

The Mountain

PROTECTION POLICIES

PREAMBLE

August 2015

We, The Mountain recognize the importance of fostering and creating communities where everyone, especially our most vulnerable populations such as children and youth, are protected.

We seek to preserve that spirit of welcome, respect and trust in balance with our concern for the safety of our children, applying the test of “reasonable precaution” to any policies or guidelines we adopt. We further acknowledge that institutions operating in the best possible manner with all due concern still cannot guarantee an absolutely risk-free setting.

In this spirit, we adopt this policy statement and apply it to all events conducted under the purview of The Mountain.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This document contains the following overall sections:

DEFINITIONS

I. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

II. SUPERVISION

III. TRANSPORTATION

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY

V. SUSPECTED ENDANGERMENT

VI. CONSEQUENCES

These policies will apply to all Mountain events.

DEFINITIONS

Youth CONference (also “Youth CON” or “CON”) – a gathering of youth for a weekend of experiential education, fun and fellowship.

PAL – Peer Advocate Leader; Youth age 16-17 serving as youth leadership during Mountain Youth CONs. PALs implement overall programming, facilitate workshops and group activities.

PAL Mentor – Young Adults age 18- 25 who serve as mentors to PALs throughout the weekend. PAL Mentors are also responsible for overall programming, facilitating workshops and group activities.

Advisor – An adult who serves as the overall supervision of youth attending CONs.

Mountain Staff – Workers who serve in a capacity of staff to the Mountain in any department.

Youth Participant – youth under the age of 18 participating in the Youth CON with the supervision of an advisor.

Group of Three - a combination of any three individual Advisors, PALs, PAL Mentors, Mountain Staff, or Youth Participants together. In High School CONs, three Youth Participants together constitute a Group of Three and may travel between activity areas. During all CONs, a single Youth Participant should not be supervised by a single PAL, PAL Mentor, Mountain Staff, or Advisor (unless the Advisor is the parent of the Youth Participant)- there must always be another Youth Participant or PAL/PAL Mentor/Mountain Staff/Advisor present to constitute a Group of Three.

Religious Education (also “RE”) Staff Member - A Director of Religious Education/ Exploration (or supporting staff member) who acts as a liaison between their congregation and The Mountain to help coordinate CON promotion, registration, Advisor selection, and Advisor screening

I. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. POLICY STATEMENT

In general, CON Advisors must be at least 25 years old. Under certain circumstances, Advisors between 21 and 25 years of age may also attend, provided that:

- They are a member of their congregation's RE Staff, or
- Extenuating circumstances restrict the availability of older advisors, and a Congregational Staff Member can attest to the reliability and maturity of the individual.

PROCEDURES

RE Staff Members should check that Advisors meet the age requirement when conducting Advisor background checks (see below).

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Advisors must consent to a criminal background check. As per UUA guidelines, RE Staff Members must conduct a criminal background check for each adult staff member or volunteer working with youth from their congregation, including staff and volunteers working as Advisors for Mountain Youth CONferences.

PROCEDURES

Advisors are responsible for supplying the necessary background check information to the RE Staff Member coordinating logistics for their congregation.

RE Staff Members should collect the necessary background check information for all advisors attending a Youth CON, and must provide written confirmation to The Mountain that background checks have been processed and each advisor is appropriate to provide supervision of youth prior to their attendance at a Youth CONFERENCE.

After an initial criminal background check is completed, a new background check must be processed for returning Advisors once every two years.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

RE Staff Members seeking additional information or assistance in conducting criminal background checks for their congregation's staff and volunteers should consult with their congregation's insurance provider.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

PAL Mentors must consent to a criminal background check. The Mountain will conduct criminal background checks for each PAL Mentor applying to volunteer at a Youth CONFERENCE, and will utilize this information when determining an applicant's eligibility for working with youth.

PROCEDURES

PAL Mentors will furnish The Mountain with any information necessary to complete a background check. The Mountain will then request background checks for each PAL Mentor, and will exclude PAL Mentors from volunteering at Youth CONferences if information gathered during their background check indicates that they are not fit to supervise or work closely with youth.

