



Child Protection Policy Manual



Approved, Board of Directors, March 22, 2025



Dear Parents, Members, Volunteers, Staff and Affiliates,

Welcome to VOCES Caelestes Choir of Men and Boys. I am pleased to present you with the VOCES Caelestes Child Protection Policy Manual. This comprehensive document has been developed out of my sincere concern for the welfare of the children affiliated with the VOCES Caelestes Choir of Men and Boys and reflects my strong commitment to ensuring the safety and security of everyone who is a part of VOCES.

The protection of the children in our care is our highest priority and most sacred responsibility. Whether you have been with us for a short time or for many years, I want you to know how deeply I appreciate your dedication to upholding the high standards of safety and care that are essential to our mission. This policy manual outlines the specific procedures and guidelines that will help us create and maintain a secure environment for all children participating in our programs.

You have joined a very special organization, which is possibly quite different from any you have belonged to before. As members of the VOCES Caelestes family, we work harmoniously together not only to create beautiful music but also to nurture and protect the young people entrusted to our care.

As well as respecting the dignity of each child we serve, we also respect your dignity as a parent, volunteer, member or affiliate. Every position and every responsibility in upholding child safety is important. **YOU** are important – indeed special – and your commitment to child protection is vital to our collective success.

This manual is a comprehensive guide to the principles, policies, and procedures that govern our interactions with children. I do not intend that any policy should cause undue hardship, but rather that these guidelines will provide clarity about what to expect from VOCES Caelestes and what will be expected of you regarding child safety.

Please understand that this manual cannot anticipate every situation or answer every question about child protection. VOCES Caelestes reserves the right to change or revise policies and procedures whenever such action is warranted to better protect the children in our care.

You are requested to read this manual carefully and keep it for future reference. If you should have any questions concerning the policies outlined here, please reach out to me at: chad@vocescaelestes.org.

Together, we can ensure that VOCES Caelestes remains a safe, nurturing environment where children can develop their musical talents and personal growth.

Yours,



Chad L. Blosser
Executive Director

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Mission Connection

VOCES Caelestes is committed to the safety and well-being of all children who participate in our programs. As an organization that works directly with boys in our choir, we recognize our profound responsibility to create a secure environment where children can develop their musical talents free from harm.

This Child Protection Policy aligns with our organizational mission to preserve and celebrate choral music through education and performance, while adding the essential dimension of ensuring that this work occurs in a context that prioritizes the safety of all young participants.

Legal Framework

This policy has been developed in accordance with:

- Federal laws pertaining to child welfare and protection
- Virginia state laws regarding mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect
- Best practices recommended by national child protection organizations
- 501(c)(3) standards of care and governance

Policy Objectives

- To protect all children who participate in our choir and educational programs
- To provide staff and volunteers with clear guidelines about expected behavior and practices
- To establish consistent procedures for screening, training, and supervision
- To detail appropriate reporting mechanisms for concerns about child welfare
- To demonstrate our organizational commitment to child safety in all activities

SCOPE OF POLICY

Who is Covered

This policy applies to all individuals associated with VOCES Caelestes who may have direct or indirect contact with children, including but not limited to:

- Board members
- Artistic and administrative staff (both paid and volunteer)
- Choir directors and music instructors
- Guest artists and clinicians
- Volunteers who assist with rehearsals, performances, or events
- Parents/guardians serving in supportive or chaperone roles

Applicable Activities

This policy governs all VOCES Caelestes programs, events, and activities where children are present, including:

- Regular rehearsals
- Public performances
- Educational workshops and masterclasses
- Open rehearsals for educational purposes
- Travel for performances or competitions
- Digital or online instruction
- Social events associated with the choir

Responsibility for Implementation

The Board of Directors bears ultimate responsibility for the implementation of this policy. Day-to-day oversight is delegated to the Child Protection Officer (CPO), a position appointed by the Board.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy:

Child/Minor: Any person under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse: Any act or failure to act by a parent, caregiver, or other person in a position of trust that results in physical abuse, neglect, medical neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or an act or omission that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

Physical Abuse: Non-accidental physical injury to a child.

Sexual Abuse: Any sexual activity, contact, or behavior with a child for which the child cannot legally give consent.

Emotional Abuse: Pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth.

Neglect: Failure to provide for a child's basic physical, educational, or emotional needs.

Staff Member: Any person employed by VOCES Caelestes, whether full-time, part-time, or contract.

Volunteer: Any person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task on behalf of VOCES Caelestes without compensation.

Child Protection Officer (CPO): The designated individual responsible for overseeing implementation of this policy and coordinating the organization's response to concerns about child welfare.

Mandatory Reporter: A person who, in their professional capacity, is legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.

