



VERDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

CHILDREN & YOUTH POLICY HANDBOOK



CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

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Overview of the Verde Community Safety System

Because we love children and youth and desire to protect them, all staff members and volunteers working with children or youth are required to complete some or all of the **4 SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

Full time volunteer – has completed all 4 steps detailed below. This person is fully certified to work in child/youth ministry activities and can supervise part-time volunteers.

Part time volunteer – has completed step 1 & 2 detailed below. This person is able to work in child/youth ministry under supervision by certified staff and full-time volunteers.

STEP ONE: Policies & Procedures (required for staff and all volunteers)

All staff members and volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

STEP TWO: Criminal Background Check (required for staff and all volunteers)

All staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or youth activities or programming are required to undergo a criminal background check.

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth:

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc
- Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
- Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to participate in any event.

STEP THREE: Screening Process (required for staff and full-time volunteers)

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the following:

- Employment Application (employees only)
- Safety Application (employees and volunteers)
- Face-to-face interview (employees and volunteers)
- Provide references to be checked (employees and volunteers)

STEP FOUR: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (required for staff and full-time volunteers)

It is required that all staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to their immediate Supervisor. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child/youth, win the child/youth's trust (and the trust of the child/youth's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child/youth into sexual activity and keep the child/youth from disclosing the abuse. To equip staff members and volunteers with information necessary to

recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, all staff members and full-time volunteers are required to complete sexual abuse awareness training. This training will be renewed every two years.

Child and Youth Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

There is a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer to act in the best interest of all children and youth in every program. In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to their immediate Supervisor.

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

It should be the commitment of every congregation to provide a safe, secure environment for children, youth and vulnerable persons and their families. Arizona state law requires that any person having cause to believe a child/youth's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency (911) or the Arizona Department of Family and Protective Services. Staff members and volunteers must uphold the Arizona state law and notify their immediate supervisor as necessary. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and Arizona state law, to their immediate supervisor, Pastor and the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to their immediate Supervisor. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children/youth for abuse, it is possible that a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child/youth for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to their immediate Supervisor.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all these policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor.

Our calling and our mandate is to ensure a safe haven for all of God's people. As Christians, we are called to create a protective environment in our churches. They must be holy, safe and protective communities for all of God's children, regardless of age or ability. Verde Community Church recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable persons and (2) to help provide safeguards for workers from false accusations and/or suspicions (3) to hold accountable all those who minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children and youth, staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to their immediate Supervisor.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child/youth will be immediately suspended from participation in all ministry activities involving children/youth. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies. Any person found to have committed a prohibited act should be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children and youth populations. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment. Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children and youth.

REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Arizona state law requires that any person having cause to believe a child/youth's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the Child Abuse Hotline, the appropriate law enforcement agency (911) for emergencies, the Arizona Department of Family and Protective Services, or Child Protective Services. Staff members and volunteers must uphold the Arizona state law and notify their immediate supervisor as necessary.

RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE

Immediate action on behalf of the church is required when a report of abuse occurs, in addition to contacting the Senior Pastor.

BUILDING SAFETY

No child/youth will ever be left unattended during ministry programming or classes. Staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child/youth in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child/youth, that staff member or volunteer will take the child/youth to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child/youth is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present.) After every programming event, staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

On a playground setting, staff members and volunteers are to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to the areas which are not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures.)

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

WORKER TO CHILD/YOUTH RATIOS

Verde Community Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children/Youth Ministry programs. Accordingly, the following worker to child/youth ratios will be observed:

| Program | Workers | Students |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Nursery | 2 | 8 |
| Preschool, 2 and 3 years old | 2 | 12 |
| Preschool, 4 and 5 years old | 2 | 18 |
| Elementary | 2 | 20 |
| Youth | 2 | 25 |

If a worker is out of ratio, it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify their immediate Supervisor. Their immediate Supervisor will make diligent efforts to immediately bring staff member/volunteer to student ratios into compliance with this policy.

DISCIPLINE

It is the policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors. Disciplines such as using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management are better options. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

1. Verbally redirect the child/youth before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
2. If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child/youth away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the child).
3. Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with clear explanation of your expectations. (“Jamie, you didn’t stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.”) In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
4. Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a “spot” to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.
5. Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child’s age (3 years old, 3 minutes).

6. Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. (“Jamie, you’re doing a great job of sitting quietly – just 2 more minutes.”)
7. Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Follow this with praise. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and their immediate Supervisor. If a youth is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff/volunteers, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student’s parent will be contacted to pick up the student. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff/volunteer will verbally redirect students involved and will try to avoid physical intervention.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINE

Nursery children

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

1. Only female nursery workers or the child’s parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
2. Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
3. Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.
4. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards (“Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.”)
5. Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
6. Children should be changed on changing stations only.

Toilet training

1. No child will be forced to toilet train.
2. Only female nursery workers or the child’s parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children of either sex.
3. When children are taken into bathrooms the door will be left partially open.
4. Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
5. Parents should be consulted on each child’s progress in the toilet training process before leaving the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents

leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration card (“Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded – ask her if she needs to go.”).

6. Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
7. “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing. Extra clothing and diapers should be available, if the parent has not furnished a clothing change.

School age children

School age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. (However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.) Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom. If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

Special needs

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special needs individuals. After the age of 4, parents or legal guardians will change all special needs individuals.

INTOXICANTS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while performing ministry duties, while traveling with children/youth, or while working with or supervising children/youth.

MEDICATIONS

Medication may be given to a child by a staff member or volunteer with a doctor’s prescription or signed parental authorization. The medication must be in the original packaging, including over the counter medication.

NUDITY

Staff members and volunteers should never be nude in the presence of children/youth in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to their immediate Supervisor concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children/youth while participating in ministry programs. Another adult who has completed the Verde Community Church application and screening process should always be present. It is noted that meeting the emotional needs of students may occasionally require staff member and volunteers to minister to them on an individual basis. Staff Members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines when interacting with students. Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-to-one meetings with an individual student at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed. If you are left alone with a child, find another adult. If necessary, you can check out a camcorder from the Verde Community Church Office Manager. This must be checked out and checked back in when the interaction is complete.

TRANSPORTATION

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children or youth:

1. Children/Youth should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Under no circumstances should an adult be alone in a vehicle with a student of the opposite sex.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children/youth while in vehicles.

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents who leave a child in the care of staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child/youth is involved. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their child/youth's programs will be required to complete the Verde Community Church volunteer application, screening process and training.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

A 'physical contact policy' is implemented which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for ministries while protecting children and youth. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in these ministry programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children/youth are important for their development, and are generally suitable in the church setting.

2. Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to Child Protective Services.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child/youth, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other students, staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in any ministry must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child/youth's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children/youth under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to Child Protective Services.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children/youth, and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child/youth in the program.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children/youth.

SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

It is anticipated that certain activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff/volunteers (i.e. lock-ins, mission trips, ski trips, etc.). In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. There must be a minimum of 2 adult leaders present who have previously completed the Verde Community Church application, screening and training process.
2. As long as any students are awake, one of the leaders must also be awake and monitoring students to ensure safe behavior.

3. Leaders should use good judgment regarding PG or PG-13 movies. No R-rated movies are permitted.
4. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn.
5. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both boys and girls, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by student leaders of the same gender.
6. Staff and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff and volunteers should never physically touch a student.
7. Whenever possible, at least one staff or volunteer (same gender) will sleep in the same room as students or in an adjoining room with the door between the rooms kept open.
8. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances a “one-person-to-one-bag or blanket” rule will be observed.

TOBACCO USE

Staff members and volunteers are required to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children/youth or their parents, or during activities or programs.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children/youth should be positive and uplifting. Staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children/youth. To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children/youth in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children/youth.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child. In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate Supervisor.

SUPERVISION

Staff members and volunteers are expected to provide adequate supervision for children in their care while working in church programs.

Children and Youth Ministries Policies and Procedures Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of these Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at Verde Community Church in Cottonwood, Arizona.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by Verde Community Church, Cottonwood, Arizona.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at Verde Community Church in Cottonwood, Arizona at any time. (If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my immediate Supervisor). I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between me and Verde Community Church in Cottonwood, Arizona. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked. I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed. I acknowledge receipt of the Verde Community Children and Youth Ministries Policy and Procedures Manual.

Staff Member or Volunteer's name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's signature

Date: _____

