



## Minor Protection Policy

### OUR COMMITMENT

Victory Life Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for those participating in our Student Ministries. We also seek to minimize any vulnerability or unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our organization, volunteers, and employees may experience as they fulfill their ministerial duties. To fulfill these commitments as fully as possible, we have adopted the following procedures to be used, without exception, when selecting ministry volunteers, new employees, and supervising minors.

### DEFINITIONS

**Student Ministry**—Organized, Victory Life Church sponsored ministry to any person between the ages of 0 and 18. A minor may include any 18-year-old still enrolled in high school.

**Child or minors**— Any person between the ages of 0 and 18. A minor may include any 18-year-old still enrolled in high school.

**Volunteer**—A person performing services or donating time or effort without compensation who is authorized to work with minors. Normally referred to at Victory Life Church as a Grow Team Member.

**Employee**— A paid staff member of the ministry.

**Worker**—A volunteer or employee authorized to work with minors.

## VOLUNTEER SCREENING PROCEDURES

1. All candidates seeking a volunteer position working with minors will complete and return a Student Ministry Grow Team application that is attached to this document. If the applicant is a minor, they must complete the application for Minor Applicants attached to this document.
2. The ministry leader or designee will carefully review the application, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position.
3. If the individual appears to be a suitable candidate for the position, the ministry leader or designee will order a background check for the applicant. A sample background check is attached to this document.
4. While the background check is processing, the ministry leader or designee will check a minimum of two references to confirm that the applicant is suitable for Student Ministry. Those references should be institutional references – other ministries, schools, day care, Boy Scouts, coaching etc. where the applicant has worked with minors in the past.
  - a. If an applicant has no institutional references, personal references may be accepted. Personal references must be from members of Victory Life Church that are known by the church staff.
    - NOTE: If a candidate has been active with Victory Life Church *less than* 6 months, Institutional references are REQUIRED.
  - b. When calling references please use the Reference Call Guide attached to this document.
5. After the ministry leader or designee contacts references and performs a background check, he or she will conduct an interview with the candidate to confirm that they are suitable for serving in student ministry.

When indicated by our screening procedures, volunteer candidates who pose a threat to minors will be removed from consideration for any ministry position involving minors. The Campus Pastor or a qualified designee is responsible for making the applicant aware of the disqualification and making them aware of alternate serving opportunities.

## **EMPLOYEE SCREENING PROCEDURES**

The same screening procedures required for volunteers also apply to all potential employees, regardless of the ministry position for which they are being considered.

When indicated by our screening procedures, employment candidates who pose a threat to minors will be removed immediately from consideration for employment anywhere within our organization.

## **WAITING PERIOD**

All volunteer candidates must be regularly involved in our organization *at least* two months before they will be considered for any ministry position involving contact with minors.

- NOTE: If a candidate has been with Victory Life Church less than 6 months, Institutional references are REQUIRED.

## SUPERVISION

Ministry to minors may only take place if the “Rule of 2” OR “Rule of 3” and the minimum safe Worker to Student ratio is met. **Conducting class without meeting these standards is a violation of Victory Life Church policy.**

### **RULE OF 2:**

- A minimum of 2 screened adult workers must be present for every function or program involving minors. This includes every classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area.

### **RULE OF 3:**

- In limited circumstances when the “Rule of 2” cannot be implemented, *at least* 3 individuals must be present.
  - 1 individual must be a screened adult worker, at least 18 years of age, the other 2 individuals must be *at least* 5 years old (presumably students). Immediate family members do not count.

### **MINIMUM WORKER TO STUDENT RATIOS**

- For large groups, the number of workers must be increased to maintain the following *minimum* ratios. More workers are always preferred for safety and greater ministry impact.
  - 0-1 years old - 1 Worker for every 3 Children
  - 2-4 years old- 1 Worker per 6 Children
  - 5-6 years old - 1 Worker per 10 students
  - 7-18 years old - 1 Worker per 20 students

## **ONE ON ONE INTERACTIONS:**

- While adult workers should avoid being alone with a Student, some limited exceptions may be permitted for spiritual guidance or mentoring.
  - Any unscheduled one-on-one interaction *must* take place in clear sight of others.
  - Any planned one-on-one meetings for the purpose of spiritual guidance must be approved by a ministry leader and prior written approval must be obtained from the minor's parent/guardian.
  - The duration and frequency of approved one-on-one meetings are to be limited to no more than three occasions for no more than 60 minutes at a time. Meetings beyond three occasions or longer than 60 minutes require review and approval by the Campus Lead Pastor.

