

Child Protection Handbook for South Yukon Church of Christ

Revised 4/12/2016



Revisions are highlighted in Red.

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes (a) child...welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are not only the church of the future, but a part of the church today. They are our hope, our teachers, our inspiration, our joy. They deserve to be protected from all that is evil.

In some respects, churches are the ideal environments for child molesters. Churches have unique features that can make them susceptible to incidents of child molestation. Churches tend to be trusting and unsuspecting institutions. Most churches struggle to get adequate help for children’s and youth programs. Research indicated about 75 percent of churches screen paid employees, but only about 33 percent screen volunteers. Churches provide ample opportunities for unsupervised close personal contact between adults and children. Child molesters are attracted to an institution in which they have immediate access to potential victims in an atmosphere of complete trust-the church.

God expects us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. God wants us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. It is the purpose and intent of the South Yukon Church of Christ to provide a safe, secure environment in which to teach and care for the children of our church and community. Our goal is to protect children from sexual abuse, child molestation, and other forms of physical abuse by employees or volunteers in this church and to protect employees and volunteers from false accusations. Thus, we adopt these policies and principles for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse or molestation varies from state to state, but in general includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In a more general sense, child sexual abuse is:

Any sexual activity with a child--whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.

Child sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent. It is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behavior. Child sexual abuse can involve fondling, penetration of the oral, genital, and anal areas, intercourse and forcible rape. Other forms of abuse can include physical abuse, verbal comments, exposure to pornographic materials, obscene phone calls, exhibitions, or allowing children to witness sexual activity.

Definition of a minor

A minor is any individual under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Child Protection Policies and Principles

The policies and principles set forth below will apply to all people, both employees and volunteers, who give supervision or have custody of minors while working within South Yukon Children's and Youth Ministries, having opportunity for contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

These policies and principles will address five areas that are critical for the protection of the children, our employees and volunteers, and our church: Selection and Screening Process, Supervision of Workers, Reporting Procedures, Response Plan, and Training.

I. Selection and Screening Process

- A. An *employee* is defined as anyone who is paid by the church on a full or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with preschoolers, children, and youth.

New church employees will be required to complete a confidential application form and will be interviewed by the appropriate staff members. They must have references checked and verified, and give written permission for a criminal background check. **A criminal background check will then be performed; confidential results will be kept on file with the application.** Any information indicating that a candidate poses a threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person will result in the immediate removal of the individual candidate from consideration for employment with this organization. (Any exceptions to this will be addressed by our legal advisors).

- B. A *volunteer* is defined as a person who is *not* paid by the church on a full or part-time basis and is serving in any ministry position at the request of the church. **This includes any adult or teenager (13 years or older). A parent, legal**

guardian, or potential future volunteer may observe, with no responsibilities, a Bible class of minors for up to three (3) consecutive weeks and not be considered a volunteer. (The intent of this exclusion is to allow a parent or legal guardian to observe their child's Bible class and for recruiting future teachers. It should not be used in any way to circumvent the Child Safety policies and principles included in this handbook.)

All volunteers in the Children's and Youth Ministries will be required to complete the Child Protection Training Course offered by the South Yukon Church of Christ, and submit a confidential application form. First time volunteers must also be interviewed by an appropriate staff member, and have references checked and verified. All volunteers must give written permission for a criminal background check if they are going to be working in the care of minors or have custody or supervision of minors. **A criminal background check will then be performed; confidential results will be kept on file with the application.** In lieu of a background check, a parent or legal guardian of a minor (13-17 years old) must complete an affidavit acknowledging no awareness of any charge or conviction of any sexual offense and agrees to notify the church immediately if such a charge is filed against the minor. Upon turning 18 years of age, a background check must be performed to maintain certification. Any information indicating that a candidate poses a threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person will result in the immediate removal of the individual candidate from consideration to volunteer in the area of youth and children with this organization. In addition to the above requirements, a volunteer must be a member and regular attendee of South Yukon Church of Christ for at least six (6) months prior to being eligible to volunteer within the area of youth and children. ~~The ministerial staff and administrative elder(s) must approve any deviation from this procedure.~~

~~Note: There will be no exemption permitted for criminal background checks. A background check will be performed on all employees and volunteers who work with youth and children in overnight supervision, counseling, and all children's and youth programs/ events sponsored by South Yukon Church of Christ.~~

~~**Existing teachers as of policy implementation date, June 1, 2014, will not be required to submit references, however, everyone working with children and/or youth will be required to complete an application and submit to a Criminal Records Check. [Removed 2/22/16]~~

