

Safety Policy and Procedures for Children and Youth

A Policy for Preventing Child/Teen Abuse, Neglect, and Molestation

Singing Oaks Church of Christ

Approved February 28, 2008

Purpose of Policy

Singing Oaks Church of Christ (SOCC) has developed and placed into effect this policy for the purpose of: 1) providing a safe and secure environment for all children and youth in the church and 2) protecting children and youth workers from false accusation of inappropriate behavior with children. SOCC has an obligation to parents to ensure the safety of their children and teens to the greatest extent possible. SOCC strives to develop procedures that will result in the safest environment possible for the children and youth of the church. SOCC wants all children to know God as their loving Father and the Church as their spiritual family. This policy applies to all:

- Elders, deacons and employees of SOCC
- Volunteer workers in the children's and youth ministries.
- Anyone who wants to help prevent abuse and neglect

Definitions and Terminology

- A. Child sexual abuse is defined as any sexual activity with a child in any setting with the abuser being an adult or another child provided the child is at least three years older than the child being abused.
- B. Child sexual abuse includes but is not limited to the following:
1. Fondling
 2. Oral, genital, and anal contact with the others genitals
 3. Genital or anal penetration by any means
 4. Intercourse
 5. Allowing children to witness sexual activity
 6. Inappropriate verbal comments pertaining to sex
 7. Exhibitionism
 8. Allowing children to view pornography of any kind
 9. Obscene phone calls
- C. "Children" are defined as anyone less than seventeen (17) years of age.
- D. "Youth" are defined as anyone in grades 6 through 12.
- E. "Adult" is defined as any individual seventeen (17) years of age or older.
- F. "Worker" is defined as any person, seventeen (17) years of age or older, who works with children/teens in the care of SOCC.
- G. "Teen Worker" is defined as any person in grades 6 through 12 serving as a volunteer in the SOCC children's ministry.
- H. "Ministry Supervisor" is defined as the Youth Minister in cases involving youth or the Children's Minister where children in 6th grade or younger are involved.

Worker Screening

- A. Volunteer workers must complete the SOCC Volunteer Application and be approved through the application process.
- B. Volunteer workers considered for a position in the children's/youth ministry must be a member of SOCC for a minimum of six (6) months before applying to serve in one of these areas. Exceptions may be permitted on a case-by-case basis provided a letter of recommendation is received from the minister or elders of a potential worker's former church.
- C. The ministry supervisors reserve the right to interview each applicant.
- D. Each worker's records will be kept in a secure file and will be held in strict confidence by SOCC, available only to ministers and elders of SOCC. Records include: Volunteer Application, notes of personal interviews, a copy of photographic identification, and criminal background check.
- E. Individuals who have entered a plea of guilty, no contest or nolo contendere to, have been placed on probation for, have been given deferred adjudication for, or have been convicted or found guilty by a judge or jury of either sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, assault of or injury to a child will not be employed or allowed to volunteer for any church sponsored activity or program related to the children's or youth ministries. If arrested for one of the above charges, a more thorough investigation will be conducted before approval can be granted.
- F. A list of workers (including teen workers) authorized to work with minors will be available for all areas of ministry where children or youth are involved.
- G. All workers must wear appropriate identification badges when serving in children or youth areas of ministry.
- H. All teen workers must complete the Teen Worker application process, be approved by the Ministry Supervisor, and serve with an adult worker.

Volunteer Worker Supervision

The paid staff and approved deacons and ministry leaders will help to ensure that SOCC activities, classes, and events are conducted in the safest possible environment by:

- A. Making every attempt to have two (2) workers with children or youth at all times during church activities, whether on or off campus.
- B. By assuring that a worker is not permitted to visit in seclusion with a child. In activities where there is a legitimate reason for being alone with a child (for example, pastoral counseling), the activity will be conducted in a place where there are other people nearby to observe the activity.
- C. By prohibiting the use of corporal punishment of any kind is.
- D. By not allowing physical affection to be forced on any child.
- E. By assuring that no worker under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with, any child or youth without having an adult check in with them periodically.
- F. By maintaining classroom environments that are fully observable through eye-level windows or open doors.
- G. By allowing Ministers, elders, deacons, ministry supervisors, coordinators and parents or guardians may make unannounced visits into classrooms or other program sites.