## **VEHICLE TRAVEL**

- Adult employees and volunteers should avoid traveling in a vehicle one-on-one with a minor. If it is necessary, develop a communication strategy to notify parents/guardians or supervisors when leaving for and arriving at an event.

## **NO GO ZONES**

- Identify no-go zones. Reduce or eliminate areas that are difficult to properly supervise, unused rooms, closets, and outdoor structures are to be kept locked with limited key access.

## BATHROOM PROCEDURES

Ideally a children's area should be equipped with restrooms that are not accessible by the general public. If this is not possible then additional precautions must be taken to ensure that children are never in the restroom with another person regardless of age.

### RESTROOM PROCEDURE FOR MINORS AGE 1-11 YEARS

1. A screened and approved adult must escort minors to the restroom.
2. While the child remains outside the restroom, the adult must visually confirm that the restroom is unoccupied
3. Once the restroom is confirmed empty the adult should send the child in and then stand guard outside the restroom not allowing anyone of any age to enter the restroom.
4. If the child requires assistance inside the restroom the "Rule of 2" or the "Rule of 3" must be observed.

**NOTE:** If a minor age 5 or younger needs assistance it should only be given by an adult female. She must leave the bathroom door ajar with a second screened worker nearby for additional accountability.

**NOTE:** Children over the age of 3 still in diapers may only be changed by their parent or guardian.

## CHECK-IN/CHECK-OUT PROCEDURES

Workers should arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled activity. They must remain at their assigned post until all minors in their care have been picked up by an authorized person. No minors should be released to find their parents or wait unattended for transportation.

## DISCIPLINE

Workers may never physically discipline anyone. Prohibited discipline includes but is not limited to spanking, hitting, biting, grabbing, or shaking. Minors should never be physically restrained unless it is reasonably necessary to prevent an individual from physically harming themselves or another individual. When at all possible restraint should only be carried out by a member of the same sex.

Unusual, violent or persistent disciplinary problems should be reported to the ministry leader.

### **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**

Physical violence committed by anyone age 6 or up is never tolerated on church premises and **MUST** be reported to the ministry leader. If a Minor age 6 and up commits an act of physical violence against another person, minor or adult, they must be returned to their parent or guardian immediately. Depending on the situation the minor may be allowed back in a classroom after 24 hours.

Any adult committing physical violence or discipline is to be *permanently* banned from Student ministry and Student ministry areas.

Violence committed by a child age 5 or under is not acceptable, however, the Adult worker supervising the child will need to use their best judgement on what level of violence warrants simple correction and what level of violence requires the child to be immediately removed from class. Signs that a child needs to be removed from the classroom include (but is not limited to) causing injury that draws blood or leaves a mark that persists longer than 5 minutes, including biting, or repeated violence despite correction/redirection.

- **NOTE:** Violence against a worker is still violence and must be treated as such.

## AFFECTION: AGES 0-3 YEARS OLD

### **The following forms of affection are appropriate for children in class:**

- Pats on the shoulder or head
- High fives are ok
- Verbal praise
- Sitting beside children
- Children sitting in laps
- Comforting hugs/holding for extended amounts of time.

### **The following forms of affection are inappropriate for children in class:**

- Never kiss babies or children.
- Never affectionately touch a child below the waist or on the breast area.
- Never give any form of unwanted affection – if a child expresses displeasure with affection it is always inappropriate to continue.
- Never bring gifts to a specific child. Gifts are for everyone in a class or no one. (Individual gifts are a sign that investigators look for when investigating child abuse because it is a technique commonly used by pedophiles to gain trust.)



## AFFECTION: AGES 4-18 YEARS OLD

### **The following forms of affection are appropriate for minors in class:**

- Pats on the shoulder
- High fives or fist bumps
- Verbal praise (*never* referring to a minor's physical development)
- Sitting beside minors
- Hugs - Side hugs *initiated by the minor* are acceptable.

