Mandated Reporter Policy

> **Related documents.** This policy is one of Mayflower's four safeguarding documents. It is read together with:

- Child Safety Policy
- Volunteer Screening and Application — Service with Minors
- RSO Attendance and Membership Policy

Mayflower Church

Mandated Reporter Policy

1. Purpose

Mayflower Church is committed to protecting children and other vulnerable persons entrusted to our care. This policy establishes the obligation of every staff member, elder, deacon, trustee, ministry leader, and volunteer to report suspected abuse or neglect of a child to civil authorities and to designated church leadership. It is a companion to, and operates within, the Mayflower Church Child & Youth Protection Policy.

This policy is drafted to comply with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119, Section 51A, which designates clergy and certain other persons as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All Mayflower Church employees, including pastoral and non-pastoral staff.
- All elders, deacons, and trustees.
- All ministry leaders, team leaders, and volunteers serving in any role with minors, including — but not limited to — Discipletown, Nursery, EQUIP youth contexts, Vacation Bible School, summer camps, and any event involving children or youth.
- Any contractor or guest speaker working with minors on Mayflower property or at Mayflower-sponsored events.

All persons in scope are designated mandated reporters under this policy, regardless of whether the law independently designates them as such.

3. Statutory Authority

Mayflower Church operates under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The following statutes are referenced throughout this policy:

- M.G.L. c. 119, § 51A — Mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.
- M.G.L. c. 119, § 51B — Department of Children and Families investigation procedures.
- M.G.L. c. 233, § 20A — Clergy-penitent privilege (limited application; see Section 8).
- M.G.L. c. 265, §§ 13B, 22A, 23 — Definitions of indecent assault, rape, and statutory rape of a child.

4. Definitions

Child. Any person under the age of eighteen (18).

Abuse. Non-accidental physical injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or emotional injury inflicted upon a child by a caregiver or other person.

Neglect. Failure by a caregiver, either deliberately or through negligence, to provide minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care.

Reasonable cause to believe. A standard lower than “probable cause” or “certainty.” It is met when facts known to the reporter would lead a reasonable person, in similar circumstances, to suspect abuse or neglect. Certainty is not required to trigger the duty to report.

Mandated Reporter. A person designated by statute or by this policy to report suspected abuse or neglect of a child.

Designated Church Liaison. The Senior Pastor, or in the Senior Pastor’s absence or conflict of interest, the Chair of the Elders, who serves as the internal point of contact for reports made under this policy.

5. Reporting Standard

A mandated reporter is required to make a report when, in their professional or ministry capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering from abuse or neglect.

The reporter is not required to investigate, gather evidence, confirm allegations, or determine credibility before reporting. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is responsible for investigation; the reporter is responsible for raising the concern in good faith.

If you are unsure whether a situation meets the reporting threshold, the answer is to report. Massachusetts law and this policy err on the side of reporting.

6. Reporting Procedure

6.1 Immediate Safety

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911 first. Then proceed with the steps below.

6.2 External Report to DCF

1. Make an oral report to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families within 24 hours of forming reasonable cause to believe abuse or neglect has occurred.
2. DCF Child-at-Risk Hotline: 1-800-792-5200 (available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week).
3. Submit a written report (DCF Form 51A) within 48 hours of the oral report. The form is available at mass.gov/dcf and may be filed by fax, mail, or in-person delivery to the local DCF Area Office.
4. Retain a copy of any written report in a sealed envelope provided to the Designated Church Liaison for confidential storage. Do not place reports in personnel files, ministry files, or shared drives.

6.3 Internal Notification

As soon as reasonably possible after making the external report — and never as a substitute for it — the reporter shall notify the Senior Pastor (Designated Church Liaison). If the report concerns the Senior Pastor or someone under the Senior Pastor’s direct authority, notification shall instead be made to the Chair of the Elders.

The Designated Church Liaison shall promptly inform the Board of Elders of the existence of a report (without identifying the child or other protected information beyond what is necessary) so that the church can take appropriate pastoral, protective, and personnel actions consistent with the Child & Youth Protection Policy.

6.4 No Internal Pre-Clearance

The duty to report to DCF is personal to the reporter and is not conditioned on permission or pre-approval from any pastor, elder, deacon, supervisor, or church body. No church officer may delay, redirect, or interfere with a report. Doing so is a violation of this policy and of Massachusetts law.

