

OPP 4.8 – PROTECTION OF MINORS

PURPOSE: To establish policy and procedures that encourage an environment that protects minors participating in the programs and ministries of Round Rock Christian Church (RRCC).

POLICY: It is the policy of Round Rock Christian Church (RRCC) to provide a safe and secure environment for all minors who participate in RRCC ministries and programs. To facilitate this responsibility, this policy provides for the selection, screening, training, supervision and assessment of persons who work with minors in any capacity as either a volunteer or an employee of RRCC.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms used in this policy are specifically defined below to provide clarity of meaning.

Youth Worker - an employee or volunteer fulfilling a role involving direct interaction with and/or supervision of minors participating in programs or ministries at RRCC. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Nursery attendants
- Sunday school teachers
- Vacation Bible School leaders, teachers and assistants
- Youth group leaders
- Ministers
- Christian Education Coordinator
- Kiddos Preschool leaders, teachers and other Kiddos workers
- Music leaders
- Special event leaders
- Persons responsible for and/or providing transportation of minors
- Persons serving in other positions having a direct interaction with minors.

Minor - any person who has not reached their 18th birthday or the age of majority as defined by the laws of the State of Texas.

Abuse - Abuse is mental, emotional, physical, or sexual injury to a child. Failure to prevent such injury also constitutes abuse.

Neglect - Neglect of a child includes failure to provide a child with food, clothing, shelter and/or medical care; and/or leaving a child in a situation where the child is at risk of harm.

Physical Abuse of a Child - includes the following acts or omissions by a person:

- Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, conservator or responsible adult congregation member that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm.
- Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury or substantial harm to the child.

- The current use by a person of a controlled substance, in a manner or to the extent that the use results in physical, mental, or emotional injury to a child.
- Causing, expressly permitting, or encouraging a child to use a controlled substance.

Sexual Abuse and/or Misconduct - includes the following acts or omissions by a person:

- Sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault.
- Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child.
- Compelling or encouraging a child to engage in sexual conduct.
- Causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of a child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene or pornographic.
- Causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing a sexual performance by a child.

Emotional Abuse - includes the following acts or omissions by a person:

- Mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.
- Causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

All employees and volunteers serving as Youth Workers are obligated to maintain an exemplary moral standard and will observe the following guidelines:

- All Youth Workers will exercise careful supervision.
- Youth Workers should endeavor to never be alone with any minor.
- Youth Workers are responsible for ensuring that minors are participating properly in RRCC activities.
- Youth Workers will observe the practice of the one to two rule (1:2 ratio). Using this goal or guideline there should never be a situation where there is only one Youth Worker and one minor together alone. Any private interaction with an individual minor requires the presence of two Youth Workers. If an individual Youth Worker is present, two or more minors must be present.
- Youth Workers will use positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior, self-esteem, self-control, and self direction: praise and positive reinforcement outlining clear behavioral expectations, redirection using positive statements, verbal warnings, time out (supervised temporary removal from activity or group when appropriate for the child's age and development but no more than one minute per year of the child's age), and communication with parents regarding behavior.
- Youth Workers may not employ any form of behavior modification that includes: corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishment; punishment associated with food, naps, or toilet training; pinching, hitting or shaking a child; hitting a child with a hand or instrument; putting anything in or on a child's mouth; humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting, or yelling at a

child; intimidation; subjecting a child to demeaning or harsh, abusive or profane language, unsupervised isolation; place a child in a locked or dark room, bathroom, or closet with the door closed; and requiring a child to remain silent or inactive for inappropriately long periods of time for the child's age; or any other form of conduct that violates State of Texas laws regarding minor supervision, abuse, or misconduct.

- All tobacco use should take place out of the view or presence of minors and their parents.
- Youth Workers will not discuss personal drinking, drunkenness, or any other alcohol/drug-related activities in the presence of minors.
- Sexual jokes, innuendo, or lewd discussions of any kind are strictly prohibited.
- Youth Workers will actively strive to live and exemplify Biblical principles.

