



KIDS & YOUTH MINISTRY

HANDBOOK



Policy and Procedures for
Volunteers, Paid Child Care Workers
and Employees

Riverstone Church
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A Child Protection Program

The purpose of this handbook is to outline the requirements and qualifications for volunteering with our kids and youth in various ministries; to provide guidelines and procedures for working with kids and our facilities; to explain what it means to be KidsSafe at Riverstone Church and provide a baseline education on child sexual abuse awareness.

At Riverstone Church, we believe that Christ has called every believer to make disciples of all nations, and this begins with our families and children. All followers of Jesus are called to share the love of Christ to children.

We consider this ministry a high calling and a sacred trust. Therefore, we are committed to doing everything within our power to protect these young people from the possibility of harm, abuse, or neglect.

It is our hope and prayer that in the midst of a troubled world, Riverstone Church will always be a place where kids can be safe.

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. - 1 John 5:20-21



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KIDSSAFE PROGRAM GOALS

- To protect the children entrusted to our care from people who may seek to harm them.
- To prevent child abuse by educating members of our church family who have children at home or who minister to children at Riverstone Church.
- To ensure proper and lawful reporting of suspected cases of child abuse to the civil authorities and law enforcement.

QUALIFICATIONS

Any person, 14 years or older, who comes into contact with minors, either paid or unpaid, who are responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children must undergo a thorough and detailed child abuse/criminal background check and meet the following requirements:

Personal Qualifications

Volunteers of all kids and youth ministries must have:

- Minimum age and grade requirement:
 - o Infants Nursery (0-18 Months)—Age 14+
 - o Toddler Nursery (19-36 months)—Age 12+ and completed the 6th Grade
 - o Kids Ministry (4-11 years)—Age 12+ and completed the 6th Grade
 - o Youth Ministry (12-17 years)—18+ and out of high school
- No history or criminal record of child abuse or other abuse.
- Attended Riverstone Church regularly for at least 6 months prior to serving in order to become a part of our church family and understand our mission.

Exceptions may be considered on a **case-by-case basis and at the careful discretion of Riverstone Church staff.**

WHO NEEDS BACKGROUND CHECKS?

- All adults and individuals 14 years of age and older wanting to work with minors, either paid or unpaid, who are responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children, including:
 - o Pastors, church staff, and elders
 - o Children/Youth Ministry volunteers
 - o Paid childcare workers
 - o Paid babysitters, 14 years of age and older
 - o Security team and shuttle bus drivers
 - o Mission trip participants and chaperones
 - o Chaperones on overnight trips or activities
 - o Other ministry volunteers providing childcare for small groups or Bible studies.

Clearances are good for 5 years, or as frequently as the law requires.

REQUIRED CLEARANCES, SCREENING & TRAINING

Screening, interviewing and background check protocol:

Pennsylvania Act 153 (Act 153) requires employees, volunteers, and other individuals who have routine contact with minors to obtain three different background certificates:

- Pennsylvania Criminal History Check through the Pennsylvania State Police (PATCH);
- Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Check through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services; and,
- FBI Criminal History Check, which requires the individual to submit their fingerprints to the FBI. (from IdenToGO print sites) OR if you have lived in PA for the past 10 consecutive years you can review and sign the Statement of Volunteer in lieu of fingerprints. See details for other requirements

Riverstone Church also requires all employees, volunteers, and other individuals who have routine contact with minors to complete the following as part of the KidsSafe procedures:

- Complete the KidsSafe application online;
- Read this KidsSafe handbook;
- Attend a KidsSafe training, they are held monthly at Riverstone Church.

Additionally, in accordance with Act 31 of 2014, current employees, 18 years or older, including paid babysitters are required to:

- Complete the Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Mandated and Permissive Reporting in Pennsylvania Online Training

All clearances and training need to be renewed every 5 years, or as frequently as the law requires to stay current.

In addition, an employee or volunteer must provide Riverstone Church leadership with written notice, not later than 72 hours, after an arrest, conviction, or notification that they have been listed as a perpetrator in the statewide database. Anyone who willfully fails to disclose information commits a misdemeanor of the third degree and shall be subject to discipline up to and including termination or denial of employment or volunteer service.

