



ST. STEPHEN
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Policies & Guidelines for the Safety of Children & Students

“But Jesus called the children to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” - Luke 18:16

These policies and guidelines have been made to insure the safety of St. Stephen’s children and students, staff and volunteers, and church as a whole. Whether you are a parent of a child in our programs or a volunteer who serves in one of our ministries, it is important that you read and follow all policies and guidelines set in this document. The safety, well being, and faith development of our young people depend on our consistent and loving application of these principles.

A. Goals for these Policies and Guidelines

1. To protect children and students in church programs from sexual and physical abuse.
2. To educate those who work with children and students about sexual and physical abuse.
3. To protect leaders, staff, teachers, and volunteers, as well as the church as a whole, from potential allegations of abuse or other legal matters.
4. To allow our children and students the best and safest environment to grow in discipleship with Jesus Christ.
5. To create an environment where visitors feel welcome, comfortable, and safe bringing their children to worship and discipleship.

B. Volunteer Process

Screening procedures are established for all people (High school and older) who would like to work with children and students at St. Stephen Lutheran Church, or be involved with any children or student ministry activity where contact with children and students may occur. We classify “adults” as any person 18 years or older **and** out of high school. The procedures are as follows:

1. Volunteers will be given a copy of Policies and Guidelines for the Safety of Children and Students to read.
2. Each potential volunteer will fill out completely and sign a background check form (Appendix C) which will be kept confidential. The background check addresses whether the worker has ever been convicted of a crime.
3. Each potential volunteer will fill out completely and sign the Confidential Application (Appendix A & B) for Volunteers and Staff working with Children and Youth, listing other organizations in which the worker has worked with children and/or students. References should be included.

4. Each potential volunteer will be asked to sign a covenant agreeing to abide by all policies and guidelines set by the church. If at any point the volunteer or staff member does not follow this covenant they may be removed or terminated from their position.
5. Each potential volunteer must attend a “Reducing the Risk” training class provided by the church. Classes will be held once a month.
6. A member of the church staff will contact listed references if the volunteer has not been a member or regularly attending St. Stephen Lutheran Church for 12 months or more.
7. All above forms will be kept strictly confidential by the professional paid staff of St. Stephen Lutheran Church. At no time will these completed forms be available for anyone outside of the paid staff without the written permission of the individual. All background checks are done through “Lexis/Nexis”. St. Stephen only provides the agency with the information they have requested of us to run the background checks.
8. Upon review of the completed background check, the office will use their discretion in approving submitted applications. Any persons who has a criminal record, including but not limited to a conviction for the physical or sexual child abuse of a minor or adult, will not be allowed to work with children or students at St. Stephen Lutheran Church.
9. Once a volunteer has completed and passed the above process they will be allowed to begin ministry with children and students. All volunteers are asked to abide by the following:
 - a. Conduct yourself as a mature person of faith in actions and words.
 - b. When participating as a volunteer in a children or student event, wear the appropriate lanyard with photo identification stating you have passed the children and student safety process and your certified thru date. This lanyard and ID will be provided to the volunteer upon completion of above process. This must be worn while volunteering.
 - c. Each volunteer must complete a background check and the “Reducing the Risk” training class every two years to continue to work with children and students.
 - d. Blue lanyards are for certified adult volunteers. Purple lanyards are for certified student volunteers. Red lanyards are for certified staff, directors, and team leaders who have had additional training for emergencies.
 - e. These procedures will be used for any volunteer (adult or high school aged student) who works in any regular way with our children and students, Sunday school teachers, nursery volunteers, substitutes, youth group leaders, confirmation leaders, etc. We classify “adult” volunteers as people 18 years or older and out of high school.

C. Adolescents

We encourage our students to get involved in ministry and service to others by volunteering in our nursery, Vacation Bible School, Music Camp, etc. Students who may work with children must be in middle school or high school and are required to go through the above volunteer process in addition to the below qualifiers. To safeguard our students as they fulfill these important roles, we follow these guidelines:

1. A high school student may serve in an adult role of teacher or leader (rather than helper or assistant) as long as the teen is paired with an adult helper.

2. A student in middle or high school may assist adults in any area of children ministries: nursery, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Music Camp, etc.
3. Students may provide child care in the Nursery for special events and meetings under the supervision of a certified adult.
4. Certified students wear purple lanyards with photo identification while volunteering.
5. Students must abide by the Volunteer Process in Section B.

