

River Youth

Volunteer Policy and Guidelines

Youth Ministry Policy

In order to ensure a safe and secure environment for our youth (6th-12th grade), The River Church Community requires that all volunteers working with youth complete a Three-Step Application Process before ministry work or volunteer placement begins.

Step One: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete The River Church Community Screening Process, which requires a volunteer to complete a face-to-face interview with the Youth Pastor.

Step Two: Policies and Guidelines

Volunteers are required to review the policies contained in this manual and sign the last page indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

Step Three: Background Check and Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

The River Church Community requires that all volunteers in River Youth activities or programming undergo a criminal background check and complete a sexual abuse training.

Child Safety Policy

Abuse Tolerance

The River Church Community has a zero tolerance policy for abuse in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at The River Church Community to act in the best interest of young people in every program.

In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their personal responsibility to immediately report their observations to the Youth Pastor, Associate Youth Pastor, or Pastor of Adult Spiritual Formation.

Reporting Suspicious or Inappropriate Behaviors

The River Church Community is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. In order to maintain a safe environment for children, staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate or suspicious behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area, the Associate Youth Director, Youth Pastor, or Pastor of Adult Spiritual Formation.

Enforcement of Policies

The River Church Community staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff or

volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all The River Church Community policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Youth Ministry positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be decided by the Youth Pastor in consultation with the Pastor of Adult Spiritual Formation.

Reporting Violation of Policy

Reports of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, (which could include as appropriate) to the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

Consequences of Violation

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Youth Ministry. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective Agencies.

Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving youth at The River Church Community.

Reporting Suspicions of Abuse to Law Enforcement Agencies

Staff members and volunteers at The River Church Community are required to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or co-worker, to the immediate supervisor of the area, the Youth Pastor or Pastor of Adult Spiritual Formation.

Staff members and volunteers are required to verbally report an incident to supervisory staff as soon as possible after the incident.

Youth Ministry Policies and Procedures

2-adult rule

At least two adults must be present for all River Youth gatherings with young people. To the greatest extent possible, at least two mandated reporters need to supervise gatherings.

Building Safety

No student will ever be left unattended or unsupervised during youth ministry programming or meetings. Youth Ministry staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual student in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single student, that staff member or volunteer will take the student to a room or building occupied by others, to a location easily observed by others, or location monitored by security cameras. (Example: If a student desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or volunteer after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members are present).

After every programming event, staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and

restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Students and volunteers must remain with the group or with their Small Group during River Youth Programming.

Discipline

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of children or students. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction of inappropriate behaviors by students. If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff/volunteers, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student's parent will be contacted to pick up the student. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff/volunteers will verbally redirect students involved and will try to avoid physical intervention. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the ministry supervisor.

Intoxicants

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, and/or any legal substances that would impair service or duty while in any River Church Community facility, while traveling with students, or while working with or supervising students.

Dress and Attire

Appropriately modest attire must be worn at all times by volunteers in the River Youth Ministry. Clothes with inappropriate messages or images are not permitted. When in doubt, don't wear it.

Staff and volunteers in the River Youth Ministry should never be nude in the presence of students in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member/volunteer will make appropriate arrangements for showering or changing clothes separately from students.

One-on-One Interactions with Students

The River Church Community recognizes that meeting the emotional needs of students may occasionally require staff members and volunteers to minister on an individual basis. Staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines when interacting with students.

Individual Meetings

Staff members and volunteers should conduct one-on-one meetings with an individual student at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed, unless prior approval is obtained from the Youth Pastor.

In the event that a closed-door meeting must occur, the volunteer must inform a staff member

and use one of the rooms monitored by security cameras. The volunteer must ensure that the door remains unlocked.

Social Media, Texting and Messaging

Staff and volunteers should not have ongoing private communication with students. Staff and volunteers should aim to keep texting and messaging with students within a group context. Include another staff or volunteer as appropriate.

Staff and volunteers that participate in social media are expected to have a respectable media presence.

Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships of any kind between students and volunteers are strictly prohibited.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be observed when workers are involved in the transportation of students:

Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place are prohibited. Transportation circumstances that leave only one student in transport are not recommended.

Staff members and volunteers must avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.

Parental Contact

Parents who leave a student in the care of The River Church Community staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Youth Ministry programs.

Physical Contact

The River Church Community is committed to protecting students in its care. To this end, The River Church Community has implemented a “physical contact policy” which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Youth Ministry programs. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in the youth program:

Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and students are important for student 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.

Physical contact should be for the benefit of the student, 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 students or student staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted as such 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 or volunteers in the Youth Ministry must foster trust at all times.

Do not force any physical contact, touch or affection upon a reluctant student. A student's preference not to be touched must be respected.

Youth Ministry staff and volunteers are responsible for protecting students under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.

Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by staff or volunteers must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor.

Sexually-Explicit Oriented Conversations

It is expected that, from time to time, student ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will convey to the students the church's views on these topics and might include their application broadly in the life of a staff member or volunteer. Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any other sexually-explicit conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any student in the program.

Sexually-Explicit Materials

Staff members and volunteers of River Youth are prohibited from possessing any sexually-explicit printed materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of students.

Sleeping Arrangements

It is anticipated that certain Youth Ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff/volunteers (i.e. lock-ins, mission trips, retreats, etc.) In the event an activity requires sleeping arrangements, staff and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

The two-adult rule must be followed. Two adult leaders must be present and must have previously completed the River Youth application and screening processes.

Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing to and approved by the Youth Pastor.

Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn.

In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff, volunteer, and student will use single sleeping bags or blankets. In these instances, a “one-person-to-one bag or blanket” rule will be observed.

Tobacco

The River Church Community requires volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and vape, in the facility and while in the presence of students or their parents.

Verbal Interactions

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

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