

What is Sexual Misconduct?

Sexual misconduct in the church occurs when someone in perceived position of leadership or power, an active or retired clergy, or someone in a lay leadership role (i.e pastor, church musician, youth advisor, Sunday School teacher, camp counselor) sexually contacts or uses sexual language or behavior with a parishioner, employee, student, child, youth, or counseling client in the pastoral care relationship.

Any conduct or communication is unacceptable that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment, or interferes with the services received from the church.

It is unacceptable for a person to require or seek submission to sexual contact. It is unacceptable for leader to solicit, punish, reject, or reward submission to sexual contact or language. It is unacceptable for a leader to expect anyone to tolerate sexual innuendos, flirtations, or jokes under the guise of "just kidding".

Physical Contact

Sexual misconduct can include physical contact by a person in a ministerial role such as:

- **Sexual touching**, "accidental" touch of your body, and offensive contact such as patting, pinching, blocking movements.
- **Suggestive or insulting whistling or gestures, leering.**
- **Tickling and playful aggression** that seems uncomfortable to you.
- **Any inappropriately intimate hugging or kissing.**
- **Pressing up against your body** when hugging.
- **An inappropriate gift** from someone in this ministerial or leadership role. Trust your feeling about what is appropriate.
- **Sexual intercourse.**

Verbal Contact

Sexual misconduct can also include verbal behavior initiated by a ministerial leader when such behavior sexualizes a relationship. For example:

- **Innuendo or sexual talk, jokes, or humor**
- **Sexual comments.**
- **Tales of his / her sexual exploits or experiences.**
- **Inappropriate questions** about the intimate details of your relationships.
- **Looking for sympathy** about his / her partner's sexual inadequacies.
- **Inviting you to share a hot tub or swim naked, etc.**
- **Sexual overtures on the internet.**

Your Boundaries Have Been Crossed When:

- You feel uncomfortable and confused with the interaction even if you are initially flattered.
- You are receiving personal gifts from the ministerial leader.
- You are receiving counseling and you end up talking more about his / her problems than about yours.
- The ministerial leader invites you out for intimate, social occasions.
- The ministerial leader touches you in a way that you find confusing, uncomfortable, or upsetting.
- The ministerial leader uses theological rationale for questionable conduct. For example: "God brought us together."

What Should You Do?

- **Pay attention to your feelings** and trust yourself. Notice the "skin crawl test".
- **Say "No"** to the perpetrator. Be direct and tell him / her that you want the behavior to stop.
- **Stay safe.** Leave the situation.
- **Keep records** of what happened and where. Save letters, cards, or notes.
- **Document dates, times, places, witnesses, and the nature of the exploitation.**
- **Share your confusion, fear, or anxiety** with someone you trust.
- **Remember that you are not to blame, even if you agreed to the relationship in the beginning.**

What Is Your Next Step?

If you feel your boundaries have been crossed, you can **contact your district superintendent or Response Team coordinator for help.**

Any of these first contacts are familiar with the Conference procedure for dealing with complaints about sexual misconduct in the church.

They will offer you guidance, support, and tell you about the Conference's policies and procedures. They will listen carefully and act expediently upon your report.

The church cares about and is concerned for victims of ministerial misconduct and will facilitate an appropriate response to stop the exploitation. Specific allegations will be relayed to the Bishop's office.

Remember that **you might not be the only person to whom this has happened.** Your action can help you and perhaps prevent another occurrence or help others.

April 2008
M. Robb for the NEAC Misconduct Steering Committee

Abuse of a Minor

If a minor has been sexually abused by someone in a ministerial role, in a leadership role, or simply by someone in the church, make an immediate report to a law enforcement agency in your community.

If the abuser is not the pastor, you may go to the pastor, district superintendent, or Response Team coordinator for help, support, and guidance.

The five states of our Conference have different laws, but **immediate safety of the child is of utmost importance.** Mandated reporting is now a law so one of the above named contacts should also be called.

If the pastor or another real or perceived church leader is the abuser, you should contact one of the following:

- **Rev. Marilyn Robb** - Coordinator of the New England Conference Response / Intervention Team
207-899-1463 or (cell) 781-454-7269
5 Codman St, Portland ME 04103
- **Bishop Peter Weaver** – Area Bishop
978-682-7555 x 250
PO Box 249, 276 Essex St.
Lawrence, MA 01842
- **Or your own district superintendent**

If you do not know your superintendent, you may call the Bishop's Administrative Assistant at the bishop's number above.



Please Post In A Visible Place In The Church

**How To Receive Help
In the Event of Sexual Misconduct
In The Church**

First Contact