II. Supervision of Workers

A. Two Adult Principle

The **Two Adult Principle** means there are two non-related adults present when supervising one or more minors. The **Two Adult Principle** will be used in all high-risk settings which include all events occurring off the church property and events on the church property at times when other large groups of people are not present. Although we encourage the use of older teenagers (ages 13-17) in supervision of younger minors, in high-risk situations they cannot be relied upon to meet the **Two Adult Principle**. At all risk levels, every effort will be made not to use a husband/wife team to supervise children under age three years in an effort to comply with the **Two Adult Principle**. (Where a husband and wife team is used to supervise children under three years old, a third non-related adult or teenager should present.) In low risk settings, the **Two Adult Principle** could include one adult and one teenager. In the event that the **Two Adult Principle** can not reasonably be met in a low risk setting, the event leader must be notified and a door must remain open.

B. Doors

For all activities every effort will be made to place preschoolers, children, and youth in rooms that have an uncovered window in the door. In the event there is no window in the door, the door will be left partially open.

C. Adequate personnel

Every effort will be made to provide adequate personnel for supervision. In principle, we will make every effort to maintain these ratios. The ratios are:

- Babies not walking 3 babies to 1 adult
- Walking to two years 5 children to 1 adult
- Twos and Threes 7 children to 1 adult
- Fours to kindergarten 10 children to 1 adult

D. Overnight Supervision

All overnight chaperones and supervisors will be cleared in advance with a completed criminal background check on file and will be required to comply with all outlined policies including completion of the Child Protection Training Course. The **two adult rule** will be upheld in all cases of overnight supervision.

E. Small Groups

Small Groups should establish the **two adult rule** if the children are separate from their parents during the meeting.

F. Security Identification Procedure

Nursery classes are for babies under two years old. The classes are divided into groups generally by developmental level. A tagging system will be used to assist in identifying parents and child(ren). Guests should provide a cell phone number they have on site or receive a pager so they can be contacted if a need arises. When a baby is inconsolable, the parents are contacted.

G. Work Restrictions

1. Since the children's classrooms for ages one and two have private restrooms, those children use the restroom

by themselves. Exception: Female teachers (only) assist with potty training. Other children must use the public restrooms.

2. When public restrooms are used, children (boys and girls) under kindergarten age should be escorted as needed to the restroom by an adult female (only). Children kindergarten through 2nd grade will be escorted by an adult; a female should escort girls and a male **or female** should escort boys. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe, and then wait outside the restroom until the child comes out. If other adults are in or enter the restroom, the escort should wait just inside the door of the restroom.
3. Never touch a child's private areas except when necessary, as in the case of changing a diaper. Workers should wear rubber gloves at all times while changing diapers. Only females are permitted to change diapers.
4. Workers should avoid the appearance of impropriety; care should be taken to be in the presence of others when allowing children on laps, kissing, or embracing others, etc.
5. Workers are to release children who are in their care (first grade and under) **only** to parents or a responsible guardian specifically authorized to pick up the child.

H. Youth Ministry

Adults involved with the South Yukon youth ministry program should always use discretion when interacting with the students of this ministry. The following guidelines have been established to protect the integrity of the ministry, as well as the students and adults who are involved in this program. In other words, these principles exist to protect our students, and to protect workers from false allegations.

1. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual interaction with any student is inappropriate at all times.
2. Much discretion should be used when displaying physical contact with all students at all times. Even innocent behavior/interaction can sometimes be misinterpreted.
3. One-on-one private counseling with a student should always take place in a public setting, such as the community areas while others are present. Setting private one-on-one counseling appointments that take place off the South Yukon church property is strongly discouraged and should never be done in a private/non-public location or without the knowledge of a person in a leadership position. When a situation arises where you are alone with a student, quickly move that situation to a public setting.
4. Driving alone with a student should be avoided at all times. If an adult must transport a student, prior parental consent must be obtained and at least one other person should be in the vehicle.
5. All suspicions of child or sexual abuse must be reported per the following REPORTING PROCEDURES section.
6. Any suspicions of any church employee or volunteer having an inappropriate relationship with a student must be promptly reported per the following REPORTING PROCEDURES section.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

- A. All church employees and volunteers are considered “mandatory reporters.”

- B. Observed, reported, or suspected child abuse or child molestation will be verbally reported immediately to a Minister and a OSDH Form #333-F will be completed. (Available online by Google searching “OSDH Form #333-F”)
- C. The Minister will provide emotional support and assist the reporter in promptly contacting the local Oklahoma Department of Human Services or calling the statewide 24-hour hotline number (1-800-522-3511) to make a report of suspected child abuse and/or neglect in good faith and in accordance with the law of the state of Oklahoma.
- D. The Minister will notify the elders as soon as possible and keep them updated as to progress of the reporting procedures.

