

## Safeguarding God's Children

### Child and Youth Protection Policies of Sheridan Lutheran Church

Sheridan Lutheran Church, Lincoln, Nebraska strives to create a safe place for all children and youth to experience God's love. Our goal in implementing these policies is to be good stewards of God's precious gifts, our children and youth.

All children and youth will be treated with dignity and respect. No verbal, sexual, physical or other abuse of any kind will be tolerated by any staff member, volunteer or participant. Our church should be a safe haven for each child that enters our doors and we will always strive to provide a loving, supportive and safe environment.

#### **SCREENING PROCEDURES**

All staff and volunteers who work directly with children and youth have been carefully selected, trained and screened. All staff and volunteers must participate in the Safeguarding God's Children training program and complete an application process which includes a background check. This training involves an overview of child sexual abuse awareness and procedures for keeping everyone safe. The application for new volunteers and staff includes three references. Each person undergoes a national background criminal check paid for by the church. All volunteers will be interviewed by church staff before being allowed to work with children and youth.

Any information indicating that a person poses a threat to others or has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse will make that person ineligible for serving in Sheridan's children and youth ministry programs.

All records of volunteer and staff applicants will be kept confidential and in a locked location.

#### **SUPERVISION**

1. All classroom areas must be open and parents/guardians are encouraged to attend activities at any time. All doors must have windows so as to provide direct visual access. (Windows shall not be covered.) No doors should be locked when children and youth are in a room. Doors of classrooms not being used for activities may be locked.
2. Sheridan strives to maintain a minimum child-adult ratio at activities, excluding Sunday School; Nursery - two attendants at all times; Pre-school - 1 adult per 6 children, elementary - 1 adult per 8 children; Middle school/Junior High - 1 adult per 8 youth, High School- 1 adult per 10 youth. Ratios may be computed counting supervisory staff present in the area.
3. Adult volunteers should arrive at least 10 minutes before the scheduled program. They must remain until all children have been picked up. Children should not be sent out to find parents or be released to wait for transportation. Children and youth are never to be left unattended. Parents are encouraged to pick up their children promptly to help ensure children are not alone or outside the classrooms searching for parents.
4. All aspects of children and youth ministry programs are open to observation by parents and congregational leaders.

## **APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR**

1. An adult should take children under the age of five to the restroom and assist them as needed. The adult should check to make sure the facility is safe, and may wait outside the stall or the restroom until the children come out. During children's programming, only the restrooms in the Children's Ministry Wing are to be used.
2. Children over the age of five can go to use the restroom individually, however all children 5<sup>th</sup> grade and younger will be escorted to the restroom and back to the classroom.
3. Care should be taken to exhibit appropriate touch with children and youth. Avoid the appearance of impropriety, such as older children sitting on laps, kissing or full body hugging. Children over the age of three should not be carried by youth or be held on laps of youth or adults other than parents, grandparents or guardians at church related activities.
4. Adult leaders should not date or be romantically involved with children or youth in the congregation.
5. Sexual contact between adult leaders and children or youth is prohibited. Sexual comments or jokes are prohibited. The showing of sexual material, exposure of private parts or any sexually abusive behaviors are not permitted. Church personnel are prohibited from viewing sexually explicit material on the Internet on church property or in the presence of children.
6. Adult leaders must not consume alcohol, illegal or controlled substances at church, as well as prior to or during any ministry related activities where children or youth are present.
7. Church personnel are prohibited from being alone with a child or youth in any place where other adults cannot easily observe them. Church related activities are never to take place in an adult's home without the presence of parents or other adult supervision.
8. Church personnel over the age of 21 must directly supervise church personnel under the age of 18 and be physically present during all activities. Church personnel 19 years and over do not need direct supervision.
9. A regularly updated list of approved congregation sponsored programs for children and youth will be maintained in the church office. New programs for children and youth must be approved by church leadership. All approved programs will be monitored for adequate supervision.
10. When both boys and girls are participating in church related programs, both male and female adults must be present.
11. Lock-ins (activities where children or youth bring sleeping bags/air mattresses) will be supervised as follows: Genders will be split in separate rooms/areas with gender appropriate adults remaining in close proximity.
12. At hotel events, adults will not share a bed with any child other than their own.

## **DISCIPLINE**

1. Discipline should be constructive, respectful and reflect Christian values. Physical, sexual or emotional punishment is prohibited. Spanking, hitting, grabbing, pinching, shaking or other physical discipline is not allowed. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child or youth.
2. Verbal torment, harassment, or initiations or any kind are prohibited. This includes the use of put-downs, sarcasm or excessive teasing. This kind of abuse is not acceptable by supervisors nor will this kind of treatment be tolerated by one or more children in interaction with each other.
3. Mechanical restraints such as ropes or tape are not to be used for behavior management.
3. Disciplinary issues should be reported to the child's parent or guardian, and in writing to the staff person responsible for the activity either the Director of Children's Ministry, the Director of Youth Ministry, and the Director of Ministries, depending on the setting.

## **GENERAL SECURITY**

Children and middle school youth are not allowed to wander around the building or leave the premises without adult supervision. Adults who see children wandering around during worship or education classes should approach them and escort them back to their classroom or to worship.

An emergency evacuation plan is to be posted in each room. In case of fire, the alarm will be sounded and children and youth are to be escorted out the nearest exit. In case the tornado siren is sounded, children and youth are to be escorted to an interior room away from windows and doors.

Supervisory personnel will continually monitor and supervise the behavior of adults, youth and children who are with other children and youth so that inappropriate behaviors can be detected and stopped.

## **RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS**

1. When inappropriate behaviors are observed, volunteer and paid church personnel must immediately report their observations. Inappropriate behaviors or policy violations that relate to interactions with children or youth should be reported by a telephone call or meeting with the church supervisory staff.
2. All reports of inappropriate behavior or policy violations with children or youth must be taken seriously.
3. Church personnel are required to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to the appropriate authorities. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. In addition to reporting to the state authorities, church personnel are required to report any suspected or known abuse of children and youth that may have taken place at church related activities to Sheridan's Leadership Team so that immediate and proper steps may be taken to ensure the safety of alleged victims.

