

Mission Adelante *Child Protection Policy*

The very essence of our calling is to stand with vulnerable members of our community. We recognize that the children entrusted to our friendship are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable among us, and we take our responsibility to protect them seriously. In an effort to provide a safe and healthy physical and emotional environment, Mission Adelante will adopt a child protection practice that includes training for staff, volunteers, and children; gives clear guidelines on expected practices; and provides a pathway to report and deal with any suspected incidents of abuse.

The following definitions will be used for the purposes of this policy.

Child: Any person under the age of eighteen (also referred to as minors)

Abuse: Any act that harms a child, whether physically, sexually, or emotionally. Any act of physical aggression, such as intentional hitting, slapping, or kicking will be considered abuse for the purposes of this policy, even if no injury is evident. Any sexual act, inappropriate touching, or act of exposing a child to sexually explicit material will be considered abuse for the purpose of this policy.

Volunteer: Any person serving in Mission Adelante's ministry without compensation, including summer interns.

Staff Member: Any employee compensated by Mission Adelante for their work, including apprentices and staff interns.

Background Screening

Prior to working with minors at Mission Adelante, each potential volunteer or staff member must complete an application and undergo a background check through our security vendor. A volunteer may participate in orientation and observe programming without these steps in place, but he or she will not be permitted to volunteer with children and youth until the application and background check have been completed. Additionally, the applicant must provide the email address of at least one character reference. To allow the person supplying the character reference enough time to communicate with Mission Adelante, a volunteer may begin serving before the reference is completed, but the reference process must be completed within the first week of the volunteer's service in order for him or her to continue working with children and teens. In rare cases, where a volunteer applicant is not able to access the background check system, he or she may ask a member of the Mission Adelante staff to be a reference or submit the contact information of a pastoral reference from their church. This staff/pastoral reference will be in lieu of the background check, but the applicant will still submit the application and character reference.

While we affirm grace and Christ's redemptive work to change and heal people, any known history of having abused a child will exclude a volunteer or staff member from working with children at Mission Adelante. At the discretion of the Executive Director, the individual might still be welcomed into our community but will not have access to minors. If during the course of service, it becomes known that a volunteer or staff member has abused a child, regardless of whether the child is associated with Mission Adelante, the volunteer or staff member will be dismissed from working with children at Mission Adelante.

Any "red flags" apart from the abuse of a child that are raised during the course of the background check or during the course of service will be cause for further investigation to determine whether the volunteer will be allowed to serve with children. These situations will be considered on a case by case basis. The staff member who receives the background check or complaint should report it to their program director. The Operations Director and at least one other member of the Leadership Team will investigate the "red flag" further to determine whether the volunteer will be allowed to serve with children or in another capacity at Mission Adelante.

Guidelines for Interaction

Setting a Good Example

A key responsibility for volunteers and staff that work with children and teens is to set a good example for our kids, both in speech and action. Toward that end, volunteers and staff will dress modestly, speak respectfully, and demonstrate appropriate physical boundaries. Considerations for speaking respectfully include refraining from profanity, jokes with sexual or racially-biased themes, name-calling, and body shaming. Appropriate physical boundaries include touching children on the head, shoulders, arms, hands, and upper back. Children over the age of five should be encouraged to sit next to an adult of the opposite gender, rather than on the adult's lap. Physical contact should be in response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult. Touch should be age-appropriate and generally initiated by the child, rather than the adult. It should be with the child's permission and any resistance from the child should be respected.

Discipline

Should a child need discipline during a Mission Adelante activity, the first course of action for staff and volunteers should be re-direction, incentives, or other forms of positive behavior modification. At no time should yelling, public humiliation, name-calling, or physical punishment of any type be employed. Volunteers and staff will be trained to seek the assistance of the program director if they are ever in a situation where either the child is not responding to positive redirection, or if the adult feels unable to handle the situation in a calm and positive manner.

Restroom Guidelines

- As a general guideline children aged six and under should not be sent to the restroom alone. A volunteer should escort a child or group of children to the hallway and check to ensure there are no adults already in a bathroom before a child enters. Because our bathrooms do not have stalls, only one child may be allowed in each restroom at a time. The adult escort should wait in the hallway outside the restroom to ensure that only one child is in the bathroom at a time, and will escort the child or children back to programming afterward.
- An adult should not be alone with a child in a bathroom and should never use the toilet with a child present. In the case of very young children that may need assistance in the restroom, the adult assisting the child must alert another adult that they are taking the child to the bathroom and check in with that adult as soon as they are finished. Whenever possible, a child that needs assistance should be assisted by a volunteer of the same gender.
- During programs, children over the age of six may go to the restroom unsupervised, but their mentor should pay attention to how long a child has been gone and investigate if the child has spent an unusual amount of time in the restroom.

Visibility

Adults should generally avoid being alone in any room with a minor during weekly programming. Should the need for a private conversation arise, choose a visible site such as room #2 with glass doors or a corner of a larger room away from other children. When meeting with a minor in a classroom or office without a window in the door, the door should be left open and the adult should position themselves so as to be visible from the doorway.

