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3 **540-05N VOLUNTEER SCREENING GUIDELINES FOR**  
4 **CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRIES OF THE NORTH**  
5 **AMERICAN DIVISION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY**  
6 **ADVENTISTS—REVISION**  
7

8 VOTED, To revise the Volunteer Screening Guidelines for Children and Youth  
9 Ministries of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventists, to read as follows:  
10

11 1. *Objectives*—a. The Seventh-day Adventist Church desires to make its worship  
12 and educational environments free from abuse of all kinds. To achieve this goal in its ministry  
13 and educational programs, the following guidelines have been developed for implementation  
14 throughout the North American Division.  
15

16 b. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to providing a safe  
17 environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. The records show the  
18 disturbing and traumatic increase of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the  
19 attention of our nation, our society and the church. Adventist churches and schools, which  
20 conduct programs for children and youth, are not insulated from those individuals who abuse  
21 kids.  
22

23 c. In keeping with the Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* and in concert  
24 with the local conference, it is the responsibility of the local church and/or school to select,  
25 screen and manage trustworthy individuals to fill volunteer positions in ministry for children and  
26 youth activities.  
27

28 “The local church should take reasonable steps to safeguard children engaged in church-  
29 sponsored activities by choosing individuals with high spiritual and moral backgrounds as  
30 leaders and participants in programs for children.” (*Ch Man*, Ed 17, p. 120.)  
31

32 d. The work of volunteers is essential to the successful accomplishment of  
33 the Church’s mission and ministry. In selecting individuals for volunteer positions, only persons  
34 who support the mission of the organization should be recruited. The management policies and  
35 procedures employed to supervise the work of volunteers must be consistent with the mission of  
36 the church or school and must support its successful achievement. Individuals who are unwilling  
37 to support the volunteer screening guidelines and practices should not be allowed to serve.  
38

39 e. Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it is important  
40 to ensure to the best of its stability that the local conference, church, school (hereafter: the  
41 church), and the programs they sponsor are safe and provide a joyful experience for children and  
42 youth.  
43

44 2. *Organizational Responsibilities*—a. The church has both a moral and civil duty  
45 to protect the children entrusted to its care from harm caused by abuse. The local community has

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1 an expectation that the church will provide a safe haven for children who participate in its  
2 ministries.

3

4           b.       It is recommended that appropriate levels of adult supervision shall be  
5 provided at all times.

6

7           c.       The church will exercise reasonable care in the selection and supervision  
8 of volunteers including:

9

10                   1)       Careful selection of individuals needed to supervise a specific  
11 ministry or activity.

12

13                   2)       Appropriate training and orientation of individuals in order to  
14 provide proper supervision of the ministry or activity.

15

16                   3)       Providing each volunteer with a written copy of the policies and/or  
17 expected code of conduct required by the church.

18

19                   4)       Providing proper oversight and management of volunteers.

20

21                   5)       Taking appropriate corrective action to either discipline, counsel,  
22 or remove volunteer(s) when necessary.

23

24                   6)       Reporting all incidents of suspected child abuse in accordance with  
25 the law.

26

27           3.       *Volunteer Selection and Management*—a. It is the responsibility of the church to  
28 select individuals who will serve in volunteer positions.

29

30                   b.       All volunteers should be appropriately screened before they are allowed to  
31 supervise children.

32

33                   c.       The church should adopt a practice that no adult will be considered for a  
34 volunteer leadership role in a church-sponsored ministry or activity until he/she has held  
35 membership in the congregation or has been known by the organization for a minimum of six (6)  
36 months.

37

38                   d.       All volunteers should be invited to participate in a volunteer service  
39 orientation program conducted by the church and submit to a screening procedure that will  
40 include a signed Volunteer Ministry Information Form. Individuals who submit incomplete  
41 forms will not be considered for a volunteer position.

42

43                   e.       The Church should establish a Volunteer Service Committee of three to  
44 five members.

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1  
2 f. All volunteer positions should be evaluated to determine the appropriate  
3 level of screening based on the potential level of interaction with children; i.e., one-on-one  
4 activity, off-site programs, and overnight activities in which the volunteer may be involved.

5  
6 g. The appropriate level of screening should be completed before the  
7 volunteer is allowed to serve. (In some cases the local conference may provide assistance in the  
8 volunteer screening process.)

9  
10 h. The Volunteer Service Committee will notify the appropriate ministry  
11 leader and the volunteer when the screening process is complete.

12  
13 i. All volunteer leaders, regardless of their previous experience, shall submit  
14 to the screening procedure provided by the church.

