

Sturbridge Worship Center Policies & Procedures for Children's Ministry

At Sturbridge Worship Center, we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for Sturbridge Worship Center volunteers and staff members. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for children, protecting children, you and the mission of Sturbridge Worship Center. The following procedures have been adopted and will be diligently enforced.

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1. Overview of the Sturbridge Worship Center Safety System

Because we desire to protect children involve in our ministry, Sturbridge Worship Center requires all staff members and volunteers working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

STEP ONE: Screening Process

Staff members and volunteers are required to complete the Sturbridge Worship Center Screening Process, which requires a staff member or volunteer to:

- Complete a face-to-face interview with ministry leadership
- Employees of the church require an application (not volunteers)
- Be a member of Sturbridge Worship Center for at least 6-months

STEP TWO: Criminal Background Check

Sturbridge Worship Center requires that all staff members and volunteers working or volunteering in children's or student activities or programming undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the position, differing levels or intensity of background check may be required.

STEP THREE: Standards of Ministry Policy

Staff members and volunteers are required to review and sign the Standards of Ministry policy, indicating that he or she has read and understood the material, and agrees to comply with policy requirements. Any questions or concerns will be discussed confidentially with leadership.

STEP FOUR: Child Safety Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

Sturbridge Worship Center requires that staff members and volunteers avoid abusive behavior of any kind. Staff members and volunteers are required to report any policy violations to the pastor or church elder. Staff members and volunteers should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in 'grooming' a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip Sturbridge Worship Center staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, Sturbridge Worship Center will provide training to all staff members and volunteers on the basics of child safety.

2. Child Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

Sturbridge Worship Center has a **zero tolerance for abuse** in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at Sturbridge Worship Center to act in the best interest of all children 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 responsibility to immediately report their observations to their immediate supervisor and the pastor.

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Sturbridge Worship Center is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Sturbridge Worship Center Leadership and the Police Department, Child Protective Services or other appropriate agency.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor or a member of the Sturbridge Worship Center Leadership. 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, any policy violations or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor and the pastor.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Sturbridge Worship Center staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Sturbridge Worship Center policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action or reassignment from Children's Ministry's positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the Pastoral Team.

3. Reporting Abuse or Suspicions of Abuse

REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

In order to maintain a safe environment for our children, Sturbridge Worship Center 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, suspicious or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to an immediate supervisor in the ministry area and the pastor.

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 Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programming that involves children or students at Sturbridge Worship Center. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment from Sturbridge Worship Center.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children or students at Sturbridge Worship Center.

REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO STATE AND/OR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Massachusetts law requires that any person having cause to believe a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate agency. An oral report is required immediately, with a written report submitted within 48 hours.

Staff or volunteers are to report such knowledge or incidents immediately (not to exceed 12 hours) to the pastor or a church elder. Sturbridge Worship Center Leadership will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs, in accordance with state laws. The following link provides guidance for Massachusetts mandated reporting requirements and how to do so.

<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/report-child-abuse-or-neglect-as-a-mandated-reporter>.

4. Children's Ministry Staff Monitoring Plan

Monitoring of staff and volunteers will include regular (announced and unannounced) visits in each program to provide supervisors the opportunity to observe staff members and volunteer interactions with children.

BUILDING SAFETY

No child will ever be left unattended during children's ministry programming or classes. Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. There is a minimum of two volunteers scheduled for each group in program. As a general guideline, we will try to schedule non-related volunteers to any given group. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself about to be alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to a room where other staff members or volunteers are present.)

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

WORKER TO CHILD RATIOS

Sturbridge Worship Center is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, a ratio of 2 workers to up to 20 children will be observed:

If a worker is 'out of ratio' it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or the Children's Director. Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring the worker to children ratios into compliance with Church policy.

