

Policy for the Safety and Nurture of Children and Youth

Southport Christian Church

As approved by the SCC Board on Thursday, November 14, 2013

Jesus Blesses Little Children

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

Believing that the Good News of Jesus Christ is for the whole world, and is especially Good News for those who are least and lost, Southport Christian Church ("SCC") sets forth the following policy for the safety and nurture of those who are among the most vulnerable--our children and youth.

It is the desire and goal of Southport Christian Church to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children and youth who participate in our programs. To facilitate this goal, we believe it is important to provide for the screening, training, and ongoing supervision of volunteers and staff who work in our youth and children's ministries. Those involved with these ministries would include, but are not limited to: all paid staff persons, Nursery supervisors, Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers, children and youth choir leaders, JYF, Chi Rho, and CYF youth leaders, SCC camp staff, transportation providers, and special event chairpersons.

Policy Outline

All adults¹, employed and volunteer, who work with children or youth must be active participants² at SCC for the preceding six months and undergo a screening process and child protection training prior to beginning child or youth related activities with SCC. (*The six months rule may be waived for a new staff member.*)

Adults who have been convicted, or who are currently under investigation, of sexual or physical abuse of children or youth or those who have a history of inappropriate conduct with children or youth shall not work in programs at SCC that involve children or youth.

Volunteers and employees who work with children or youth at SCC shall make every reasonable effort to avoid situations where an employee or volunteer is alone with a child without another adult present.

¹ Adult is anyone 18 years of age or older.

² "Active participant" is defined in Active Participant Guideline addendum.

Recruitment of Volunteers

A good volunteer is one who meets policy requirements for eligibility and who exhibits the following qualities:

- Christian faith that promotes spiritual growth of all
- responsible, mature leadership
- appropriateness with children and youth
- commitment to children and youth
- commitment to volunteer responsibilities with children and youth

Recruitment of volunteers will be done by the event leadership team. The event leadership teams will have the final decision regarding selection and placement of volunteers.

Screening

All adults wishing to work with children and youth shall undergo a screening process. Information obtained through the screening process will be kept confidential. Printed information will be kept locked up. Screening will take place every three years or sooner as deemed necessary by the Child Protection Team.

A. Church Staff (paid employees): All church staff shall submit an application form which asks for personal information, a list of references and permission for the church to perform a limited criminal history (lch) background check. An lch background check will be performed AND all references will be contacted before the individual will be permitted to work with children or youth.

B. Adult Volunteers: All adult volunteers shall submit an application form which asks for personal information, a list of references and permission for the church to perform a limited criminal history (lch) background check. An lch background check will be performed AND/OR references will be checked before the individual will be permitted to work with children or youth.

C. Youth Volunteers: High school-aged youth³ will undergo a screening process that is different from that performed on adults to insure appropriate consideration of their volunteer ability. The Child Protection Team has created a questionnaire and reference form. Each youth who is considering serving as a volunteer with children in SCC programs must have a Youth Application on file. Youth volunteers must understand that as volunteers they are leaders and separate from the children they are serving. Applications should be turned in to the Director of Children and Youth (or the comparable position person) and will be reviewed by the Child Protection Team. Youth will be contacted once their application has been approved. The Director of Children and Youth will be responsible for providing adequate training for approved applicants.

Middle school-aged youth⁴ will not undergo a screening process. Many youth this age have a high desire to help with the ministry to young children. Because of the intricacies in working with children aged 0-2, middle school youth (and younger) will not be permitted to help provide nursery care. This is for the safety of both youth and the children in nursery care. These youth should not be loitering in the nursery at any time. Middle school-aged youth may volunteer in the Children's Hallway classrooms, or serve mentoring roles during special SCC events. This type of volunteering is in conjunction with adequate adult supervision and thus does not warrant special screening. Such dedicated supervision would be difficult to create in a nursery care setting as the focus needs to remain on children ages 0-2.

D. Transportation: Any adult, volunteer or staff, who will be transporting children or youth must

³ High school-aged youth are defined as those in grades 9-12.

⁴ Middle school-aged youth are defined as those in grades 6-8.

submit a copy of their valid driver's license and proof of insurance. Permission may be requested to perform a driving record check.

Training

All volunteers and staff working with children and youth will undergo training. This will include, but is not limited to, the following:

- A. Recognizing signs of abuse.
- B. Review of Policy for the Safety and Nurture of Children and Youth.
- C. Specific rules, expectations, and procedures for specific events.

Supervision

Children participating in SCC-sponsored events will be supervised by volunteers and/or staff who have been screened and trained. Ordinarily there will be at least two adult volunteers present. In the event that this is not possible, all classrooms have windows in the doors. The door to the room should be left open or ajar.

Volunteers will make every effort not to be alone with a single child or youth that is not under his or her legal guardianship.

Reporting Procedures

The Definition of Child Abuse is as follows:

The exploitation, serious physical and/or emotional harm, physical and/or sexual abuse and neglect of a child as defined in the statutes of the State of Indiana.

Indiana law requires any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect shall make a report to the appropriate agency. SCC requires that all staff and volunteers comply with this law. [A child is any person under the age of 18.] The appropriate agency is the Indiana Division of Child Services (DCS), or child abuse hotline in the county where the alleged abuse took place. It is not the responsibility of volunteers/staff to interview or question the alleged victim. The appropriate agency representative will handle this.