15  
16 j. The Volunteer Service Committee shall periodically review the  
17 performance of all volunteers. (Volunteer information on file at the church should be updated  
18 every three (3) years.)

19  
20 4. *Protecting Confidentiality of Information and Records*—a. It is the duty and  
21 responsibility of all individuals involved in the screening, interviewing, and selection process of  
22 volunteers to conduct themselves with utmost integrity and confidentiality. The information  
23 received concerning individuals who volunteer their services to the church will be maintained at  
24 all times on a confidential basis by the organization. (Information contained on the Volunteer  
25 Ministry Information form will be released only to other church organizations upon the request  
26 and written authorization of the applicant.)

27  
28 b. All information received during the volunteer screening process, including  
29 the Volunteer Ministry Information form, will be maintained by the church on a confidential  
30 basis and kept in a locked file.

31  
32 c. All allegations of inappropriate conduct involving a child with a volunteer  
33 will be promptly investigated by the leadership of the church. The church will respect the rights  
34 of all parties involved in the alleged incident and treat all matters concerning the situation  
35 discreetly, confidentially, and in accordance with local child abuse reporting laws.

36  
37 5. *Levels of Screening for Volunteer Service*—a. Basic level – all volunteers—1)  
38 The leader of the ministry will personally interview the volunteer applicant.

39  
40 2) The applicant completes and signs the Volunteer Ministry  
41 Information form.

42  
43 3) The applicant shall provide three (3) personal references.  
44

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- 1                   4)     The Volunteer Service Committee shall review the Volunteer  
2 Ministry Information form, and contact and document the personal references provided by the  
3 applicant. Example: Interviews of applicants to serve in children’s Sabbath Schools, school  
4 room mothers, and other volunteer positions conducted on site with numerous individuals  
5 present.  
6
- 7                   b.     Comprehensive level – Regular interaction with children and while  
8 accompanying them on off-site trips—1) Volunteer applicant completes all elements of the Basic  
9 Level screening.  
10
- 11                   2)     State and/or Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal History and  
12 Sex Offender Registry Check, of criminal backgrounds may be required of the applicant. (This  
13 action requires fingerprinting and additional written permission from the applicant to obtain  
14 access to this information from law enforcement or other agencies. Example: 1. Volunteers  
15 involved with regular one-on-one interaction with children or youth, including off-site or  
16 overnight trips. 2. All Youth, Pathfinder, and Adventurer leaders, teacher’s aides, and athletic  
17 coaches at churches or schools.)  
18
- 19                   c.     Cost of screening procedures—All volunteers must complete the Basic  
20 Level of screening. The church is responsible for the cost of implementing these screening  
21 procedures. (The local conference may provide assistance with or conduct the formal screening  
22 of applicants at the Comprehensive Level.)  
23
- 24                   d.     Minimizing resistance to screening and achieving cooperation—1) Always  
25 focus on the project mission.  
26
- 27                   2)     Invite adults to apply for the privilege of volunteering in ministry  
28 activities.  
29
- 30                   3)     Conduct an orientation program for volunteers.  
31
- 32                   4)     Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children (Matthew  
33 18:1-6); therefore, child protection is an essential element in all church-sponsored children’s  
34 activities. (Volunteers will be expected to conduct themselves at all times in accordance with  
35 biblical principles.)  
36
- 37                   5)     Resist prolonged discussion of volunteer screening procedures.  
38 Handle these questions in a private meeting with the individual raising the objection.  
39
- 40                   6)     Personally invite a volunteer applicant to complete any missing  
41 information on the application form and resubmit for consideration. (Individuals will not be  
42 allowed to serve as a volunteer until the screening process is complete.)  
43

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1           6.     *Screening for Volunteer Service*—“Effective screening of volunteers requires  
2 considering the mission of the organization and the activities of volunteers necessary to  
3 accomplish that mission. Designers of effective screening must also consider the willingness of  
4 volunteers to give up some of their privacy for a greater good. Screening must be thorough  
5 enough to impact child abuse, but should not intrude on the privacy of volunteers more than  
6 required for the safety of the children with whom they work. Every youth-serving organization  
7 should understand that even well-screened volunteers may still pose a threat to the children with  
8 whom they work.” – The National Collaboration for Youth – *Screening Volunteers to Prevent*  
9 *Child Abuse: A Three Step Action Guide*, p. 3.

