

Child Safety Program

Severna Park EP Church

The Gospel of Mark records that when people brought little children to Jesus, he took them in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:16). It is our desire to bring children to Jesus, too.

Because we recognize that we are a reflection of God's love to those in our care, we take seriously our responsibility to them. These guidelines are set forth to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we can bring our children to the Savior.

We view ourselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide quality care and instruction in our children's and youth ministries. All of our guidelines are designed to promote growth in God for each child, youth and adult involved.

Everyone who teaches, helps, or cares for children/youth under the sponsorship of Severna Park EP Church must follow these policies and procedures. Our children are God's precious gift to us. It is our desire to provide a safe and loving environment for them to experience God and the joy of learning more about how much God loves them. That is why the leadership of SPEP has set up the following guidelines to be followed during all Children's Ministry and Youth programs of SPEP.

It is our hope that these policies will serve as a guide for those caring for our precious children and as an encouragement for the parents leaving their children in our care.

The standard of excellence to which we will strive in caring for the children entrusted to us is founded upon a biblical understanding of purity in relationships. A detailed explanation of this standard follows under the *Volunteer Policies* heading. These policies are for the protection of volunteers, the church, and especially for the children. We are not only to avoid sin, but also even the appearance of sin.

Child abuse is a problem today – even for the church. It is important to us to provide a safe, secure, and loving environment for children and youth where God is honored in every relationship and where parents feel comfortable leaving their children. These policies are intended to protect both the children and volunteer workers and are intended to be a helpful resource in addressing the issues of child safety. All workers are expected to adhere to the following policies, regardless of their area of ministry. ANY EXCEPTIONS TO THESE POLICIES MUST HAVE THE PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT OF THE PARENTS INVOLVED AND THE PRIOR PERMISSION OF THE SENIOR PASTOR OR DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVE.

Throughout this policy a child will be defined as anyone under the age of 18.

1. VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS

- a. All people in teaching or leading roles must be a member of Severna Park Evangelical Presbyterian Church and must have been attending SPEP for at least six months. This includes but is not limited to Nursery volunteers, Sunday School teachers, VBS teachers, Children's Church teachers, Kids' Quest teachers, camp counselors, Pioneers and Brigade leaders and youth group workers.
- b. Volunteers who are not members may not serve in teaching or leading roles. Upon approval of the Session they may serve in non-teaching roles, but should be regular attenders of the church for at least six months, have been through the application procedure, and must serve alongside an approved member of SPEP before being appointed to any volunteer position in the children's or youth ministry.
- c. People related to each other (spouses, siblings, parent/child teams, etc) may serve together provided there is a third non-related volunteer serving alongside them.
- d. All volunteer workers must be 18 years of age or older unless working under the supervision of an adult who has met the qualifications in these policies.
- e. All volunteers who work with children must complete a Children's and Youth Ministry Volunteer Application, submit three references and be interviewed. A person with a history of having been abused as a child will be permitted to serve in children's or youth ministries at the discretion of the pastoral staff.
- f. A criminal records check will be done on all professional church staff and on all volunteers who work with children or youth. Any person meeting any of the following conditions will be prohibited from working with children or youth:
 - * Any person who has been denied legal custody of children for reasons of abuse or neglect.
 - * Any person who has been convicted for any felony, violent crime or any crime against a child.
 - * Any person who has been disciplined for, or convicted of, any unlawful sexual conduct, abuse, child abuse, child neglect and/or child sexual abuse.
 - * Any person who is currently a defendant under process for any of the offenses previously identified.
 - * Any person who is currently registered or has ever been required to register as a sex offender in any jurisdiction, or whose name has ever appeared on a Sex Offender Registry.Any individual who does not fall under the conditions cited above, but who has been either accused of, or charged with, any criminal activity and/or abuse / neglect of a child but never adjudicated, must be approved by the Session, on a case by case basis, before he can be permitted to work with children or youth.
- g. All people working with children or youth must complete an orientation training program.

2. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- a. A **Volunteer Application** is available from the church office, from the Children's Ministry Director, and from the Youth Director. Every volunteer in the children's and/or youth ministry must complete and turn in a signed application, and be interviewed by the appropriate Ministry Director.
- b. **Background Checks:** A criminal records check for persons 18 years and older will be conducted through an agency authorized to perform a security background check. The results of the criminal records check will be reviewed by the Session. Background searches will cover a period of 10 years prior to the time of application.
- c. **References:** References provided on the application form may not include relatives. References will be contacted and interviewed by the Session-appointed administrative assistant. Results of the interview will be shared with the Children's Ministry or Youth Director, as appropriate.
- d. **Interviews:** Volunteer interviews will be conducted by the appropriate Ministry Director
- e. Volunteers will be allowed to work in ministry on a **provisional basis** if all their paperwork, including application, signed permission to conduct background check, and personal interview is completed.
- f. **Confidentiality:** All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the result of the criminal records check, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of

such disclosure requirements in most cases will be considered confidential. The results of the criminal records check will be reviewed by the Session as well as the staff member appointed by Session. Any persona authorized by Session for the collection and storage of volunteer information will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to serving.