VOLUNTEERS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 12-17 YEARS

Youth volunteers between the ages of 12-17 years of age wanting to work with minors in an unpaid position who are responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children, only need to complete the following:

- Riverstone Church KidsSafe application including references;
- KidsSafe in-person training;
- Read KidsSafe handbook

The three different background certificates are not required for volunteers between the ages of 12-17. Individuals under the age of 18 are not Mandated Reporters either.

Riverstone Kids & Youth Ministry

Procedures & Rules

GENERAL RULES

- All volunteers must wear their Riverstone Church name tag with the orange lanyard while serving in Kids Ministry.
- There should be at least two KidsSafe people at all times with the children.
- The lights are to remain on at all times.
- Only approved KidsSafe people are to be serving in the Ministry at any time.
- Younger kids (6th grade or below) cannot be “helping” the KidsSafe volunteer.
- Kids (7th grade or above) must be KidsSafe approved if they are helping/volunteering.
- Substitutes: If you are not able to volunteer for your turn, please find a substitute that is of equal level. Adult for Adult, Youth for Youth, Leader for Leader.
- Visitors are welcome to observe a class in session up to 2 times, if approved by the Director.
- Observing parents may not have contact with any children, since they are not helpers, only observers.
- Do not ride the elevator alone with a child. If you are escorting a child alone, use the stairs.
- If, because of physical limitations, it is necessary to use the elevator and you are alone, make every effort to find another person to ride in the elevator with you.
- Do not send any child younger than a 3rd grader in the elevator by themselves.
- Do not send any child younger than a 3rd grader to the bathroom by themselves.
- If at any time during an individual’s service an issue arises that is in conflict with the Riverstone Church Statement of Faith, Riverstone Church staff reserves the right to suspend a person’s KidsSafe status.

Special Activities

All activities or outings outside the normal ministry calendar must be approved by the Kids & Family Ministry director or youth pastor.

Off-Site Events

Written parental permission must be obtained for each minor prior to any off site event or trip.

Social Media

Do not take and post pictures of children to whom you are ministering on any social media sites. Do not communicate with minors on tech/social media past 10 p.m.

Driving

You must be at least 21 years old and a Riverstone Church approved driver in order to drive children or youth to or from any Riverstone Church event.

NURSERY CARE, INFANTS & TODDLERS PROCEDURES

In order to serve in the nursery with infants, all volunteers must be at least 14 years of age and in 9th grade. To serve with the toddlers, all volunteers must be at least 12 years of age and in the 7th grade. The following parental instructions related to their child's care should be followed:

Notification

Parents must be notified through the remote paging system located in the nursery rooms when any of the following occur:

1. A child has cried for up to 10 minutes.
2. A child has been injured.
3. A child is exhibiting illness.
4. A child is soiled and a change of clothes is not available.

Diapers

Diapers should be checked each hour and changed as needed. Changing should be done in the room with another nursery volunteer present. Nursery volunteers need to strictly adhere to Riverstone Church nursery policies & procedures.

Cribs

Only one child is permitted in each crib at a time, with the exception of an evacuation emergency. In the event of an emergency, infants are to be placed in crib and rolled to safety. Up to 4 per crib.

KIDS MINISTRY 3-11 YEARS OLD PROCEDURES

In order to serve in Kids Ministry, all volunteers must be at least 12 years of age and in 7th grade.

Buddy System

Two KidsSafe volunteers should be present when caring for children of any age.

Bathroom

Whenever possible, take children to the bathroom as a class with two or more volunteers present. If you must take a child to the bathroom alone, tell another adult, prop the outside door open and do not enter the stall. Do not send any children younger than 3rd grade to the bathroom by themselves.

Physical Affection

Good touches are an important means of demonstrating our love and concern for the children in our ministries, yet the following limits must be followed:

- Hugging or cuddling should be done in a public area with other adults present.
- Touching or tickling children under their clothing is prohibited.
- No rough-housing.

