




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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Before They Volunteer

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Children's ministries are a labor-intensive element of church-sponsored activities, and we must be aware of the risks and opportunities of this work. One morning while teaching the mission story for the Primary Sabbath School class, the door opened, and Lucas walked in. As I was welcoming him, I could see Lucas was very upset. He stopped and said, "I am late because my dad couldn't wake up early to come to church."

After our class was over, I took a moment to talk with my friend and fellow Sabbath School teacher. We realized that all the hours spent preparing for our class were totally worth it. Lucas loved church and he couldn't imagine missing his Sabbath School class. That day Lucas reminded me of the joy of serving at church.

Jesus placed a high value on the protection of children, and we must be proactive to create a **safe** place for children like Lucas to worship and learn about Jesus (Matthew 18:1-6). The following guidelines are taken from the Church Manual, Chapter 8 Notes, #8 *Safeguarding Children*.

Waiting Period: The Six-Month Policy

When a newly baptized or transferring member indicates a willingness to work with children, plan on requiring a waiting period of six months. In my case, when I volunteered to work with children, a pastor also set up a meeting to learn more about my talents and previous church experience. The meeting was a great opportunity for the pastor not only to meet a new church member, but also to see where my talents could be put to use. He gave me an overview of the various church ministries and was able to start checking my references.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer members are willing to volunteer. Don't wait until you have a need to start looking for volunteers. Start the process of selecting approved volunteers in advance. You might want to ask some of the children's Sabbath School parents to become approved volunteers as backup Sabbath School teachers. Partner the new backup volunteers with experienced volunteers for a mentorship process. That way, a new volunteer doesn't feel overwhelmed when the time comes to work. This backup system and mentorship process can apply to all children's ministries.

Volunteer Screening

“Church should be a safe place to bring our children. Everyone involved in work with children who are minors must meet all Church and legal standards and requirements.” [2]

Have all volunteers completed a volunteer information form? Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) has a [helpful form](#) to collect this information. It is critical to meet with the volunteers before they complete the form. This is an opportunity to let them know the reason the church screens volunteers. Check the character references, being mindful of what to ask while checking the volunteer’s references. For sample reference questions and other tips, please check this informative article [“What You Should and Shouldn’t Do When Checking References.”](#) Take notes when you are checking the references and let the person know that you might contact them again if more information is needed.

The final step of the volunteer screening is the background check. The North America Division uses [Adventist Screening Verification](#) to clear employees and volunteers. Please contact your conference for more information on how to conduct a background check. If the volunteer might be driving children, they will need to check an extra box for their driving records to be screened. Also, check with your conference about any extra procedures or requirements to follow when selecting volunteers working with children. For example, some conferences might have a minimum required age for driving children to children’s ministry functions.

After a volunteer has completed the screening process and is ready to start, thank them for their willingness to work with your church and have the tools and materials ready to continue any needed training.

Remember that the volunteer screening procedure should be updated for everyone every three years. [3]

Two-Adult Policy

Have two adults present in children’s classrooms or activities. The two-adult policy should be the minimum recommended. Always have approved backup volunteers ready. Also, the number of children in a class will impact the number of volunteers needed.

Please ask your Sabbath School superintendent to make sure this policy is followed, especially during holidays and summer season when people are more likely to vacation. Finally, alert your approved backup volunteers that they might be needed during this time.

Training

During my years volunteering in various children’s ministries at my church, I always learned something new from my local conference’s training programs. Check with your conference about referring volunteers (especially the new ones) to these opportunities, including children’s Sabbath School training, Vacation Bible School training, youth leadership conventions, etc. The more training you offer to your approved volunteers, the more empowered and equipped they will be and the more likely they will be to continue to volunteer year after year.

Adventist Risk Management offers child protection training seminars to the conferences. Please check with your local conference to see if they are planning one so you can send your volunteers and prospective volunteers.

Additional Recommendations

Here are some additional recommendations to consider:

- Ensure that you set up or update your church’s child protection plan. Your conference may have a model for you to use. If not, ARM has a [sample for you to download](#). You can select a few long-standing volunteers in different ministries to review and customize your child protection plan.
- Ask your safety officer to check with all the children’s ministries directors and Sabbath School teachers to review classroom safety concerns, such as a wobbly chair, a light bulb that starts flickering after a few minutes, furniture that is not anchored to the wall, etc. The Sabbath School teacher will be aware of safety concerns that may not be immediately visible when the safety officer does the annual [self-inspection](#).
- The Sabbath School superintendent should review the mentorship process for the backup and new volunteers. During the mentorship process, the long-standing volunteer might see concerns that the screening process didn’t bring up.
- Ask your approved volunteers to sign up for the Adventist Risk Management newsletter [Solutions](#) to receive articles and tools related to child protection.

It is a great joy and blessing to volunteer with God’s most precious gift, His children, and as church leaders, we need to be cautious in selecting the appropriate volunteers who will protect instead of harm them.

I hope one day in heaven we will encounter all the children we impacted by planting a seed in their hearts. May God continue to bless your children’s ministries and the volunteers that make it possible.

References

- [1] North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2020). Children's Ministries Departmental Policies. In *Working Policy* (2020 – 2021 ed., p. 352). Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- [2] Secretariat: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. (2016). Safeguarding Children. In *Church Manual* (19th ed., p. 174). Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- [3] North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2020). Children's Ministries Departmental Policies. In *Working Policy* (2020 – 2021 ed., p. 353). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

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