LEAVING AND PICKING UP MINORS FROM RRCC EVENTS

All employees and volunteers serving as Youth Workers will observe the following guidelines:

- Minors under 12 are to be dropped off and picked by their parent/guardian from within the building or meeting area where the scheduled activity is taking place and with the acknowledgement of a Youth Worker.
- Minors 12 and above may be allowed to walk and meet their parent/guardian for departure from the scheduled activity.
- Minors who drive to the church may not be allowed to use their vehicle for transportation during scheduled church activities. Youth will not be permitted to transport other youth during scheduled church activities.
- All minors are to be picked up by their parent/guardian unless they have made other arrangements with a Youth Worker or representative of the participating program or ministry. Parents should provide a written list to RRCC of approved persons to pick up a child/youth to help ensure their safety while in RRCC's care. Youth Worker is to document the person picking up the child/youth.

SELECTION OF VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES AS YOUTH WORKERS

Selection and screening procedures in this section are to be used with all employees and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and/or supervision of minors.

Employees or Volunteers that are Youth Workers in a ministry or program of the church that is licensed for child care by the State of Texas, Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), may be exempted from the selection process outlined in this OPP so long as they are subject to an employee selection and screening process that is part of and in compliance with the Child Care License as granted to the ministry or program by DFPS.

Youth Workers that are themselves minors, whether volunteer or employee, are subject to the selection process outlined in this OPP. For example, if members who are minors volunteer for service in positions during Vacation Bible School where there is constant exposure to other minors and the potential to be alone for periods of time with groups of minors, then the volunteer minor should be treated as any adult volunteer for the purpose of selection as a Youth Worker.

Volunteers

Volunteer Youth Workers must be actively participating members of RRCC for a minimum of six months before assuming any leadership or supervision role with children, youth, youth programs, or any program that includes minors. The Senior Minister in consultation with the Personnel Committee and/or the Christian Education Coordinator may make exceptions to this rule on a case-by-case basis, and such exception must be noted in the volunteer's file.

Volunteer Youth Workers must complete a screening process (equivalent or similar to the process for hiring Youth Worker employees) administered by the Personnel Committee to determine their suitability for working with minors. This process will include a request for references and a release allowing Round Rock Christian Church to perform a background check. If the Volunteer Youth Worker is a minor, the release must be cosigned by at least one parent or guardian. The Personnel Committee and the Senior Minister will be responsible for ensuring these background checks take place.

Persons may be encouraged to pursue other service opportunities based on the results of the screening process. For instance, any person convicted of a sex crime or a crime against persons will be denied the opportunity to serve in any capacity as a Youth Worker. Persons charged but not convicted of such offenses will be interviewed by the Senior Minister in conjunction with the Personnel Committee or Christian Education Coordinator and, at the discretion of these individuals, may be denied the opportunity to serve as a Youth Worker or may have restrictions placed on their service as a Youth Worker.

In order to serve as a Youth Worker at RRCC, each individual must complete a child protection training event offered by RRCC. This training will include: discussion of legal reporting obligations, potential criminal sanctions related to sexual and physical abuse of minors, how to recognize symptoms and signs of abuse, effects of abuse, and appropriate conduct while working with minors. The ministry, committee or group sponsoring activities requiring Youth Workers are responsible for making this training available or making resources available to prospective Youth Workers that satisfy the requirements for child protection training defined in this paragraph. Sharing these training resources between groups is encouraged.

Employees

Employees who are Youth Workers will have the same screening and selection process as volunteer Youth Workers as part of their hiring process outlined in RRCC OPP 4.5 Hiring Procedures. The requirement to be an active member of RRCC for a minimum of six months does not apply to the paid staff positions designated as Youth Worker positions that are filled using employee hiring procedures.

Employees who are Youth Workers may also be subject to further background checks, reference checks, screenings and interviews as determined by the Administrative Teams Personnel Committee, the Functional Job Description for the employees position, the minimum qualifications for the employees position and in alignment with RRCC Operating Policies and Procedures.

ASSESSMENT AND REMOVAL OF YOUTH WORKERS

It is vitally important that RRCC continuously assess volunteer and employee Youth Workers to confirm their suitability for continued service with programs and ministries involving minors. Occasionally, a Youth Worker may be required to discontinue serving in any capacity involving minors.