IV. RESPONSE PLAN

- A. All allegations will be taken seriously, and the appropriate action will be taken, including immediately notifying the appropriate minister regarding cases where there is reason to believe abuse or criminal acts have occurred.
- B. The church staff will not deny or minimize the allegation. The South Yukon Church of Christ ministerial staff will be available to all persons involved and will cooperate with civil authorities. The church will not investigate the situation; all investigations will be handled by civil authorities.
- C. The parents of the alleged victim will be notified immediately by the appropriate minister and an elder regarding any allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse that does not involve them as the alleged perpetrator(s).
- D. The Minister will document, in writing with date(s) and signature, all efforts in the handling of any incident.

- E. Any employee of the church who is the subject of a child abuse or molestation investigation whether within or outside of his/her work with the church will be removed from any work associated with minors, pending completion of an investigation by civil authorities.
- F. Any volunteer worker who is the subject of a child abuse or molestation investigation whether within or outside of his/her work with the church will be removed from any roles with ministries to minors, pending the completion and outcome of the investigation by civil authorities.
- G. Any person who is not found innocent of alleged abuse or molestation will be permanently removed from working with minors within the organization. The church will consult with legal counsel for advice if termination of employment is indicated.
- H. The elders will designate an official spokesperson for the church. Consultation will occur with external legal counsel and insurance company prior to any public comments. No other elders, employees, or volunteers shall speak to the media with regard to any actual or alleged incidents of abuse.
- I. All elders, employees, and volunteers will cooperate fully with any law enforcement or governmental agency that may be investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation in connection with activities of the church.

V. TRAINING

The Connections Minister **and any Minister(s) who are responsible for Children or Youth Ministry are** responsible to see that training is provided with regard to these policies and principles.

Lesson objectives for training workers with children and youth should include the following:

- A. Provide a basic orientation to the facts about child sexual abuse and the church.
- B. Present a rationale for the emphasis upon protecting young people from abuse in the church.
- C. Describe church policies governing ministry to children and youth.
- D. Encourage worker commitments to follow church policies.
- E. Discipline
 - 1. Workers are never to spank, hit, grab, shake, or otherwise physically discipline anyone.
 - 2. Serious disciplinary problems should be reported to the worker's class coordinator/department supervisor and to the child's parent or guardian.
- F. Injuries or Illness
 - 1. Workers who are ill (with a fever, or have a communicable disease which can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity.
 - 2. A suitable substitute (who **is Child Safety Certified at South Yukon Church of Christ**) must be used to take the place of workers who are ill.
 - 3. Minors should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If this is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that will allow supervision to continue until the person can be returned to his/her parent or guardian.
 - 4. Reasonable steps should be taken to avoid direct contact with bodily fluids of any kind.

5. Any Class Coordinator/Department Supervisor who becomes aware of an injury to a volunteer or student will take steps to ensure proper medical attention is given to the injured person.
6. Minors who have received an injury which is obviously minor, should be given simple first aid as needed at the time of injury, however no medication, either orally or topically, should be administered without written consent from the parent in advance. The child's parent or guardian should be notified when they pick up the injured child.
7. Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parent or guardian of the injured person should be immediately notified, as well as the Class Coordinator/Department Supervisor. 911 should also be called immediately if warranted by the injury.

G. Violation of policy or procedures

1. Volunteers must promptly notify their Class Coordinator/Department Supervisor or a Minister of any activity undertaken on their own behalf or by others which violates these policies or principles.
2. Any Class Coordinator/Department Supervisor or ministry leader who becomes aware of a violation of these policies or principles will take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance by all volunteers and will remove volunteers from their position if such removal is warranted or if the volunteer poses a potential threat to others.

H. Bi-Annual Employee/Volunteer Review

1. The Child Protection Handbook for South Yukon

Church of Christ will be reviewed bi-annually, in January, by all volunteers, employees, coordinators, supervisors, and ministry leaders to whom it applies.

2. All employees and volunteer workers who will be working in any capacity with children/youth will complete a brief renewal application when they complete their bi-annual review of the Child Protection Handbook for South Yukon Church of Christ.
3. Should the renewal application show that any employee or volunteer worker has become unsuitable for working with children/youth; they will be immediately removed from their current position, and will not be considered for other positions involving work with children/youth.

I. Revision of Policies and Principles

This handbook will be regularly reviewed and can be modified in accordance with the bylaws of the church. Any such modification will be promptly conveyed to all persons affected by the modification.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child may experience the blessings of Jesus: “but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).