

# **A Spacious Place: Creativity & Spirituality Center AUSTIN, TEXAS**

## **POLICIES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUTH, PERSONS 65 YEARS OR OLDER, AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**—Adopted March 26, 2011—**

**—Revised April 10, 2017—**

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Board and staff of *A Spacious Place: Creativity & Spirituality Center* in Austin, Texas are committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for children and youth, persons 65 years or older, and adults with disabilities (collectively, “Protected Classes”). We recognize our responsibility to take affirmative steps to protect the vulnerable among us. Accordingly, we have developed the following policies to minimize the risk of persons in our care being subject to physical, psychological, spiritual, or sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Reducing the risk of the physical, psychological, spiritual, or sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation requires policies that: (1) address the screening and selection of volunteer and paid workers who interact with the Protected Classes; (2) establish training and education standards for paid and volunteer workers selected to teach the Protected Classes; (3) create operating procedures that limit opportunities for abuse or the appearance of abuse; and (4) establish a system for quickly and effectively responding to reports of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

#### **II. KEY DEFINITIONS**

**Abuse:** This policy employs the latest definition of abuse offered by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ([https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact\\_us/report\\_abuse.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/report_abuse.asp), which has links to Texas Code where the definition of abuse of children or the elderly may be found).

**Guest Leader:** A person invited by or with the approval of the Executive Director of *A Spacious Place* for short-term leadership roles that do not involve primary caregiving of Protected Classes. A representative of the *A Spacious Place* staff or a designee will be present with the Protected Classes when the guest leader is sharing.

**Paid Worker:** A person hired and paid by the *A Spacious Place* staff to provide primary caregiving to Protected Classes.

**Primary Caregiving:** Providing direct supervision and care for a Protected Classes’ health and safety (e.g., feeding, taking to the bathroom, bandaging cuts, transporting)

**Volunteer Worker:** A person invited by the *A Spacious Place* staff to provide spiritual nurture and primary caregiving to Protected Classes. A Volunteer Worker receives no payment for his or her services.

#### **III. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF WORKERS WITH PROTECTED CLASSES**

**A. Screening of Paid Workers and Volunteer Workers with Protected Classes**

Individuals will be considered for work as primary caregivers with Protected Classes only after the completion of a criminal background check. Potential employees will also submit a written application naming references knowledgeable of the applicant's ability to work with the Protected Classes. The Executive Director and two Board designees will be responsible for checking references. All applicants for paid positions will be personally interviewed by the responsible staff member or a Board designee.

*A Spacious Place* paid and volunteer workers must complete an application form and will also be considered for work with Protected Classes only after the completion of a criminal background check. The application form will require applicants to provide names of references knowledgeable of the applicant's ability to work with Protected Classes. The Executive Director and two Board designees will be responsible for checking references of paid volunteer workers.

#### **IV. TRAINING AND EDUCATION OF WORKERS WITH PROTECTED CLASSES**

##### **A. Training**

The *A Spacious Place* Executive Director and its Board will arrange annual training to be provided to all volunteer workers, paid workers, Board Members, and staff working with Protected Classes. Recorded or online training will be made available to workers ([www.aspaciousplace.com/ASP Reducing the Risk Training.mp4](http://www.aspaciousplace.com/ASP Reducing the Risk Training.mp4)). All volunteer workers, paid workers, Board Members, and staff working with Protected Classes will be provided this document and will be asked to sign and date a statement verifying that these policies have been read and understood, and that the worker will comply. In addition, the individual responsible for providing training for each new volunteer will sign off that the volunteer completed the training. Both signed documents will be placed in the volunteer worker's file.

#### **V. OPERATING PROCEDURES TO REDUCE RISK OF ABUSE**

##### **A. Shared Responsibilities**

No set of policies or operating procedures regarding Protected Classes can be effective unless parents and/or guardians recognize their ultimate responsibility.

Parents and/or guardians must accept responsibility for delivering their child(ren) to the worker(s) entrusted with the child's (children's) supervision, and for signing their children in and out of all *A Spacious Place* children's offerings at its facilities.

When providing activities at another organization's facilities, *A Spacious Place* workers will serve as guest volunteers. The facility's primary staff will create and implement its own policies for signing in and out Protected Classes members.

##### **B. Supervision of Minors in the Classroom**

Under most circumstances, two adults should be present as primary caregivers in each room in which *A Spacious Place* activities with minors are conducted. During situations, such as health emergencies or situations in which preschoolers must be escorted to a restroom, where one adult is required to supervise minors, care should be taken to leave doors open and, if possible, to notify teachers in adjacent rooms. To the extent possible, activities for minors should be assigned to classrooms that provide a clear view into the room.

Workers will use an appropriate sign-in/sign-out system for drop off and pick up of minors from *A Spacious Place* activities.

