

## **VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT & SCREENING GUIDELINES FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH & SCHOOL OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH—NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION**

### 1. Objective—

The Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to make its worship and educational environments free from abuse of all kinds. To achieve this goal in its ministry and educational programs the following guidelines have been developed for implementation throughout the North American Division.

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 rise and recognition of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation, our society, and the Church. Adventist churches and schools which conduct programs for children and youth are not insulated from those individuals who abuse young people.

In keeping with the counsel of *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, it is the responsibility of the local church or school to select, screen and manage trustworthy individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry and school activities.

“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.” *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Revision 2000 page 120

Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it is important to take decisive steps to ensure that to the best of their ability, the local church, school, and the programs they sponsor, are safe and provide a joyful experience for children and youth.

### 1. Focus on Mission—

The work of volunteers is essential to the successful accomplishment of the Church’s mission and ministry. The management policies and procedures employed to supervise the work of volunteers must be in keeping with the mission and must support its successful achievement. Therefore, the mission of the ministry should always be the focus of volunteer selection and of the management process. In selecting individuals for volunteer positions only persons who support the mission of the organization should be recruited. Individuals in leadership who are unwilling to support the volunteer management policies and practices should be discontinued.

### 3. Organizational Responsibilities—

- a. The Church has both a moral and civil duty to protect the children entrusted to its care from harm caused by physical or sexual abuse. The local community has an expectation that the local church or school will provide a safe haven for children who participate in the ministries or educational programs of the Church.
- b. It is recommended that appropriate levels of adult supervision will be provided by trained denominational employees or volunteers at all times. Wherever possible a minimum of two adults will be present to supervise activities involving minor-aged children.
- c. The local church or school will exercise reasonable care in the selection and supervision of personnel that will include:
  - 1.) Careful selection of employee(s) or volunteer(s) needed to supervise a specific ministry or activity.
  - 2.) Appropriate training and orientation of employed staff or volunteer(s) in order to provide proper supervision of the ministry or activity.
  - 3.) Each staff member or volunteer will receive a written copy of the policies and/or expected code of conduct that will be required of them.
  - 4.) The local church or school will be expected to provide proper oversight and management of employed staff and volunteer(s).
  - 5.) The local church or school will be expected to take appropriate corrective action to either discipline, counsel, or remove staff members or volunteer(s) when necessary.
  - 6.) The local church or school has a duty and must report all incidents of suspected child abuse in accordance with the law.

### 4. Volunteer Selection & Management—

- a. It is the responsibility of the local church or school to select individuals who will serve in volunteer positions.
- b. It is recommended that all volunteers will be appropriately screened before they are allowed to supervise children.
- c. It is recommended that the local church or school adopt a practice that no adult will be considered for a volunteer leadership role in a church or school sponsored ministry or activity until he/she has been a member of the congregation or known by the organization for a minimum of six (6) months.
- d. All volunteers should be invited to participate in a volunteer service orientation program conducted by the local church or school and submit to a screening procedure that will include the completion of a signed Volunteer Information Form.

- e. The local church or school should establish a small Volunteer Service Committee (3-5 members) of respected church leaders who will be responsible to review Volunteer Information Forms submitted and approve individuals to serve in a volunteer capacity for the organization.
- f. All volunteer positions at the local church or school should be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of screening that should be undertaken based on the potential level of interaction with children, taking into consideration, one-on-one activity, off-site programs, and over-night activities in which the volunteer may be involved for the organization.
- g. The appropriate level of screening should be completed before the adult is allowed to volunteer in a local church- or school-sponsored activity. In some cases the local conference may provide assistance in the volunteer screening process.
- h. The Volunteer Service Committee will notify the appropriate ministry or school leader and the adult volunteer when the application for volunteer service has been approved.

#### 5. Protecting Confidentiality of Information & Records—

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 local church or school will be maintained at all times on a confidential basis by the organization. Information contained in the Volunteer Ministry Information Form will only be released to other church organizations upon the request and written authorization of the applicant.

All information received during the volunteer screening process, including the Volunteer Ministry Information Form, will be maintained by the local church or school (unless otherwise directed by the local conference) on a confidential basis and kept in a locked file. All allegations of inappropriate conduct involving a child with an adult volunteer will be promptly investigated by the leadership of the local church or school. The local church or school will respect the rights of the child(ren) and the volunteer(s) involved and treat all matters concerning the situation discreetly, confidentially and in accordance with local child abuse reporting laws.

