



# **Damascus Community Church Child Safety Policy**

## **General Purpose Statement**

Damascus Community Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the children who participate in its programs and activities. By implementing the below policies, our goal is to protect the children and youth of Damascus Community Church from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

These policies shall apply to all current and future workers, whether compensated employees or unpaid volunteers. These policies are for the internal guidance of DCC only and do not create on the part of any individual or class of individuals any right of action against DCC whether in tort or contract. DCC reserves the right to modify these policies, in whole or in part, at any time without notice. All workers, whether paid or unpaid, are participating in ministry at DCC on an at-will basis, and DCC reserves the right to terminate any position or participation in ministry at any time, for any reason, without notice, and at DCC's sole discretion.

## **Definitions**

For purposes of this policy, the terms "child," "children," "youth," and "students" include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "worker" or "volunteer" includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children and youth.

## **Timeline of This Policy**

The implementation of this policy will be completed by January 1 2020, including having applications, reference checks, interviews, and trainings done for all childcare workers. As of now, the six-months rule (with three noted exceptions) and the criminal background check on all workers must be observed.

## **Selection of Workers**

All adults who desire to work with, regularly participate in, or observe our children's ministry programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

### **1. Six-Months Rule**

All adults seeking to work with children must be attenders of Damascus Community Church for six (6) months or longer, as confirmed by someone on pastoral staff. There are three exceptions to this rule:

- 1) For parents or legal guardians of a child attending Damascus Christian School, they may be helpers in the presence of DCS staff, or drivers for nearby events (nearby being defined as 1 hour away or less), after their child has been involved in DCS for longer than 1 month. (Applicant proceeds with steps 2 through 6.)
- 2) For parents in our children's and youth ministry programs whose children have been consistently attending (average twice per month or more while the program is running) for 6 months or longer, they may volunteer in the area of ministry where their children participate. (Applicant proceeds with steps 2 through 6.)
- 3) For paid DCC/DCS staff, they may work with students upon being hired and signing a contract. (Applicant proceeds with steps 2 through 6.)

### **2. Written Application**

All persons seeking to work with children at DCC/DCS must complete and sign a DCC volunteer application requesting basic information such as experience with children, current employment, and references--as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. This form will be maintained in confidence on file at Damascus Community Church. For employees of DCC/DCS who have gone through a formal and more thorough vetting process (application, reference checks, and interview), they may skip steps 2, 4, and 5.

### **3. Criminal Background Check**

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and volunteers. Prospective workers will be asked to complete a form online authorizing DCC to proceed with the background check. If an individual declines to give authorization, he/she will not be permitted to work with children. An offense that disqualifies an individual from working with children will be determined by the DCC elder council on a case-by-case basis. In general, convictions for any offense involving children, or convictions involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency--or any conduct contrary to the DCC/DCS mission--will preclude that person from working with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will automatically disqualify an applicant. Upon completing the background check, the prospective worker must complete child safety training or show proof of completing a qualified child safety training elsewhere.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence on file at Damascus Community Church.

#### **4. Reference Checks**

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, two of the applicant's references will be checked. These references should preferably be from organizations or people who have observed the applicant working with children. References should not be related to the applicant and should have knowledge of the applicant's character. One of the two references should be associated with the applicant through Damascus Community Church or Damascus Christian School if applicable. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Damascus Community Church.

#### **5. Personal Interview**

Upon satisfactory completion of the application process thus far, at least one face-to-face or phone interview will be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

#### **6. Relevant Training**

Finally, persons interested in working with children must complete all relevant training prior to becoming an official children's ministry worker. This includes completing the driver approval process if applicable. If part of the training includes observing the relevant ministry program, they may begin observing prior to steps 5 or 6 of this process.

### **Rule of 3**

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. At times, during some class sessions, only one adult teacher may be in attendance; in these instances, doors to the classroom must have a window. There must always be two or more students with one adult teacher in a classroom. We do not allow a single minor to be alone with one adult on our premises, or in any sponsored activity, unless in a counseling situation. Any counseling situation must take place in a well trafficked and visible area, and a supervisor must be informed it is happening prior to the session, or if impromptu, immediately following.