After an initial criminal background check is completed, a new background check will be processed for returning PAL Mentors once every two years.

II. SUPERVISION

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Congregations sending youth and adult advisors to Mountain events must maintain a 1:4 advisor: youth ratio. For housing purposes, advisors must be of the same gender as the children or youth that they are supervising.

Corporal punishment will not be used under any circumstances.

At no time shall one adult and one child/youth be alone together out of sight of other adults unless the adult is a parent or legal guardian of the child/youth.

Visibility and accessibility shall be maintained into all activities rooms at all times, including sleeping rooms and movie rooms, via either an open door or unobstructed interior window into the space.

YOUTH CONS

In accordance with The Mountain's liability policy, -

Elementary & Intermediate CONs:

While attending an Elementary CON or Intermediate CON, youth must be supervised by Advisors, PALs, or PAL Mentors at all times.

Advisors, PALs, and PAL Mentors should provide supervision in pairs whenever possible. Advisors, PALs, and PAL Mentors may provide supervision alone when necessary, although

they must always supervise at least two youth together when doing so, so that they have a Group of Three, and an Advisor/PAL/PAL Mentor is not left alone with a Youth Participant.

High School CONs:

Youth attending High School CONs may travel in a 'group of three' from one location with advisor supervision directly to another location with advisor supervision during free-time periods. While not traveling from one advisor-supervised location to another, youth participants at High School CONs must be supervised by Advisors, PALs, or PAL Mentors.

Advisors, PALs, and PAL Mentors should provide supervision in pairs whenever possible. Advisors, PALs, and PAL Mentors may provide supervision alone when necessary, although they must always supervise at least two youth together when doing so, so that they have a Group of Three, and an Advisor/PAL/PAL Mentor is not left alone with a Youth Participant.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Fire Safety will be a primary concern of adults responsible for Mountain events. Established fire procedures are documented for The Mountain, and are available in our main office or in one of several Emergency Procedures binders located on The Mountain.

PROCEDURES

Prior to Mountain events, adults responsible for programming shall exercise care to note the location of all fire-safety equipment (extinguishers, etc.), to ensure the posting of evacuation route maps, and to determine a safe place to congregate in the event of an evacuation.

In the event of evacuation, adults responsible for programming shall take attendance roster and Emergency Releases to gathering site and to take roll immediately.

III. TRANSPORTATION

1. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the responsibility of RE Staff Members, Advisors, and parents of Youth Participants to coordinate and provide safe transportation to and from Mountain events.

PROCEDURES

Advisors driving youth to, from, or during Mountain events shall possess a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.

In every vehicle in which seat belts are required by law, vehicle occupancy shall not exceed the number of seat belts, and all occupants shall be properly secured in the seat belts.

No driver may consume alcohol or use any form of drug which can affect physical or mental performance during or before carrying out his/her duty as a driver.

In the event that a youth must drive themselves to and from a Mountain event, they must possess a current license, proof of insurance and the express written consent of their parent or guardian. Upon arrival at The Mountain, they must park their car until the end of the event.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Adult advisors or sponsors shall have in their possession signed medical release forms for all children and/or youth with whom they are traveling and they shall be responsible for obtaining appropriate medical care for any child and/or youth in their custody. After check-in, The Mountain is responsible for assisting the adult responsible for the child or youth in obtaining such care. A parent shall be notified of the need for and provider of care as soon as is possible without endangering the child or youth. In the absence of a parent, an adult advisor shall accompany the child or youth to the medical care facility.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

No adult, other than a parent or guardian, is to be alone with a child or youth off-site in transporting youth to and from The Mountain.

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY

Parents and/or guardians are responsible for their dependent children and/or youth and are required to ensure those dependents are in compliance with all policies and procedures herein.