#### 6. 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 Guide for Volunteers

A. Basic Level – All Volunteers

1. Personal interview of the volunteer applicant by the leader of the ministry or school official to determine the individual's interest and desire to be of service to the organization
2. Complete a Volunteer Ministry Information Form with applicant's signature
3. The applicant for volunteer service will provide three (3) personal references
4. Local church or school Volunteer Service Committee responsible to review the information form and follow-up on personal references provided by the applicant.

B. Intermediate Level – Volunteers with High level of Interaction and Off-site Trips

1. All of the elements of Basic Screening should be applied
2. State Criminal History and Sex Offender Registry Check which may require fingerprinting and additional written permission from the applicant in order to obtain access to information from law enforcement or other agencies

C. Comprehensive Level – Volunteers with Direct One-on-One Interaction  
i.e. Big brother/sister programs, In-home or Overnight care programs

1. All elements of the Basic and Intermediate Screening should be applied
2. FBI Criminal History Check
3. Home Visitation and Observation
4. Psychological Evaluation

Note: All volunteers must complete the Basic Level of screening. The local church or school is responsible for the cost of implementing these guidelines. In some areas, the local conferences may provide assistance with or conduct the formal screening of applicants at the Intermediate and/or Comprehensive Levels.

D. Minimizing Resistance to Screening & Achieving Cooperation

1. The focus should always be on the mission.
2. Invite adults to apply for the privilege of volunteering in the ministry and school program(s). Conduct an orientation program to acquaint interested individuals.
3. Jesus placed a very high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6), therefore child protection is an essential element in all church- or school-sponsored children's activities. Adult employees and volunteers will be expected to conduct themselves in accordance with Biblical principles at all times.

4. Set the example by having all volunteer leaders participate in the screening program even if they have been a volunteer for many years at your church or school.
5. Volunteer information should be updated every three (3) years.
6. Resist becoming involved in a prolonged discussion of why volunteer screening is a mandatory requirement at your church or school. Handle these types of questions in a private meeting with the individual who is raising the objection to the screening process.
7. Carefully review all Volunteer Ministry Information Forms to be sure that they are completed, including the signature of the applicant.
8. Personally invite a volunteer applicant to complete any missing information and resubmit the form for consideration. Any objections to specific questions on the form should be addressed with the applicant.
9. Encourage the applicant to participate in the screening process in order to maintain the integrity of your volunteer program.
10. Always keep the focus on your mission.
11. If the applicant continues to refuse to cooperate with your established screening process he/she should not be allowed to serve in a volunteer position involving children.

#### 7. Code of Conduct 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. Therefore, volunteers must receive orientation and training in the following areas to effectively serve the local church or school:

- a. Provide all volunteers with an understanding of your ministry or school's mission and the expectation you have for its accomplishment in a safe and abuse-free manner.
- b. Explain and provide in writing the expectations, code of conduct, and rules that will be followed by all adult staff and volunteers in relation to their supervision and interaction with children.
- c. Conduct awareness education concerning child abuse (physical and sexual) and outline the steps your church has taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents in its program. Reaffirm that alleged incidents of child abuse will be investigated and reported to authorities in accordance with local law.
- d. Conduct Good Touch – Bad Touch education and training on how to affirm children in an appropriate manner.
- e. Reinforce the Two-person rule – Never be the only adult supervisor or caregiver. Always have a minimum of two (2) adults present at all times during the supervision of children's activities.
- f. Reinforce the Open Door rule – If an activity is taking place in a room where the door does not have a glass viewing area, it should remain open, so the adult staff member or volunteer is in full view during the activity.

- g. Never leave children alone without supervision. Provide education on how to determine the appropriate level of supervision in order to conduct your program in a safe manner at all times.
- h. Make it clear that failure to comply with the established code of conduct and rules may result in the volunteer being asked to terminate participation in your program.
- i. Use professional members (teachers, physicians, attorneys, social workers, pastors etc.) of your church family and invite them to help you conduct the training of volunteers in order to bring credibility and support for your child protection efforts.

#### 8. Opportunity For Service

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 children 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 children and young people whom you serve.

## GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

Because our society is filled with pain, problems, and litigation caused by improper conduct of adults working with children and youth, it is imperative that those working with children in the churches have meaningful guidelines for conduct—to protect both themselves and those under their care. As a ministry volunteer, you want parents and others to feel comfortable and confident with you. Here are some practical guidelines:

1. **Never leave a child or group of children for whom you are responsible unattended.** Provide adequate supervision at all times, no matter what.
2. **ALWAYS have at least one other adult 18 or older with you when ministering to children.** If you find yourself in a situation where you are the only adult present, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES should you allow yourself to be alone with one child.
3. **Always ask a person's permission before touching** him/her anywhere, even when responding to an injury or problem. This is especially true for any area that would normally be covered by a T-shirt and/or shorts. If an injury is within this area, make sure another adult works with you as you provide care.
4. **Physical and verbal attacks are inappropriate** and should never be used as discipline. “Time out” or “sit-in-that-chair” may be helpful methods with children.
5. **Children need to be touched appropriately.** However, keep hugs brief and “should-to-shoulder” or “side-to-side.” Always keep your hands at (not below) the shoulder level. A caregiver kiss is 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. **When taking small children to the bathroom**—take another adult along, or leave the door open.

