

## Youth and Children's Safety Policy of the Northern Lights Region

### Introduction

The youth/children's ministries of the Northern Lights Region intent is to provide youth with opportunities for personal spiritual growth and development as well as experiences which minister to mind, body, and spirit.

Child abuse is a problem in our society that affects children and youth of all ethnic and economic backgrounds. The following contains information designed to protect and care for youth/children who are involved in regional youth ministries and to assist volunteers and staff working with youth/children to prevent the harming of those persons during the course of regional events.

The intent of this policy is to reduce the risk of youth/child abuse and also to ensure appropriate intervention and reporting if abuse does occur. The intent of this policy is also to enable volunteers and staff working with youth/children to provide appropriate care in situations when abuse to a youth/child is suspected or disclosed during the course of a regional youth event.

#### 1. Definition of terms

- a. Staff member: Any person in the Northern Lights Region in an official paid capacity by the region.
- b. Volunteer: Persons giving unpaid leadership in any of the Northern Lights Region's youth ministries. This does include clergy within the region who are serving as an extension of their calls to their local settings.
- c. Youth and Children's Ministry Coordinator: the paid staff member on the regional staff responsible for overseeing the ministries pertaining to youth and Children. From here on out this position will be referred to as YCMC
- d. Child or Youth: A person under 18 years of age. May also be referred to as a participant
- e. Abuse and/or neglect—means the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the individual's health, welfare, or safety; or the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a youth/child by any person who is responsible for or providing care to the child/youth under circumstances which indicate that the youth/child's health, welfare, and safety is harmed.

#### 2. Accountability

- a. The YCMC in consultation with the Regional Minister and President, shall be the final authority for major decisions regarding any youth or children ministry.
- b. The Director of each event in consultation with the YCMC has authority over their event and recruitment of volunteers.
- c. The event staff and volunteers are expected to adhere to the policies established by the Regional Board of the Northern Lights Region.
- d. Each participant must sign a Covenant of Conduct stating that he/she has read the provided covenant for each event and agrees to abide by them. Should participants be asked to leave an event because of violating any of the stated expectations or covenant,

parents/guardians will be responsible for providing their child's transportation home. If the participant's parents cannot be reached, the participant's pastor will be contacted and will be asked to make those transportation arrangements.

3. Screening procedures for Volunteers/staff in Regional Youth/Children's Ministries
  - a. All volunteers/staff must complete an application before they are accepted into the youth and children's ministries of the Northern Lights Region. As part of the application, two written references are required. One must be from the applicant's pastor, or in the case of clergy, the Regional Minister.
  - b. References will be reviewed, evaluated and used to determine the selection of all volunteers. The selection process will be conducted under the guidance of the Directors and YCMC.
  - c. The application and references are to be renewed every three years.
  - d. Each volunteer/staff must undergo a criminal background check. Any person found to have been convicted of a sex crime or a crime against person as defined in the criminal code from corresponding state or federal government, will be denied the opportunity to serve in the ministry program.
  - e. All volunteers/staff must attend a training session, in person or by electronic means, where the Child Safety Policy will be discussed, as well as expectations of conduct between volunteers and youth/children which are described in the ministry handbook.
  - f. All records will be handled in confidence and maintained by the Region.
4. Guidelines for Volunteer/Staff behavior in Youth/Children's Ministries of the Northern Lights Region. The following guidelines serve the dual purpose of protecting the youth/child participants as well as providing volunteers/staff protection from unfounded allegations of abuse.
  - a. Volunteers/staff shall not engage in abuse of any kind.
  - b. Private one-on-one activities between volunteers/staff and youth/children are not permitted. If individual "counseling" is required, such activity must be done in plain view of other campers or staff.
  - c. All persons in leadership positions will exercise deliberate supervision and report observations of suspected abuse to the director immediately. Prompt warnings will be issued where appropriate and the situation will be investigated and monitored closely.
  - d. The director, ministry leader, or YCMC will have the option of dismissing any volunteer immediately for an offense of sufficient gravity. Law enforcement officials will be contacted in any instance of conduct which could be criminally sanctioned.
  - e. Volunteer/staff training will include a discussion of reporting procedures.
5. Reporting Procedures for Suspected or Disclosed Abuse of a youth/child.
  - a. When any volunteer or staff learns of possible and/or disclosed abuse this will be reported immediately to the Director or YCMC. The Director or YCMC will follow up to provide care to the youth/child as appropriate. Should the possible and/or disclosed abuse involve the Director or YCMC, the Regional Minister and President shall be contacted immediately.
  - b. When there is reasonable cause to believe that a youth/child has suffered abuse or neglect, the Director or YCMC shall report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to the proper law enforcement agency or to Child Protective Services.