D. Supervision

1. A two certified adult policy will be enforced. We promote two leaders (two adults or an adult and a teen) be present at all activities, classes, child care situations, small groups, etc.
2. Two certified adults, 21 years old or older, must be present for high school activities.
3. Visual access to the room should be maintained at all times.
4. Church leaders and staff will make random visits to classrooms and other places children and students use.
5. Supervision of children and students should be provided before and after the event until all children are in the custody of parents/guardians or have left the premises. This applies to on and off campus programs.
6. It is an expectation that as a volunteer and leader you help to hold others to these policies and guidelines. If at any time you feel a fellow volunteer or staff member is not abiding by these policies and guidelines bring this information to the director/team leader. If it is the director/team leader who is at fault bring this information to the pastoral staff or council president.

E. Emergency Plan

Fire/Emergency Weather evacuation diagrams and plans are placed in areas that are most frequented by children and students (i.e. Learning Center) and are attached to these policies and guidelines as Appendix D.

Fire Evacuation Plan

1. In the event of a fire or building evacuation emergency, each group leader (i.e. Sunday School teachers, VBS leaders, youth group leaders) will, in a calm and orderly manner, assemble their group and count the number of children or students. The group leader will then follow the route which will most quickly get their children safely out of the building. The group leader will then be responsible for keeping the children safely away from the building until their parents or guardians come to get them. Directors/Team leaders will be responsible for making sure that all children or student groups are evacuated from the building.

Weather Emergency

2. In the event of a weather emergency, each group leader (i.e. Sunday School teacher, VBS leaders, youth group leaders) will in a calm and orderly manner, assemble their group and count the number of children or students. The group leader will then take the

children or students to the designated emergency weather safe spot. The group leader will again count the number in his/her group to make sure all are in the safe area. The group leader will be responsible for making sure members of the group remain in the area until the weather emergency has passed. Directors/Team leaders will be responsible for making sure all groups are in the designated weather safe spots and for notifying groups when the weather emergency has ended.

3. It is the responsibility of the directors/team leaders to be aware of potential hurricane or tropical storm threats that may impact a children or student activity. It will be left to their discretion to cancel any events that may be impacted. We highly encourage you to listen to the latest news reports on storm tracks. If government operations or schools in Seminole and/or Orange county close then we will follow suite and also cancel all programs until the storms have passed and damages are accessed.

Lock-Downs

4. In the event of a facilities emergency (bank robbery next door, armed person on or near campus, terrorist attack, etc.) teachers and event leaders will lock all doors. No persons will enter or exit the buildings except for designated staff people and law enforcement. All people will be asked to sit along the walls of the rooms away from windows and remain quiet. All persons with cell phones are to call 911 to report the emergency. Do not leave this position until the designated staff person gives the all clear.

All volunteers and staff will be trained on evacuations and emergencies during the Reducing the Risk training and are expected to know the processes and procedures to ensure their children and students safety.

F. Reducing the Risk of Abuse

Guidelines and suggestions for adults who work with children and students:

We live in a time of lawsuits, abuse, and moral relativism. It is important for the protection of children and students and those of us who work with children and students to keep the highest standards possible in regards to our relationships with each other. Here are some guidelines that will help maintain a high level of standards:

1. Never meet alone with a child or student without his/her parent's permission and with another adult present.
2. If an impromptu meeting of a certified adult with an individual child or student should occur, precautions should be taken. Meet in an open area and be sure that all doors are open.
3. For conversations regarding a confidential nature meet in an open area with others around or in a public setting (i.e. Starbucks, Panera, etc.). When possible bring a second adult with you and have them sit at a separate table away from the conversation but within view.
4. Do not be alone with a child or student in a car. Be sure another child or certified adult is in the car at all times.

5. Discretion must be used in dealing with all children and students, especially regarding physical contact. Innocent behavior can be misinterpreted.
6. Sexual gestures or overtures to a student worker by a child or student should be reported to a member of the professional staff so that discussion can be held with the student.
7. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior with any child or student is inappropriate. It is never appropriate for an adult leader to date a minor at any time.
8. Avoid any situation that puts you or the child/student in a risky position. Think before acting.
9. Seek the advice of the Youth & Family Ministries Coach about any activity you are planning with a child or student before engaging in such activity.
10. Always favor on the side of caution if you are unsure of a situation.