5. Other Policies

DISCIPLINE

It is Sturbridge Worship Center's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children in Sturbridge Worship Center ministries. **No form of physical discipline by volunteers or staff is acceptable during Sturbridge Worship Center children's activities.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

1. Verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
2. If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting (avoid being alone with the child).
3. Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out and provide the child with a clear explanation of your expectations. ("Jamie, you didn't stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
4. Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a "spot" to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.
5. Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child's life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
6. Monitor the child as they enter time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. ("Jamie, you're doing a great job of sitting quietly – just 2 more minutes.")
7. Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in a further time-out. Follow this with praise.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Children's Ministry leader. In any situation where the child's behavior falls outside of the boundary of the staff or volunteers, the parent will be texted to immediately come and sign out the child for the day. They may return to service. A conversation will be necessary concerning the behavior that took place prior to returning the child to the program.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION AND ASSISTANCE GUIDELINE

School Aged Children

School age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. (However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.) Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom.

If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should get to the exterior bathroom door, knock and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist

the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall. Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

If any child requires additional toileting assistance, who is not yet using the bathroom independently, a parent will be contacted to perform such duties.

Proper hand washing instructions will be posted in each bathroom and are expected to be followed by both the children and volunteers.

INTOXICANTS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any Sturbridge Worship Center facility while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children.

COVID PRECAUTIONS

Extra precautions are taken during the COVID pandemic. It is each person's duty to ensure they remain safe for exposure to others before even considering participating in church services. Before being signed into the program for the day, parents are to confirm if the child was feeling any symptoms of sickness of any kind, or been exposed to someone who is suspected or diagnosed with COVID. If they have not, then they will be allowed into the program.

Each child will be provided an individual bin to store their individual papers, coloring/writing items and crafts. There will be no sharing of items among children.

For snack, we will offer individually packaged snacks and water bottles or juice boxes.

The basic surfaces in the classroom will be sanitized after each class.

MEDICATION

During Sunday service programs, no medications will be administered to children by Sturbridge Worship Center staff or volunteers. That will remain the responsibility of a parent.

For extended stay programs or events, medication may be given to a child by a staff member or volunteer with a doctor's prescription. The medication must be in the original packaging, including over the counter medication.

NUDITY

Staff members and volunteers in Sturbridge Worship Center's Children's Ministries should never be nude in the presence of children in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e. changing clothes during a pool party, weekend or overnight retreat, etc.), staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to the to the Pastor concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in Sturbridge Worship Center Children's Ministry program. Another adult who has completed the Sturbridge Worship Center application and screening process should always be present.

TRANSPORTATION

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

1. Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
2. Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.
3. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving vehicles owned or rented by Sturbridge Worship Center, unless in an emergency.

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents who leave a child in the care of Sturbridge Worship Center 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 Children's Ministries programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at Sturbridge Worship Center. 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 children's programs at Sturbridge Worship Center will be required to complete the Sturbridge Worship Center volunteer screening process.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Sturbridge Worship Center is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, Sturbridge Worship Center has implemented a 'physical contact policy' that promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

1. Hugging, pats on the back 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.

2. 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 and the pastor.
3. Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
4. Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or children's staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
5. Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children's Ministries must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
6. Do not force physical contact, touch or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
7. Children's staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
8. Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor and a pastor.

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 in Children's Ministries at Sturbridge Worship Center are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

PHOTOS/VIDEOS

Photos or videos will not be taken and posted on-line without express permission by the parent.

TOBACCO USE

Sturbridge Worship Center 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 Sturbridge Worship Center activities or programs. Sturbridge Worship Center is a tobacco-free facility including eCigs.

VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Sturbridge Worship Center 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 any 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.

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to Sturbridge Worship Center staff members or volunteers, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and volunteers must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Children's Ministries 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.

It is presumed a person who drops off a child or student has the authority to pick up the child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor, Pastor or other church leader before releasing the child.

SUPERVISION

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries are expected to provide adequate supervision for children in their care while working in church programs.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Signing below signifies that I have received and read a copy of Sturbridge Worship Center’s Children’s Ministry Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at Sturbridge Worship Center.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised or eliminated by Sturbridge Worship Center.

Printed Name _____

Signed _____ *Date* _____