

Appropriate Touch Guidelines January 2020

First Mennonite Church—Lincoln

Our congregation wishes to be a safe, supportive community where we can worship and share our joys and concerns together. Our fellowship develops through our communication via a diversity of styles, both verbal and nonverbal. These guidelines hope to help cultivate respect, safety, and trust. They seek to avoid contact that is or may appear threatening or inappropriate.

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries.

Examples of positive and appropriate behaviors and forms of affection:

- Handshakes
- High fives, hand slapping, and fist bumps
- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Holding hands during group prayer
- Gentle brief pats on the back
- Briefly touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth
- Sitting beside children (without touching them)
- Verbal praise

The following behaviors are considered inappropriate in a ministry setting by anyone other than parents or guardians because they can be used to groom potential abuse victims (and their community) and/or can be abuse:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting
- Showing affection when one-on-one in isolated areas, such as classrooms, closets, offices, or other private areas
- Concealing contact from others (regardless of location)
- Behavior which would hurt the trust of parents or guardians
- Behavior which frightens, distresses, or embarrasses another
- Holding children over three years old on the lap
- Touching knees or legs
- Tickling
- Wrestling
- Piggyback rides
- Solitary meals or activities with an individual child, youth, or vulnerable adult (except in public areas)
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Any form of unwelcome physical contact
- Any form of unnecessary closeness, including brushing up against or cornering an individual
- Any type of massage (both given or received)

In general, affection should be displayed in the open in with at least two unrelated adults present.

Trust builds and maintains our fellowship. These guidelines are to be respected in all areas of the church, its grounds, and off church grounds, wherever any of our community gathers.

If you observe inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by any individual toward a minor or vulnerable adult, please share your concern with a parent, our pastor, an elder, or a member of the Child Protection Team as soon as possible.