

Guiding Lights: Working with Children and Youth Policy Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

In Mark 9.36, Jesus tells his Disciples, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...” Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (HRCC) believes, as Disciples, we are called by God to create a safe space for all children and youth in our care to know they are welcomed, loved and affirmed. Our goal as a community of faith is to be intentional about creating hospitable space where all can thrive; a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God’s love.

- Intentions:
 - We are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth participating in the activities and programs of this church. This policy is intended to empower our children, volunteers, and staff to set appropriate boundaries and live into healthy relationships.

As used herein the terms child, children, and youth all refer to persons under 18 years of age.

This policy addresses the risk of abuse or harassment (whether physical, mental, verbal or sexual) by any of the employees, teachers, or volunteers of Heart of the Rockies Christian Church while on church property or otherwise engaged in church activities and programs. All Heart of the Rockies CC activities and programs involving children and youth, regardless of location, will be subject to the following policy standards.

- Communal Responsibility: we acknowledge that all participants in the life of our church are included in the care and formation of our children. We expect that this policy can serve as a guideline for living in community together.

Child/Adult Ratio

- Two or more adults will be assigned to lead all activities.
- **Nursery** (ages birth-5): At least two adults (including at least one staff member) to five children must be present at all times in the nursery. Two adults must always be present at all times. Our nursery is staffed with paid, trained Child Care Workers. In the event that a full staff is unavailable, we may have temporary volunteers who are background checked, trained, and meet the requirements.
- **For youth pre-K-12th** grade we require at least two adults to supervise all activities
- In the case of events where it is difficult to predict the number of youth and it is small parents may agree to sign a waiver of our two-adult policy.
- One-on-one interaction may take place between an adult volunteer and child/youth only in a public space. It is our policy that an adult volunteer will not be alone with a child/youth if they are not in an open space, observable by others.

Requirements to be a volunteer

- We expect our adult youth leaders to model how to live in community and love others as God intended, as well as provide a safe space where all feel welcome and accepted.
- Any volunteer/leader of children's activities will:
 - Be a member of HRCC for at least 6 months, or if under the age of 18, be a child or under the care and supervision of an HRCC member.*
 - Complete a volunteer information form.¹
 - Have a security background check.
 - Give consent for repeat security background checks as needed.
- Age Requirements:
 - A volunteer must be at least 18 years of age and out of high school to be considered an "adult volunteer" to work with Children's Ministry (preK-3rd grade) and Club 456 (4th-6th grades.)
 - A volunteer must be at least 21 years old and 4 years removed from high school to volunteer with Youth Fellowship (6th-12th grades.) A volunteer cannot have participated in youth fellowship with any of the current youth participants.

**At the discretion of the senior minister, someone actively involved for six months or more but not a member may be a volunteer/leader.*

- Background Check Process
 - All volunteers will complete a background check and volunteer information form.
 - Background checks will be completed every two years
 - Background checks are submitted to the office and once completed will be kept on file.
 - All background checks are confidential.
 - In the event that there is a question about a background check, it will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor, and then communicated with the volunteer. All findings on background checks will remain confidential between staff and the person being background checked.

Training Requirements

- All volunteers will receive training on this policy, including emergency procedures, reporting process, healthy boundaries, ratios, allergy and first aid awareness, and other general training procedures deemed necessary by staff (such as mental health awareness and suicide prevention.)
- Volunteers will be trained on this policy annually.
- For larger events involving children and youth such as Vacation Bible School (VBS), a policy training may be offered.

¹ See Appendix A.

Reporting Process

- Anything that would raise the suspicion of abuse, neglect, or exploitation must be reported to appropriate agencies according to all applicable state and federal law. The senior minister is available to assist in that reporting process.
- Staff members, including clergy and childcare staff are under the mandatory reporting law to report suspected child abuse.
- Likewise, it is our policy that any questions or *suspensions of abuse, neglect, or exploitation* observed by volunteers will be reported to the senior minister.