**C. Transportation Provided to Minors by *A Spacious Place: Creativity & Spirituality Center***

Parents or guardians will receive 1) a field trip form and 2) a medical release form for their completion and signature, and will be notified in advance of the destination of any travel provided by *A Spacious Place*. Vehicles should caravan when possible.

**D. Overnight Trips**

For each overnight excursion, parents or guardians will receive 1) an overnight permission form for that specific event and 2) a medical release form for their completion and signature. Fewer than two adult supervisors on overnight trips is to be allowed only with specific parental consent. *A Spacious Place* staff members or their designees should develop and implement a plan for workers to monitor minors and adults during the event.

**E. Off-Site Group Events**

Parents or guardians will be notified of, and their consent will be required, for off-site *A Spacious Place*-sponsored group activities.

**F. One-On-One Counseling with Minors**

Unless specified otherwise, neither paid nor volunteer workers may provide counselling to minors without the approval of the Executive Director. Instead, they will take reasonable steps to insure the minor's health and safety, and then consult the Executive Director or another approved staff member. While workers should limit the circumstances in which children or youth are alone with one adult, one-on-one counseling may be the best form of service to a child or youth in certain limited circumstances. One-on-one counseling is often best done by the *A Spacious Place* staff. When possible, personal counseling should be done with doors open or behind windowed doors. Additionally, an additional adult worker should be informed and should be present in the vicinity of the counseling session. In most cases, personal counseling should be done with the parent's or guardian's consent.

**VI. RESPONDING TO REPORTS OF ABUSE**

Paid staff, Board Members, and volunteers shall report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of Protected Classes members that are participating in *A Spacious Place* activities to an appropriate governmental authority as required by state law (refer to Department of Family and Protective Services materials for definitions and reporting requirements available at [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact\\_us/report\\_abuse.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/contact_us/report_abuse.asp)), and then follow the steps below.

**A. Initial Steps in Responding to Abuse Alleged to Have Occurred During *A Spacious Place* Activities**

All reports of abuse or suspected abuse are to be taken seriously and treated in the manner outlined in this policy. The following steps should occur after the recognition of reported or suspected abuse:

Individuals suspecting abuse or receiving reports of abuse should refrain from asking leading questions of suspected victims, but should listen carefully to any statement voluntarily

offered by the Protected Classes member and should contact an appropriate staff or Board Member as soon as possible.

- Reports or allegations should be communicated to the Executive Director.
- The Executive Director will identify a Board Member to serve as a point of contact for the investigator of suspected abuses and will notify an attorney.
- The Executive Director and designated Board Member will confirm that all legal reporting requirements have been fulfilled.
- In cooperation with the involved governmental agency, the Executive Director will conduct a review and compile facts and information available about the suspected abuse.
- The Executive Director and/or the designated Board Member will take the necessary steps to remove the person suspected of abuse from contact with Protected Classes members during the duration of any investigation. Neither the *A Spacious Place* staff nor its Board should interview the alleged perpetrator.
- The *A Spacious Place* Executive Director and Board will consider whether allegations or findings of abuse are sufficient grounds for dismissal of its employee(s) or volunteer(s).

**G. Reporting Suspected Abuse Outside the Building During *A Spacious Place* Activities**

- Individuals suspecting abuse or receiving reports of abuse should refrain from asking leading questions of suspected victims, but should listen carefully to any statement voluntarily offered by the Protected Classes member and should contact an appropriate staff or Board Member as soon as possible.
- Reports or allegations should be communicated to the Executive Director.

**H. Follow-up on Reported Abuse**

The designated Board Member should monitor the course of any official investigation and report to the Executive Director.

The Executive Director should consider making appropriate offers of assistance to the families of victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation; such offers include, but are not necessarily limited to

1. Referral to appropriate mental health professionals and medical professionals as needed;
2. Providing information regarding governmental investigations of abuse and *A Spacious Place*'s anticipated role in such investigations; and
3. Referral of trained professionals to specifically minister to the family.

**I. Dealing with the Media**

In cases of reported abuse that attract media attention, sufficient information should be distributed within the *A Spacious Place* Board Members to make persons aware of that which will be discussed publicly. As stated in the *A Spacious Place* by-laws, Board Members will maintain full confidentiality, except on information sharing made necessary by law. Every effort should be made to distribute information within the community prior to its public disclosure.

Contact with the media should be limited to the Executive Director and a designated Board Member.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

These policies and procedures are designed to assist families to raise healthy, safe children and youth, and to serve persons age 65 or older and adults with disabilities. By implementing these policies, *A Spacious Place: Creativity & Spirituality Center* hopes to reduce the various risks and respond to any alleged abuse, neglect, or exploitation in a manner that exhibits and reinforces Christ's redemptive role in our community.