- c. The report must be made at the first opportunity, but in no case longer than forty-eight hours after there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has suffered abuse or neglect. The report must include the identity of the accused if known.
  - d. An immediate oral report must be made by telephone or otherwise to the proper law enforcement agency or Child Protective Services, and upon request, must be followed by a report in writing. Such report must contain the following information, if known:
    - i. The name, address, and age of the child/youth
    - ii. The name and address of the child's parents, stepparents, guardians, or other persons having custody of the child
    - iii. The nature and extent of the alleged injury or injuries
    - iv. The nature and extent of the alleged neglect
    - v. The nature and extent of the alleged abuse
    - vi. Any evidence of previous injuries, including their nature and extent
    - vii. Any other information that may be helpful in establishing the cause of the child's death, injury, or injuries and the identity of the alleged perpetrator or perpetrators.
  - e. The regional Minister and President and YCMC will be apprised of the report that has been made to law enforcement or Child Protective Services.
  - f. Volunteers and staff shall receive training in recognizing signs of abuse, and appropriate responses to disclosed and/or suspected abuse, and the regional reporting procedures for suspected or disclosed abuse. Volunteers and staff are not expected to investigate instances of suspected or disclosed abuse, however the suspected and disclosed abuse will be reported to law enforcement or Child Protective Services.
6. General Expectations for Youth/Children Ministries in the Northern Lights Region
- a. Dates of the ministry event will be communicated to the Regional office by the Youth and Children's Ministry Team or the YCMC as early as possible.
  - b. Staffing requirements
    - i. Ideally each event should have a Director or Ministry lead, a person with first aid training, and at least one counselor for every five campers.
    - ii. Each counselor must be 5 years older than the oldest camper that they are to be working with.
    - iii. In the event that a camp or retreat has no director, no individual with first aid training, or less than one counselor for every five campers by ten days prior to the event, the YCMC shall confer with the Regional Minister and President and decide whether to allow that event to proceed.
7. Safety
- a. Vehicles brought by participants shall remain parked in designated areas for the duration of the event. Participants and staff are to stay on site at all times unless asked to do otherwise by the director. For sanctioned activities off site, participants may be transported by a licensed driver 21 years of age or older who can show proof of insurance.
    - i. If there is an instance in which a trip is planned as a part of the ministry event, permission slips are necessary for all participants who are going on the trip.

- b. Participants are to remain in their sleeping units during their rest period and after lights out, except to use restrooms with counselors permission. All sleeping units will have an assigned volunteer/staff person who shall be in that sleeping unit. Participants will not be allowed to sleep in any area without a volunteer/staff present.
  - c. Participants must stay in the areas designated by their leaders. Raiding of another group's area will not be tolerated.
  - d. All injuries must be reported to the designated first aid person at the earliest possible time.
    - i. The designated first aid person must document all injuries and treatment given.
    - ii. The record of treatment and injuries will be submitted to the Regional office at the conclusion of the event.
    - iii. Parents should be notified if there is any question as to the seriousness of the injury.
    - iv. Any life-threatening situation or behavior should be communicated to the parents.
8. Regional Youth Council (RYC)
- a. The RYC shall consist of no more than 16 youth with a preferred equal representation from each area of the region.
  - b. Interested applicants shall submit an application for the position, including two recommendations. One from their pastor and another of their choosing.
  - c. Youth eligible to serve shall have completed at least the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and finish their time in RYC after the summer of their High School graduation.
  - d. The RYC shall be responsible for planning and implementing the winter retreat and to serve as leaders and representatives of their peers in other Regional events.
  - e. The RYC adult Sponsors do fall under the volunteer guidelines as they are listed above.