G. Reporting & Responding to Abuse

Should a parent, student worker, or staff person observe, suspect or hear about some behavior or activity that conflicts with the policies and suggestions of this handbook, or seems abusive or destructive to a child, student or student worker, the following procedures should be followed:

1. The safety and security of the child must be safeguarded before the person accused of the abuse is confronted.
2. Contact a member of St. Stephen's pastoral staff and the Youth and Family Ministries staff promptly for consultation. If the senior pastor is the alleged abuser, the matter must be reported to the council president of the congregation.
3. The volunteer who observed, suspects, or heard about the abuse must submit a written statement to the St. Stephen's pastoral staff or the Youth and Family Ministries staff promptly.
4. If a student worker observed, suspects, or hears about the abuse, their parent's will be brought into the conversation and kept involved in the communication and procedures. There will always be two adults present for any meetings with a student worker who is reporting abuse.
5. If possible, a written or oral statement should be obtained from the victim of the abuse.
6. In consultation with the member of the pastoral staff, the Youth and Family Ministries staff and the council president, a plan will be devised to verify and address the situation.
7. The member of the pastoral staff, the Youth and Family Ministries staff, the council president and the volunteer who observed, suspects, or hears about abuse will contact the following promptly with regards to the devised plan:
 - i. Pastoral Staff at St. Stephen;
 - ii. Seminole County Children's Services and/or local police; and
 - iii. The child's parents.
8. The pastoral staff member and the council president will contact the following promptly with regards to the devised plan above:
 - i. The child's parents;
 - ii. Our insurance carrier;
 - iii. Our legal counsel; and
 - iv. Our Synodical Bishop's office.

9. If a paid staff person is suspected of abuse, s/he will be relieved of his/her responsibilities during the investigation. If a volunteer is suspected of abuse, s/he will be suspended from his/her position during the investigation.
10. Only the senior pastor (if not the alleged abuser) or council president will issue statements to the media regarding an accusation of abuse.
11. All reports, conversations, and steps taken regarding an accusation of abuse will be documented and handled forthrightly with due respect for confidentiality and privacy for both victim and accused.

As leaders working with children and students, you are obligated by law in the state of Florida to report any accusations of abuse. This includes being a witness to abuse, hearing or being told about abuse, and suspecting abuse. Failure to report such claims will be a violation of these policies and may result in your resignation from the volunteer position. These procedures are to be followed for incidents on or off church property.

H. Nursery

1. The nursery will be open from 8:45am – 12:30pm for Worship on Sunday mornings. Nursery will also be available at other scheduled times. (See postings each year.)
2. Two certified attendants will be in the nursery for the entire Sunday morning. Volunteers will be scheduled during each service to help.
3. Only 4 years old aged children and younger may use the nursery.
4. Parents/Guardians shall complete the sign-in/sign-out procedures each time they use the nursery.
5. Nursery pagers will be distributed to users at sign-in. Parent's are required to respond to pages when necessary.
6. Parents/Guardians should supply an extra diaper for their child.
7. Children will not be allowed to have toys from home in the nursery
8. Parents/Guardians should indicate where they will be during the time their child/ren are using the nursery.

I. Sunday School

1. All students and parents must have completed the Medical Information Form, Parent/Guardian Consent to Medical Care Form, and Internet Photo Use Form.
2. Parents/guardians must register their child/ren for Sunday school. Registration forms are at the front desk and available at Rally Day.
3. When parents/guardians drop off their child/ren they must sign them in at the front desk with the Sunday school administrator present. This applies for children 4th grade and below.
4. Children 4th grade and below will not be released from their classrooms until the parents/guardians have signed them out at the front desk with the Sunday school administrator present.
5. An older sibling, 5th grade or higher, may sign out younger siblings as long as they have been listed on the registration form. They still must sign the book at the front desk with the Sunday school administrator.