In addition to mandated reporting to relevant agencies according to all state and federal law, Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) policy also requires that any safety issues occurring during church activities or on church property including suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation, inappropriate behavior, or policy violations are reported to the senior minister.

- Reporting Procedures for suspected Child Abuse: Anyone may report suspected child abuse and will not be liable for an unfounded report if it is made in good faith.
 - If child abuse in any form is suspected:
 - Notify the pastor and/or a staff person present (who will then notify the pastor).
 - Avoid discussing suspected child abuse with other workers or parents.
 - Church workers/volunteers should not attempt to gather detailed evidence or discuss among themselves. Children's protective services agency will investigate and determine the level of risk to the child.
 - More information is available from the National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-422-4453.
 - Larimer County Child Protective Services number is 498-6990, <https://www.larimer.org/humanservices/cyf/child-protection>.

Transportation of a Child

- HRCC will ultimately defer to the parent's preferences for their child's transportation and will work to confirm those details ahead of any program requiring travel to a location.
- In the event the church provides transportation for a child or children to and from an activity, HRCC will:
 - Have signed permission from the child's parent/guardian for HRCC to provide transportation on occasion
 - Adhere to the child-adult ratio as listed above and require that no youth travels alone with an adult unless waived by the parent.
 - Require that all drivers be over the age of 21 and approved as a driver by the pastor(s).

Permission Slips for Youth Participants

- At the beginning of each programming year (Fall Kickoff), participants in Children and Youth programming will fill out a permission slip to be signed by a legal parent or guardian.²
- Staff person with oversight of specific Children and Youth Ministry program will keep these forms on file in the church office in both hard copy and electronic copy.

Drafted Summer/Fall 2019

Updated March 2020

Updated August 2020

Approved by Church Board on September 9, 2020

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Appendix A:

Youth Volunteer Information Form

Dear Youth/Children Ministry Volunteer,

I am so excited and grateful for your willingness to partner with the children/youth of Heart of the Rockies Christian Church to learn together, laugh together, ask questions together, and experience how God's love is at work in our lives and in our community.

² See Appendix B

We are people of the table, so we understand Church through our intentional emphasis on building authentic and healthy communities and relationships. Likewise, our youth and children's ministry emphasizes building relationships modeled off that table fellowship we talk so much about – where all are welcome, just as they are, loved as a person of God, and called to love others in the same way.

Ultimately, it is in community and through relationship that we are growing in our connection and understanding of who God is, how God is at work, and what God expects of us as a people of faith.

As a volunteer with our children and youth, you have a unique opportunity to partner with our kids in a meaningful moment on their spiritual journey. We get to practice our faith together: growing in God's love and exploring together how to be in community in the ways that God hopes for the world.

We hope that together we will create a space where our youth can come and thrive. We will partner in creating spaces where our kids can be open and honest with each other, know their voices are important, have opportunities for fun and play in a world of stress and expectations, and be courageous and willing to ask questions that have no easy answers. Most importantly, we will be thoughtful and intentional in affirming all our youth as created in the image of God and loved as such, while growing in a faith that is rooted in God's love.

Let's have some fun!

Peace,

Wendy Davidson
Associate Minister
Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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- Any volunteer/leader of children's activities will:
 - Be a member of HRCC for at least 6 months, or if under the age of 18, be a child or under the care and supervision of an HRCC member.
 - Complete a volunteer information form.
 - Have a security background check. Background checks will be completed every two years.

- All volunteers will receive training on HRCC’s policy for working with children and youth, including emergency procedures, reporting process, healthy boundaries, ratios, allergy and first aid awareness, and other general training procedures deemed necessary by staff (such as mental health awareness and suicide prevention.) Volunteers will be trained every two years.
- Age Requirements:
 - A volunteer must be at least 18 years of age and out of high school to be considered an “adult volunteer” to work with Children’s Ministry (preK-3rd grade) and Club 456 (4th-6th grades.)
 - A volunteer must be at least 21 years old and 4 years removed from high school to volunteer with Youth Fellowship (6th-12th grades.) A volunteer cannot have participated in youth fellowship with any of the current youth participants.

