



Swamp Rat Experience Child Safety and Protection Policy

Swamp Rat Experience (SRE) is committed to providing an environment that is safe for all Children and participants free of discrimination, harassment and harm, where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity, can contribute fully, and have equal opportunities. SRE is committed to providing an environment where every child can thrive, succeed and be their best self. SRE has zero tolerance for abuse.

Swamp Rat Experience (SRE) is committed to the safest environment for participants under the age of majority. As such, SRE will have the following procedures in place:

- 1) All personnel in contact with youth will provide:
 - a. a clean Criminal Record Check
 - b. a clean Vulnerable Sector Check
- 2) A Ratio of 1 instructor to 15 Children will be followed for all programming and events
- 3) All Communication will be provided to the parent/guardian with provided contact information.
- 4) All Social Media contact shall be conducted through Swamp Rat Experience's main social media accounts. Personnel shall not engage in contact via personal social media accounts.
- 5) Fulfilment of all Swamp Rat Experience's Policies and Procedures including the Discrimination and Harassment Policy will also be followed in addition to this policy.

People working with children are responsible for reporting suspicions of child abuse, not for proving whether child abuse has occurred. That is the responsibility of legally authorized authorities. Throughout these policies and procedures, reference is made to children and vulnerable adults. Every person in Alberta, including someone who works with children, must call a child protection agency immediately to report their suspicion that a child may have been abused or is at risk of abuse.

SRE also recognizes that some adults may also be vulnerable to abuse, and therefore similar reporting procedures may be applied (with appropriate adaptations) to allegations of abuse and the protection of vulnerable adults. SRE is committed to ensuring that it:

- Provides a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Identifies children, young people and vulnerable adults who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm; and
- Take appropriate action to see that such children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe when working with SRE.

In pursuit of these aims, SRE will annually review and approve policies and procedures with the aim of:

- Promoting and implementing appropriate procedures to safeguard the well-being of children, young people and vulnerable adults and protecting them from abuse while participating in SRE activities and programs.
- Recruiting, training, supporting and supervising staff and volunteers to adopt best practices to safeguard and protect children, young people, and vulnerable adults from abuse and to reduce risk to themselves.
- Requiring staff and volunteers to adopt and abide by this Child Safety and Protection Policy and the outlined procedures.
- Establishing procedures for reporting and dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers; and
- Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this policy, the procedures and adapting them whenever there is a notable change in the Fellowship or if there are any legal changes.

WHAT IS ABUSE?

Child abuse is defined by the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act¹. Anyone can contact Child Intervention when they are worried about the safety or well-being of a child or youth.

There are 4 types of child abuse and neglect:

- neglect
- emotional abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse

Child abuse and neglect can happen to any child or youth:

- up to 18 years of age
- living full-time or part-time, with or apart, from their parents or guardians
- of all abilities, gender identities and cultural and spiritual backgrounds

¹ <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/c12> (June 26, 2023)

Neglect

Neglect is when a parent or guardian does not provide their child or youth with basic age-appropriate care such as:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- love and affection
- protection from harm

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can happen along with neglect or the other types of abuse. This may include:

- humiliating the child by blaming or belittling them
- refusing to comfort the child when the child is upset or frightened
- criticizing the child by calling them names like stupid, bad, useless or a troublemaker
- setting unrealistic expectations, threatening or accusing the child
- exposing the child to violence or chronic drug or alcohol use in the home
- cruel or unusual treatment or punishment

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a parent or guardian causes an injury or trauma to any part of their child's body. It might leave bruises and marks that can be seen, but can also include internal injuries that are hard to spot. Physical abuse can happen only once or many times. It may include:

- hitting, choking and kicking
- biting, scratching and pulling hair
- throwing or hitting their child with things

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse happens when a child is exposed to inappropriate sexual contact, activity or behaviour. This may include:

- non-touching activities such as:
 - having inappropriately sexual phone calls or conversations
 - making the child watch someone expose themselves
 - showing them pornographic material
- sexual touching activities such as:
 - fondling
 - making them touch an adult's or other child's genital area
 - sexual intercourse with the child or youth

