

CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAFETY COVENANT

Revised September 16, 2025

Adopted: September 16, 2025

South Elkhorn Christian Church will be a place where people of all ages can come together for worship, study, and service, with the assurance that they are safe and secure in the community of faith. The following procedures will be adopted and strictly enforced so that all participants, parents/guardians, clergy, staff, and volunteers are aware of the rules, policies, and procedures that will apply to children and youth activities.

Certain events, including off-premises events or events that involve travel, may not be able to strictly comply with this policy. In such circumstances where an event cannot comply with all requirements of this policy, a written safety plan shall be prepared by staff and/or adult volunteers, which shall be reviewed and approved by the Ministry Cabinet in advance of the event. Plans should be submitted with sufficient time for the Ministry Cabinet to review them. An event that cannot comply with this policy or does not have an otherwise approved safety plan shall not be permitted.

Definitions

“Child” or “Children” shall refer to anyone younger than sixth grade.

“Youth” shall refer to anyone recognized as being in sixth through twelfth grade, or graduates under eighteen (18) years or age.

“Children and/or youth event” shall refer to any event held at or organized by South Elkhorn Christian Church in which staff or volunteers are directly responsible for the custody of children or youth.

“CWW” shall refer to Children’s Worship and Wonder programming and shall also include the nursery, both of which occur during worship at South Elkhorn Christian Church.

“Clergy” or “Staff” shall mean paid employees or contractors of South Elkhorn Christian Church.

“Volunteer” shall mean an unpaid adult that participates in or assists with children/youth events.

“Parent/Guardian” shall refer to the adult with legal responsibility and decision-making authority for a child or youth.

“Background check” shall mean a review of an individual’s criminal convictions and/or registration on any “sex offender registry.” A background check shall be considered valid for two (2) calendar years from the date it is received.

“Designated Pastor” shall mean the Senior Minister or his/her designee. In the event the Designated Pastor is not the Senior Minister, his/her designation shall be subject to review and confirmation by the Ministry Cabinet.

Parental Permissions and Authorizations

For parents/guardians wishing to utilize the nursery and/or allow their children to participate in other children’s activities, including CWW, it is a requirement that parents/guardians use sign-in and sign-out sheets provided. Parents must provide a cell phone number or a means to contact the parent should emergencies arise. Only the parent/guardian of the child may pick up the child unless the parent/guardian provides a written and signed permission for someone other than a custodial parent/guardian to pick up the child. Permission slips and clear instructions must be provided before allowing caregivers with children to administer any medication or over-the-counter topical creams such as sunscreen, lotions, lip balm, etc.

An authorization or permission slip shall be collected to participate in children and youth activities. A permission slip must be signed by the child or youth’s parent or guardian, and shall be valid for a period not to exceed thirteen (13) calendar months.

For off-site activities, parents are to be given advance notice and full information regarding the location of event(s) in which their children or youth will be participating.

If any child or youth sustains an injury of any kind, it is required of the assigned volunteers or paid workers to contact the parent/guardian of the affected child/youth, to fill out an accident report form, and to follow procedures for first aid (including contacting emergency medical services, if necessary).

Participation Agreement

A written covenant of participation should be developed and provided to all clergy, staff, volunteers, and participants in children’s and youth ministries. The covenant is a statement in which the participants, clergy, staff, and volunteers agree to:

- a. Take part in the ministry
- b. Give their best efforts to the ministry
- c. Respect the other participants
- d. Treat the others as well as they would wish to be treated.

Violations of the participation agreement/covenant may result in the child/youth or adult volunteer being unable to participate in future children/youth programs, or of disciplinary action if the violation is committed by staff or clergy. Such determinations shall be made by the Designated Pastor or their supervisor. Anyone subject to suspension or removal from child/youth programs by the Designated Pastor shall have the right to appeal that decision to the Ministry Cabinet, subject to the provisions articulated below (see “Appeals”).