- g. **Storage of confidential records:** All records, including all volunteer applications, reference interviews, and results of all criminal records checks will be kept in a secure storage cabinet in the church office. Any request by a volunteer to purge information from his or her file will be honored; however, the fact that information was purged will be noted in the file, and such request may affect the decision of Session to approve an applicant for ministry. Volunteer profiles and records checks may be required to be updated from time to time, but only if the worker is still a current volunteer. Only the Session, the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate) will have access to these files.
- h. Volunteers are approved annually for re-appointment to their current or new positions.
- i. All volunteers must have the approval of the Session before being placed in any position of ministry to children/youth.
- j. Volunteers that are not approved for working with children for one reason or another will be graciously assisted in finding another place of ministry in the church whenever possible.

3. VOLUNTEER IDENTIFICATION

- a. All volunteers must wear the appropriate identification whenever serving in our children's ministry. Please make this a high priority.
- b. If you forget or lose your identification, please go to the Ministry Office of the Education Center and request a temporary identification badge.
- c. Do not allow unauthorized individuals into your classroom, or entrust children to their care. Please direct them to a staff member instead.

4. VISIBLE MINISTRY POLICIES

- a. No worker is ever to be alone with a child. Workers who are related cannot be alone with a child.
- b. At least two unrelated adult workers will be present at all times.
- c. If a child arrives early, ask the parent to stay until the second volunteer arrives.
- d. Each door of a classroom should have a window. If there is no window, the door should be left open. Sight lines through each window should remain unobstructed at all times.
- e. Doors without windows should never be closed completely when children are inside with adults.
- f. When a child or student needs to have a private discussion with an adult, be sure to sit in view of an open door or window, or carry out the discussion in an open hallway or the back of the classroom out of the earshot of others.

5. PHYSICAL TOUCH / AFFECTION GUIDELINES

Physical touch and affection are important to a child's physical and emotional development. They are an essential component in nurturing lives. However, there is obvious danger with inappropriate touch or affection either intentionally or inadvertently in children's or youth ministry. Physical contact with children/youth should be age and developmentally appropriate. Be aware of and sensitive to differences in sexual development, cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. The following guidelines are to be promoted for pure, genuine and positive displays of God's love:

- a. All physical affection needs to be in the presence of other workers.
- b. Physical touch or affection should be brief in nature, and never on a child's private parts.
- c. Preteen and older children should be hugged from the side.
- d. Kids on laps should be sitting on legs, not straddled over adult private areas. Children older than kindergarten age should be discouraged from sitting on laps.
- e. Kisses should be extremely limited and rare and never on the face of a child (instead, kisses may be given on the top of the head or the hand).

- f. When approached by a child physically, do not reject the child, but guide his/her affection to an appropriate contact. Hugs are easily shifted, as are misplaced hands. When a child touches an adult in an inappropriate way unintentionally, no reference to it should be made to the child, simply redirect his/her hand or body. If intentional, simply correct with the same tone as any other correction and then move on without making an issue of it.

6. RESTROOM PROCEDURES

- a. All children should be encouraged to visit the bathroom with their parent's supervision before the start of a program.
- b. Two adults who are not related to one another should escort any child who is toilet trained, up to and including kindergarten age, to the bathroom. This may mean incorporating a class bathroom break during the program in which the entire class is taken to the bathroom. Do not send pre-school aged children to the bathroom without proper adult supervision.
- c. Do not employ one volunteer to assist with a bathroom break and leave one volunteer with other children in the classroom. This violates the two-adult rule.
- d. Class bathroom breaks for children 4-years-old and younger should take place in the women's bathroom only. If there is one male and one female teacher who are not related to one another, both teachers should enter the women's bathroom after it has been determined that the restroom is empty.
- e. Men should not assist girls in the restroom.
- f. Never enter a toilet stall with a child and shut the stall door.
- g. If a child needs help with a belt or pants button, or for girls, assistance with tights, adult help should be given outside the stall door in the presence of the second adult. The child may then be sent into the stall independently.
- h. If there is a bathroom in the classroom, one adult may help the child as needed, provided a second unrelated adult is present, being careful to leave the door slightly open in giving assistance while still protecting the privacy of the child. Do not shut the door behind you.
- i. All children should be instructed to wash their hands after using the toilet.
- j. Any adult who assists children with bathroom breaks should also wash his or her hands.
- k. Children in first grade and above should be discouraged from using the bathroom during class, especially during the teaching time, except in the case of an emergency.
- l. If the teacher determines that it is appropriate, children in first grade and above can be released from class to use the bathroom in pairs (either two boys or two girls).
- m. If the children who have been released from class/program to use the bathroom have been gone too long, radio the office for assistance.
- n. Children who ask for frequent bathroom breaks should be tactfully discouraged from making an excuse to get out of class. Consult with the child's parent to determine if there is a biological need. If not, the child will have to wait until the end of class to use the bathroom.
- o. If in any of the above situations another adult is needed, the volunteer should call for help on the two-way radio.