Additionally, we do not allow volunteers/workers to transport a solitary minor unless there is an emergency or the minor is related to the worker and has permission from the child's parent or guardian. Under ordinary circumstances there must always be at least a third person in the vehicle, which may include another minor if he/she is at least 5 years old and in Kindergarten.

### **Identification**

To promote the awareness and confirmation of who has been approved as a children's ministry worker, all approved workers must wear their assigned badges that were provided to them by their department when working in their specific role. This could include different ID badges for DCC or DCS, ministry specific lanyards, and/or driver stickers.

## Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse may occur in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse** – any physical injury to a child that is intentional, such as slapping, shaking, burning, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse** –any behavior on the part of an adult that intentionally deprives a child of feeling valued, safe and secure--such as excessive criticism, belittling or teasing.
- **Sexual abuse** – any behavior or activity between a child and an adult--or between two children--that can reasonably be construed as stimulating either party or both sexually.
- **Neglect** – any behavior that deprives a child of his or her essential physical needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

On occasion, DCC childcare workers may have reason to suspect abuse or neglect of a child under their care. Such suspicions should be reported immediately to a ministry supervisor or a member of the DCC elder council for further action. In this situation, the Child Abuse Response Team will be summoned. The C.A.R.T. includes the DCC Elder Chairman, the Senior Pastor, the Business Administrator, and the School Administrator.

## Teenage Workers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for teenagers (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:

- Must be at least 12 years old and in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Must be approved by a ministry supervisor.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult and should not be left alone with children. This is especially critical when taking children to the restroom.
- Must complete steps 2, 4, 5, and 6 in the “Selection of Workers” section.

## Check-in/Check-out Procedure

For DCC Sunday morning ministries, a security check-in/check-out procedure will be followed for children in nursery through 6<sup>th</sup> grade to ensure their release to appropriate adult caregivers. Children should only be released to people listed on their registration form. In the event that an exception to procedure is requested, a children’s ministry team leader or a member of the elder council must be contacted. That person will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of the parent or guardian after discussing the circumstances with him/her.

Children in 1<sup>st</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade must be picked up by a parent or guardian—or an older sibling (at least 7<sup>th</sup> grade) who has been approved in writing by the

parent/guardian. Children Kindergarten and younger may only be released to an adult listed on their registration form.

## **Sick Child Policy**

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all children at Damascus Community Church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other families when deciding if their children are well enough to attend our programs. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be checked in or admitted to class:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 24 hours;
- Green or yellow runny nose;
- Rash;
- Persistent cough;
- Eye or skin infections; and/or
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease.

A child who is observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children, and the parent or guardian will be contacted to pick up the child.

## **Medications Policy**

Medications may be given to children if needed during a DCC activity by an adult with written parental permission only. Medications should be administered by a parent or guardian whenever possible.

Exceptions to this rule may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the ministry supervisor to develop a plan of action. Exceptions are also granted during overnight events, such as camps or retreats, as long as proper waivers have been signed by parents or guardians.

## **Physical Contact**

Damascus Community Church is committed to protecting minors in its care and recognizes that appropriate touch is part of a positive, nurturing environment. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all workers.

The following are considered appropriate:

- An arm around the shoulder
- Holding hands while guiding or walking with young children
- A brief congratulatory or greeting hug, or a side hug
- A brief, reassuring pat on the back or shoulder
- Handshakes, high fives, and fist bumps

The following are inappropriate and must be strictly avoided:

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- Touching a child or youth in anger or disgust
- Touching a child or youth who doesn't want to be touched, unless needed for a safety or classroom management issue, in which case contact should be made with caution
- Touching a child or youth in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive
- Touching a child or youth with your hands between the chest and knees
- Having a child or youth in 1<sup>st</sup> grade or older sit on the worker's lap
- Tickling or massaging a child or youth

Physical contact in any form must be above reproach. The personal behavior of DCC staff members and workers must foster trust at all times.

## **Discipline Policy**

It is the policy of Damascus Community Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There will be no spanking, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should consult the ministry overseer if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues, and parents should be called to intervene when necessary.