### **The following forms of affection are inappropriate for minors in class:**

- No lengthy hugs (hugs longer than 3 seconds)
- No adult-initiated hugs
- No kissing of any kind
- No sitting in laps
- Never affectionately touch a minor below the shoulders (forearms and hands are ok)
- No wrestling with minors
- No tickling minors
- No piggyback rides
- Do not allow any type of massage
- Never give any form of unwanted affection
- No comments or compliments referring to a minor's bodily development
- Do not bring gifts to a specific minor. Gifts are for everyone or no one. (Individual gifts are a sign that investigators look for when investigating child abuse because it is a technique commonly used by pedophiles to gain trust.)

## INJURIES OR ILLNESS

### **WORKERS**

Persons who are ill (with a fever, or a communicable disease that can be transmitted by cough or by touch) will not be permitted to participate in any Student Ministry activity.

### **MINORS**

Minors should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as the illness is discovered. If immediate return is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that allows an adult worker to monitor the minor until he/she can be returned to a parent or guardian.

Take reasonable steps to avoid contact with blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids.

Leaders who become aware of an injury to a worker or minor will take steps to ensure that proper medical attention is given to the injured person and provide for continued monitoring of the remaining activity participants.

Persons who have received an injury that is obviously minor should be given first aid as needed at the time of injury. The individual's parents or guardians should be notified of the injury when they pick up the injured person.

Any injury that may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid should be given immediate attention. The parents or guardians of the injured person should be notified immediately, along with the ministry worker's coordinator or supervisor. If warranted by the injury, emergency medical personnel should be called.

Workers must fill out an injury report whenever an injury occurs during a ministry function. Promptly forward the injury report to the ministry coordinator or supervisor. A sample injury report is attached to this document

## RECORDKEEPING

All ministry functions involving minors should maintain an attendance list for every function. Record the date of the function, along with the names of all participants, ministry coordinators, and supervisors. If PCO is used for check-in to the event then a record will be stored there automatically.

## CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

**All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers are subject to mandatory reporting guidelines. They are expected to fully comply and report any reasonable suspicion of abuse or signs of neglect to local authorities.**

### **STEPS TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE:**

#### **Worker**

1. If a worker suspects that a child has been abused or is suffering from neglect, they must complete a *Suspected Abuse or Neglect Report* immediately. A *Suspected Abuse or Neglect Report* is attached at the end of this document.
2. The worker needs to give the completed report to their leader within 15 minutes.
3. If appropriate, show the leader the physical evidence.
  - NOTE: If the workers direct leader is the suspected perpetrator, the worker must inform the Campus Lead Pastor personally.
4. If the worker suspects that a child has been abused or is suffering from neglect, they are legally required to call Child Protective Services and report their suspicions.
  - Oklahoma Child Protective Services 1-800-522-3511
  - Texas Child Protective Services 1-800-252-5400
  - Colorado Child Protective Services 1-844-264-5437

#### **Leader**

1. Leaders who are made aware of a reasonable suspicion that a minor has been abused or neglected must inform the Campus Lead Pastor no later than 2 hours after the initial report.
  - If the Campus Lead Pastor cannot be reached within 2 hours of the report, or if the Campus Lead Pastor is the suspected perpetrator, the leader must report their suspicions and give a copy of the completed report to an alternate Ministry Leader i.e. an Associate

Pastor, Executive Team member, Central Director or the Campus Lead Pastor of another campus.

2. If the leader suspects that a child has been abused or is suffering from neglect, they are legally required to call Child Protective Services and report their suspicions.
  - Oklahoma Child Protective Services 1-800-522-3511
  - Texas Child Protective Services 1-800-252-5400
  - Colorado Child Protective Services 1-844-264-5437

### **Campus Lead Pastor**

1. Campus Lead Pastors who become aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor must immediately inform the Victory Life Church Legal Team. The Legal Team will then advise the Campus Lead Pastor of their next steps.
2. A representative from the Victory Life Church Legal Team will promptly notify the ministry's insurance upon notice of abuse or sexual misconduct.