- H. By having workers attend scheduled volunteer meetings designed to review and enhance the safety of children and workers.
- I. By providing parents advance notice and full information about activities involving children and youth
- J. By providing appropriate equipment and supervision for activities
- K. By holding adequate insurance for the entirety of the ministries.

Worker Training

- A. Training and education are vital to the prevention of child abuse. To this end a mandatory training program has been implemented.
- B. Candidates for training:
 - 1. Ministers, leaders of the children's and youth ministries, and volunteer workers will be required to complete the state approved online safety training available through Spiritual Manna every two years.
 - 2. Training for volunteer workers will be available to interested parents or guardians of children as well as any other SOCC member who are involved in any area of ministry at SOCC.
 - 3. Refresher training for all volunteer workers in the children's and youth ministries is required at least every two years.

Reporting Process and Response Plan while on the premise of SOCC or at any SOCC sponsored function.

- A. All persons covered by this policy must report known or suspected cases of alleged child sexual abuse to state officials of Child Protective Services or to local law enforcement authorities and to the appropriate Ministry Supervisor.
- B. Appendix A, relevant portions of the Texas Family Code should be reviewed by all persons covered by this policy. Any real or perceived contradiction between this policy and the Appendix A, Texas Family Code, will always be resolved in favor of the Texas Family Code in effect at the time.
- C. All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously and investigated. All situations will be handled with due respect for the privacy and confidentiality of all parties concerned. The following procedures will be followed:
 - 1. The care and safety of the alleged victim is the first priority. The accused should not be confronted until the safety of the child is secured.
 - 2. If the situation involves an incident that is current (the discovery of an abuse situation or learning of one while the parties are still present), report the situation as follows:
 - First, in a non – accusatory manner, separate the alleged abuser from the victim
 - Second, notify the police immediately!
 - Third, notify the Ministry Supervisor or designee..
 - Fourth, notify the parents if possible
 - Fifth, notify the elders.
 - Sixth, document all steps taken pursuant to the notification of alleged abuse.

3. If the situation involves an incident that is NOT current (i.e. an alleged abuse situation that occurred previously and that is reported to you by any means), report the situation as follows:

First, notify the parents if possible.

Second, notify the Ministry Supervisor or designee.

Third, notify the elders.

A determination will then be made as to how to proceed, but in no circumstance may the report to an enforcement agency be delayed more than 24 (twenty-four) hours from the time the suspected abuse was first reported.

4. The Ministry Supervisor or designee must submit a written report to the elders within twenty-four (24) hours.
 5. If applicable, the church insurance agent and church legal counsel will be notified and full cooperation will be given to the appropriate governmental entity or agency under the guidance of the elders.
- D. In the event a worker is accused of sexual misconduct, and/or an investigation is conducted by an appropriate government agency, that person will be suspended from all activities involving children of SOCC until the investigation is concluded.
 - E. Any person found guilty of engaging in child abuse or inappropriate behavior toward a child shall be subject to immediate dismissal as a worker.

Compliance

In order to comply with this policy:

- A. Every minister, elder, deacon, and ministry supervisor is responsible for carrying out the provisions set forth in the policy.
- B. All workers, elders, deacons, and church staff must be familiar with the policy and abide by its provisions.

Conclusion

The Youth Minister and Children's Minister will oversee the implementation of this policy and provide for the safe-keeping of the consent forms at the church. The policy will be reviewed annually by the Minister's and relevant deacons. The goal of this policy and provisions set forth is to provide a safe and secure environment for children by preventing their molestation, sexual abuse, and exploitation. The implementation of this policy will also protect workers.