Transparency

Adults should not bring a child into their confidence to share personal information. Similarly, an adult or teen volunteer should never put a child in a position to have to choose whether or not to break rules or be asked to keep anything that happens a secret. We expect transparency in all Staff and Volunteer relationships with children.

Overnight Trips

For overnight trips, there will always be two adults per room or tent. Adults will never share a bed with a child or teen and will refrain from dressing or bathing in front of any child or teen.

Interaction Outside Official Mission Adelante Activities:

While we encourage mentors to spend time with kids outside of the context of formal programming or activities, extreme discretion must be used. When interacting outside of official Mission Adelante activities, volunteers and staff must adhere to the following policies to protect both the children and adults of the Mission Adelante community.

- Mentoring interactions should take place in a public place, such as a restaurant, library, or event, and only with prior parental permission. Parents should always be informed of where you are going, who will be present, and what time you will return.
- A volunteer should not enter a child's home unless an adult is home at the time.
- Similarly, there should always be at least two adults present if a child or children are to be invited into a volunteer's home (for example, a Christmas cookie baking party with a few kids and at least two adults).

Transportation of Children

- A volunteer or staff member must submit a copy of his or her driver's license before transporting a child during a Mission Adelante programming event (such as field trip, LIT, camping trip, etc.)
- The driver is responsible for ensuring that all passengers wear seatbelts at all times and will limit the number of passengers in a personal vehicle to the number of seatbelts available. The safest place for a child under the age of 12 is to sit in the back seat. Children under the age of 4 must use a properly installed car seat, and children between the ages of 4 and 7 must use a booster seat. Mission Adelante staff and volunteers may not transport young children without appropriate safety seats.
- Whenever possible, it is best to avoid being alone with a child in a vehicle. When transporting multiple children home, drop off any children of the opposite gender of the driver first, even if that means taking a less-efficient route. Likewise, be sure to pick up any children of the same gender before those of the opposite gender of the driver.
- When taking children home, ensure that they make it safely into their homes before driving away.

Online Communication

We recognize that many teens use social media as their primary mode of communication, and it may be a necessary tool for communicating with teens. However, this ever-changing medium also has potential for abuse and adults must exercise the utmost discretion in their electronic communication with minors. To protect both teens and adult volunteers, the following guidelines are implemented:

- Adult volunteers and staff may have contact with minors on public forums, such as Facebook, but not on private and temporary communication apps such as SnapChat and Kik. Adults may be “friends” with a child or teen in our ministry, as long as both the adult and child are also “friends” with the program director.
- Remember that if you have children or teens as Facebook friends, they can see everything you post, like, and comment on. Please consider your online habits carefully before accepting a request from a minor and then post with discretion.
- Please do not post children’s names or tag individual kids on any posts.
- Electronic communication is best suited for quick, information-giving exchanges, such as texting that a group is meeting for a soccer game with the time and place. Whenever possible, save meaningful spiritual or emotional conversations for face-to-face.
- Frequent electronic communication between adults and minors or communication that includes words of affirmation, comments on the appearance of the minor, or suggestions of an emotional attachment of some kind cross the line very quickly from well-intentioned to inappropriate. Adults should take great care to avoid this kind of communication with minors. A good personal check can be to imagine your private messages with minors being published on social media for all to see.
- For program-related communication, copy another adult into the conversation or send group messages, whenever possible.
- It is never acceptable to send to a minor or receive from a minor electronic material that is sexually explicit, racially-charged, or profane.

Procedure if an Issue Arises

Mission Adelante will take any and all concerns seriously. All allegations of abuse will be reported to proper authorities and thoroughly investigated.

- Reporting: If anyone associated with Mission Adelante becomes aware of an incident of alleged abuse, the first point of contact is to be the program director. Do not discuss the matter with any other person. The program director will report it directly to the Executive Director and will not confront the volunteer or staff member in question. The Executive Director will be the primary point of contact for anyone directly involved with an investigation and the only person authorized to communicate with the person in question, child, family, staff, volunteers, media, or anyone else regarding the investigation.
- During an investigation, the person in question will be prohibited from having any contact with any minors in our community or their families until the investigation is completed and all allegations have been cleared. To safeguard the integrity of the ministry and the privacy of the individuals and families involved, we ask all volunteers to refrain from discussing, speculating, or answering questions about any allegation or investigation. Refer all questions to the Executive Director.

Training

- Staff will be trained on this Child Protection Policy annually.
- Volunteers will be trained on this Child Protection Policy prior to working with children in our programs, and at least every two years thereafter.
- Kids participating in LIT and Teens programs will be trained on appropriate boundaries and who to report issues to at least once every school year.

Rescreening

- Volunteers will undergo a background check every two years. In the rare case of a volunteer who is unable to access the background check system, the program director in charge of the volunteer will conduct a Volunteer Peer Review with an unrelated volunteer who has worked closely with the volunteer needing to be rescreened.