Expectations of Volunteers

- Help youth connect with God and have a meaningful spiritual experience.
- Allow youth the opportunity to discover aspects of their personalities/identities in a safe, non-judgmental environment.
- Teach and model how to live in community and love others.
- Affirm our youth by listening to them, supporting them, and encouraging the gifts that they share.
- Meet our youth “where they are” and modeling grace, compassion, and empathy.
- Protect youth from bullying and abuse.
- Partner with our youth on their faith journey, being open to exploring what it means to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

General Information:

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Email Address: _____

Date of Birth: _____

What age group do you work with? (Circle all that apply)

- Alpha and Omega (PreK-3rd grade)
- Club 456 (Grades 4-6)
- Youth Fellowship (Grades 6-12)

Please list any medical allergies, medications being taken, medical problems, or other pertinent information:

Please list all medical conditions we should be aware of and if/how they might affect your participation in youth activities:

Name of Insurance Company (if you have it) _____

Policy # _____

Physician Name: _____

Phone # _____

Background Check Authorization Form - Applicant Agreement and Release

I, the undersigned applicant, do hereby certify that all information provided by me for the purpose of employment is true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that falsification of any information on company documents may lead to denial of employment or termination.

In connection with my application for employment, I understand that investigative background inquiries will be made about me that can include consumer credit, education verification, criminal convictions, motor vehicle records check, workers' compensation, and others. These reports will include information as to my character, general reputation, work habits, performance, and experience, along with reasons for termination of employment from previous employers. Further, I understand that you will be requesting information from various federal, state, and other agencies that maintain records concerning my past activities relating to my driving, credit, criminal, civil, and other experiences.

I authorize, without reservation, any party or agency contacted by Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to furnish the above-mentioned information prior to or at any time during my employment. The information on this form will be used solely for the purpose of conducting background checks to determine employment eligibility and will be maintained in a confidential file, separate from the general personnel file.

I hereby release all of the persons and agencies providing such information from any and all claims, damages, or liabilities connected with their release of any requested information. I agree that any copy of this document is as valid as the original.

I do hereby agree to forever release and discharge Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to the full extent permitted by law from any claims, damages, losses, liabilities, costs and expenses, or any other charge or complaint filed with any agency arising from the retrieval and reporting of information. According to the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, I am entitled to know if employment was denied based on information contained in a consumer credit report.

Applicant Information and Signature

I understand that to aid in the proper identification of my file or records, the following information is necessary:

Please print

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____

Middle Name: _____

Other names you have used: _____

Current Address: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Driver's License Number: _____

Applicant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B:

Sample Youth Participant Permission Form

Fall 2019-Spring 2020 Permission Forms

Name of Youth Participant: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Phone # _____

Grade of Youth: _____

School: _____

Full Address: _____

Parent Name: _____

Parent Phone # _____

Okay to text? Y or N

Please list any medical allergies, medications being taken, medical problems, or other pertinent information:

Please list all medical conditions we should be aware of and if/how they might affect your participation in youth activities:

Name of Insurance Company (if you have it) _____

Policy # _____

Physician Name: _____

Phone # _____

* I give permission for my youth (name) _____ to participate in Heart of the Rockies Christian Church youth activities for the 2019-2020 school year.

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

*I understand that, in the event medical treatment is required, every effort will be made to contact me. However, if I cannot be reached, I give my permission for a representative of Heart of the Rockies Christian Church to secure the services of a licensed physician to provide the care necessary.

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

*I agree that my child can be photographed at youth events and the pictures can be shared via social media or during church-wide events.

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

*I understand that on some occasions my child will be transported by the church. I give permission for my youth (name) _____ to be transported by the church.

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Forms will be kept on file as hard copy and electronic copy in the Church office.