline currently is: 1-800-800-5556. If any pastor, employee, or volunteer of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship is aware of any facts or circumstances that create a reasonable suspicion of child neglect or abuse, they shall immediately report this matter to law enforcement or Child Protective Services.

Individuals and staff are discouraged from conducting an investigation to determine the merits of any allegations of abuse. Such investigations may impair or impede any future investigation by government authorities. Under Indiana law, pastors and ministers are NOT exempt from the mandatory reporting requirements. Accordingly, a pastor who becomes aware of child abuse or a risk of child abuse is obligated to report it even if that information is made known through pastoral counseling or confession with a specific individual.

As part of our goals and objectives of establishing a safe and healthy environment for children and youth, we establish the following guidelines:

1. All who volunteer to work with minors on behalf of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship will have regularly and frequently associated with or attended Berkey for at least six months.
2. Pastors, staff, and anyone working with children, youth, or protected adults in a 1:1 capacity will complete a background check (including child abuse and sexual offender registries) before beginning their duties. Background checks will be updated every three (3) years at the expense of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship. Guest speakers do not need a background check if at least one teacher/volunteer who has an up-to-date background check will be present.
3. All volunteers who regularly work with children, youth, or protected adults will receive a copy of this policy and complete and submit the attached disclosure document annually.
4. All volunteers and employees who work with children, youth, and protected adults will receive orientation regarding church policies and procedures before beginning their work. Orientation will be available annually with mandatory updated orientation every three (3) years.
5. Berkey will provide adequate supervision and safeguards for activities involving children, youth, and protected adults both on and off the premises. Every attempt will be made to have at least two approved volunteers in a room with children, youth, or protected adults. When this is not possible, the "Triangle Rule" will be followed in which no child, youth, or protected adult

is alone with a volunteer. In the case of infants in the nursery, there will be no fewer than two adults present with the children.

6. Berkey will require written consent of a parent or guardian of a minor or protected adult for all overnight activities.
7. Adults may express appropriate displays of affection when non-manipulated permission has been given by the intended recipient. Appropriate displays of affection include a side-to-side hug, a handshake, or a high-five. Any refusal by any party (adults or children) of such a display of affection will be respected.
8. Bathroom use:
  - a. Children are encouraged to use bathroom facilities before and after classes or other programs.
  - b. Other than a child's primary caregiver (parent/guardian), any adult taking a child to the bathroom will stand outside the bathroom door. If the child needs assistance, the adult will either ask a second adult or a parent to be present. For younger children, the nursery bathroom could be a good option where another adult will be present.
  - c. Two adults will be present when changing diapers unless it is a parent/caregiver.
  - d. In the unlikely event that two adults are not present for a needed diaper change or assistance in the bathroom, the adult present will notify the parent/guardian that the contact occurred.
  - e. Children are never to use the single bathrooms with an adult other than their parent, guardian, or caregiver.
9. Before any private one-to-one contact with a child or youth occurs (i.e. transportation or mentoring), a parent/legal guardian is to be informed and permission obtained. If this cannot occur, circumstances of the situation will be explained to a parent/legal guardian as soon as possible.
10. Technology and social media considerations:
  - a. Adults will not engage in one-on-one electronic communications with children, youth, or protected adults without prior approval from the parent/guardian of that individual.
  - b. Parents or other adults will be copied on emails and text messages.
  - c. Photos of children or youth will not be shared on personal social media platforms without permission from a parent/guardian.
11. Pastors and sponsors will consider these guidelines when participating in programs provided by another institution, such as camp or convention.

#### **Oversight:**

The Safe Caring Team, which will include a pastor, is responsible for providing training and overseeing these guidelines. Persons serving on the Safe Caring Team at this time include Andrea Bontrager Yoder, Rebecca Shetler Fast, Patrick Buller, and a pastor. They will work to share this policy widely within Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship with the goal that these expectations will become a well-known part of our church culture. It is the expectation that the Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship Spiritual Leadership Team will review this policy every three (3) years to ensure it is kept up-to-date with current standards.

## **Definitions of Child Abuse: (See <https://dovesnest.net/CAN>)**

According to the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA), child abuse and neglect is defined as the following: *"Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation" or "An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."*

**Sexual abuse:** any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other. Grooming, forcing, coercing or persuading a child to engage in any type of sexual act. Non-contact acts such as exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, voyeurism, and communicating in a sexual manner by phone or Internet.

**Physical abuse:** Non-accidental physical injury to the child.

**Emotional abuse:** Injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child.

**Child Neglect:** Failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide for the child to the degree that the child is threatened with harm.

## **Regarding Abuse of Elderly and Endangered Adults:**

It is our goal and objective to report to appropriate legal authorities incidents in which elderly abuse is reasonably suspected or threatened. In addition, we desire to take reasonable steps to protect elderly persons or endangered adults in the event of suspected abuse even in the absence of any mandatory reporting obligations. If any pastor, employee or volunteer of Berkey is aware of any facts or circumstances that create a reasonable suspicion that elderly abuse has occurred or there exists a substantial risk that elderly abuse may occur, they shall immediately report this matter to the Safe Church Caring Team who in turn shall be responsible for meeting all legal reporting obligations on behalf of Berkey. This Policy also applies to all individuals who are "protected adults" as defined below. In Indiana, elderly abuse is reportable to the Family and Social Services Administration, hotline: 1-800-992-6978.

### **Definitions:**

a. "protected adult" means an individual who is:

(1) at least eighteen (18) years of age;

(2) incapable by reason of mental illness, intellectual disability, dementia, habitual, excessive drunkenness, use of drugs, or other physical or mental incapacity of managing or directing the management of the individual's property or providing or directing the provision of self-care; and

(3) is harmed, intimidated, or threatened with harm as a result of:

(A) neglect;

(B) battery; or

(C) exploitation of the individual's personal services or property.

b. "Exploitation" means the intentional misuse of a person's property, person or services for financial gain.

### **Additional Resources:**

- Policy for Dealing with Bullying, Harassment, and Abuse