YOUTH MINISTRY 12-17 YEARS OLD PROCEDURES

In order to serve in Youth Ministry, all volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and graduated high school.

Driving

If a minor or group of minors needs a ride to or from a church meeting or activity, a leader must not drive alone with a minor. If a leader needs to drive a minor without another adult present, parental permission must be obtained prior to the trip.

Overnight Activities

Written parental permission must be obtained for each minor prior to the trip. A minimum of two unrelated adults must be present at any overnight activity. Separate sleeping and changing areas must be designated for girls and boys and off limits to members of the opposite sex. No socializing, raiding, or peeping in windows will be permitted in these areas. Each sleeping area must have a minimum of two unrelated adult leaders and two or more minors.

Youth leaders should focus on ministering to minors of the same sex. No youth leader is permitted to date a minor in our youth ministry.

Classroom Procedures

CHECK-IN & DISMISSAL

Parents should check in all children ages infant through 6th grade that are attending Sunday morning Kids Worship and/or Wednesday Kids Clubs. Each child will be issued a computerized name tag with his/her name, any allergy or special needs and a computer-generated number.

Another tag will be printed with a matching number. Parents or care givers should hold this tag. This tag must be presented to a ministry volunteer before a child can be dismissed. If a parent or care giver does not have a tag, do not release that child. The parent or care giver needs to “find” the tag. If the tag cannot be located, please ask for assistance from a Kids & Family Ministry director.

Children under age 12 are not permitted to pick up siblings or other children, even with the appropriate tag.

MANAGEMENT & DISCIPLINE

Never strike or spank a child or physically force children to behave. All children should be handled in a quiet and gentle manner. Screaming or using harsh language is unacceptable. If a child’s behavior is totally out of control or a child’s safety is at risk, get another teacher to help you or ask someone to find the child’s parents.

The following procedures should be used for discipline:

- 1st Incident: Warning
- 2nd Incident: Time-Out (Sitting away from others with supervision.)
- 3rd Incident: Parents called to class or told after class

Offenses include, but are not limited to bullying, inappropriate language, hitting, kicking, and biting. Repeated offenses may lead to temporary removal from a ministry.

Participation

A child should never be forced to participate in a game or activity in which he/she does not feel comfortable. Allow him/her to sit on the sidelines and watch. If and when the child is ready, allow the child to join in.

Classroom lights should remain on when teaching or ministering to children and youth, even if showing classroom videos.

INJURIES & ALLERGIES

Injuries

In the event of an injury of any kind, a parent and the ministry leader should be notified and an incident report completed and signed by all parties. Injuries are defined as biting, bruises, nosebleeds and cut/scrapes.

In a medical emergency during Sunday services, locate Kids & Family Ministry director or a security team member.

Allergies

Due to the dangerous nature of this food allergy for some individuals, Kids Ministry is nut-free. Any type of snack brought into the building should not contain any nuts or nut products. Please notify the Director of Kids Ministry of other allergies or special needs.

WELLNESS

For the health and safety of all our volunteers and children, children with the following symptoms of illness must not be brought to class or group activities:

- Fever
- Runny nose with colored mucus
- Red itchy eyes
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Unusual rashes
- Vomiting
- Impetigo
- Diarrhea
- Active Chicken Pox
- Measles
- Mumps
- COVID-19

If a child requires medication, it must be administered by the parent.



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In the event of the sound of the fire alarm, please follow the procedures below:

- Make every effort to keep children calm.
- Take a headcount of children in your care before leaving the room.
- Infants are to be placed in crib and rolled to safety. Up to 4 per crib.
- Toddlers and Preschoolers should be led out using the emergency walking rope provided in classroom.
- If safe, turn off lights and close door behind you.
- Exit the building and gather on the retention basin lawn.
- Do not release any child while in transition.
- Hold all children, regardless of age, until the family picks them up and only release children to the appropriate person.
- Do not re-enter the building until directed.