10

11           7.     *Orientation for Volunteers*—Jesus loves to minister to children. Today, we have  
12 the privilege of volunteering our time, talents, and service in numerous ways to help fulfill the  
13 gospel commission. As a volunteer you have the privilege of working with children, one of  
14 God’s most precious gifts. Beyond protecting children from abuse, we also desire to empower  
15 volunteers to help kids grow in their experience and understanding of Jesus and His saving grace.  
16 So we encourage you to walk with God daily, letting His love fill you up and spill over to the  
17 kids you serve.

18

19           Therefore, volunteers must receive orientation and training in the following areas to  
20 effectively serve the church.

21

22           a.     Provide all volunteers with an understanding of the ministry’s mission and  
23 the expectation the church has for its accomplishment in a safe and abuse-free manner.

24

25           b.     Explain and provide in writing the expectations, code of conduct, and  
26 rules to be followed by volunteers in relation to supervision and interaction with children.

27

28           c.     Conduct awareness education on child abuse (physical and sexual) and the  
29 necessary steps to be taken to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents. Reaffirm that  
30 alleged incidents of child abuse will be investigated and reported to authorities in accordance  
31 with local law.

32

33           d.     Conduct training on appropriate physical contact to affirm children.

34

35           e.     Always provide appropriate supervision of children. Never leave children  
36 alone without supervision. Wherever possible, a minimum of two adults should be present to  
37 supervise activities involving minor-aged children.

38

39           f.     Keep doors open to allow observation of the activity when the room is  
40 without an interior viewing area.

41

42           g.     Make it clear that failure to comply with the established volunteer  
43 guidelines and code of conduct will result in the individual being asked to terminate participation  
44 in the ministry.

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1           h.       Plan volunteer orientations to include knowledgeable individuals and in-  
2 service materials to help with the training of volunteers in order to bring credibility and support  
3 for your child protection efforts.

4  
5  
6                                   Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Volunteers  
7                                   Revised 2005

8  
9 Acknowledgment

10  
11           Because our society is filled with pain, problems, and litigation caused by improper  
12 conduct of individuals working with children and youth, it is imperative that those working with  
13 children have meaningful guidelines for conduct in order to protect both themselves and those  
14 under their care. As a ministry volunteer, you want parents and others to feel comfortable and  
15 confident with you.

16  
17 My Commitment to Volunteer Ministry

18  
19 I will,

20  
21           1.       Never leave a child or group of children for whom I am responsible unattended.  
22 I will provide appropriate supervision at all times.

23  
24           2.       Always have at least one other adult, eighteen (18) years of age or older, to help  
25 with the supervision of children. If I find myself in a situation where I am the only adult present,  
26 **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** will I allow myself to be alone with one child.

27  
28           3.       Always ask a child’s permission before physically touching him/her anywhere,  
29 even when responding to an injury or problem. This is especially true for any areas that would  
30 normally be covered by a T-shirt and/or shorts. (If an injury is within this area, make sure  
31 another adult works with you as care is provided.)

32  
33           4.       Refrain from physical and verbal attacks and corporal punishment which are  
34 inappropriate behaviors and should never be used as discipline. “Time outs” or “sit-in-that-chair”  
35 may be helpful discipline methods to use with children.

36  
37           5.       Affirm children with appropriate touching by keeping hugs brief and “shoulder-  
38 to-shoulder” or “side-to-side.” (Always keep hands at (not below) the shoulder level. A  
39 caregiver’s kiss should be to the forehead or cheek only – not elsewhere. For small children who  
40 like to sit on laps, I will encourage them to sit next to me.)

41  
42           6.       Provide extra care when taking small children to the restroom. I will take another  
43 adult along, or leave the door open.

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1           7.       Be aware of conducting activities in rooms that do not have an interior viewing  
2 area, or I will leave the door open during the activity to allow easy observation by others.

3

4           8.       Cooperate with the volunteer screening process and complete the Volunteer  
5 Ministry Information form, as required by the church.

6

7           9.       Be aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse and aware of the legal  
8 requirements for reporting suspected cases of abuse.

9

10          10.       Cooperate with church leadership in conducting children and youth ministries by  
11 being a volunteer who is loving, kind, firm, and always a thoroughly professional person.  
12 Working with children and youth is not only a privilege; it is also a serious responsibility that  
13 must be approached with utmost care.

14

15          11.       Participate in orientation and training programs conducted by the church.

16

17 The North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and  
18 Adventist Risk Management, Inc., recommend these Guidelines for Volunteers, which serve as a  
19 protection to you, your ministry, and the church from allegations of abuse.

20

21 I, the undersigned, have read this document and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct and  
22 Volunteer Guidelines outlined above. I will retain a copy of this document and keep it for  
23 reference.

24

25

26

27

28 Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_