## **Other Prohibited Conduct**

- Excessive or inappropriate electronic communication with a minor, including, but not limited to, social media and texting. The use of Snapchat, or other disappearing images or messages, is strictly prohibited.
- Using tobacco products (including smoking or vaping), alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs in the presence of minors.
- The presence or consumption of alcohol or legal/illegal drugs—or being under the influences of such substance--while leading or participating in any DCC activity.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual advances, grooming behavior, sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
- The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any DCC function--whether children are present or not.
- Any other act or omission that constitutes child abuse or neglect--or otherwise violates any requirement in this child safety policy.

## **Restroom Guidelines**

Parents will be strongly encouraged to have their children visit the restroom prior to each class. On Sunday mornings during class time, preschool through kindergarten ages will use the nursery restroom. If the nursery restroom is unavailable, workers should follow the directions in the next paragraph.

For other preschool and kindergarten ministries outside of Sunday morning, at least one adult should take children to the appropriate restroom. The worker should

check the restroom first to make sure that the restroom is empty. The worker should then remain outside the restroom, and when all are finished escort the children back to the classroom. If a child needs assistance, prop the door open or get a second approved childcare worker.

During class time, 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> graders may be sent to the restroom in pairs without an adult. 5<sup>th</sup> graders and older may be sent without supervision.

For the protection of all, a worker must *never* be alone with a child in a restroom with the door closed--nor in a closed bathroom stall with a child. At minimum, we will observe the rule of 3.

## **Accidental Injuries to Children**

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps will be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide topical first aid (cleansing, Band-Aids, ice, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up. An incident report does not need to be completed.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the parent or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report must be completed.

## **Sexually Oriented Conversations**

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented 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 DCC or DCS student. However, it is expected that from time to time Student Ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will occur in group settings and will convey the church's views on these topics. Occasionally, a student will need counsel on sexually-oriented matters. It is important to (1) report the conversation to the direct supervisor and (2) take care to observe the above guidelines. The supervisor will inform the student's parents when appropriate so they can provide guidance or discipline as indicated.

## **Sleeping Arrangements**

It is anticipated that certain Student or School Ministry activities may occasionally require that overnight sleeping arrangements be made for students and staff members and volunteers (i.e., retreats, camps, field trips, mission trips, etc.). In these events, staff members and volunteers will strictly observe the following rules:

1. The Rule of 3 must be followed; a single student should not be alone with a staff member or volunteer.

2. All adult leaders must have previously completed DCC's screening and training process.
3. Overnight sleeping arrangements must be submitted in writing to and approved by the Associate Pastor of Children and Youth, Senior Pastor, or School Administrator prior to the activity.
4. Regarding choice of movies, leaders will consult with parents and exercise good judgment. No R-rated movies will be permitted, and PG-13 movies must be approved by the staff member supervising the event.
5. Appropriately modest sleeping attire must be worn--both tops and bottoms.
6. In the event of a sleepover on campus that involves both genders, boys and girls must sleep in separate rooms, properly supervised by background-checked adults of the same gender.
7. Staff members and volunteers will monitor sleeping students by periodically conducting visual bed checks to ensure that sleeping students remain in designated sleeping places. During bed checks, staff members and volunteers will never physically touch a student.
8. In the event that overnight arrangements do not include standard beds, each staff member, volunteer, and student will use a single sleeping bag or blanket-wrap. In these instances, a "one-person-to-one-bag-or-blanket" rule will be observed.

## **Emergency Procedures**

(Note: since DCS has a more extensive list of procedures, those ministries will be governed by DCS-specific guidelines)

## **Evacuation Procedures**

1. A clearly labeled evacuation route is posted in each room. Workers will familiarize themselves with the route before an emergency occurs.
2. If an emergency occurs that requires evacuation, the workers will line the children up in single file, take a head count, and take the attendance roster with them (if that ministry uses one).
3. They will follow the emergency route posted in their classroom to the parking lot located on DCC property.
4. They will keep track of their children while walking to the evacuation area.
5. Upon arriving in the designated evacuation area--away from buildings, they will take another head count and compare it to the original head count.
6. Workers—remember that these children are YOUR responsibility! Take care of them as you would your own children until they are released to parents or other proper authority.