Chesapeake Conference

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

To effectively manage risks to children, the Chesapeake Conference requires the active support and cooperation of ministers, educators, all church members, leaders, and volunteers implementing the safety procedures in any and all activities.

Objectives

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a moral and civil duty to take reasonable steps to protect the children and youth entrusted to its care. This policy is designed to help provide a framework for providing a safe, spiritual, and abuse-free environment for every child who attends programs and activities of all churches, schools, and organizations incorporated under Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. From this point forward referred to as Church.

Purpose

It is our purpose to prevent any form of child abuse, physical, emotional, sexual, neglect, or abandonment, and to protect employees and volunteers from false allegations. The Conference will work in partnership together with children and parents to promote the welfare, health, and development of children. Child protection is everyone's responsibility.

Principle

Zero tolerance of child abuse: The Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists does not tolerate child abuse. Our organization will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children.

1. Definitions of Abuse

Physical Abuse is a non-accidental injury to a child, regardless of motive, that is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by a caretaker or any act that causes or creates a substantial risk of harm or threat of harm to a child's well being.

Sexual Abuse is any behavior with a child designed to gratify either an adult or a child sexually. It is a violation of a child's sexual privacy whether by physical contact, visual, or verbal remarks. It includes fondling of any intimate parts of the child's body, oral, genital, and/or anal penetration by any foreign object; oral, genital, or anal sexual intercourse, telling a child to masturbate, exhibiting or showing any genital parts to a child, allowing a child to witness or watch any forms of sexual activity, showing any pornographic materials, etc. Verbal descriptions of genitalia and sexual activities may also be considered sexual abuse if it is designed to gratify either an adult or a child sexually.

Emotional Abuse is any verbal communication that intends and actually causes harm to a child. Examples are harsh criticism, degrading, belittling, threats,

disparaging name-calling, unnecessary shouting, demeaning terminology, unrealistic demands for perfection, violent or obscene language, improper use of scripture or prayer to manipulate a child, etc. These are provided as examples and these examples are not exclusive or exhaustive.

Neglect includes failure by a caretaker, either deliberately or through negligence, to take actions necessary to provide a child with shelter, minimally adequate food, clothing, medical care, supervision, or other essential care.

Abandonment occurs when the parent or caretaker leaves a child alone or with another person and fails to reclaim the child. This includes parental failure to provide information about her/his own whereabouts or providing of false information about his/her whereabouts, or failure to establish a legal guardian or custodian for the child.

2. Volunteer Selection and Management Procedures

The work of volunteers is essential to the successful accomplishment of the Church's mission and ministry. The Church will choose individuals with high spiritual and moral backgrounds as leaders and participants in programs for children. Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children and youth (Matthew 18:1-6); therefore, child protection is an essential element in all Church-sponsored children and youth's activities.

I. It is the responsibility of the Church to select, screen, and manage individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry for children and youth activities.

II. A minimum of six (6) months of membership at a Seventh-day Adventist congregation is required for volunteer leadership positions.

III. All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth, regardless of their previous experience, must participate in a screening procedure that will include a signed Children and Youth Ministry Volunteer Code of Conduct, online training, and a background check. The volunteer screening procedure must be updated for each individual every three (3) years.

IV. Background screening and online training, conducted by Verified Volunteers, must be completed before the volunteer is allowed to serve. The local church or school is responsible for the cost of implementing these screening procedures.

V. Individuals who have committed any form of abuse as previously defined may not work or serve as volunteers or staff in any Church sponsored activity or program for children and youth.

VI. No convicted sexual offender will be elected/appointed to an office or position. Convicted sex offenders may be permitted limited participation in a congregation.

Such limited participation will be at the discretion of the local congregation, but if such is permitted, the sex offender must sign and adhere to a Church Attendance/Participation Agreement.

VII. When an allegation is made, the individual is to be immediately suspended from office or position until an investigation is completed. Whereupon appropriate action, such as counsel, discipline, removal, or restoration of office or position will be taken.

3. Orientation and Training of Volunteers

All volunteers will be required to participate in educational courses on child abuse and the necessary steps to be taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidences.

I. Verified Volunteers is the background check and online training program approved by North American Division and Adventist Risk Management and required by Chesapeake Conference.

II. Background screening reports will be sent and reviewed only by the Conference Executive Secretary and Executive Assistant. Information received from the report will be confidential and used only in the context of Church ministry. When necessary, reports will be shared with the local pastor, principal, or appropriate departmental director.

