



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

DESERT SPRINGS CHURCH CHILD SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Ensuring a safe environment begins long before families arrive, and children are placed under our care. The protection of children placed into the DSC Children's ministry is a responsibility we take very seriously. Because of this desire to protect children involved in our ministry at DSC we require all staff and members working with children to complete four safety steps before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

- Application and screening process
- Criminal background check
- Ministry Orientation, Policies and Procedures Overview
- Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

Parameters for the Child Protection Policy

This child protection policy applies to children (from birth to 5th grade) who are voluntarily placed by parents/guardians under the responsibility of the church for the church's public worship services or specific children's ministry-related church-sponsored activities (seminars or special events with accompanying childcare, Vacation Bible School, etc.). Any form of abuse, harm, neglect, or other problems related to children at home, school, or in any bible-study, Community group, activity, or venue not directly related to children's ministry at DSC is not covered by this policy.

Desert Springs Church has a zero tolerance for abuse in our ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at DSC to act in the best interest of all children in every program. In the event a staff member or volunteer observes any inappropriate behaviors (e.g., policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is that individual's responsibility to immediately report their observations to the Children & Families Minister or his Pastoral Assistant.

Appropriate Physical Touch

We are committed to creating a safe environment for children in our church - physically, spiritually, and emotionally. All staff and volunteers are expected to maintain appropriate boundaries and treat each child with respect:

- Never be alone with a child outside of public view. Any private conversation with a child should take place within the line of sight of another adult. If you must accompany a child to another part of the building, take another adult or child with you. If there are only 2 adults in the group, take the whole group with you.
- Hugging, pats on the back, high fives, fist bumps and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
- Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Children & Families Minister, or his Pastoral Assistant.
- Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
- Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in the Children's Ministry must always foster trust. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
- Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
- Staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others. *This includes unwanted touch from another child.*

Additional Boundaries and Safety Policies

- Do not let a child use your phone, scroll through your photos, social media feeds, etc.
- Do not take/post pictures of children.

- Do not allow a child to use a phone or device, whether it is yours or theirs, at any point during Children’s Ministry.
- A staff member or volunteer may *not* administer medication to any child while serving in the Children’s Ministry.¹

Diaper and Bathroom protocol:

Only adult women are allowed to change diapers. Every diapered child should receive a diaper check during every service and change in the event of a dirty diaper. Diapers are changed on the changing stations only. Wear gloves when changing diapers. Change gloves and use a new paper liner for each diaper change. Wipe down the changing station pad with the sanitizing cleaner after each diaper change. Children are never to be left unattended on changing stations.

Only adult women are allowed to assist children in the bathroom. Children 3 and over can use the bathroom unassisted. Children should not use a bathroom occupied by an adult. Children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. Children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities. If the child requires more than verbal assistance, all volunteers and staff should assist with the door open in view of other children, adults volunteers and assistants.

Reporting of Neglect & Abuse

Because sexual abusers ‘groom’ children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to ‘groom’ a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report ‘grooming’ behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to the Children and Families Minister, or any elder at DSC. Anyone who suspects, witnesses, or has any reason to believe that a child has been or is likely to be neglected and/or harmed or threatened with abuse in any form should contact the Children and Families Minister, or any elder at DSC. This reporting includes questionable behavior (overly flirtatious behavior, shoulder massages or other intimate acts, etc.) and/or possible offenses (volunteers observing actual abuse or possible evidence of abuse, like abrasions, lacerations, etc.). New Mexico is a mandatory reporting state and the guidelines for filling a report are detailed in the next section.

No DSC staff, elder, deacon or volunteer will be prevented nor discouraged from reporting to the civil authorities in following their own conscience or the applicable laws related to neglect or abuse and should do so as they see fit. If the person who suspects or witnessed or has knowledge of neglect or abuse is a mandatory reporter, he or she must follow the guidelines and laws set out for mandatory reporters. He or she must fulfill his/her obligations to the law, including reporting to Child Protective Services or the police. At no time will the mandatory reporter be prohibited from reporting, even if their consultation with staff or leadership in the church results in a disagreement.