7. EVENT PLANNING / APPROVED ACTIVITIES

- a. Whenever moving children from the classroom, do a head count upon departure and arrival to make sure every child is accounted for.
- b. Workers are never to take a child home (to the child's or workers' home) without another adult accompanying them and without the permission of the parents involved.
- c. Never take a child or children outside of the church building or program room without prior consent of the ministry leader. Any activity off the premises of the church property will require written permission of the parent or guardian. Permission slips are available in the Ministry Office for your use.
- d. A minimum of two approved adult leaders is required for any trip or out-of-class activity.
- e. When an activity requires travel, all drivers must have a valid driver's license, current automobile insurance and approval in advance to transport children (based on investigation of driving record). The number of persons per car should not exceed the number of seatbelts. Each driver should have a copy of the activity permission slip for

- those students riding in his/her car. Emergency contact phone numbers are of primary concern and shall be available to the leaders. All drivers must be a minimum of 21 years old.
- g. When an activity is local, it is best if parents arrange their own transportation to and from the activity site. At least two unrelated adults must stay until the last child is picked up.
 - h. Overnight Policies
 - All overnight events must be accompanied by at least 2 approved, unrelated staff.
 - All overnight events should be pre-approved by the appropriate paid staff member (Children's Ministry Director / Youth Director)
 - There will not be overnight events for children younger than 3rd grade except for parent/child outings.
 - Supervising adults are never to sleep in a closed room one-on-one with any children/youth attending the event.
 - If both male and female students are attending the overnight activity, there must be at least two male and two female-screened adults present. All overnight activities must provide for separate sleeping accommodations for the male and female participants.
 - i. Always observe the two unrelated persons rule.

8. EXCEPTIONS

It is understood that circumstances may arise that necessitate the need for deviating from this policy. For such infrequent and unusual situations that are not easily classified elsewhere in this policy, the standards and spirit of this policy shall be recognized as being in force. Exceptions should be with the prior consent of the parents involved and prior approval of the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate). A record of all exceptions should be kept and submitted to the Session for review once a quarter. In the event of an unavoidable or uncorrectable deviation of this policy, observers must notify the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate), parent(s)/guardian(s) involved, as well as the Senior Pastor, or designated representative, as soon as possible, which is for your own protection.

9. SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY / REPORTING VIOLATIONS or SUSPECTED ABUSE

Individual Responsibility: In order to maintain a safe environment for all children and youth, all persons must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, admission, or situation which endangers or threatens children. All questions or concerns of suspected activity of abuse or harassment by a volunteer should be reported to the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate) and/or the Senior Pastor. Should the activity of concern involve a paid church employee, the matter shall be reported to the Senior Pastor. Pending the outcome of an investigation, the alleged abuser shall not participate in children's/youth ministry activities. All information pertaining to the alleged incident should be kept confidential. A mere allegation of improper behavior by a volunteer will not be treated as an actual occurrence, pending the completion of the investigation, and the church will take steps necessary to protect the integrity of the volunteer involved.

