

Child-Youth Protection Policy

Context:

We live in a society that suffers from social confusion, dysfunctional behavior and addictions of many natures. The church is not immune from the potential of abuse or neglect of children, either by its members or those in leadership positions. The victimization of children crosses every racial, social, economic and religious boundary. This policy reflects a commitment of Sovereign Redeemer Church to protect children in our care from harm and abuse.

We will diligently strive to be a safe place for all children and adults who attend any fellowship or ministry activity and we will not tolerate any type of abuse, especially targeted toward our children.

Rationale:

For the safety and protection of our children and workers, guidelines are necessary to allow us to maintain the ministry of our congregation as a safe place where we can trust one another. All compensated and volunteer child/youth workers are required to read, understand and comply with this policy. The format of these guidelines is also required by our insurance liability company.

Purpose:

This policy not only protects the children and youth we are ministering to, but is also designed to prevent unfounded allegations of child/youth abuse. Since many volunteers are involved with our child and youth programs, these guidelines are intended to build a sense of mutual trust and accountability. Expressing Christ's love and compassion for children and youth is a beautiful reflection of Jesus in us. There must be unquestionable trust in these ministries among workers, parents and children.

Definitions – in this policy, the following definitions will apply:

1. Child/youth – Any person under the age of 18.
2. Special Needs Person – Any adult or child requiring direct adult supervision as a result of physical or mental limitations.
3. Adult – Any person age 18 or over.
4. Child abuse and neglect – Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect of a child by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's welfare.
 - a. Physical abuse – Maltreatment which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, cuts, welts, fractures and internal injuries.
 - b. Emotional abuse – Maltreatment which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including, but not limited to, belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on the child's performance and isolation from normal social activities.
 - c. Sexual abuse – Maltreatment which consists of sexual contact or interactions with a child, including but not limited to physical contact (fondling, genital/oral stimulation, sexual intercourse) and non-physical contact (exhibitionism, child prostitution, pornography, and voyeurism).
 - d. Neglect – Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care and supervision.
5. Compensated workers – Hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employees who work with children at any church sponsored activity.
6. Volunteer workers – Any non-compensated individual who works with children at any church sponsored activity.
7. Caregiver – any compensated or volunteer worker, seventh grade or older.
8. Leadership Team – the ministry team including all pastors, elders and deacons.

Overview of Child/Youth Protection Policy

This policy will have four components:

- Selecting and screening compensated and volunteer child/youth workers.
- Supervision of compensated and volunteer child/youth workers.
- Reporting procedures for suspected abuse.
- Response plan to suspected abuse or allegations of abuse.

We will provide training on this child protection policy to all new childcare workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are required to attend these training events.

Section 1 – Selecting and Screening Compensated and Volunteer Child/Youth Workers

1. Volunteer workers must be regular attendees “in good standing” at Sovereign Redeemer Church for at least six months.
2. All compensated workers shall be members “in good standing” of Sovereign Redeemer Church for at least six months before assuming responsibilities. Exceptions to six month rule may be granted by the Leadership Team for justifiable reasons.
3. All adults who will serve as child/youth workers must complete an application indicating their experience, training and goals for being involved in the youth ministry. The application may also request basic information such as previous church affiliation, references and employment history.
Any criminal offenses will be indicated and the applicant will also explain if they have ever been accused, arrested or convicted of any sexually related crimes. These personnel files will be kept confidential in a locked file in the church office.
4. All adult compensated and volunteer child/youth workers shall be screened by a background check at the expense of Sovereign Redeemer Church for the purpose of obtaining information regarding criminal and abuse history. This will include a requirement to fill out a Child Abuse History Clearance Form and a Criminal Record Check Form and submit the completed papers to the church office. The Child Abuse History Clearance Form will be sent to the address of the person who submitted the form. This person is responsible to submit the certificate to the office before they can begin working in any child/youth position. The results of these screenings will be kept confidential by authorized church staff. Background checks will be performed every five years.
5. Disqualifying offenses that will keep an individual from serving as a child/youth worker will be determined by the Leadership Team on a case by case basis in light of surrounding circumstances. However, convictions for an offense involving children will preclude someone from being permitted to serve in these roles. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also disqualify the individual.
6. All compensated and volunteer workers must read this policy and sign a letter of understanding. Sovereign Redeemer Church will provide orientation and training appropriate to the level of responsibility.