**Be aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse; be aware of the legal requirements in your locality for reporting child abuse.** In nearly all places, a caregiver can be held legally responsible for failing to report suspected or actual child abuse.

Be loving, kind, firm, and always thoroughly professional as a caregiver. Working with children and youth at church is not only a privilege; it is also a deep responsibility that must be approached with utmost care. As a volunteer you are expected to participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the church or conference.

Adventist Risk Management and the North American Division recommend the following rules for leaders. These serve as a protection to you and to your ministry against charges of abuse:

- **The volunteer screening rule.** The volunteers must complete the screening process described on the Volunteer Ministry Information Form (available at [www.nadadventist.org](http://www.nadadventist.org)).
- **The six-month rule.** Do not recruit a volunteer who has been a church member for less than six months.
- **The two-person rule.** Have at least two adults present at all times.
- **The glass window rule.** If the door to a classroom does not have glass in or around it, the door should be left open, so that the teacher is in full view.

**I, the undersigned, have read the guidelines listed above and agree to abide by them. I will obtain a copy of this signed form and keep it for reference.**

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

**NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
Volunteer Management & Screening Guidelines  
FAQ's – Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why does the church need to screen volunteers who work with children?**

Our mission is to provide a safe environment where children can learn to experience the joy of Christian worship and education. Jesus placed great importance on the conduct of adults who interacted with children in Matthew 18: 1-6. Society places a moral and legal responsibility on the Church to properly care for children and to supervise their activities as well as the conduct of adults to whom we have entrusted their care.

**Are these NAD Volunteer Management & Screening Guidelines mandatory working policy?**

**No,** These Guidelines are not presently NAD Working Policy. They are recommended guidelines to help provide conferences, local churches, and schools with guidance in establishing an effective volunteer management and screening program.

- One Size Doesn't Fit All: We recognize that the legal requirements and availability of information/resources in numerous jurisdictions cannot be summarized into one set of guidelines.
- Existing Programs: Some conferences already have established volunteer management screening programs and there is no need to duplicate or to change screening strategies already in place and working.

**Why are the Guidelines for local church versus conference centralized?**

The Guidelines have been developed in keeping with the Church Manual which indicates it is the responsibility of the local church to safeguard its children and to select individuals who will work with children. {See *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* page 120} Therefore, the local church should be responsible for implementing its program for managing and screening the volunteers at its location. If a conference wishes to centralize or assist with this endeavor, the Guidelines also accommodate a centralized program format.

**Are Criminal Background Checks required of all Volunteers?**

**NO,** The Guidelines do not specifically require criminal background checks of volunteers. There may be certain volunteer positions that warrant this level of reference checking. Where appropriate and economically feasible they may be conducted with the permission of the individual who is applying for a volunteer position. Each organization will have to determine the means of access to this information, obtain the necessary personal information from the applicant and be responsible for the cost of the background check.

## **Could the Church be held liable if it fails to obtain a Criminal Background Check on a Volunteer and an incident occurs?**

- Volunteer Information Forms – One of the most effective tools in obtaining background information on the individual. Requiring this form demonstrates the organization's interest in protecting its children to the applicant. The organization learns more about the individuals who will be working with their children.
- Reference Checks – In many ways personal telephone or written contact to an applicant's personal references from previous locations of volunteer service may reveal better information than a criminal background check.
- Six-Month-Rule – Implementing a local church policy to allow for a six-month time period to observe and to become acquainted with an individual before placing them in a position of leadership also provides much information on the applicant and allows time for background screening and orientation.

## **How will the Church maintain confidential information on Volunteers?**

It is the responsibility of the local church to maintain all volunteer records on a secure and confidential basis. It is recommended that only trusted church leaders who have demonstrated the ability to keep confidential information be asked to serve on the Volunteer Service Committee which will be asked to conduct the screening process. The information obtained on the Volunteer Ministry Information Form will only be released to other church organizations upon the written request of the volunteer applicant. In some organizations the maintenance of this information may be centralized at the conference level.