## **VIOLATION OF POLICY OR PROCEDURES**

Ministry workers must promptly notify their Campus Lead Pastor or supervisor when they or others violate the procedures mandated by this policy.

Campus Lead Pastors, supervisors, and ministry leaders who become aware of a violation of the procedures set by this policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with them.

## **INTERNAL INVESTIGATION**

This ministry organization considers any allegation of abuse or molestation a serious matter. Each situation will be fully investigated first through civil authorities, then by ministry leaders with the assistance of legal counsel. The ministry will not interfere with a pending law enforcement investigation.

Employees who are the subject of an investigation will be removed from their position pending completion of the investigation. Employees who admit to the abuse or molestation will be terminated consistent with the established employment practices of this ministry.

Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.

This ministry will permanently remove any employees or volunteers from their ministerial duties within the organization if they are found guilty of abuse or molestation. Whenever termination of employment is a factor, we also will consult with legal counsel.

## **INTERACTIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT, NEWS MEDIA**

All ministry leaders, employees, and volunteers of this organization will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.

The leadership of this ministry will seek legal counsel as soon as possible after we receive notice of possible abuse or molestation within the organization. Advice from legal counsel will be the basis for our response to the allegations.

One individual appointed by the Victory Life Church Legal Team will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. Our spokesperson will be the only person to convey information concerning the situation, doing so in a prudent manner to avoid compromising an ongoing investigation and to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved.

## REVISION OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The leadership of this ministry will regularly review this policy and the procedures established within it. If necessary, the policies and procedures will be modified in accordance with the bylaws of the organization. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all employees and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

## **SIGNS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT IN A MINOR**

**PHYSICAL ABUSE** - a physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child. The physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) can result from punching, beating, shaking, kicking, biting, throwing, stabbing, hitting, burning, choking, or otherwise harming a child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caretaker intended to hurt the child.

### **Possible signs of Physical Abuse:**

- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes, or burns without adequate explanations
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Burns or bruises in unusual patterns that may indicate the use of an instrument or human bite; cigarette burns on any part of the body
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Fear of going home or seeing parents
- Unreasonable clothing that may hide injuries to arms or legs

**NEGLECT** - Failure to provide for a child's basic needs necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused.

### **Possible Signs of Neglect:**

- Obvious malnourishment
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn or dirty clothing
- Stealing or begging for food

**SEXUAL ABUSE** - Includes fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or producing pornographic materials.

### **Possible signs of Sexual Abuse:**

- Physical signs of sexually transmitted diseases
- Evidence of injury to the genital area
- Pregnancy in a young girl
- Difficulty in sitting or walking
- Extreme fear of being alone with adults of a certain sex
- Sexual comments, behaviors or play
- Knowledge of sexual relations beyond what is expected for a child's age
- Sexual victimization of other children

*[This should be posted where easily accessible to teachers but out of sight of the public and children over the age of 4. It is recommended that a reference copy of this document be kept with the Abuse/Neglect reporting form.]*

# SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT FORM

**PRIVACY DISCLAIMER:** This form should not be shared with co-workers or other volunteers. Submit form to your immediate supervisor, law enforcement, or other reporting agency. Note that mandatory reporting laws may apply, and you may be required by law to report this information to local authorities.

YOUR INFORMATION	Name _____ Title/position _____ Phone number _____ Signature _____ Date of report _____ Time of report _____
INJURED PERSON	Name _____ Age _____
SUSPECTED PERPETRATOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> Known Name _____ Age _____ Description _____ Relationship to suspected victim _____ Where did the suspected abuse occur _____
REASON FOR REPORT/ DETAILS OF INCIDENT	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____  <p style="text-align: center;">(if more space is needed, continue on the back of this form)</p>
WITNESSES	Name _____ Phone number _____  Name _____ Phone number _____  Name _____ Phone number _____
REPORT SUBMITTED TO:	Name _____ Title/position _____ Phone number _____ Date _____ Time _____

*THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PERSON THIS REPORT WAS SUBMITTED TO*

Did you notify state/local authorities regarding suspected abuse/sexual misconduct? Yes No

If yes, list agency name \_\_\_\_\_ Name of contact \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_