- sexual exploitation activities such as:
- engaging a child or youth for prostitution
- using them in pornography
- luring them via the Internet for sexual purposes

MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

SRE Management is responsible for ensuring that a safe environment is maintained in all facilities and programs by:

- Implementing all procedures relating to child protection
- Establishing a reporting protocol that complies with provincial child protection legislation
- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers who have significant contact with children and vulnerable adults are oriented to child protection policies and procedures
- Establishing guidelines that ensure programs are developmentally appropriate and well planned; and
- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers have read, understand, and signed the Child Safety and Protection Policy and Procedures document.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITY

SRE staff, contractors, and volunteers have a responsibility to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults in their care by:

- Reporting that a child needs protection as provided in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act²;
- Staff are encouraged to inform their supervisor should they require assistance or need clarification in the reporting requirements
- Following guidelines that ensure programs are developmentally appropriate and well planned; and
- creating a safe and caring environment for children and vulnerable adults that will challenge their development in spirit, mind, and body.

The senior member of the SRE management team with special responsibility for child protection issues is: Kayla Erlandson, Company Manager.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

SRE supports and requires all staff and volunteers to observe the following code of conduct including verbal and non-verbal actions when involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

² <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/c12>

This code of conduct is a clear and concise guide of what is and is not acceptable behaviour or practice when working with children and vulnerable adults.

Through defining what is and is not acceptable behaviour, best practices can be promoted and opportunities for abuse minimized. This can also help prevent false allegations from being made against staff and volunteers.

All concerns about breach of this code of conduct will be taken seriously and responded to in line with the Fellowship's performance management, disciplinary procedure and/or procedure for responding to concerns about child abuse.

Best Practices

- Treat all children, youth, and vulnerable adults equally, with respect, dignity, and fairness.
- Provide encouragement rather than negative criticism.
- Involve parents wherever possible and reasonable.
- Be vigilant and aware of how actions can be misinterpreted and always work in an open environment. Avoid private or unobserved situations with a child or young person.
- Ensure the number of adults is appropriate to safely supervise an activity.
- Have two staff members present when in situations with children and vulnerable adults where it is necessary for anyone to change or undress (i.e., change into costumes or similar) so this activity is not misconstrued.
- Avoid taking a child or young person alone on journeys. Where this is unavoidable the child should sit in the back seat. When feasible, parents should be advised before departure.
- Staff and volunteers should avoid any online social media interaction with a minor without parental consent.
- Posting photographs of minors is prohibited outside of authorized uses as directed by SRE guidelines.

Practices to be Avoided

In the context of your role within SRE, the following practices should be avoided:

- Spending excessive (i.e., unwarranted) amounts of time alone with children, youth, and vulnerable adults away from others.
- Relating to children, youth, and vulnerable adults from programs in non-program activities, such as babysitting or weekend visits.
- Where possible, doing things of a personal nature for children, youth, and vulnerable adults that they can do for themselves.

Prohibited Practices

In the context of your role within SRE, the following practices will not be condoned, and may also be prohibited by law and may impact continued employment:

- Engaging in rough or physical contact is never permissible, whether in play or as a form of punishment.
- Forming intimate emotional, physical, or sexual relationships with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Allowing or engaging in touching a child, youth, or young person in any sexually suggestive manner.
- Allowing/encouraging children, youth, and vulnerable adults to swear or use sexualized language unchallenged.
- Making sexually suggestive comments to a child, youth, or young person, even in fun.
- Reducing a child, youth, or young person to tears as a form of control or isolating the child, youth, or young person from his/her peers (i.e., the use of timeouts is not an acceptable practice).
- Allowing allegations made by a child or young person to go unchallenged, unrecorded, or not acted upon.
- Inviting or allowing children, youth, and vulnerable adults to stay with you at your home.
- Asking children, youth, and vulnerable adults to keep any type of secret from other children, youth and vulnerable adults, staff or from their parents.
- Utilizing personal devices to record, photograph or capture images of minors, or vulnerable adults; staff are expected to exercise sound judgement and discretion where individualized programming requires online interactions.

CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

Get help if you, or children you know, are being neglected, abused or sexually exploited. If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7. Contact the Alberta Children's Services: www.alberta.ca/childrens-services-office-locations.aspx.