7. Confidentiality

All information related to a report shall be handled with strict confidentiality, shared only with persons who have a clear need to know in order to comply with the law, protect the child, manage personnel matters, or provide pastoral care. Reporters and church officers shall not discuss reports with the congregation, on social media, or with any party not involved in lawful response.

Confidentiality is not a license for silence. Reports to DCF are required by law regardless of confidentiality concerns.

8. Pastoral Privilege — Narrow Application

Massachusetts law (M.G.L. c. 119, § 51A) generally requires clergy to report suspected child abuse and neglect, with a narrow exception for communications made solely in the context of confession or formal religious counsel where confidentiality is required by the discipline of the religious body.

Mayflower Church’s position is that this exception is narrow and does not apply to:

- Pastoral conversations that are not strictly confessional in character.
- Information learned outside of formal pastoral counsel (e.g., observation, a child’s disclosure, a third party’s report).
- Situations involving ongoing risk to a child or another vulnerable person.

When in doubt, the duty to protect a child supersedes the desire to preserve confidentiality. Pastoral staff with privilege questions shall consult the Senior Pastor or, if needed, legal counsel before relying on the exception.

9. Anti-Retaliation

Mayflower Church will not tolerate retaliation against any person who, in good faith:

- Makes a report under this policy.
- Cooperates with a DCF or law enforcement investigation.
- Raises concerns to church leadership about the safety of a child.

Retaliation includes — but is not limited to — termination, demotion, removal from ministry, social exclusion, public criticism, or pressure to recant a report. Any retaliation will be treated as a serious violation of this policy and may result in removal from staff or ministry roles.

10. Good-Faith Immunity and False Reports

Massachusetts law provides civil and criminal immunity to mandated reporters who file reports in good faith, even if the report is later found to be unsupported.

Knowingly false reports, however, are a violation of both Massachusetts law and this policy and may result in removal from staff or ministry roles, in addition to any civil or criminal consequences imposed by the state.

11. Training

Every person within the scope of this policy shall complete mandated reporter training:

- At the time of hire, election, appointment, or volunteer onboarding.
- Every two (2) years thereafter, before the start of the ministry year, through online training (currently MinistrySafe). In the years between, the person re-signs the Mandated Reporter Policy acknowledgment.

Training shall cover the legal duty, recognition of abuse and neglect indicators, the reporting procedure under this policy, and the boundaries of pastoral privilege. The Senior Pastor, or a designee approved by the Board of Elders, is responsible for ensuring training is delivered, documented, and current.

12. Recordkeeping

The Designated Church Liaison shall maintain a confidential record of:

- The date and general nature of each report (without disclosing identifying information beyond what is necessary).
- Confirmation that an oral report was made to DCF and that the written 51A report was filed within the required window.
- Training completion dates for all persons in scope.

Records shall be stored securely (locked file or access-restricted digital location) and retained in accordance with Mayflower's Document Retention Policy. Records shall not be destroyed during any open investigation or pending litigation.

13. Failure to Report

Under Massachusetts law, a mandated reporter who knowingly fails to report suspected child abuse or neglect may be subject to fines and, in cases of serious bodily injury or death, criminal penalties.

In addition to any civil or criminal liability, failure to report under this policy is grounds for immediate removal from staff position, board office, or ministry role at Mayflower Church.

14. Relationship to Other Policies

This policy operates as a foundational element of Mayflower's Child & Youth Protection Policy, and is referenced by:

- The Mayflower Church Employee Handbook (mandated reporter section).
- The Volunteer Screening & Application for Service with Minors.
- The Registered Sex Offender Policy, which sits within the Child & Youth Protection Policy.

- The Pastoral Counseling Policy (when established).

Where this policy and any other Mayflower policy conflict on the duty to report, this policy and Massachusetts law govern.

15. Approval and Review

This policy was approved by the Board of Elders and recommended to the Servants Council on May 30, 2026. It shall be reviewed annually by the Board of Elders and revised as needed to reflect changes in Massachusetts law or in church practice.

Acknowledgment

I have received, read, and understand the Mayflower Church Mandated Reporter Policy. I understand that I am a mandated reporter under this policy and that I am required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families and to the Designated Church Liaison.

I understand that the duty to report is personal to me and that I will not be retaliated against for making a good-faith report.

Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____

Role / Ministry: _____

Date: _____

Amended September 29, 2026 by the Servants Council following Board of Elders approval of September 19, 2026. This page previously stated annual mandated reporter training. See the amendment record in the church office.

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