**Youth Protection Policy**



Westside and mvmt youth are committed to providing an environment that is as safe as possible for both minors and adults. The purpose of these policies and procedures is to protect:

* Minors from abuse
* Volunteers from the false accusation of abuse
* The integrity of Westside and mvmt youth

To reach these goals, mvmt youth herein establishes procedures for volunteer screening, supervision of and interaction with minors, church-sponsored transportation, and child abuse/neglect reporting. Westside and mvmt youth will not tolerate ANY occurrence of abuse, and upon learning of such, will report violators to legal authorities.

These policies and procedures apply to all mvmt youth-sponsored and/or supervised activities involving minors. All volunteers assigned to such activities will comply and conduct themselves in accordance with these policies and procedures. Failure to comply will subject the volunteer to disciplinary action, which may include dismissal from work with minors.

**Volunteer Screening Process**

1. Once an applicant has been invited to become involved in mvmt youth, copies of the adult volunteer handbook, the mvmt vision plan, the youth protection policy, and any applicable volunteer-area training materials will be provided and explained to the volunteer.
2. The applicant will sign the volunteer covenant stating that these documents have been read, understood, and agreed upon.
3. A criminal background check will be completed following submission of the criminal background check authorization form. This will include a driver record screening.
4. If necessary, the student office will request the names of references or other supporting documentation. An appointment will be scheduled to discuss any flags in the background screening process.
5. Volunteers will receive notification that they may begin working with youth following the successful completion of this process.

**Volunteer Requirements**

* In general, a volunteer should be a member in good standing at Westside Baptist Church. In some instances, this requirement is waived.
* Volunteers must be 18 years of age or older.
* All volunteers must complete the volunteer screening process before working with youth.
* All volunteers must sign a statement acknowledging they have read, understood, and will abide by the adult volunteer guidelines and youth protection policies.
* All volunteers must receive appropriate training prior to beginning work.
* A person who has been convicted of any crime involving the abuse or neglect of minors will be removed from their position immediately.
* A person who has been accused of any crime involving the abuse or neglect of minors will be suspended from service until such a time that the matter has been resolved legally with a satisfactory outcome.

**Volunteer Guidelines for Supervision and Interaction with Youth**

A minimum of two workers are to be present during any mvmt youth activity involving minors. On church property and during church-sponsored events, no adult should ever be alone with a minor in any non-public place or any overnight event. If a volunteer needs to talk to a student privately, he/she must do so either (1) in an open area or (2) with another adult present.

Because mvmt youth intends to protect both minors from harm and adult volunteers from hurtful allegations, all volunteers are instructed to keep any one-on-one activity with youth in a public place (restaurant, coffee shop, etc.) and said activity must always be known and approved by the parent/guardian of the youth.

Volunteers must have parent/guardian approval to transport a minor in their personal vehicle. Three people should be present in the car so that at no time will the adult be alone with the minor. In cases of serious emergency (transport to the hospital or other approved crisis situation) this requirement is waived.

No volunteer is permitted to be alone with a minor behind a closed door.

Because of mandatory reporting laws in cases of child abuse, sexual assault, or imminent harm, no adult should ever promise absolute confidentiality.

Adequate adult/minor ratios will be maintained at all times. On-campus ratio is 15:1 minimum. Off-campus ratio is 7:1 minimum.

The following behaviors are STRICTLY prohibited for all staff and volunteers:

* Threatening or intentionally inflicting physical, verbal, or emotional injury upon a minor
* Committing any sexual offense against a minor or engaging in any sexual contact with a minor
* Making any type of sexual advance, making requests for sexual favors, or engaging in other verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature with a minor
* Sending or receiving text messages, emails, or any other electronic messaging containing prohibited language, images, or subject matter, or any meetings or telephone calls that violate policies including prohibited language or behavior
* Physical discipline

Affirmation and encouragement are always appropriate.

In rare instances, physical restraint may be necessary to prevent a minor from harming others or disrupting an activity. Staff will advise volunteers on the best age-appropriate behavior management methods.

Disciplinary problems should be reported to staff, who in turn, will notify parents or legal authorities as deemed necessary.

Physical affection should be used appropriately. Touching to comfort or affirm a minor in an age- and gender-appropriate manner is permitted.

Any volunteer refusing to comply with these guidelines or who continues to violate them will be removed from service.

**Qualifications for Drivers**

* All drivers transporting students must be pre-approved volunteers and complete the entire volunteer training process.
* All drivers must have a valid driver’s license and be free of major accidents and felony traffic violations in the last five years.
* All drivers must have current insurance.
* Drivers will be disqualified for convictions of the following: manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide, DUI, drug possession, reckless or dangerous driving, or more than three moving violations in the past 36 months.
* Seatbelts must be worn by all occupants and no vehicle may carry more passengers than available seatbelts.
* Drivers must transport students directly to and from the activity location. Additional stops should be for emergencies only. Drivers must not take side trips without approval.

**Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting Policy**

In all cases where any worker has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be abused or neglected, the worker is obligated by Florida law to report the incident or suspicion within 48-hours of first learning of possible abuse. When working with mvmt youth, any volunteer who suspects abuse or neglect should immediately inform the youth pastor, who will then help make a determination about whether a report should be made. If a report is made, the youth pastor and volunteer together will make the report to local law enforcement and the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Persons who act in good faith to report, assist in investigation, testify, or otherwise participate in reporting alleged abuse or neglect are protected in such activity as provided by law.

Anyone knowingly filing false reports of abuse or neglect may be punished as provided by law.

Persons who fail to report an act that they have cause to believe could adversely affect a child’s physical health or welfare may be punished as provided by law.

Any time a volunteer suspects or has knowledge of abuse (of any kind) against a student by another volunteer, that volunteer should immediately meet with the youth pastor and prepare in writing (if possible) an account of the incident. The volunteer in question will be immediately suspended while an internal investigation and/or law enforcement investigation is convened.

**Other Reporting Matters**

Any adult volunteer must report a student’s imminent threat of harm or death to themselves or others. These include, but are not limited to:

* Imminent threats of suicide (specific and actionable)
* Imminent threats of injury or death toward another person
* Reports of a specific planned crime with imminent carryout

If ever in doubt, discuss any matters with the youth pastor. The consequence for ignoring these matters is always greater than the risk of reporting what might turn out to be harmless.

**Emergency Evacuation**

In case of an evacuation from the building of any type, you will become responsible for the group of students you are working with at that moment. Immediately count the group; stay with the group and recount once a safe distance from the building. Do not leave the group. Remain calm. Release students only to parents. Await instructions from mvmt youth staff or other Westside personnel.