



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Introduction

STEP, Inc. (“STEP”) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for the children and volunteers who participate in the ministry. STEP emphasizes one-on-one relationships while recognizing the importance of protecting the children from misconduct and inappropriate behavior or even the perception of such. This policy also provides specific accountability and support for staff and volunteers.

Scope

This policy applies to all adult staff and volunteers participating in STEP sponsored programming and activities whether on or off STEP’s premises.

Required Background Checks

An FBI Background Check, Arkansas Child Maltreatment Registry Check, and signed copy of this policy will be required for all staff, mentors and tutors every two years. STEP will coordinate the process to complete these requirements with the applicable individuals. Only general multi-state background checks will be done for short-term volunteers in the STEP Summer Programs. Background checks for volunteers participating in the Encourager Program will be handled by the individual school districts.

Determining Participation in Programs

Based on the volunteer interview by STEP staff and the results of background checks, the Executive Director and Mentor Coordinator will make any decisions on participation in STEP’s programs.

On-Site STEP Activities

A volunteer should not be alone with a child on STEP’s premises. Volunteers should not accompany children to the restroom. If attention is needed to assist a child in a restroom or in the case of a similar situation, volunteers should alert a staff member to assist the child.

Off-Site STEP Activities (Organized by STEP Staff)

STEP staff will occasionally organize events away from STEP’s premises including camps, lock-ins, retreats, etc. Participants are expected to follow guidelines set forth by STEP staff for such events. If unclear about guidelines, contact STEP staff for clarification.

The Encourager Program is facilitated by the various schools. Volunteers for the Encourager Program are to abide by both STEP guidance listed here and all guidance outlined by the administrators at the schools. In the event there is a conflict between the two, the volunteers should follow the guidance provided by the school and alert a STEP staff member to the discrepancy.

Off-Site STEP Activities (Organized by Volunteer)

Sometimes volunteers will organize off-site activities such as a Faithfulness trip. Faithfulness is a recurring activity organized by an individual volunteer or volunteers as a reward for completing STEP program requirements and is considered an important part of the STEP mentoring program. For a student to participate in Faithfulness or other volunteer-organized, off-site activities, the volunteer is **REQUIRED** to obtain in advance a permission slip signed by the child's guardian.

Volunteers are encouraged to communicate clearly with the guardian the details of any off-site activity such as location, pick-up and drop-off time, etc. which should be specified in the permission slip.

Off-site activities organized by a volunteer that involve an overnight stay are prohibited without advance written permission from STEP's Executive Director.

The use of tobacco products by volunteers is not permitted in a child's presence.

Volunteers shall not be under the influence or use any substance that could potentially affect judgment, driving, reaction time, or otherwise jeopardize the child's safety and wellbeing. This includes, but is not limited to alcohol, illicit drugs, and legal drugs such as medical marijuana and prescription medication.

Suspicion of Misconduct or Observed Actions of Misconduct

If anyone suspects or observes misconduct believed to be abuse or maltreatment of a child and/or in violation of STEP policy, that person will immediately notify the Executive Director.

Method of Reporting Suspicion of Misconduct or Observed Action of Misconduct

Any suspicions or observed misconduct believed to be abuse or maltreatment of a child and/or in violation of STEP policy should **IMMEDIATELY** be verbally reported to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is unavailable, the report should be made to a staff member.

This verbal report should be followed up in writing with the Executive Director that details both the alleged misconduct and timeline of events/reporting.

The Executive Director will oversee the investigation based on the allegations, facts, and circumstances, notify any outside authorities as applicable, and take any immediate actions warranted including but not limited to temporary removal of persons from participating in STEP activities. The Executive Director will notify and involve the Board about all investigations of alleged misconduct believed to be abuse or maltreatment of a child and/or in violation of STEP policy as well

as specific actions contemplated or taken by the Executive Director with any parties involved. If allegations of misconduct are made with respect to the Executive Director, the Board Chair will oversee the investigation and follow up with all applicable parties. Reinstatement of a person removed from participating in STEP activities requires a unanimous decision of the Board.

Acknowledgement of Child Protection Policy

This Child Protection Policy will be reviewed and acknowledged by the required volunteers upon initial service and revisited at least every two years. Volunteers are expected to participate in child protection training **annually**.

VOLUNTEER VERIFICATION

I have carefully read this Child Protection Policy, and I agree to abide by it to protect the health and safety of the children involved in STEP.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____