CODE OF CONDUCT

General Behavioral Expectations

All staff members and volunteers must:

1. Treat all children with respect and dignity
2. Maintain appropriate physical boundaries at all times
3. Use positive reinforcement rather than criticism or comparison
4. Consider the perception of their actions, not just intent
5. Never use physical punishment or verbal abuse
6. Avoid favoritism and preferential treatment
7. Respect children's right to personal privacy
8. Take all reasonable steps to protect children from harm
9. Challenge unacceptable behavior in others
10. Report all concerns about possible abuse or policy violations

Appropriate/Inappropriate Physical Contact

Appropriate physical contact may include:

- Brief, congratulatory side hugs
- Handshakes, high-fives, and fist bumps
- Touching shoulders, arms, or hands when instructing

- Physical assistance for safety (such as catching a falling child)
- Physical assistance with musical techniques when necessary, with verbal explanation and permission

Inappropriate physical contact includes:

- Kisses of any kind
- Holding children on lap (except in emergencies)
- Touching areas covered by a bathing suit
- Prolonged hugs or embraces
- Wrestling, tickling, or rough-housing
- Any unwanted physical contact
- Contact that could be misinterpreted by observers

Prohibition of One-on-One Interactions

Under no circumstances shall an adult over the age of 18—whether an employee, volunteer, board member, or anyone officially or unofficially affiliated with VOCES Caelestes—be alone with a child or young person under the age of 18 (the age of majority in Virginia).

This prohibition applies to:

- Rehearsal settings
- Performance venues
- Educational activities
- Transportation
- Digital or online interactions
- Social events
- All other activities connected to VOCES Caelestes

This prohibition is absolute and has no exceptions. Violation of this policy is grounds for immediate dismissal.

One-on-One Interactions

One-on-one interactions between any adult affiliated with VOCES Caelestes and any child under 18 are strictly prohibited at all times and under all circumstances.

1. Individual music instruction must include:
 - At least two adults present at all times, OR
 - At least two children present with one adult
 - All instruction in open, visible spaces with other adults nearby
 - Parental observation welcomed and encouraged
2. For voice lessons or specialized instruction:
 - A parent/guardian or second staff member must always be present
 - Lessons must take place in rooms with windows or open doors
 - Lessons must be scheduled during times when others are in the building
 - Lessons must be documented with time, location, and attendees
3. No staff member, volunteer, or adult affiliated with VOCES Caelestes shall:
 - Meet alone with a child in any location
 - Transport a child alone in a vehicle
 - Communicate privately online with a child

- Be alone with a child before or after official activities

Violation of this policy is grounds for immediate dismissal and may be reported to appropriate authorities.

Rule of Three

To implement the above prohibition, the "rule of three" must be followed at all times:

1. At least two adults must be present when supervising one or more children.
2. Alternatively, at least two children must be present with one adult supervisor.
3. No staff member or volunteer should ever be alone with a single child.
4. All interactions should occur in open, visible spaces where others can observe the interaction.

Verbal Interactions

Appropriate verbal interactions include:

- Positive reinforcement
- Appropriate jokes and age-appropriate humor
- Encouragement and praise
- Constructive musical feedback

Inappropriate verbal interactions include:

- Sexual comments, jokes, or innuendo
- Discussing personal intimate details
- Harsh language, shaming, belittling
- Secrets or private special relationships
- Swearing or offensive language
- Derogatory remarks about the child or their family
- Comments related to a child's physical attributes or development

SCREENING AND SELECTION OF PERSONNEL

Application Process

All staff members and volunteers who will work directly with children must complete:

1. A detailed written application that includes:
 - Personal identification information
 - Qualifications and relevant experience
 - Educational background
 - Employment history with addresses and phone numbers
 - Explanation of any gaps in employment

- Personal references (minimum of three)
- Disclosure of any criminal history
- 2. A face-to-face interview, conducted by at least two representatives of VOCES Caelestes
- 3. Reference checks, conducted by designated staff members

Background Checks

1. **Pre-Employment/Pre-Service Requirement:**
 - All staff members must successfully complete and pass all required background checks before their first date of employment.
 - All officially sanctioned volunteers must successfully complete and pass all required background checks before beginning any volunteer activities.
 - Final clearance must be explicitly provided by the Executive Director in writing before any individual may begin working or volunteering with the organization.
2. Required background checks for all staff, officially sanctioned volunteers affiliated in an official capacity with VOCES Caelestes include:
 - National criminal database search
 - National sex offender registry search
 - Social security number verification
 - County criminal records check in all counties of residence for the past seven years
 - Virginia State Police (VCIN) background check may be a requirement or may be superseded with a fingerprint check through the FBI
3. Fingerprint-based background checks:
 - A background check or an FBI fingerprint background check is required for all staff members
 - FBI fingerprint-based background checks may be required for officially sanctioned volunteers at the discretion of the Executive Director
 - The organization reserves the right to require background checks or fingerprint-based background checks from any individual involved with the organization
4. Additional checks required for specific roles:
 - For positions involving driving: Motor vehicle records check
 - For financial positions: Credit history check
 - For foreign nationals: International criminal background check where available
5. Background checks must be renewed every three years for ongoing staff and officially sanctioned volunteers.
6. The cost associated with background checks for employees will be covered by VOCES Caelestes, Inc. The cost of the background check for volunteers seeking official sanctioning shall be borne by the volunteer seeking official sanctioning unless otherwise waived by the Executive Director.
7. Results of all background checks will be maintained in secure, confidential files separate from general personnel records.