- Phone: 1-800-387-5437 (KIDS) in Canada and the United States.
- Elsewhere in the world dial 00-1-780-427-9485.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION OF CHILD ABUSE

In the event that a child discloses or there are grounds to suspect child abuse, SRE will take prompt and immediate action. SRE is mandated by law to report any suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities for investigation.

General Procedures

- Staff, contractors and volunteers of the Fellowship will take allegations of abuse seriously.
- SRE will ensure staff working with children and vulnerable adults are familiar with the procedure for handling a disclosure of abuse or neglect by a child. (Appendix A)
- Staff will follow the prescribed procedure for handling a disclosure.

- The first priority will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk by taking any precautionary measures as advised by the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act³.
- In the event the reported incident(s) involve staff or a volunteer, the procedure for handling an allegation against a SRE staff or volunteer will be followed. (Appendix B)
- A report will be filed in accordance with relevant provincial child protection reporting requirements and the Fellowship will cooperate to the extent required by the law with any legal authority involved.
- All information related to disclosures, or an allegation of abuse will be handled confidentially.

MANAGING AN ALLEGATION COMPLAINT AND CLAIM OF ABUSE AGAINST SRE

In the event of an allegation, complaint or claim of abuse against a staff or volunteer, SRE will follow the following procedures:

Incident Reporting

- If a staff or volunteer suspects or receives an allegation or complaint of abuse about another staff member, volunteer or student, they will follow the procedure for reporting an allegation or suspicion of abuse to the appropriate child protection authority. (Appendix B)
- The staff or volunteer will notify the Company Manager and Artistic Director as soon as a call to the child protection authority has been made.

Information Management

- Staff and volunteers will follow the documentation and information handling procedures required under relevant child protection legislation. (Appendix C and D)
- All records related to the allegation or complaint will be retained until such time as determined by the authorities, or by SRE records retention requirements, or by the insurer, whichever is longer.

³ <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/c12#detailed>

Appendix A

Procedure for Handling Disclosure by a Child

1. The staff must investigate suspected marks and discuss with management who reported the marks and if support is needed to make a call to the Children's Services⁴. At this time a decision must be made as to whether the call to the Agency is:

- A. For consultation purposes
- B. Non-abuse request or
- C. Abuse request

If a report is not made to the Children's Services, the marks should be recorded stating the colour, approximate size and location. If a call is made to the child's parents, the conversation should be recorded.

2. When a decision to report is made, the following information should be documented before calling:

- A. Type of abuse suspected.
- B. If physical, documented on chart the location, approximate size (relate size to coin) and colour of marks.
- C. Name, address, birth date, telephone number and religion of child. Make sure to document any comments the child might have concerning the marks and the child's condition at the time of the report.
- D. The name and telephone number of the individual suspected of abuse and where they can be located. If the individual suspected of abuse is not the parent, then the name, telephone number and parent's location is to be given. It is important to let the agency know how to approach these parents.
- E. If the decision to report was made after talking to the parents, then document where the incident occurred and any other information you might have.
- F. If this is not the first incident of concern, have other reports available for reference.
- G. If any other person or agency has been involved with the child, have the name and telephone number available.

3. When you call the Children's Services, make sure:

- A. You give your full name, professional title, and the Fellowship's contact information.
- B. Report all information you have documented.

⁴ <https://www.alberta.ca/childrens-services-office-locations.aspx>

Appendix B

Procedure for Handling an Allegation Against an Employee or Volunteer

It can be very distressing when a staff member is accused of abusing a child. An SRE staff member who receives a disclosure of abuse against another staff member or suspects a colleague of abuse has a legal obligation to report to the local Children's Services. Staff must follow the procedures outlined below if a report is made against a colleague, contractor or volunteer.

In general, an allegation against a staff member is usually made by a parent, a child or a colleague. In all cases, there is a legal obligation to report.

In the event that a parent makes an allegation against a staff member, the obligation to report also lies with the parent.

The parent needs to be advised/reminded of their duty to report and be encouraged to make the report to the local Children's Services. The staff member who has been informed of the situation or observed the situation, has the legal duty to report as well even if the parent(s) make a report. The staff member must follow the Children's Services reporting procedures to report the allegation against another staff member.

