**CHILD PROTECTION AND BACKGROUND CHECK FOR EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS**

All individuals covered by this policy, including volunteers, pastors, and other employees within the Ohio Conference, are expected to adhere to its guidelines.

1. *Objectives*

* + 1. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a moral and civil duty to protect the children and youth entrusted to its care. The local community also has an expectation that the church will provide a safe haven for children who participate in its ministries.
		2. The church is committed to providing safe worship and educational environments to help children and youth learn to love and follow Jesus Christ.

“Church should be a safe place to bring our children. Everyone involved in work with children who are minors must meet all Church and legal standards and requirements.” (Church Manual, Edition 18, pages 168-169.)

* + 1. Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children (Matthew 18:1-6); therefore, child protection is an essential element in all church-sponsored children’s activities.
		2. All volunteers referenced in this section include all adults, over the age of 18, involved in any capacity in children’s and youth ministries and activities, and all church ministry leaders and officers voted or appointed by the local church consistent with the SDA Church Manual; volunteers voted or appointed by the conference, union, or the North American Division and its affiliates, as well as all registered volunteers either from within or outside the North American Division voted or appointed to serve in the territory.
	1. *Volunteer Selection and Management*—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 consistent with the mission of the church or school and must support its successful achievement.
		1. Selection and Screening of Volunteers
			+ 1. It is the responsibility of the local church and/or school to select, screen and manage trustworthy individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry for children and youth activities.
				2. In selecting individuals for volunteer positions, only persons who support the mission of the organization should be recruited.
				3. The church shall adopt a practice that no adult will be considered for a volunteer leadership role in a church-sponsored ministry or activity until he/she has held membership in the congregation or has been known by the organization for a minimum of six (6) months.
				4. All volunteers are required to participate in a screening procedure that will include a signed Volunteer Ministry Information Form, a criminal background check, and three (3) character references. Individuals who submit incomplete forms will not be considered for a volunteer position.
				5. Background screening must be completed before the volunteer is allowed to serve.
				6. All volunteer leaders, regardless of their previous experience, shall submit to the screening procedure provided by the church. The volunteer screening procedure must be updated for each individual every three (3) years.
				7. The local church or school is responsible for the cost of implementing these screening procedures. The local conference may provide financial assistance at their discretion.
				8. It is the duty and responsibility of the church to maintain all volunteer information on a confidential basis at all times.
		2. Supervision of Volunteers
1. Failure to comply with the established volunteer guidelines and code of conduct will result in the volunteer being asked to terminate participation in the ministry.
2. All allegations of inappropriate conduct involving a child or minor will be promptly reported in accordance with local child abuse reporting laws and investigated by the leadership of the church. The church will respect the rights of all parties involved in the alleged incident and treat all matters concerning the situation discreetly and confidentially.
3. Appropriate corrective action — discipline, counsel, or removal from ministry — will be taken when necessary.
	* 1. Orientation and Training of Volunteers
4. Provide all volunteers with an understanding of the ministry’s mission and the expectation the church has for its accomplishment in a safe and abuse-free manner.
5. Explain and provide in writing the expectations, code of conduct, and rules to be followed by volunteers in relation to supervision and interaction with children and youth. Reaffirm that alleged incidents of child abuse will be investigated and reported to authorities in accordance with local law.
6. All volunteers will be required to participate in educational courses on child abuse (physical and sexual) and the necessary steps to be taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents.
7. Training should include instructions on appropriate methods of physical contact to affirm children.
	1. *Ministry to Sex Offenders within the Church*—The Church has a responsibility to provide worship opportunities and ministry to individuals who have previously engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct or physical abuse involving children or youth. When an offender wishes to be actively involved with the Church the following practices will be followed:
		1. The individual agrees to not seek or hold church office, and when participating in and attending adult Sabbath School, worship services, and other church related activities on a chaperoned basis and will not interact on a personal basis with any child under the age of eighteen (18).
		2. The individual will not be allowed alone in any building on church premises where activities involving children under the age of eighteen (18) are being conducted.
		3. If a child in the congregation approaches the individual on church premises or in public during a church sponsored activity the person will politely and immediately excuse themselves from the situation.
		4. The local church pastor and elders will meet personally with the individual and enter into a five-year covenant agreement that outlines the expected conduct to be followed at all times while on church premises or while involved in a church sponsored activity. Compliance with the conditions outlined in the covenant agreement will be reviewed on a periodic basis and maybe renewed at the end of the five-year term. Inappropriate conduct or failure to comply with the terms of the covenant agreement may forfeit the individual’s participation in church services or sponsored activities at any time. (NAD Working Policy 2023-2024 – pages 364-367.)