- a. During services, children are not allowed to wander around the church property. If you see a child who is not in an appropriate place, please approach him/her or contact a staff member. We will take the child to class or to his/her parent.
- b. If you see an adult wandering around the building, please ask if you can help him/her find his/her way. We do not permit people to wander around the children's classes.
- c. Ministry leaders will be available in the Ministry Office or in the program area to assist teachers, parents, etc., as needs arise, and can be contacted by 2-way radio.
- d. Reporting Abuse:
 - 1. In the event anyone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this policy, that person will be asked to complete an Incident Report (form available in ministry office and church office). All efforts at handling the incident should be documented. Anyone witnessing such an occurrence shall follow these guidelines to ensure the security of the child and to protect against physical, emotional, or psychological injury to all persons involved:
 - A. All incidents shall be reported immediately to the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate), if available, or to the adult leader in

- charge of the event or activity. The incident must be reported by the staff member to the Senior Pastor and the Session within 24 hours of the staff member being made aware of the incident.
- B. The parents must be notified by the Children's Ministry Director or the Youth Director (as appropriate) and/or staff member within 24 hours of the staff member being made aware of the incident.
 - C. Should an appropriate investigation warrant it, the Senior Pastor or member of the Session must immediately report the incident to the church insurance company and church attorney, and notify the proper authorities, as required by law.
 - D. A duly authorized representative of SPEP will be responsible for all communication on behalf of the church.
 - E. Personally secure the safety of the child, children, or youth involved. Do not leave them unattended while reporting the incident.
 - F. The accused should not be confronted until the safety of the child or youth is secured.
 - G. Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of the policy unless imminent injury or damage is present.
2. In the event a child or youth reports alleged abusive conduct, regardless of where the conduct occurred, (at church, offsite church event, or non-church event.) the person initially contacted by the child must complete a written Incident Report which should include, as much as possible, the precise wording of the child or youth. This report will be given to the appropriate ministry director and the Senior Pastor.
 3. In the event a child makes an accusation of abuse or neglect occurring in the child's home, the person initially contacted will report the allegation to the Senior Pastor or his appointed representative for disposition of the matter.
- e. Response to the Accuser
 1. Allegations should be taken seriously and emotional support given to the alleged victim. The care and safety of the alleged victim is a primary priority.
 2. All efforts should be made to reach out to the accuser and the accuser's family, extending whatever pastoral and professional resources may be needed.
 - f. Response to the Accused
 1. Treat the accused with dignity and support. He/she will be presumed innocent of the accusations pending an investigation and civil and church judicial proceedings. He/she is relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is completed.
 2. Pastoral and/or professional resources should likewise be extended to the accused.
 3. Accusations of sinful behavior by members will be handled by the Session according to the Rules of Discipline contained the PCA Book of Church Order.

Child Abuse Definitions, Symptoms, Indicators of Abuse*

DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse	Any mistreatment or neglect of a child that results in harm or injury.
Physical	Purposely <i>injuring</i> a child by any means, including hitting, biting, shaking, kicking, burning or throwing objects
Emotional	Consistent and/or extreme crushing of a child's spirit with verbal attacks, threats or humiliation
Sexual	Any sexual activity or contact with a child- whether in the home or by a caretaker, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, adolescent, or another child.
Neglect	Willingly failing to provide for a child's emotional or physical needs: failing to offer guidance and supervision.

SYMPTOMS, INDICATORS OF ABUSE

The following signs and symptoms do not always mean abuse. Repeated incidents of injury combined with behavioral problems, inconsistent stories, etc. are typical indicators a family may need assistance. Fears of a teacher, adult worker or relative, may indicate something unhealthy in the relationship.

Physical	unexplained bruises, welts, broken bones cuts or scrapes, burns, missing hair injuries or redness around the genitals injuries at different stages of healing injury or medical condition that hasn't been properly treated bodily complaints related to stress-stomach aches, headaches, vomiting without cause suicidal gestures or self mutilation substance abuse or eating disorders appearance may be one of poor grooming and dirty, clothing may be in poor condition or not suited to the weather
Child's Behavior	aggressive or withdrawn behavior- especially as a shift in personality unusual fears (of certain people, going home, etc.) pulling out own hair, eyelashes or eyebrows craving for attention running away fatigue without physical cause and/or depression lack of concentration, school problems- misbehavior hunger, begging for food, stealing frequent tardiness or absence from school unusual knowledge of sex, explicit language, inappropriate behavior with peers, knowledge beyond developmental age regression to earlier behaviors such as thumb sucking, bed wetting, etc. afraid to be alone with certain people or "clingy" with other people pseudo-mature behavior
Adult's behavior	harsh punishment of child in public refer to the child as "difficult", "different" or "bad" seem unconcerned about the child give conflicting stories about injuries become defensive when asked about the child's health presence of family stressors - loss of job, financial difficulties, marital problems family history of violence or substance abuse parents who were physically or sexually abused as children families in which children or women are seen as possessions; male authoritarian and rigid households; also strongly religious homes in combination with these factors

*information adapted from the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/overview/index.cfm>) and from the Church Law and Tax Report *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*.

**Children may talk about being abused.
Take what they say and any suspicions you have, seriously.**