

Shalom Mennonite Congregation
Safe Congregation Policy Summary

Purpose for this policy:

We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and commit ourselves to justice and compassion through respectful personal interactions and intergenerational trust. **This compels us to implement a policy that fosters a consistently safe environment that protects children, youth, and adults from harm and promotes the wellbeing of all.**

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

- We seek to identify any possible situations in which Shalom is directly responsible for the wellbeing of our youth and children. Thus, **the policy includes guidelines for faith formation classrooms, the nursery, the youth mentoring program, and special church events geared towards youth and children.** The Safe Congregation Committee is the primary committee which focuses on the implementation of this policy.
- The Safe Congregation Policy establishes a “two-adult rule” as an overarching guideline. These two adults, called “**Approved Adults**” in this policy, will meet the following **requirements**:
 - have attended the congregation for at least 3 months
 - attend a standard initial training to understand issues relating to sexual abuse and how to respond to suspicious activity or disclosure of sexual abuse
 - complete Shalom’s Approved Adult application and the required clearance forms
 - sign and comply with the Child Protection Covenant

Other adults are encouraged to participate with youth and children’s ministries, but at least two in each setting must be Approved Adults. The only exception to the “two adult” rule is the youth mentoring program, for which the policy is nuanced by a system of log-keeping.

- For the purposes of Safe Congregation, pastors will function as **mandated reporters** though this is not required by law. Volunteers who are “approved adults” are also not considered mandated reporters under the Virginia code; however, best practices in church settings dictate that all such persons immediately report any suspected abuse to the person designated in our policy, who in turn will make the required report.
- Individuals who have been adjudicated by a court or child protective services findings as sexual offenders and/or have admitted to past sexual abuse of children, and who are willing to abide by the guidelines set forth in the policy, are welcome to attend worship services and adult educational activities. The congregation will initiate “**covenant partnerships**” with **known offenders**, both to keep our children and youth safe from risk, as well as promote healthy boundaries and support for the offender.
- This policy is a **living document** attempting to address the current safety concerns and visions of a healthy community. The congregation may in future years wish to amend it to reflect changing needs and realities.