Child Abuse Awareness

CHILD ABUSE DEFINED

“When an individual acts or fails to prevent something that causes harm or a high likelihood of harm to a child. Any serious, non-accidental, physical, or mental injury, sexual exploitation, or serious physical neglect of a child under eighteen years of age.”¹

- We will talk openly about the societal problem of child abuse.
- We will provide helpful literature on child abuse prevention to our church membership, parents, and volunteers.
- We will require those who wish to become involved in our ministries to children and youth to participate in a KidsSafe Child Abuse Prevention Training Seminar prior to serving, and we will require them to be re-certified as the law requires.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse, according to The Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law, is when an individual acts or fails to prevent something that causes harm or a high likelihood of harm to a child (anyone under the age of 18). Intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:

- Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

Child abuse also includes certain acts in which the act itself constitutes abuse without any resulting injury or condition. These recent acts include any of the following:

- Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
- Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
- Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.

- Interfering with the breathing of a child.
- Causing a child to be present during the operation of a methamphetamine laboratory, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement
- Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the parent knows or reasonably should have known was required to register as a Tier II or III sexual offender or has been determined to be a sexually violent predator or sexually violent delinquent

"Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date the report is made to ChildLine. Sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect and deaths have no time limit.

ARE YOU A MANDATED REPORTER?

As related to Riverstone Church, the state law requires an adult, 18 years of age or older to report child abuse if you are:

- The spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization.
- An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.
- An individual's acting in lieu of or on behalf of a parent.
- An adult, paid or unpaid, who is involved in decisions about personnel, policy, compliance and supervision/safety of children.

In Pennsylvania, a mandated reporter is required by law to report suspected child abuse. This includes our pastors, elders, staff, mission volunteers, and any adult volunteer whose ministry includes direct contact with children.

Protection

Persons making a report of suspected child abuse are immune from civil and criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith.

The identity of the person making the report is kept confidential with the exception of being released to law enforcement officials or the district attorney's office.

Failure To Report

The penalties for a mandated reporter who willfully fails to report child abuse range from a misdemeanor of second degree to a felony of the second degree.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Reporting suspected cases of child abuse is an important part of our prevention program. Anyone who sees a child being abused or has reason to suspect that a child has been abused must report it immediately and the church is not to do any investigation on their own first.

What types of things should be reported?

- If you witness someone abusing a child.
- If a child confesses to you that he has been abused. Make it clear that this information cannot be kept confidential.
- If someone 14 or older discloses that they have abused a minor.
- If you see physical evidence that a child has been abused (for example: any

unusual pattern or location of bruises, cuts, burns or scars on a child, missing hair, injuries or unusual redness around the genitals, conflicting stories about injuries, a medical condition that hasn't been properly treated, etc.)

- If someone 14 or older discloses that they have abused a minor

WHEN IS A REPORT TO BE MADE?

A mandated reporter must make a report of suspected child abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse under any of the following circumstances:

- The mandated reporter comes into contact with the child in the course of employment, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service.
- The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization, school, regularly established church or religious organization or other entity that is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child.
- A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse.
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.
- Nothing requires the mandated reporter have direct contact with the child in order to make a report.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING

- Make an immediate and direct report to Childline at 1-800-932-0313.
- Tell designated agent at Riverstone Church — Director of Kids Ministry or Lead Pastor.
- Document the incident using the designated form in the office.
- Handles cases in a quiet and confidential matter, which means that we will keep details to only those who must know, and all reports will be made to authorities.
- If suspicion seems warranted, volunteers and staff members should meet with the ministry pastor to alert him of the situation.

All cases should be handled in a confidential manner.

“Thinking and talking about child abuse is the first step toward protecting our kids, protecting ourselves, and our organization.”²

Contacts

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Notes

1. Cosner, Robert E., "A Guide to the Management of Child Abuse," (Doylestown, PA: Bucks County Children & Youth Services) p. 3
2. Special Report Video "Somebody Told," (Seattle, WA: VideoNet, 1987)
3. Cosner, Robert E., "A Guide to the Management of Child Abuse," (Doylestown, PA: Bucks County Children & Youth Services) p. 3
4. PA Family Support Alliance, <http://pafsa.org>
5. Pennsylvania Department of Human Services www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov



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