



YOUTH AND CHILD SAFETY POLICY

PURPOSE

Common Threads understands the importance of protecting youth in the community and in our programs. The Board of Directors of Common Threads has adopted this policy on February 12, 2019 in order to provide guidance on practices that will protect youth from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior and also protect Common Threads staff and volunteers from false accusations.

DEFINITIONS

- **Staff** - all employees, full and part-time, and program volunteers (including AmeriCorps service members) who have any contact with youth or access to facilities.
- **Youth** - individuals 17 years of age or younger.

SCREENING

All Common Threads staff are screened prior to serving with youth via:

- **Written Application** which includes a release allowing Common Threads to conduct a background information search and requests basic information from the applicant - inquiring into previous experience with children, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions that may have bearing on the applicant's job duties. The application will be stored electronically in Common Threads' secure cloud based system (NEON) and any background information will remain strictly confidential.

- **Personal Interview** conducted with the applicant by appropriate management staff to discuss the position and the applicant's talents, qualifications, and abilities. Multiple and/or group interviews may be conducted as appropriate.
- **Reference Checks** - All applicants must provide at least two references. References may be personal or professional and be presented in written form. Staff will document reference checks in applicant's personnel file. References may not be checked for short-term or episodic volunteers who are at no times to be working directly with youth without support from Common Threads staff (as defined above).
- **Criminal background check** - A [WATCH](#) (Washington Access to Criminal History) check will be run on all staff and volunteers prior to their work with youth. An FBI check and a background check from the applicants state of origin will also be run for AmeriCorps service members. Applicants will not be considered for positions when checks show evidence of convictions related to an applicant's job duties, including for an offense involving children, violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency, or conduct contrary to the mission of Common Threads. Failure to disclose a relevant criminal conviction on the application may also terminate an individual's application.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

All staff will receive an orientation that includes

- Review and receipt of Common Threads core values and expectations. An original signed copy will be uploaded to the individual's personnel file.
- Review of policies related to transportation, prevention and reporting of child abuse and emergency procedures - within first week of activation
- Training in recognizing signs of suspected child abuse - within three months of activation
- Training in the prevention of "Bullying" - within three months of activation

Supervisors will be trained on hiring and screening potential staff members

New staff and board members will review this Youth and Child Safety Policy as part of their staff/ board orientation.

Staff training and orientations will be updated and refreshed each year

Documentation of all training will be maintained in each individual's personnel file.

SUPERVISION

Supervision of youth, programs, facilities and staff will be designed to protect youth and staff at all times. Practices to ensure a safe and caring environment will include:

- Staff and volunteers will never be alone with an individual youth where they are not observable by others. Staff and youth will follow the “rule of three” - which specifies that there should always be at least three people present - i.e. one staff and two students or two staff and one student.
- Non-adult (minor) staff will not be included in prescribed staff to youth ratios
- All sites of operation will have access to a telephone on location during operating hours.
- Youth will never be left unsupervised; including bathrooms. Written restroom use practices will be in place for all youth programs.
- Staff will never release youth to anyone other than the authorized parent(s), guardian(s), or an individual authorized by parents in writing or verified by phone.
- Sign-in and sign-out will be in place for all youth programs.
- Staff will check for signs of physical injury or emotional abnormality each time a child reports to program.
- Staff will utilize constructive methods for maintaining group control and managing youth behavior.
- Staff will not disrobe a child other than outer garments without the presence of another staff member.
- Staff will avoid changing clothes in front of youth.

CONTACT WITH YOUTH

Staff will develop positive relationships with youth while involved in programs. In the event that staff or volunteers have contact with or accept supervisory responsibility for youth outside of Common Threads programs and activities (such as accepting babysitting jobs), that additional contact will be disclosed to the staff or volunteer member’s immediate supervisor.

Staff will not communicate with youth outside of programs via written, electronic or other means without express Executive approval.

Staff will appear and behave in a manner consistent with the mission and values of at all times while on or off duty; including electronic, written and verbal communications.

COMMUNICATIONS

Common Threads will promote positive values and youth protection strategies in its programs, facilities, with parents and in the community.

- Parents will receive regular written information about the program's content and schedules; feedback regarding their child's participation in program including behavior and general health; and an introduction to the program staff.
- Parents will be allowed to observe programs at any time as appropriate
- Parents and the community will be made aware of Common Threads' youth protection efforts through regular written and/or electronic communication including: Common Threads core values and expectations and this Youth and Child Safety Policy document.
- Common Threads' designated spokesperson to the media and community in the event of any incident concerning abuse or neglect is the Executive Director.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Staff is recognized as mandated reporters and will report known or suspected child abuse immediately or as soon as practically possible. Common Threads will follow current regulations and guidelines for the reporting of abuse. Staff will follow an internal chain of command for the reporting of abuse and may report directly to local authorities if their supervisor does not handle any report immediately. If an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at or during programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed:

- The parent or guardian of the child will be notified
- The appropriate authorities will be notified; consistent with local, state and/or federal regulations The alleged perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from the pending an investigation
- The insurance company will be notified, and an incident report will be completed

Common Threads will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities. In the event there is no investigation of the incident by state or local authorities, a management team will be formed to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The team should act only in consultation with Common Threads' insurance company and/or attorney.

Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with Common Threads.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed and updated as needed (at minimum on an annual basis) by the Board of Directors.

Reviewed and unanimously approved for adoption by the board on February 12, 2019

Reviewed by Infrastructure committee--completed Apr 29 2020