

## **Code of Conduct for Child Safety**

Avant is committed to caring for children so they might experience tangible expressions of God's goodness and love. Avant desires that children would grow in understanding God's purposes for their lives as a result of their interactions with us. Avant wants to create opportunities where children are safe and implement practices that make anyone with intentions to harm children feel unsafe.

The following Code of Conduct is an important means by which our staff helps us provide safe and healthy interactions with children in our families and programs.

Thank you for joining us in this vital commitment to love children.

Avant's Child Safety Team

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last name, First name)

Event: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates of event: \_\_\_\_\_

(For volunteers) Point of Contact with Avant: \_\_\_\_\_

## Code of Conduct for Child Safety

### A. Background

The welfare and safety of children are paramount to Avant's policies and procedures. This includes valuing them, regarding them positively, and treating them with respect and care at all times. Adult staff assumes the full burden of setting and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all interactions with children.

One of the most effective ways to prevent abuse of children is to be vigilant. By being vigilant in adhering to the following standards for interaction with children, we hope to protect children from abuse.

This Code of Conduct includes, but is not limited to, the following expectations of Avant's members, employed staff and volunteers serving at any Avant event or location.

### B. Visibility

All work with children shall be planned in a way that minimizes risks as far as possible. This includes being visible to other adults when working with children.

This can be accomplished by planning activities in areas where other adults are present and at a time when other activities are occurring. It can be accomplished by utilizing rooms for activities with children with doors that have windows or by keeping doors open.

### C. Overcoming Isolation

At least two unrelated adults shall be present in work with children. Isolation can also be overcome by avoiding being alone with a child. For example, take two or more children to the bathroom together rather than only one, drop off siblings last in a carpool or take your own child along when providing rides. An adequate number of adults shall supervise events in which youth are involved, especially overnight activities.

### D. Accountability

All staff is expected to interact with children in a mature, capable, safe, caring and responsible manner, with a high level of accountability. All adult staff is responsible for giving and accepting feedback from others in order to maintain our high level of professionalism and integrity in interaction with children.

When ministry to a child involves one-on-one contact, the following procedures shall be followed as applicable:

- Always be accountable to other adults regarding your interactions with children.
- Parents and/or supervisors are to be notified beforehand of any activity with children, for example, before transporting a child, keeping a child after class, or when tutoring a child.
- Counseling or necessarily confidential meetings with children shall be done in an office with a window in the door and only when another adult is in close vicinity, aware that the meeting is occurring, and is willing to stay in the vicinity until it is completed.
- In an emergency situation, find someone to go with you if at all possible, or notify whoever is available.

### E. Supervision

Supervision also reduces risk. Program administrators shall periodically and randomly inspect classrooms, offices, work areas and other areas where children and adults are together.

## **F. Technology**

Technology shall be used appropriately to protect children from abuse and exploitation, for example, to prevent inappropriate internet content and use.

## **G. Discipline**

Discipline shall be used to teach and correct rather than punish. It shall not include slapping, hitting, shaming, yelling at, or belittling a child or other forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

*This is not intended to address appropriate corporal discipline by a child's parent.*

## **H. Touch**

Because healthy, caring touch is valuable to children, but unhealthy touch is abusive, the following guidelines apply:

- Touch shall be in response to the need of the child and not the need of the adult.
- Touch shall be open rather than secretive. For example, a hug in the context of a group is very different than a hug behind closed doors.
- Touch shall be age appropriate and generally initiated by the child rather than the adult. It shall be with the child's permission and any resistance from the child shall be respected.
- Touch shall always communicate respect for the child. Adults shall avoid doing things of a personal nature that they are able to do for themselves, including dressing, bathing, etc.
- Adults and other youth or children shall not hit, slap, pinch, push, hold against their will, or otherwise assault children.

The following signs of affection are generally appropriate within specific contexts: verbal praise, side hugs, or shoulder 'to' shoulder hugs. Appropriate forms of affection for smaller children include touching their hands, faces, shoulders and arms, arms around their shoulders, hugs, or holding them when others are present (when culturally appropriate).

The following behaviors between staff and children are inappropriate or may be perceived as inappropriate and shall not be engaged in: touching buttocks, chests, genital areas or thighs; showing affection in an isolated area or when alone with a child; lying on a bed with a child; flirtatious or seductive looks; any form of affection that is unwanted by the child; sexually-suggestive games with any child; any behavior that could be interpreted as sexual in nature. Team members shall monitor each other in the area of physical contact, helping each other by pointing out anything that could be misinterpreted.

*This is not intended to address appropriate corporal discipline by a child's parent.*

## **I. Verbal Interaction**

Words shall be used to support and encourage a child, such as praise, positive reinforcement, and positive jokes. Inappropriate verbal interaction includes the following: shaming, belittling, humiliating, name calling, using harsh language that may frighten, humiliate the child, cursing, or making derogatory remarks about the child, their family, and/or place of origin. Inappropriate verbal interactions also include inappropriate comments that relate to physique or body development, telling derogatory or sexual jokes, making sexually suggestive comments, telling inappropriate secrets, or inappropriately discussing sexual encounters or desires with children.

## **J. Parent Involvement**

Parents (or parental surrogates) are responsible for knowing where their children are at all times. Therefore, parents (or parental surrogates) shall be informed of planned trip activities and sign a consent form. Parents shall be encouraged to make unannounced visits to program activities.

## **K. Monitoring Child-to-Child Behavior**

The following actions may involve abuse or inappropriate behavior of one child to another and are prohibited: bullying, derogatory name calling, ridicule or humiliation, child-to-child inappropriate

sexual touch, inappropriate sexually explicit language, showing of sexually explicit images, hitting, slapping, pushing, holding against their will, or otherwise assaulting another child.

**Handling Allegations of Child Abuse**

Any staff or volunteer who has observed some form of harm to a child or neglect is expected to notify the Child Safety Team within 24 hours. Child Safety Lead is Carolyn Eumurian (carolyn.eumurian@avmi.org).

**Child Safety and Protection Code of Conduct Acknowledgement**

Candidates, volunteers, and staff are asked to read and sign this form thereby agreeing to abide by what is written above.

I have read the guidelines above. I agree to observe them faithfully:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted from Avant’s Child Safety and Protection Manual*