Section 2 – Supervision of Compensated and Volunteer Child/Youth Workers

1. Physical Contact Guidelines
 - a. Touch is an essential part of nurturing. Volunteers should be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences, family backgrounds, individual personalities, special needs and sexual development. Physical contact with children/youth should be age appropriate.
 - b. There shall not be any kissing, extended hugging or inappropriate touching of any child or youth.
 - c. Physical punishment shall never be used. All interactions regarding discipline must be done with the consideration of the person's dignity and self-esteem. Discipline is to be carried out through instruction, training and verbal correction. Gentleness, respect and understanding must guide all actions and words.
 - d. Anyone working with youth should never pursue or engage in a dating relationship with the youth. Staff should always be aware of youth who may develop an attraction to a youth worker.
2. Bathroom Procedures
 - a. Parents or guardians are strongly encouraged to take their children to the bathroom prior to going to classrooms.
 - b. Volunteers should keep the door open when going into a bathroom stall to assist a child. If the bathroom is one open room, the volunteer should remain outside the bathroom door. If the child requires assistance, the volunteer should prop open the bathroom door while assisting the child.
3. Health Procedures
 - a. A first aid kit will be kept in each wing of the building and carried to offsite activities. It is at the discretion of the caregiver as to whether the parent or guardian should be immediately notified of any minor accident. For any first aid application, an incident report must be filled out. No medicine should be given without instructions from the parent or guardian. Even for a minor injury, the parent or guardian should be called if the child so requests.
 - b. Sovereign Redeemer Church will not store or dispense any medication (prescription or over the counter) to children/youth in our care.
 - c. Children/youth who require medications during ministry times must have a parent or guardian hold the medication and administer it. Children or youth may self-administer medication under orders from a physician.
 - d. Children with communicable diseases, profusely running noses, fever or persistent coughing should avoid contact with other children.
 - e. For long term events (such as a field trip, retreat, etc.) medication may be administered with the following guidelines:
 - i. The parent or guardian must submit in writing to the volunteer his/her request for administering the medication,

instructions for use, side effects, precautions, etc., including the parent or guardian's signature.

- ii. The medication must be in the original container with the label intact and be carried by the volunteer.

4. General Guidelines

- a. Every effort will be made to have a minimum of two adults working together with children. In a Bible Study or similar teaching environment, it is acceptable to have individual classes/groups with only one adult caregiver provided there are other adults present in the general area. This protects the children and the adults, as well as providing a safer situation in the event of an accident or emergency.
- b. All Club activities will have at least two adults guiding each club meeting and event.
- c. Volunteers will wear a nametag provided by Sovereign Redeemer Church.
- d. Parents or guardians will be asked to bring pre-school children to their rooms. If the volunteer is not in the room, parents or guardians should stay with the child(ren) until the volunteer arrives.
- e. Within 10 minutes after dismissal time, parents or guardians should pick up preschool children unless other arrangements have been made with the volunteer. For everyone's safety, the parents or guardians are encouraged to keep their children from running in the sanctuary, narthex, halls and parking lots.
- f. All primary and youth Sunday School and nursery rooms shall have windows in the doors or walls. The windows of classrooms shall remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
- g. The Pastor and Children's Ministry Director must approve any activities that are held off site. There shall be a minimum of 2 adult caregivers present with a ratio of 1 adult to 10 children. Overnight events that are attended by children of both genders must be chaperoned by adult caregivers of both genders.
- h. A travel permission form and a medical release form for each child must be completed and signed by a parent or guardian before a child will be allowed to participate in a church outing. These forms is to be kept with the worker at all times during the outing.
- i. Photos of any child or youth will not be used without the permission of the parent or guardian.
- j. All volunteers under the age of 18 must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with a child except in an emergency. No child/youth worker will meet alone with a child or youth for a private meeting without a parent or guardian's consent.
- k. It is recognized that certain counseling and ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two adult caregivers and that the general guidelines for the supervision of caregivers should not restrict situations where individual counsel and guidance is necessary. In this case, the door must be left open or the window of the door shall remain uncovered.