III. It is the responsibility of the Church to appoint: (a) a local administrator to implement and oversee the Child Protection Policy and Procedures; and (b) a local Verified Volunteers coordinator.

4. Conference Reporting Protocol

I. Suspicions of inappropriate conduct involving a child minor should be brought to the attention of the leadership of the Church and will be promptly investigated. The Church will respect the rights of all parties involved in the suspicious behavior and treat all matters concerning the situation discreetly, confidentially, and in accordance with local abuse reporting laws.

II. Allegations must be reported to the appropriate authorities.

5. Sex Offenders within the Church

The Church has a responsibility to provide worship opportunities and ministry to individuals who have previously engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct or physical abuse involving children or youth. When an offender wishes to be actively involved with the Church the following practices will be followed:

I. The individual agrees to participate and attend all Church related activities on a chaperoned basis and will not interact on a personal basis with any child under the age of eighteen (18).

   Definition of a Chaperone: For the purpose of this agreement, a chaperone shall be a mature adult of the same gender as participant, over 30 years of age, designated by the Church board or board of elders, with no sexual misconduct history, and not a relative of the person defined in this agreement. A chaperone shall be provided a copy of the Church Attendance/Participation Agreement, advised of its content and appropriate protocol should concerns arise, and be willing to take responsibility seriously.

II. The individual will not be allowed alone in any building on Church premises where activities involving children under the age of eighteen (18) are being conducted.

III. The individual will agree to sign and abide by the Church Attendance/Participation Agreement supplied by the Chesapeake Conference. The local leadership will meet personally with the individual and enter into an agreement. Should the individual refuse to agree and sign the agreement, that individual will not be allowed to attend Church functions.

IV. The Church can consider the possibility of notifying the parents of children of the presence of a sex offender. Such a step is often difficult to administer, therefore each Church needs to fully explore the full ramifications of notifying parents. The abuser or his/her family should be informed if such a step is contemplated.

   If the person in question has not been convicted of sexual misconduct but is known to have committed such offenses, the Church leadership should consult with Chesapeake Conference for guidance in appropriate levels of restrictions and supervision.

V. The Church may impose additional restrictions depending on the nature, age, and degree of the issue. A local Church should consult with the Conference for guidance.

Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Church Attendance/ Participation Agreement

(Prepare four copies)

I recognize the concerns and responsibilities of the Church to ensure a safe environment for its members and wish to stipulate to the following conditions that would allow my attendance and participation in Church activities:

1. I will not associate with any minors attending or participating in any church/school activity without an approved adult chaperone. I will not sit next to a child and if a child sits next to me, I will move away from the child.

2. I will not go to any area where children's or youth ministries are being conducted.

3. I will not place myself into, or accept, any volunteer or other position of leadership, authority, or activity that may affect or influence children.

4. I will under no circumstances take a child home with me or transport them anywhere alone.

5. I will not develop any special relationships with minor children or their parents.

6. I will not go to a Church member's home where children are present, for any meals, Bible study, or get-togethers unless I have an approved chaperone with me.

7. I agree to maintain an accountability network with individuals designated by the Church and ensure my chaperone is with me at all times.

8. I authorize the Church to obtain information regarding myself from my parole officer, governmental agencies, or other persons who might have information relative to my prior criminal convictions.

9. I shall comply with any court-mandated restrictions, treatment, and/or requirements and recognize that these take precedence over any less restrictive parts of this agreement.

10. I understand and agree that the Church, in fulfilling its responsibilities in providing a safe environment for its members and guests, may find it necessary to disclose an account of my past behavior and/or criminal

history to parents, Church leaders, and other persons who may need to have such information in order to meet their parental or supervisory responsibilities.

11. I understand that the provisions of this Church Attendance/Participation Agreement do not create any personal and/or legal rights against the Church that would afford me any claim or right of redress in any legal or administrative proceedings, nor does this agreement in any way preclude the Church from exercising its U.S. Constitutional First Amendment rights pertaining to the Church membership and/or discipline.

12. This agreement shall remain valid as long as I attend and/or participate in the activities of the Church named in this document, and should I wish to transfer my attendance, participation, or membership to another congregation, a copy of this document will be sent to them.

_____

Church Name

_____ _____

Church Participant's Name Date

_____

Church Participant's Signature

_____ _____

Pastor's Name Date

_____

Pastor's Signature

_____ _____

Elder's Name Date

_____

Elder's Signature

_____ _____

Chaperone's Name Date

_____

Chaperone's Signature