

**Volunteer Screening Guidelines for Children and Youth Ministries
Of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventists
Revision 540-05N**

VOTED: To revise the Volunteer Screening Guidelines for Children and Youth Ministries of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventists, to read as follows:

1. Objectives

- a. The Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to make its worship and educational environments free from abuse of all kinds. To achieve this goal in its ministry and educational programs, the following guidelines have been developed for implementation throughout the North American Division.
- b. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to providing a safe environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. The records show the disturbing and traumatic increase of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation, our society and the church. Adventist churches and schools, which conduct programs for children and youth, are not insulated from those individuals who abuse kids.
- c. In keeping with the Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* and in concert with the local conference, it is the responsibility of the local church and/or school to select, screen and manage trustworthy individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry for children and youth activities.
 - i. “The local church should take reasonable steps to safeguard children engaged in church-sponsored activities by choosing individuals with high spiritual and moral backgrounds as leaders and participants in programs for children” (*Church Manual*, Ed 17, p. 120)
- d. The work of volunteers is essential to the successful accomplishment of the Church’s mission and ministry. In selecting individuals for volunteer positions, only person who support the mission of the organization should be recruited. The management policies and procedures employed to supervise the work of volunteers must be consistent with the mission the church or school and must support its successful achievement. Individuals who are unwilling to support the volunteer management policies and practices should not be allowed to serve.
- e. Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it is important to ensure to the best of its ability that the local conference, church, school (hereafter: the church), and the programs they sponsor are safe and provide a joyful experience for children and youth.

2. Organizational Responsibilities:

- a. The church has both a moral and civil duty to protect the children entrusted to its care from harm caused by abuse. The local community has an expectation that the church will provide a safe haven for children who participate in its ministries.
- b. It is recommended that appropriate levels of adult supervision shall be provided at all times.

- c. The church will exercise reasonable care in the selection and supervision of volunteers including:
 - i. Careful selection of individuals needed to supervise a specific ministry or activity.
 - ii. Appropriate training and orientation of individuals in order to provide proper supervision of the ministry or activity.
 - iii. Providing each volunteer with a written copy of the policies and/or expected code of conduct required by the church.
 - iv. Providing proper oversight and management of volunteers.
 - v. Taking appropriate corrective action to either discipline, counsel, or remove volunteer(s) when necessary.
 - vi. Reporting all incidents of suspected child abuse in accordance with the law.

3. Volunteer Selection and Management:

- a. It is the responsibility of the church to select individuals who will serve in volunteer positions.
- b. All volunteers should be appropriately screened before they are allowed to supervise children.
- c. The church should adopt a practice that no adult will be considered for a volunteer leadership role in a church-sponsored ministry or activity until he/she has held membership in the congregation or has been known by the organization for a minimum of six (6) months.
- d. All volunteers should be invited to participate in a volunteer service orientation program conducted by the church and submit to a screening procedure that will include the completion of a signed Volunteer Ministry Information Form. Individuals who submit incomplete forms will not be considered for a volunteer position.
- e. The Church should establish a Volunteer Service Committee of three to five members.
- f. All volunteer positions should be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of screening based on the potential level of interaction with children; i.e., one-on-one activity, off-site programs, and overnight activities in which the volunteer may be involved.
- g. The appropriate level of screening should be completed before the volunteer is allowed to serv. (In some cases the local conference may provide assistance in the volunteer screening process.)
- h. The Volunteer Service Committee will notify the appropriate ministry leader and the volunteer when the screening process is complete.
- i. All volunteer leaders, regardless of their previous experience, shall participate in the screening program.
- j. The Volunteer Service Committee shall periodically review the performance of all volunteers. (Volunteer information on file at the church should be updated every three (3) years.)

4. Protecting Confidentiality of Information and Records:

- a. It is the duty and responsibility of all individuals involved in the screening, interviewing, and selection process of volunteers to conduct themselves with utmost integrity and confidentiality. The information received concerning individuals who volunteer their services to the church will be maintained at all times on a confidential basis by the organization. (Information contained

on the Volunteer Ministry Information Form will be released only to other church organizations upon the request and written authorization of the applicant.)

- b. All information received during the volunteer screening process, including the Volunteer Ministry Information Form, will be maintained by the church on a confidential basis and kept in a locked file.
- c. All allegations of inappropriate conduct involving a child with a volunteer will be promptly investigated by the leadership of the church. The church will respect the rights of all parties involved in the alleged incident and treat all matters concerning the situation discreetly, confidentially, and in accordance with local child abuse reporting laws.

5. Levels of Screening for Volunteer Service:

- a. Basic Level – All Volunteers
 - i. The leader of the ministry will personally interview the volunteer applicant
 - ii. Applicant completes and signs the Volunteer Ministry Information Form.
 - iii. Applicants shall provide three (3) personal references.
 - iv. The Volunteer Service Committee shall review the Volunteer Ministry Information form, and contact and document the personal references provided by the applicant. Example: Interviews of applicant to serve in children’s Sabbath Schools, school room mothers, and other volunteer positions conducted on site with numerous individuals present.
- b. Comprehensive Level – Regular Interaction with Children and Off-site Trips
 - i. Complete all elements of the Basic Level screening.
 - ii. State and/or Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal History and Sex Offender Registry Check, of criminal backgrounds may be required of the applicant. This action requires fingerprinting and additional written permission from the applicant to obtain access to this information from law enforcement or other agencies. Example: Volunteers involved with regular one-on-one interaction with children or youth, including off-site or overnight trips. Youth, Pathfinder, and Adventurer leaders, teacher’s aides, and athletic coaches at churches or schools.
- c. Cost of screening procedures – All volunteers must complete the Basic Level of screening. The church is responsible for the cost of implementing these screening procedures. The local conference may provide assistance with or conduct the formal screening of applicants at the Comprehensive Level.
- d. Minimizing resistance to screening and achieving cooperation
 - i. The focus should always be on the mission.
 - ii. Invite adults to apply for the privilege of volunteering in ministry activities
 - iii. Conduct an orientation program for volunteers.
 - iv. Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6); therefore, child protection is an essential element in all church-sponsored children’s activities. Volunteers will be expected to conduct themselves at all times in accordance with biblical principles.