Employee, Volunteer, and Adult Guest Eligibility and Screening

It shall be the policy of South Elkhorn Christian Church to screen, including through the use of background checks, all adults who shall or may be left unattended with children or youth before being permitted to attend any children or youth event, including without limitation, Sunday groups, CWW, and youth group activities. This shall include, but is not limited to, clergy, staff, volunteers, and any adults that may be left unattended with children/youth at children/youth activities. In no circumstance may an adult be present at children/youth activities without first undergoing a background check. A background check is considered valid for a period of two (2) years, after which an adult wishing to continue participation in children/youth programs must complete a new check before their continued participation.

In accord with insurance requirements and best practices, South Elkhorn Christian Church will screen, check references, and conduct criminal records checks for all paid employees and volunteers who have contact with children or youth. No worker or volunteer shall be permitted to begin working with children or youth unless and until such screening is completed. All paid employees and volunteers must submit any information reasonably necessary for screens, reference checks, and criminal records checks to be conducted.

There is a mandatory 6-month waiting period before a volunteer may work directly with children and youth. The six months begins from an individual's demonstrated involvement with the life of the church. This waiting period shall not apply to employees; however, no employee shall be permitted to work with children or youth until any screening checks, reference checks, or criminal records checks have been conducted.

Any paid staff must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest child in the group they will be working with; provided, however, that any minor (i.e., under the age of 18) shall not be able to work with children and youth without supervision from an adult over the age of 18. The minimum age for volunteers in the nursery (i.e., working with children 2 years of age and younger) shall be 16 years old; provided, however, that at least two (2) adults (over 18 years of age) must be present in the nursery.

CWW Adult Visitors and Program Review

It is our priority to ensure that all children feel safe and welcomed in CWW. It is important and critical that this sacred space accommodates all children. In order to do so, parents/guardians are encouraged prior to your child's first visit to CWW to contact the church office prior to your visit to speak with clergy to set up a meeting where clergy will permit the family explore the CWW space ask questions, experience a story of God, and learn the theology and practice of the room in a time where children, other than those of the requesting parent/guardian, are not present. At the meeting or thereafter, the parent/guardian is welcome to undergo a background check consistent with this policy in order to attend CWW with their child for their annual visit described below.

Parents and guardians shall be permitted to visit and/or review/audit the CWW program once per year, provided that the parent/guardian has a child participating in the program and has

first undergone and passed a background check. Parents/ guardians that need to or wish to be present for more than the one (1) permitted annual visit shall first undergo training with clergy and/or staff to ensure that their participation is not disruptive and supports the spiritual development of the children/youth and shall receive permission from the Designated Pastor prior to participation.

Annual Training for Volunteers and Paid Staff

Paid staff and volunteers who regularly work with the children will be required to attend an annual session in which they are informed of this policy and other relevant skills necessary for participation. Such training will review the following items:

- Procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth
- Appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse
- Safety procedures, including first aid
- Training to recognize and report sexual abuse
- Training on electronic communication with youth
- Appropriate procedures regarding incident/accident reporting

Annual Parent and Family Education

An annual family education event will be provided in which families are invited to learn about children/youth events and the processes and procedures applicable to children/youth events. This event typically occurs in late summer prior to the start of the church's programming year. A copy of this policy shall be provided to all participating parents, and to anyone upon request.

The Two-Adult Rule

Whenever possible, no fewer than two adults will be in the presence of the children at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children and youth. The adults may not be related to one another. In isolated circumstances, if two adults are unable to be present at all times, the church may utilize assigned or paid adult "roamers" who move in and out of rooms. In such situations, the door of the room must remain open at all times. Further, at all times reasonably practicable, no adult and child should be left in a one-on-one situation unless specifically agreed to by the child's parent or guardian (i.e., counseling appointments).

Facility Requirements

Rooms set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door. At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open if requested by either the child/youth or their parent/guardian.