J. Middle & High School Youth Group

1. All students and parents must have completed the Covenant, Medical Information Form, Parent/Guardian Consent Form, Parent/Guardian Consent to Medical Care Form, and Internet Photo Use Form (Appendix H). No student is permitted to attend an off campus activity without all forms completed.
2. For off campus events we strongly recommend a 3-1, student-adult ratio. No more than 5 students for every 1 adult for off campus events.
3. No students should be permitted to go off on their own without an adult when off campus unless it is in a lock-in scenario (i.e. Night of Joy, lock-ins, etc.). We practice the buddy system and no student should ever be by themselves.
4. For overnight events, when possible, male and female students and chaperones will be in separate rooms. When not possible they will be separated on two different sides of the room with the adults between them. Students will respect the privacy of their rooms.
5. Only PG-13 movies or lower are permitted for senior high students. If adult leaders feel uncomfortable with the material presented in a PG-13 movie (i.e. horror films) we strongly recommend they not be shown. A rated R movie may be shown if the movie is judged to be relevant and appropriate by a member of the professional staff and the rating is publicized as part of an event. In that case, permission slips will be provided giving the rating, reason for the rating, and our rationale for showing it.
6. Only PG movies or lower are permitted for junior high students.
7. For any off campus events, all rules and regulations provided by the organization we partner with must be obeyed at all times.
8. While on campus for an event students are not permitted to leave campus for any reason during the time of the event unless the parents of the student have notified the adult leaders ahead of time. The students are the responsibility of the adult leaders during the stated time of the events and must remain with these leaders.
9. St. Stephen, staff, and adult leaders are not responsible for any lost, stolen, or broken items that students choose to bring with them to events. High priced electronics, cell phones, and other devices are recommended to be left at home. They are the students and only the student's responsibility if they bring them to an event.

K. Transportation

1. Transporting students and children from one place to another during a church sponsored or sanctioned event may only be done by persons who have been approved through the background checks and driving records checks.
2. Drivers must be at least 25 years old according to St. Stephen's insurance policy to drive minors.
3. All driving laws are to be observed at all times.
4. Vehicles are not to move until all seatbelts are on.
5. Students may not drive themselves or other students to off campus events in which the church is providing transportation (i.e. Night of Joy, mission trips, etc.).
6. A copy of your driver's license will need to be provided to the church office for insurance purposes.

L. Drugs & Alcohol

1. The use of any drug or alcohol is prohibited at all events. This rule applies to students and adult chaperones. (Exceptions: Communion wine and medications listed on parental permission slips.)
2. All medication and allergies must be listed on the Registration & Emergency Information Card (Appendix F) provided for individual trips.

M. Firearms & Fireworks

1. Fireworks, fire crackers, guns, knives, and any other weapons or explosive devices shall not be brought, bought, or used on any student activity or brought onto St. Stephen Lutheran Church's premises.

N. Equipment & Facilities

1. Windows in all classrooms and building areas where children and students meet are to remain unobstructed so that activities in each area can be observed.
2. Doorways and emergency exits should remain clear and easily accessible in case of an emergency.
3. Parents are welcome to observe the children and student activities/classrooms at all times.
4. No child or student under 18 years of age should have unsupervised access to the church buildings.
5. Electrical outlets within reach of young children should have protective outlet covers when not in use.
6. Spaces should be cleaned and checked by the adult leaders after the use to make sure there is no damage and to keep our campus and buildings clean.

O. Health & Medical Issues

1. Prescriptive and non-prescriptive medication will only be given to children if parents have completed the Registration & Emergency Information Card (Appendix F).
2. Smoking is not permitted during any student activity or on the St. Stephen Lutheran Church premise.
3. If there is a medical emergency, the volunteer shall call 911 immediately.
4. Any medication administered to a child or children shall be entered into the medical logbook (Appendix G).
5. Any injuries sustained by a child or children shall be reported immediately to a member of St. Stephen's pastoral staff and the Youth and Family Ministries staff promptly. The parent of the child or children shall be informed of such injury as soon as possible. A written report (Appendix E) shall be submitted by the volunteer documenting the cause of the injury. Such report shall be kept on file in the St. Stephen's Lutheran Church office.

6. Children who are ill (such as fever, vomiting, communicable disease, etc.) shall not be admitted into Sunday School or Youth Group activities. Please seek the advice of a member of St. Stephen's pastoral staff or the Youth and Family Ministries staff.

I, _____, have read and understand the above policies and guidelines and agree to abide by these policies and guidelines.

Signature:

Date

Print Name:

Date

Initials