- v. Resist prolonged discussion of volunteer screening procedures. Handle these questions in a private meeting with the individual raising the objection.
- vi. Personally invite a volunteer applicant to complete any missing information on the application form and resubmit for consideration. Individuals will not be allowed to serve as a volunteer until the screening process is complete.

6. Screening for Volunteer Service

“Effective screening of volunteers requires considering the mission of the organization and the activities of volunteers necessary to accomplish that mission. Designers of effective screening must also consider the willingness of volunteers to give up some of their privacy for a greater good. Screening must be thorough enough to impact child abuse, but should not intrude on the privacy of volunteers more than required for the safety of the children with whom they work. Every youth-serving organization should understand that even well-screened volunteers may still pose a threat to the children with whom they work.” – The National Collaboration for Youth – *Screening Volunteers to Prevent Child Abuse: A Three Step Action Guide*, p. 3.

7. Orientation for Volunteers –

Jesus loved to minister to children. Today, we have the privilege of volunteering our time, talents, and service in numerous ways to help fulfill the gospel commission. As a volunteer you have the privilege of working with children, one of God’s most precious gifts. Beyond protecting children from abuse, we also desire to empower volunteers to help kids grow in their experience and understanding of Jesus and His saving grace. So we encourage you to walk with God daily, letting His love fill you up and spill over to the kids you serve.

Therefore, volunteers must receive orientation and training the following areas to effectively serve the church:

1. Provide all volunteers with an understanding of the ministry’s mission and the expectation the church has for its accomplishment in a safe and abuse-free manner.
2. Explain and provide in writing the expectations, code of conduct, and rules to be followed by volunteers in relation to supervision and interaction with children.
3. Conduct awareness education on child abuse (physical and sexual) and the necessary steps to be taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents. Reaffirm that alleged incidents of child abuse will be investigated and reported to authorities in accordance with local law.
4. Always provide appropriate supervision of children. Never leave children alone without supervision. Wherever possible, a minimum of two adults should be present to supervise activities involving minor-aged children.
5. If an activity is in a room without an interior viewing area, the door should remain open to allow observation of the activity.
6. Make it clear that failure to comply with the established volunteer guidelines and code of conduct may result in the individual being asked to terminate participation in the ministry.

7. Plan volunteer orientations to include knowledgeable individuals and in-service materials to help with the training of volunteers in order to bring credibility and support for your child protection efforts.

Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Volunteers

Revised 2005

Acknowledgment

Because our society is filled with pain, problems, and litigation caused by improper conduct of individuals working with children and youth, it is imperative that those working with children have meaningful guidelines for conduct in order to protect both themselves and those under their care. As a ministry volunteer, you want parents and others to feel comfortable and confident with you.

My Commitment to Volunteer Ministry

I will,

1. Never leave a child or group of children for whom I am responsible unattended. I will provide appropriate supervision at all times.
2. Always have at least one other adult, eighteen (18) years of age or older, to help with the supervision of children. If I find myself in a situation where I am the only adult present, **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** will I allow myself to be alone with one child.
3. Always ask a child's permission before physically touching him/her anywhere, even when responding to an injury or problem. This is especially true for any areas that would normally be covered by a T-shirt and/or shorts. (If an injury is within this area, make sure another adult works with you as care is provided.)
4. Refrain from physical and verbal attacks and corporal punishment which are inappropriate behaviors and should never be used as discipline. "Time outs" or "sit-in-that-chair" may be helpful discipline methods to use with children.
5. Affirm children with appropriate touching by keeping hugs brief and "shoulder-to-shoulder" or "side-to-side". (Always keep hands at (not below) the shoulder level. A caregiver's kiss should be to the forehead or cheek only – not elsewhere. For small children who like to sit on laps, I will encourage them to sit next to me)
6. Provide extra care when taking small children to the restroom. I will take another adult along, or leave the door open.
7. Be aware of conducting activities in rooms that do not have an interior viewing area, or I will leave the door open during the activity to allow easy observation by others.
8. Cooperate with the volunteer screening process and complete the Volunteer Ministry Information Form, as required by the church.
9. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse and aware of the legal requirements for reporting suspected cases of abuse.
10. Cooperate with church leadership in conducting children and youth ministries by being a volunteer who is loving, kind, firm, and always a thoroughly professional person. Working with children and youth is not only a privilege; it is also a serious responsibility that must be approached with utmost care. As a volunteer I will participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the church.

The North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Adventist Risk Management, Inc. recommend these Guidelines for Volunteers, which serve as a protection to you, your ministry, and the church from allegations of abuse.

I, the undersigned, have read this document and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct and Volunteer Guidelines outlined above. I will retain a copy of this document and keep it for reference.

Signed _____

Date _____