

**Volunteer Management and Screening Guidelines  
For Seventh-day Adventist Schools  
in the New York Conference**

**Objectives:**

- a. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to providing a safe environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. At this time, the disturbing and traumatic increase and recognition of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation, our society and the Church. Adventist institutions which conduct programs for children and youth are not insulated from abusive individuals. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to make its educational environments free from abuse of all kinds, the following guidelines have been developed for implementation throughout the New York Conference.
  
- b. In keeping with the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual and in concert with the local conference, it is the responsibility of the local school to select, screen and manage trustworthy individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry for children and youth.

***"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."*** SDA Church Manual- Revision 2000 page 120

- c. The work of volunteers is essential to the successful accomplishment of the school's mission and ministry. In selecting individuals for volunteer positions, only persons 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 your mission and must support its successful achievement. Individuals who are unwilling to support the volunteer management policies and practices should not be allowed to serve.

## **Organizational Responsibilities:**

- a. The school 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 school will provide a safe haven for children who participate in the ministry of the school.
- b. It is recommended that appropriate levels of adult supervision shall be provided at all times.
- c. The school will exercise reasonable care in the selection and supervision of volunteers that will include:
  - Careful selection of individuals needed to supervise a specific ministry or activity.
  - Appropriate training and orientation of individuals in order to provide proper supervision of the ministry or activity.
  - Each volunteer will receive a written copy of the policies and/or expected code of conduct.
  - The school will be expected to provide proper oversight and management of volunteers.
  - The school shall take appropriate corrective action to either discipline, counsel, or remove volunteer(s) when necessary.
  - The school has a duty to report all incidents of suspected child abuse in accordance with the law.

## **Volunteer Selection and Management**

- a. It is the responsibility of the school 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 school should adopt a practice that no adult will be considered for a volunteer leadership role in a school sponsored activity until they have held membership in the congregation or been know by the organization for a minimum of six (6) months.

- d. All volunteers should be asked to submit to a screening procedure that will include the completion of a signed School Volunteer Information Form. Individuals who submit incomplete forms will not be considered for a volunteer position.
- e. The school should establish a Volunteer Service Committee of 3-5 members. This committee will review School Volunteer Information Forms submitted and approve individuals to serve in a volunteer capacity.
- f. All volunteer positions should be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of interaction with children: i.e. one-on-one activity, off-site activities and over-night activities in which the volunteer may be involved.
- g. The appropriate level of screening should be completed before the volunteer is allowed to serve. In some cases, the local conference may provide assistance in the volunteer screening process.
- h. The Volunteer Service Committee will notify 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 school should be updated every three (3) years.

### **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 school will be maintained at all times on a confidential basis by the organization. Information contained on the School Volunteer Information Form will only be released to other organizations upon the request and written authorization of the applicant.

- b. All information received during the volunteer screening process, including the School Volunteer Information Form, will be maintained 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 *school board*. The *school board* 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.

### **Levels of Screening for Volunteer Service:**

a. Basic Level- All Volunteers

- Personal interview of the volunteer applicant by the principal/head teacher
- Complete and sign the School Volunteer Information Form
- Applicants shall provide three (3) personal references.
- The Volunteer Service Committee shall review the School Volunteer Information Form and contact and document the personal references provided by the applicant.

Example: home room mothers and other volunteer positions conducted on site with numerous individuals present.

b. Comprehensive Level- Regular Interaction with Children/Off-site Trips

- Complete all elements of the Basic Level screening.
- State and/or FBI Criminal History & Sex Offender Registry Check. Criminal background checks 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: regular one-on-one interaction with children including off-site and overnight trips.

### **Cost of Screening Procedures:**

All volunteers must complete the Basic Level of screening. The school 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.

### **Minimizing Resistance to Screening and Achieving Cooperation:**

- a. The focus should always be on the mission.
- b. Invite adults to apply for the privilege of volunteering in ministry activities.
- c. Conduct an orientation program for volunteers.
- d. Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6), therefore child protection is an essential element in all school sponsored activities. Volunteers will be expected to conduct themselves at all times in accordance with Biblical principles.
- e. Resist prolonged discussion of volunteer screening procedures. Handle these questions in a private meeting with the individual raising the objection.
- f. Personally invite a volunteer applicant to complete any missing information on the application form and resubmit for reconsideration. Individuals will not be allowed to serve as a volunteer until the screening process is complete.

### **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- Page 3.

### **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 our children from abuse we also desire to empower volunteers to help youth 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 young people you serve.

- Volunteers must be provided with an understanding of the schools mission and the expectation that it be accomplished in a safe and abuse-free manner.
- Volunteers must be provided, in writing, with the expectations, code of conduct and rules that will be followed by volunteers in relation to supervision and interaction with children.
- Reaffirm that alleged incidents of child abuse will be investigated and reported to authorities in accordance with local law.
- Conduct training on appropriate physical contact to affirm children.
- Always provide appropriate supervision for children. Never leave children alone without supervision. Wherever possible a minimum of two adults should be present to supervise activities involving minor-aged children.
- If an activity is in a room without an interior viewing area, the door should remain open to allow observation of the activity.
- 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.
- Consider planning 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

### Acknowledgement:

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- to protect both themselves and those under their care. As a school volunteer, you want parents, staff and others to feel comfortable and confident with you.

### My Commitment as a School Volunteer:

*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, 18 years 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 them 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, I will make sure another adult works with me as care is provided.
4. Refrain from physical and verbal attacks and corporal punishment which is inappropriate behavior 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 touch by keeping hugs brief and "shoulder-to-shoulder" or "side-to-side", always keeping 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, encourage them to sit next to you.
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 School Volunteer Information Form as required by the school.
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 staff in conducting children and youth activities by being loving, kind, firm and always thoroughly professional as a volunteer. Working with children is not only a privilege, but is also a deep responsibility that must be approached with utmost care. As a volunteer I will participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the school.

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and Risk Management recommend these *Guidelines for Volunteers* which serve as a protection to you and the school 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:** \_\_\_\_\_