

Child/Youth Volunteer Policy

Saint Paul's Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the children of Saint Paul's Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child" or "children" or "youth" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children. The term "volunteer" means anyone involved in any role involving children, including but not limited to overnight activities involving minors, in counseling of minors, or in one-on-one mentoring of minors.

Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

a) **Six Month Rule**

No person will be considered for any Lead volunteer position involving contact with minors until she/he has been involved with Saint Paul's Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children. On a case by case basis a person may volunteer sooner but must work alongside someone who fits the Six Month Rule.

b) **Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by us. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at Saint Paul's Church.

c) **Personal Interview**

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

d) **Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and "volunteers" as defined above.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the church staff to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with children.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by Staff at Saint Paul's Church on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Saint Paul's Church.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Childcare workers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children at Saint Paul's Church becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under his/her care, this should be reported immediately to the Director of Children's Ministry for further action, including reporting to authorities as mandated by state law.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at Saint Paul's Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.

1. The worker or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation. He or she should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.

2. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
3. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
4. The organization will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. The advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the congregation. All other representatives of the organization should refrain from speaking to the media.
5. A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it.

Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must be screened as specified above.

Must be under the supervision of an adult.

Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For children below sixth grade, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed in by a parent or guardian. The parent or guardian must sign out the child from our care.

Appropriate Contact

The following guidelines are ways of physical and verbal contact that must be adhered to at all times.

- Touching behavior must always be above reproach and should never be forced upon a reluctant child or youth.
- Touching should be initiated by the child or youth and should never be based on the need of the adult.
- Volunteers are encouraged to give children or youth a high five, hand shake, pat on the back, or use gentle touches to shoulder, arms and the upper back.
- Hugs: Children and Youth volunteers will always respond warmly to hugs that are child or youth initiated, but should never ask for hugs or kisses, regardless of age. A brief, casual hug is the only appropriate response to a child-initiated hug.
- Sitting a child on your lap is inappropriate EXCEPT with children under school age.
- Touching between an adult and a child or youth will only occur in the presence of other adults.
- A youth or child's preference not to be touched should be respected by adults and others. This includes youth to youth and child to child.
- A volunteer/worker must not target any individual child with extra attention, gifts or activities.
- All interactions with adult/child and/or youth must be in open rooms. No secrecy or private communication.
- Workers and volunteers should not talk to children 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.
- Workers should not be involved in and should discourage any "rough-housing" or wrestling.

All workers and volunteers must sign off that they have read and agree to abide by all guidelines above. Failure to do so will not allow the individual to work with the kids of Saint Paul's in any capacity. Also violation of the above stated guidelines will result in immediate suspension of volunteering/working with the children until an investigation is done by staff/board of Saint Paul's Church.

Approved and adopted by the Board of Directors of St. Paul's church on October 28, 2019