- l. A file will be kept for each child who is a regular attendee with an emergency contact, information about allergies, physical limitations or medical concerns.
- m. Nursery: Normally, the only adults permitted in the nursery are parents or scheduled caregivers. At least one adult beyond high school age should be present in the nursery at all times when children are present unless the parent gives approval for a younger person.
- n. In situations where it is not possible to follow these policies, exceptions may be made with approval of parents and/or the Children's Ministry Director.
- o. Department supervisors for all child/youth programs will train, monitor and evaluate each responsible adult in order to maintain a satisfactory level of quality in ministry. This program resourcing will include education on the issues of abuse (physical, emotional and sexual).

Section 3 – Reporting Procedures

1. All teachers, club leaders, compensated and volunteer child/youth workers involved with children (birth – 18 years) shall immediately report any suspicions or concerns that relate to child abuse, inappropriate behavior or child neglect. The report should be confidential and should include the reporting individual's observations, complaints or suspicions.
2. If a child offers information, it should be taken seriously. The problem should not be denied. Emotional support should be given but the volunteer should not pressure the child for details.
3. Specific behaviors to watch for include:
 - a. Inappropriate comments about sexual matters.
 - b. Use of pornography.
 - c. Excessive and inappropriate attention to a particular child/youth, especially a desire to be alone with a child/youth.
 - d. Any form of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect. Example include kissing, extended hugging, or inappropriate touching of any child/youth.
4. Report the suspicious behavior to the appropriate staff person, department leader, Sunday School coordinator, youth leader or member of the Leadership Team. The senior pastor must be notified. If the behavior is required by law to be reported, the senior pastor shall contact the Children and Youth Service Agency. Strict confidentiality on these issues will be maintained.
5. Any reported incident should not be discussed with others. It is the responsibility of the senior pastor and the Leadership Team to process the incident, documenting each conversation or contact as it takes place.
6. Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care that is occurring outside our church. In the event this occurs, this should be reported immediately to the senior pastor for further action including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Section 4 – Response Plan to Suspected Abuse or Allegations of Abuse

In the event an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Sovereign Redeemer Church or during a program or activity that we sponsor, the senior pastor shall lead the following process:

1. Designate someone to speak with the individual(s) involved to determine the facts and report to the senior pastor. The senior pastor should determine the appropriate action.
2. The senior pastor may seek counsel with appropriate persons regarding next steps and whether there is a need to report the incident to legal authorities. Such action would be based upon consensus of the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team may review the plan for follow-up in any particular situation with legal counsel prior to or during implementation of follow-up.
3. The senior pastor may notify parents/guardians of alleged abuse, contingent upon advice from Child Protection Services or law enforcement agencies.
4. The worker alleged to be a perpetrator of the abuse of misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation.
5. If the reported incident appears to be true, the incident must be reported immediately to our insurance company, attorney, elders of the church and the pastor.
6. We will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law requires.
7. We will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a team will be formed consisting of the Elders to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with our insurance company and/or attorney.
8. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be permanently removed from their position with children or youth. The senior pastor and elders will confront the offender about their sinful, harmful behavior and plan a recovery process to help the offender find forgiveness and freedom in Christ.
9. The senior pastor of the congregation will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he is alleged to be involved. All other workers should refrain from speaking to the media.
10. Pastoral care resources will be provided to the victim and their family as desired.