Everyone engaging in ministry with children and youth will be informed of procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and of this policy. It is the position of Southport Christian Church that to assure proper investigation of allegations, DCS will be contacted as required by law. All incidents involving suspected abuse are to be reported to the Senior and/or Associate Minister. The Senior and/or Associate Minister will provide support while facilitating the volunteer or staff person to make the report to DCS.

All incidents alleging the abuse of a child by a volunteer or staff person will be reported to one or more of the following: the Senior and/or Associate Minister, Chair of the Board, and the Chair of the Elders. The Senior and/or Associate Minister will provide support while facilitating the appropriate person to make the report to DCS.

Upon receiving a possible child abuse report, the staff member shall promptly contact Child Services or Law Enforcement and then, in turn, notify the person who originally made the report to provide them with written notice containing the following information: (i) the agency that was contacted, and (ii) the date

and time such contact was made. A copy of this notification shall be kept on file in the Church Office in a secure (locked) location.

At the Senior and/or Associate Minister's discretion, he or she will contact the child and child's family to offer support and referral information regarding mental health counseling. In the event the allegation involves the Senior and/or Associate Minister, the family will be contacted by an appropriate ministerial staff person, the Chair of the Board, and the Chair of the Elders.

When appropriate, after DCS has finished their investigation, the Senior and/or Associate Minister, the Chair of the Board, and the Chair of the Elders will contact the individual who has been accused of the abuse. In the event the allegation involves the Senior and/or Associate Minister, when appropriate, he or she will be contacted by the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Elders.

Members of the Southport Christian Church will not make a determination of guilt or innocence but rely on the outcome of the investigation. Any staff person or volunteer accused of abusing a child may be suspended with pay, as may be deemed appropriate, from his or her position until the investigation of the allegations is concluded.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES **(addendum to Child Protection Policy)**

The Child Protection Policy provides that all adults, employed and volunteer, who work with children or youth must be “active participants” at SCC for the preceding 6 months:

1) An “active participant” may be defined as a person who has attended or led at least 6 times in the last 6 months a SCC worship related event or activity such as:

- A weekly worship service;
- A weekly Sunday school class;
- Disciples, Seekers or similar class at SCC;
- Special services (i.e. Easter services, Christmas services)

2) An active participant may also be considered for volunteering upon application to the Child Protection Policy Committee in the event that the aforementioned criteria have not been met. Such application will require a written request by the applicant and contain the following:

- 1) Personal written reference of an active* SCC congregation member in writing submitted to the SCC Child Protection Policy Team **and**
- 2) Either:
 - a. meeting in person with and obtaining written endorsement from a member of the SCC ministerial staff addressed to the SCC Child Protection Policy Team or,
 - b. meeting in person with at least one active member of the SCC Child Protection Policy Team for final approval as “Adult Volunteer Working with Children and Youth at SCC” **and**

The criteria above are in addition to otherwise qualifying as an adult volunteer through and by the Adult Volunteer Application and the standards therein.

Additionally, providing a valid written request to volunteer is not automatic approval. Upon application, a balance of the applicant’s qualifications and reference(s) will be performed by the Child Protection Committee.

SCC membership would be desirable but is not a mandated requirement to be eligible as an “Adult Volunteer Working with Children and Youth at SCC.”

*See definition of “active participant” in paragraph 1

TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES **(addendum to Child Protection Policy)**

Any adult wishing to transport children or youth⁵ for church functions or programs must follow the transportation guidelines listed herein.

Any person driving a vehicle used to transport children or youth must agree to adhere to all Indiana statutes regulating the operation of a motor vehicle and meet the following criteria:

- 1) be at least twenty-one (21) years of age,
- 2) have and provide a current and valid driver's license,
- 3) submit current proof of auto insurance to be kept on file,
- 4) have a driving history free of any suspensions,
- 5) have a driving history free of any infractions or offenses involving the use of alcohol and/or drugs,
- 6) upon request by the Child Protection Team, agree to a driving history check at the expense of the driver,
- 7) be able to provide a vehicle with a separate, legal and properly functioning restraint for each child under the age of 18 being transported in their vehicle,
- 8) agree that no child will share a seat belt or restraint with another child,
- 9) agree that no child under the age of twelve (12) will ride to and/or from a function in the front seat of a vehicle equipped with front seat passenger air bags unless such air bags can be disabled.

If you qualify to transport children and youth you **MUST** also agree to follow all Indiana laws that pertain to car seats and booster seats. Indiana Code 9-19-11 pertains to the laws that regulate passenger restraints for children. When you agree to provide transportation you are agreeing that you are both aware of the laws that relate to child restraints, and will follow the laws that relate to child restraints.

If your insurance changes **AND/OR** the status of your license changes from good standing to otherwise, you have an ongoing obligation to inform either the event leader, a member of the ministerial staff or a member of the Child Protection Policy Team of the status change and the reasons why. In certain circumstances, a change could result in your inability to continue as a transportation volunteer involving children and youth.

Written parental/legal guardian permission is required for any child or youth to be transported by someone other than their own parent/guardian or event sponsor from church sponsored events that take place away from SCC (for example SCC Youth Camp, mission trips, regional events etc).

⁵ Those individuals under the age of 18 years and those who are currently enrolled in high school and have not yet graduated.