

Child Safety and Protection Policy: Vigilant Protector Playbook

Purpose

The primary goal of this policy is to equip all volunteers with the knowledge and protocols necessary to create a space where every child is and feels completely safe. This policy is framed as an act of love, protection, and vigilance rather than a reaction based in fear.

Understanding the Threat

Forms of Abuse

Abuse is categorized into four main areas:

- **Physical Abuse:** Any form of physical harm.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Using actions or words to diminish a child's spirit.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any inappropriate sexual contact or exploitation.
- **Neglect:** Failure to provide for a child's basic needs.

The Grooming Process

Grooming is a slow, calculated strategy used by predators to build trust with a child, their family, and other leaders to gain access. The predictable steps include:

1. **Targeting:** Identifying a child who appears isolated or vulnerable.
2. **Access and Isolation:** Creating moments to be alone with the child.
3. **Building Trust:** Establishing a relationship with the child's entire family.
4. **Pushing Boundaries:** Slowly desensitizing the child through incremental boundary-pushing.
5. **Secrecy:** Using gifts, guilt, or threats to ensure the child remains silent.

Recognizing Red Flags

Volunteers must look for patterns of behavior over time rather than just isolated incidents.

- **High Risk:** Sexualized touching (must be reported immediately).
- **Moderate Risk:** Inappropriate jokes or excessively expensive gifts.
- **Enhanced Risk:** Behaviors that may appear friendly but form a dangerous pattern, such as excessive one-on-one time, private messaging, or showing special favoritism to one child.

Core Safety Rules

The Two-Adult Rule

This is the cornerstone of the safety strategy.

- At least two screened adults must be with children at all times.
- Alternatively, activities must occur in wide-open, easily observable spaces (e.g., rooms with windows in doors) where anyone could enter at any time.
- **Objective:** To eliminate isolation, which is a predator's primary tool.

Physical Contact Boundaries

- **Encouraged Touch:** Side hugs, high fives, and handshakes.
- **Prohibited Touch:** Lap sitting, back rubs, tickling, and any touching under clothing.

Restroom and Transportation Protocols

- **Bathrooms:** Never be alone in a bathroom with a child. When supervising younger children, volunteers should stand at the open door without entering.
- **Transportation:** Volunteers are strictly prohibited from giving rides to individual minors.

Response Protocols

Observation of Boundary Pushing

If a volunteer observes a boundary being pushed or feels something is wrong, they must follow three steps:

1. **Interrupt:** Break the moment by joining the conversation or opening a door.
2. **Notify:** Inform a staff member immediately.
3. **Document:** Write down exactly what was observed as soon as possible.

Handling a Disclosure of Abuse

If a child discloses abuse, volunteers must adhere to the following:

- **Do:** Stay calm, listen, tell them it is not their fault, and report to staff immediately.
- **Do Not:** Investigate the claim, ask leading/detailed questions, or promise to keep it a secret.