Electronic and Other Forms of Communication

Any clergy, staff, or volunteer that sends an electronic communication (including, but not limited to, text messages, social media message, or other form of communication) should

be aware that their communications with that child/youth are not private. Clergy, staff, and volunteers shall not delete any communication with a child/youth participant, and shall retain all communications for a period of not less than thirty (30) days. Clergy, staff, and volunteers are advised that upon request of a parent/guardian or the Designated Pastor, communications between adults and children may be reviewed to ensure all communications are of an appropriate nature.

Reporting Obligations

If any child or youth sustains an injury of any kind, it is required of the assigned volunteers or paid workers to fill out an incident report form and to follow procedures for first aid.

To report suspected child abuse, neglect or dependency call the Cabinet for Health and Family Service's 24-hour hotline at **1-877-597-2331**. All workers with children and youth must be fully aware of their responsibilities under state law and under the church's prevention policies if they become aware of or suspect abuse. When you have reason to believe a child is being abused, neglected, or is dependent, call the child protection hotline at 1-877-597-2331 or your county Department for Community-Based Services (CBS). If in doubt, it is preferred that you call and talk over what has come to your attention. CBS will help you sort things out, such as whether a specific incident must be reported and to whom. If you feel the child is in imminent danger or is in need of immediate protection, call 911 or your local police department. The safety of the victim is the church's primary concern. Both civil and criminal immunity from prosecution is given to any person making a report or assisting legal authorities or the child protection program in making an assessment, as long as that person is acting in good faith.

This is the essential information required for a report:

1. The child's identity;
2. Any person believed to be responsible for the abuse or neglect to the child if the person is known;
3. The nature and extent of the abuse or neglect;
4. The name and address of the reporter, if he or she so chooses; and
5. Where the child can be found.

More information about Child Abuse and Neglect can be found at <http://chfs.ky.gov>
A handbook published by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services on these issues is available online at: http://cfc.ky.gov/dcbs_manuals/DPP/index_dpp.asp

Background Check Procedure

Background checks documents shall be treated sensitively at all times. Following review of an individual's background check by the Designated Pastor, or following conclusion of any appeal, the background check application shall be destroyed via shredding; provided, however, that the individual that is the subject of the background check shall be permitted to review their application upon their timely request to do so prior to its destruction.

Background check reports shall be maintained by South Elkhorn for a period of twenty-five (25) months from the date of the report.

Once received, the background check report shall be reviewed by the Designated Pastor to determine whether the individual's participation in children/youth activities is appropriate. The Designated Pastor will advise the individual desiring to participate of his/her determination regarding their participation. No adult shall be permitted to participate in any child/youth events unless and until their background check is completed and the Designated Pastor has made his/her determination regarding the adult's participation.

Past criminal convictions are not considered automatically disqualifying from participation. The Designated Pastor shall consider the nature and recency of any convictions in making their determination of whether an adult's participation with children/youth is appropriate. Any adult that has been convicted of a crime of violence or of a sexual nature shall be presumed to be disqualified from participation in any children/youth events. Additionally, anyone required to register with a "sex offender registry" shall be disqualified from participation in children/youth events. Those with pending charges (other than minor traffic charges) shall be required to resolve the cases prior to volunteering/participating in children/youth programs. In all other cases, the adult's participation shall be initially determined by the Designated Pastor, subject to the appeal rights contained herein.

Appeals

Any adult determined to be ineligible to volunteer or participate in children/youth events shall be informed by the Designated Pastor if and/or when they shall be permitted to participate in children/youth programs in the future. Any child/youth or adult staff or volunteer that has been suspended from participating in child/youth programs shall be informed of the length of their suspension.

Anyone determined by the Designated Pastor to be ineligible to volunteer or participate in children/youth events, or who has been temporarily or permanently suspended from participation, may appeal that determination to the Ministry Cabinet. Anyone appealing to the Ministry Cabinet should be made aware that the results of their background check will be shared with members of the Ministry Cabinet, or their behavior disclosed to the Ministry Cabinet, as applicable. The decision of the Ministry Cabinet shall be final in all cases.