New Mexico Law Requirements

¹ The only exception is a volunteer specifically serving in a medical role, i.e., Doctors or nurses during VBS

Guidelines for Mandatory Reporting

Every person who knows or has reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected in New Mexico must report the matter immediately to CYFD's Statewide Central Intake child abuse hotline (1-855-333-SAFE [7233] or #SAFE from a cell phone), or to law enforcement or the appropriate tribal identity. Specific professionals mentioned under the law as mandated reporters are: licensed physicians, residents or interns, law enforcement officers, judges presiding during a proceeding, nurses, schoolteachers, school officials, social workers, and members of the clergy who have information not privileged as a matter of law.

It is important for every person to take child abuse and neglect seriously, to be able to recognize when it happens, and to know what to do when you see it. Call CYFD's Statewide Central Intake (SCI) at 1-855-333-SAFE [7233] or #SAFE from a cell phone if you suspect child maltreatment is occurring. When making a report of abuse or neglect, you may choose to remain anonymous as the reporter, and will be immune from liability, civil or criminal, as long as you have acted in good faith by reporting. We encourage reporters to provide information about who they are, as it assists us in the investigative process. The reporter's name remains confidential unless ordered to be released by a court of law. In rare cases, a reporter could be required to testify in court if such testimony is necessary to protect the child.

While we make every effort to protect a reporter's identity, CYFD cannot guarantee that an alleged perpetrator will not figure out who has made the report. There do exist cases in which parents or alleged perpetrators are able to guess who reported the abuse based on the nature of the report. In these cases, CYFD's role is to attempt to redirect the alleged perpetrators and engage them in focusing on the concerns for the child.

As a reporter of abuse or neglect, it is important to include as many details about the suspected maltreatment as possible. For a report to be screened in for investigation, you must be able to provide enough information about it so that we might be able to find the child. While certainly desirable, it is not necessary to know the name and address of the child and/or parents. All descriptive information you can provide about the child, parent, and location of the abuse helps, such as: the child's school, parent's workplace, vehicle license plate, etc.

Appropriate Correction and Discipline

All Children's ministry staff and volunteers are responsible for providing a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which children can learn, play, and interact with others. This atmosphere should be maintained by preparing beforehand, proactively directing children towards acceptable activities, verbally encouraging positive behavior, and, when necessary, correcting or redirecting inappropriate behavior.

We believe that discipline should be primarily positive, and we encourage parents and those who work with children to be quick to encourage and affirm positive behavior. We encourage immediate and consistent response to negative behavior before it escalates into a serious problem.

Children's volunteers and staff members are strictly prohibited from using any form of physical discipline such as spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, biting or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Staff and volunteers should never

Speak harsh words, insults, belittling comments, threatening words, or any other verbal humiliation to children.

Parent Contact and Involvement

Parents who leave a child in our care during church services or activities will be paged if a child becomes sick, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministry programming.

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their child's program will be required to complete the church's volunteer application and screening process.

Release of Children

At any time that a child has been entrusted to the Children's Ministry staff members or volunteers, the church incurs responsibility for the safety and welfare of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministry staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities. If the person attempting to check a child out is not designated as a trusted person, do not release the child. Refer the person to the Children's ministry staff. Desert Springs Church requires an adult to present the security tag in order to pick up a child in our care.

If the adult does not have a security tag, please do not release the child. Tell the Children & Families Minister or his Pastoral Assistant, who will follow necessary protocol to ensure authorized pick-up of the child.

The only exception to this is a parent who has been cleared by and is accompanied by a Children's Ministry staff member to authorize the release of additional children they had checked into the service.

Building Safety

No child will ever be left unattended during Children's ministry. Staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building outside of public view. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

After every programming event, Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Next Gen Volunteer Conduct

Serving as a role model to children is a high calling. All volunteers serving in the Children's Ministry are expected to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel - emulating Christ like character, wisdom, behavior, and decision making.

Intoxicants

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drug while in any church facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children during any DSC program or activity.

Nudity

Staff members and volunteers serving in the Children's Ministry should never be nude in the presence of children in their care.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

Sexually Oriented Materials

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from possessing (or transmitting to a child) any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children in their care.

Tobacco Use

DSC requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during DSC activities or programs.

Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by a reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