**Limitations on Incidents and Violation**

Additionally, the following factors are to be taken into account when evaluating an individual for volunteer work or employment:

1. *Speeding*: Volunteers and employees tasked with driving minors in a bus or van will be deemed ineligible for the role if they have accumulated more than three speeding violations within a three-year period.
2. *Criminal Record*: Volunteers or employees engaging in activities involving minors must not possess any criminal records within the preceding seven years. Examples of disqualifying incidents include but are not limited to:
	* Domestic violence
	* Misdemeanors such as passing a bad check
	* Vehicular manslaughter
	* Misdemeanor involving physical control (e.g., being intoxicated while in the driver's seat with the ignition on or keys, even if the vehicle is not in motion)
	* Public intoxication
3. Individuals with a history of child abuse are ineligible to work with minors under any circumstances.

**Sterling Volunteer Instructions**

The following are the step-by-step instructions for all volunteers and employees to complete the Background Check before the first date of work.

* 1. Go to: <https://www.ncsrisk.org/adventist/>
	2. Click 'First-Time Registrant'
	3. Select 'Ohio' as the state
	4. For the 'Conference' select 'Ohio'
	5. Create a user ID/Password
	6. Select your church
	7. Select your role
	8. Follow the prompts to take the child protection training (a video + short quiz that usually takes about an hour)
	9. Once you're done with the training, you'll receive an email with a link to the required background check.
	10. Once finished, the conference will receive a notification of your completion, and you're done!

**Code of Conduct**

The following code of conduct acknowledges guidance was taken from the NAD Working Policy 2023-2024, pages 367-369.

**Youth/Children’s Ministry Volunteer Code of Conduct**

1. *Acknowledgment*—Because I want our children and youth to experience the best possible environment, it is important for those working with children and youth to have guidelines for conduct in order to protect not only those under their care but themselves as well. As a ministry volunteer, I want parents and others to be comfortable with me.

2. *My Commitment to Volunteer Ministry*—As a Youth/Children’s Ministry Volunteer:

a. I will provide appropriate adult supervision at all times for the children for whom I am responsible.

b. I will have at least one other adult, eighteen (18) years of age 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 (the two-person rule). This protects the child as well as protecting me, the adult, from possible allegations.

c. I will ask a child’s permission before physically touching him/her 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.

d. I will refrain from physical and verbal attacks and corporal punishment, which are inappropriate behaviors and should never be used as discipline. I will attempt other forms of discipline such as “time outs” or “sit-in-that-chair,” which may be safer, more helpful discipline methods to use with children.

e. I will affirm children with appropriate touching by keeping hugs brief and “shoulder-to-shoulder” or “side-to-side.” I will keep hands at (not below) the shoulder level. For small children who like to sit on laps, I will encourage them to sit next to me. I will be particularly careful when taking small children to the restroom; for instance, I will take another adult along, or leave the door open.

f. I will avoid 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.

g. I will comply with the volunteer screening process and complete the Volunteer Ministry Information form, as required by the church.

h. I will be aware of the evidence, signs, and symptoms of child abuse and will become educated about the legal requirements for reporting suspected cases of abuse. I commit if I become aware of any behavior by another individual, which seems abusive or inappropriate towards children, I will immediately report that behavior to the church pastor, elder, school and/or conference administration and in accordance with local child abuse reporting laws.

i. I will cooperate with church leadership in conducting children and youth ministries by being a volunteer who is loving, kind, firm, and always a thoroughly professional person. I understand that working with children and youth is not only a privilege; it is also a serious responsibility that must be approached with utmost care.

j. I will participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the church.

k. I will uphold the standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I, the undersigned, have read this document and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct for Youth/Children’s Ministry Volunteers as outlined above. I will retain a copy of this document and keep it for reference.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_