Disqualifying Offenses

The following will disqualify an individual from working with children at VOCES Caelestes:

1. Any felony conviction involving violence
2. Any conviction (felony or misdemeanor) for a sexual offense
3. Any conviction (felony or misdemeanor) for child abuse or neglect

Any conviction for a crime against children

4. Presence on a sex offender registry
5. Other offenses will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, considering:
 - Nature and gravity of the offense
 - Time elapsed since the offense
 - Age of the person at the time of the offense
 - Relevance to the position sought

Probationary Period

All new staff members and volunteers must serve a probationary period of 90 days, during which:

- They will be closely supervised by experienced personnel
- They will not transport children alone
- They will not have sole responsibility for supervising children
- Performance and adherence to this policy will be regularly evaluated

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Initial Training

Before beginning work with children, all staff members and volunteers must complete training that includes:

1. Overview of this Child Protection Policy
2. Recognition of signs of child abuse and neglect
3. Mandatory reporting requirements and procedures
4. Appropriate boundaries with children
5. Proper supervision practices
6. Emergency procedures and safety protocols
7. Organization-specific risks and prevention strategies

Ongoing Education

1. Annual refresher training on child protection is required for all staff and volunteers.
2. Additional specialized training based on role and responsibilities.
3. Updates on policy changes or new legal requirements as they occur.
4. Ongoing professional development in child safety best practices.

Documentation

1. All training completion will be documented in personnel files.

2. Staff members and volunteers must sign acknowledgment forms confirming they understand and will comply with the Child Protection Policy.
3. Training records will be maintained for at least seven years.

SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Adult-to-Child Ratios

The following minimum ratios of adult supervisors to children must be maintained at all times:

- Ages 5-8: 1 adult to 6 children
- Ages 9-14: 1 adult to 8 children
- Ages 15-17: 1 adult to 10 children

These ratios should be adjusted based on:

- Specific needs of the children involved
- Nature and risk level of the activity
- Location (additional supervision for off-site activities)

Rule of Three

The "rule of three" must be followed at all times:

1. At least two adults must be present when supervising one or more children.
2. Alternatively, at least two children must be present with one adult supervisor.
3. No staff member or volunteer should ever be alone with a single child where they cannot be observed by others.

Bathroom and Changing Area Procedures

1. For young children needing assistance:
 - Two adults should be present when assisting children in bathrooms.
 - If this is not possible, the adult assisting should inform another adult before helping a child.
2. For older children:
 - Staff should stand in the doorway while children are using the bathroom.
 - Staff should not use the bathroom at the same time as children.
3. For changing areas (such as before performances):
 - Separate changing areas should be provided based on age and gender.

Privacy should be respected while maintaining appropriate supervision.

- Staff should never undress in front of children.

Overnight Events

When overnight activities occur:

1. At least two adult chaperones must be present at all times.
2. Written parental consent is required, including emergency contacts.
3. Sleeping arrangements must be gender-separated, with appropriate adult supervision.
4. Adults must not share beds or sleeping rooms with children (except a parent with their own child).
5. Regular bed checks should be conducted by two adults together.
6. Children should have reasonable privacy when changing and bathing.
7. Clear communication about expectations and schedule must be provided to children and parents beforehand.

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL POLICIES

Local Transportation

1. Parent/guardian permission forms are required for all transportation provided by the organization.
2. **A child must never be alone in a vehicle with a single adult affiliated with VOCES Caelestes under any circumstances.**
3. All transportation must follow a strict "rule of three" with either:
 - At least two adults and one child, OR
 - One adult and at least two children
4. All drivers must:
 - Be at least 25 years old
 - Have a valid driver's license
 - Submit to a motor vehicle record check
 - Maintain appropriate insurance coverage
 - Use appropriate child restraint systems as required by law
5. Children should be transported directly to their destination with no unauthorized stops.
6. Cell phone use while driving is prohibited.
7. Parents must be informed of expected departure and arrival times.
8. A transportation log must be maintained documenting all adults and children in each vehicle.

Travel and Overnight Trips

1. Detailed itineraries must be provided to parents/guardians in advance.
2. Emergency contact information must be carried by all adult supervisors.
3. A designated Trip Coordinator must be assigned for each trip.
4. First aid kits must be available during travel.
5. Regular check-ins with the organization's leadership are required during trips.
6. Children must always be supervised, with specific staff members assigned responsibility for specific children.
7. Hotel/accommodation guidelines:
 - Adults should not share rooms with children (except parents with their own children).
 - Room assignments should group children by age and gender.
 - Adjoining rooms with adult supervisors are preferred when possible.