



The Riverside Church Safe Sanctuary Procedures July 2018

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5). Children and youth are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, and our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, verbal abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders.

God calls us to make our churches safe places of sanctuary that protect children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and/or ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. Thus, The Riverside Church in the City of New York has these procedures, based upon best practices modeled by congregations across the country both large and small, in place to protect and nurture the children God has entrusted into our care.

I. Volunteer Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

A. Age

Volunteers recruited to work with children and youth in any position of authority must be at least 21 years of age and at least 5 years older than the average age of the group they are working to serve. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years so as to better have perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving. Persons not meeting these standards may not serve in a role of primary authority; however, they may be utilized as assistants to those in leadership positions.

B. Application

Volunteers must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

C. Background Checks

Criminal background checks shall be made of all volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and children (e.g. Sunday School teachers), to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior. The church will keep confidential all information received from the

background check process. Information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know.

D. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.

E. Interview

All volunteers must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the individual will serve, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. The guidelines outlined in these procedures may be discussed during the interview.

II. Program Procedures

All programming of the Children and Families and the Youth programs of The Riverside Church will be governed by these procedures:

A. Supervision - Every programming event is supervised by a team of adults. One adult may supervise a group of children or youth in a 3rd floor classroom as long as there are other dedicated team members available on the 3rd floor for accountability and assistance if necessary. There must be visibility through a window or open door, of the adult's location within the room. No children will be left unsupervised.

Bathroom break supervision policies may differ according to program, but supervisors must provide clear a bathroom policy for each program.

B. Checkout Procedure

All parents will observe the check-in/checkout procedures as outlined by staff personnel for any event.

C. Open Door Policy

Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This open door policy states that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

D. Outside Access:

There must be access to a phone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the groups' departure from church property.

E. Doors and Windows:

All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied by three or fewer people. Windows will be kept free from adornment and kept locked at all times.

F. Individual Counseling:

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If at all possible, a supervisor is to have knowledge of all one-on-one interactions between a staff member and the child or youth with whom the staff member is meeting as well as the location of the one-on-one meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with section III of this policy.

G. Touch

Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.

Example: Adults should refrain from saying, "Give me a hug" or "Give me a high five". Instead, adults should ask for the preferences of the child, including a non-touch option:

"Would you like a hug, high five, hand shake or wave?"

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Adults are not to force physical affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly report inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers to their ministry leader, staff member, or a minister.

No one should ever tickle, kiss, wrestle with, strike, or shove a child. No child should sit in the lap of a childcare worker. The only exception to this is when an infant requires comfort or care.

H. Comments to Children

Adults should not comment about a child's appearance, gender/gender identity/presentation, clothing, or sexual orientation.

The Riverside Church celebrates and affirms all forms of gender identity, non-conformity, and fluidity. "Gender fluid" describes a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender. We will use the pronouns our children and youth prefer to use for themselves at any given time in their lives. We affirm transgender identities and choose to support and welcome children who identify as transgender.

Examples of inappropriate comments to children:

"So, girls can wear ties now, huh?"
"What a fancy dress! You are so beautiful!"¹
"Are you a girl or a boy?"
"Do you like girls or boys?"
"Watch out! All the boys are going to be chasing her!"
"I bet you're a ladykiller!"
"Boys don't wear that color. That's feminine"
"You sound like a girl"
"Boys don't cry"

Activities, conversations, and opportunities should be provided to all children regardless of gender/gender expression. There are not boy/girl colors, boy/girl games, boy/girl groupings, boy/girl expectations at The Riverside Church.

Examples of inappropriate boy/girl binaries in education:

"Girls stand on the left, boys on the right."
"The girls get the pink shirts."
"We need some strong boys to move these boxes."

III. Response to Allegations of Abuse

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to either the Senior Minister, Executive Minister of Programs, or the minister responsible for the program (If the accused is a minister, see information below).

Be prepared to do the following:

¹ Although fancy dress can be a fun and traditional part of church attendance, the Ministry of Education encourages all adults to resist the culture of appearance and objectification by refraining from these comments.

- A. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
- B. IMMEDIATELY contact the Executive Minister of Programs or the minister on call.
- C. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, program director, minister on staff, or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
- Provide written documentation concerning the incident
 - Notify the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.) You may also contact the police department and they will dispatch a team to handle the situation.
 - Notify the Executive Minister of Programs(if he/she is not responsible for the event). If the Executive Minister of Programs is the accused party, the designee will notify the Senior Minister).
 - Give written documentation to the Executive Minister
- D. The minister or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)

IV. Guidelines Concerning Individuals Convicted of Child Abuse in the Church's building

Any individual who has been convicted of child abuse, child molestation, child endangerment, pedophilia, or any violent action taken against a child must abide by the following procedures at all times while on the property of The Riverside Church. These procedures will be made known to them by a member of the staff upon arrival. The individual must sign an acknowledgement of understanding of the guidelines governing his/her behavior while on the TRC premises.

- A. They must check in at the security desk immediately and sign a register provided for them. They must also sign out upon exiting the premises.
- B. They must be accompanied by a security official at all times while on church property, including visits to the bathroom. They are not permitted to enter a bathroom at any time by themselves unless it is a single use restroom and only then after it is confirmed that no one else is in the restroom.
- C. They will not be allowed to access floors 2-7 of the MLK building as these areas house our children's classrooms, nursery, and play areas.
- D. They may not be in any common area in which children are present (such as the Nave, Coffee Hour or Assembly Hall, etc.) unless accompanied or supervised at all times by security

personnel hired by The Riverside Church. If their presence is deemed to represent a danger to children or youth by a staff member or minister, they may be asked to leave that space at once and must comply.

IV. Universal Commitment to Safe Sanctuary Policy

These guidelines will be provided to all parents, children, youth, and volunteers. Each group will show support for Safe Sanctuary policies by signing the covenant that outlines expectations for behavior. There will be distinctive covenants for parents, children, youth, and volunteers. Each person connected to CYF programming, either as a participant, parent, volunteer, or staff, must sign the covenant.

Each covenant will include a process for handling misconduct and/or allegations of misconduct.

V. Staff/Volunteer/Leadership Failure to Comply with these Procedures

Refusal to comply with any of these guidelines, will result in a verbal and written warning from the Executive Minister of TRC. Continued disregard or refusal to follow the guidelines laid out in these procedures will result in a permanent ban from the TRC premises, will be treated as an illegal trespass and will be reported to law enforcement. Serious allegations of misconduct will result in immediate suspension and possibly dismissal from the program.

**The Riverside Church
Safe Sanctuary Acknowledgement Form**

Signing below I am acknowledging that I have read and been given a copy of The 2018-2019 Riverside Church Safe Sanctuary Form

Student Signature

Date _____

Parent Signature

Date _____