1. POLICY STATEMENT

All adults, children and youth at Mountain events will adhere to all federal, state and local laws. Youth Participants at Mountain events must also adhere to the Big Four:

1. No exclusive relationships or activities including sexual or non sexual behavior
2. No weapons of any kinds
3. No violence or threats of violence.
4. No possession, distribution or use of alcohol, cigarettes or illegal drugs

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Care must be taken to discourage the reality or appearance of an inappropriate relationship. If any significant contact occurs outside regularly scheduled Mountain events or meetings, due

diligence must be exercised to contact appropriate adults (parent/guardian, church official – DRE, minister, and/or president,). Sometimes a genuine mentoring relationship will develop between a youth and an adult. Such relationships can be healthy and transformative for both. It is in the best interest of both the adult and the youth that the parents be aware of these outside activities and relationships.

PROCEDURES

For significant contact outside the context of Mountain events, employed Mountain staff will:

- Obtain parental permission for meetings with children and youth, and
- Hold these meetings in a public place where all behaviors are easily observable, and/or in the presence of one or more of the child or youth's parents or a designated second adult approved by the parents, and
- Notify at least one of the following: the child or youth's minister, DRE, and/or congregational president.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

Each adult shall take individual responsibility for getting adequate sleep to promote good judgment and clear thinking.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

At no time shall a child or youth leave The Mountain while attending a Mountain sponsored program, except as a planned and previously announced activity hosted by The Mountain. At all times the appropriate youth to adult ratio must be maintained.

5. POLICY STATEMENT

Due to the inherent power imbalance between adults and children or youth, adults will assume the primary responsibility for setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries and cultivating an atmosphere of health and trust.

Adults who look primarily to children or youth for friendship will not be considered for a position of responsibility. Adults are expected to maintain a support network of other adults.

6. POLICY STATEMENT

When communicating in online communities, adults in Mountain leadership positions working with children or youth at Mountain events will maintain appropriate boundaries.

7. POLICY STATEMENT

Training of Mountain Staff working with children and youth will include an explanation of the limits of confidentiality and rules for reporting.

Mountain Staff will explain the limits of confidentiality and rules on reporting to children and youth in their care.

PROCEDURES

The Mountain Staff will ensure that an explanation of the limits of confidentiality and rules for reporting will be provided to all Mountain staff working with children and youth at The Mountain [See Appendix G of Southern Region Safety Policy]

8. POLICY STATEMENT

It is not appropriate for adults to engage in any manner of sexual behavior with a child or youth. This refers not only to explicitly sexual behavior, but also to sexually provocative behavior or language.

Physical expressions of affection such as hugs certainly have their place, but it is best to allow the child or youth to initiate them, and they should be kept as brief as possible under the circumstances.

Adults should avoid telling jokes with sexual content.

PROCEDURES

The owner of the contraband must either leave immediately or destroy or dispose of dangerous substances, including illegal drugs and alcohol, and turn over weapons or offensive materials to a staff person at The Mountain.

An incident report of injuries requiring medical care, possession of contraband (when materials are prohibited at a Mountain event), or other infractions of event rules shall be completed by the persons involved and shall be filed with-The Mountain's Director of Finance, and reported to The Mountain's Director, and its Programs Director.

V. SUSPECTED ENDANGERMENT

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Adults and youth shall report to the adult(s) in charge of the event and the sponsoring advisor (if applicable) any signs of:

- Physical or sexual abuse (based on observation or disclosure by the child or youth)
- Threatened or attempted suicide
- Self-destructive behavior (e.g. cutting, drug abuse, eating disorders)

All adults at Mountain events are expected to act in accordance with mandatory reporting laws of the host state. [See Appendix G of Southern Region Safety Policy]

If the responsible adult(s) in charge ascertains that a child or youth is at immediate risk, the responsible adult(s) shall take any necessary steps to protect the minor.

The responsible adult(s) shall follow Procedures to contact congregational and Mountain staff, parent(s) of the involved minor, and Child Protective Services, as warranted.

Otherwise, the matter is to remain confidential. Release of information could interfere with successful prosecution or could result in unwarranted damage to the reputation of the accused.

If child abuse is suspected, the adult who has been suspected of unwarranted conduct will be immediately relieved of any duties involving the supervision, care, or teaching of children and youth.

VI. CONSEQUENCES

1. POLICY STATEMENT

In the event that an adult or youth violates The Mountain's youth protection policy, consequences will be determined on a case by case basis through investigation into the situation, compassion and privacy for the individual or individuals involved.