Youth Workers may be asked to discontinue their service, take a leave of absence from service, or may be removed from serving for reasons including but not limited to the following:

- Emotional instability (including but not limited to inappropriate communications, emotional outbursts, or suicidal behaviors);
- Spiritually unable to lead youth;
- Alleged abuse of a minor;
- Failure to follow the guidelines established in this policy or other published policies;
- Recommendation of the Personnel Committee;
- Directive from the Senior Minister, Moderator or Guiding Board.

The following reasons listed below will result in the immediate and permanent removal of a Youth Worker, volunteer or employee, from service.

- Confirmed Abuse of a minor.
- Conviction of a sex crime or crime against persons.
- Directive from the Guiding Board.

If it is deemed necessary to remove a Youth Worker from serving temporarily or permanently the following procedure should be followed.

- For Volunteers, a conference will be held between the Youth Worker and the Senior Minister to discuss the reason for temporary or permanent removal from service. After prayer and consultation, the removal action will be documented in a memorandum to the Moderator.
- For employees, the employee's Supervisor, the Senior Minister and the Personnel Committee will immediately follow the progressive corrective action procedures outlined in RRCC OPP 4.4 – Performance Evaluation and/or the employment termination procedures outlined in RRCC OPP 4.6 – Termination Procedures that are appropriate to the situation.
- A list of any persons who have been permanently removed from serving as Youth Workers will be kept by the Senior Minister. This list will be disclosed to all ministers on staff, the Personnel Committee, and all volunteers or employees serving as Youth Workers or otherwise responsible for minors participating in RRCC programs and ministries.
- All discussions, actions, and reports taken in removing or temporarily suspending a Youth Worker will be documented in great detail by a Memorandum to the Guiding Board. The Guiding Board will receive this memorandum in a closed session for the record and consider any necessary further actions. Such documents will be stored in a secure location along with the Youth Worker's personnel file if applicable.
- Any Youth Worker who desires to appeal the decision for removal may appeal to the Guiding Board. The Guiding Board will have final jurisdiction on removals.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information obtained through the application, screening, reference check, criminal background check will be kept in confidence, unless otherwise required by law. All screening information collected by the church will be maintained in a locked file cabinet, for up to 10 years. Unless otherwise required by law, access to screening information after the fact is limited to the applicant while in the presence of the Senior Minister, Chair of the Personnel Committee or the appropriate Officer of the Congregation. Results of the background check will be given to the applicant.

REPORTING ABUSE OR ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

All Youth Workers, whether employee or volunteer, are responsible for reporting abuse or allegations of abuse to the Senior Minister as well as the appropriate state agency or law enforcement authority when required. If the allegation is against the Senior Minister, then the report should be made to the Moderator and the appropriate state agency.

Youth Workers are obligated to verbally report any observed or suspected abuse to the Senior Minister or supervisor immediately with a written report to follow within 12 hours. All reports and communication of allegations are to be handled with strict confidentiality.

Individuals suspected or alleged of abuse of minors will be immediately removed from contact with minors pending the investigation and reporting of the abuse.

For more on reporting allegations of abuse, refer to and follow the procedures outlined in RRCC OPP 4.9 - Serious Incident Investigation and Reporting.

APPROPRIATE AFFECTIONATE BEHAVIOR IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

It is widely known that “good touching” is important to life. Numerous studies have shown the importance of holding and touching for infants to survive. Likewise children do not grow and thrive without the good touches of others. We have many examples in scripture where Jesus touched people to heal and to comfort them. The Christian community has a rich heritage of sharing a loving hug, an arm around the shoulder or a squeeze of the hand to say, “you are loved...I care about you.”

Good touching, (e.g. handshake greetings, tap or hand on the shoulder attention-getting, laying of hands for prayer time, etc) done after securing the minor’s prior permission, should allow the minor to feel as if someone has given to them or has shared with them rather than taken from them. It is important in our efforts to prevent the abuse of minors that the significance of good touching is not lost. We need to continue to express Christian love in appropriate ways with minors. The healing, comforting, and affirming aspects of good touch should be emphasized. This also allows us to demonstrate to our minors that they too should seek permission before touching others.

AUTHORITY: *Section VI of the Bylaws of Round Rock Christian Church. The Administrative Team performs the staff administrative functions of the church.*

EFFECTIVE DATE

August 12, 2010

LAST REVIEW DATE

August 12, 2010