If an allegation is made against a staff member, the staff member will be placed on a leave of absence during the course of the investigation.

Appendix C

Guidelines for Writing Documentation

All documentation must be:

- Legible and handwritten by the person who suspected and reported the suspected abuse (never to be typed on a computer)
- Written with a ballpoint pen, not a marker or felt tip, which might smudge/leak
- Factual, based on your observations. Do not document your personal thoughts about how it might have happened or include second- or third-party information.
- Submitted as the original document. Do not re-write your documentation.
- Free of white-out, if you make a mistake, simply cross it out and initial any errors/changes
- Complete with the name(s) and phone number(s) of the individual(s) you spoke with at the Children's Services and/or Police Division;
- Complete with any directions you were given by a Children's Services and/or Police Division
- Signed, dated, placed in an envelope, and ensure the envelope is sealed
- Contact the Company Manager via email to advise that a report has been completed and forwarded.

Written documentation should include the following information:

- Child's name and address
- Observation date and time
- Description of the full incident(s), and/or situation(s) of suspected abuse (FACTS ONLY). Ensure to include dates, times, behaviours, specific words and interactions between the individuals involved
- Description of the physical condition of the child, including any injuries or signs of illness.
- Description of the emotional condition of the child, including any behavioural concerns, as well as the child's response upon disclosure (if applicable). Are there any noticeable changes in the child's behaviour?
- If known, a description of any further risks of abuse to the child, including the access of the alleged abuser to the child
- Describe fully the "action taken" on behalf of the child. Include all instructions and/or advice from the Children's Services or Police Official.
- Documentation regarding a Children's Services record is never to be given to anyone including Police or CS unless a warrant or subpoena is provided. The release of any SRE records will be directed to the Artistic Director (Hanna Fridhed, hanna@swampratexperience.com) and Company Manager (Kayla Erlandson, kayla@swampratexperience.com).

Reporting Procedures for Staff

Staff must follow these procedures when an allegation or disclosure is made against another staff member or when the abuse by the staff member is witnessed:

- Treat the allegations seriously and confidentially.
- Report immediately to SRE management (Company Manager) any allegations of abuse against a staff member.
 - If you are unable to reach the Company Manager, contact the Artistic Director
 - If they are not available, contact the President of the Board Directly

Company Manager: Kayla Erlandson, kayla@swampratexperience.com

Artistic Director: Hanna Fridhed, hanna@swampratexperience.com

President of the Board: Becky Fadden, becky@swampratexperience.com

- The staff member must complete the SRE Child Abuse Reporting form and follow the reporting procedures.
- Staff are required to keep information confidential and not to discuss the allegation with other staff, volunteers, parents or participants. Any questions regarding the incident should be referred to the Artistic Director or President.

Procedures for Management

Management will follow the following procedures:

- Staff will notify the Company Manager of the allegation.
- The Company Manager will notify the Artistic Director and the President of the Board.
- Management will ensure that the appropriate procedures have been followed.
- Management must take immediate steps to ensure that children are safe. This includes taking the necessary steps to ensure that the suspected staff member is not left alone with children and is placed on a leave of absence pending the investigation.
- Any questions and enquiries are to be referred to the Artistic Director and President of the Board.

Appendix D

Legal Responsibility

1. Penalty for Failure to Report

Failure to report is an offence under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Any professional or official who fails to report their suspicion of a child's abuse is liable on conviction to a fine.

2. Protection from Liability

Should civil action be brought against a person who made a report, they will be protected unless they acted maliciously or without reasonable grounds for his/her belief or suspicion.

Appendix E

Confidentiality and Privacy Protection

Confidentiality

It must be emphasized that strict confidentiality is extremely important in these situations/circumstances. Inappropriate disclosure of information about the case, whether it has been "proven" or not can result in a lot of extra pain and suffering for the family involved as well as the child. Open discussion about the case among the staff members or volunteers is not appropriate. Intentional disregard of confidentiality will result in disciplinary measures being taken.

Staff must report that a child is or may need protection even when the information is supposed to be confidential or privileged. (The only exception for "privileged" information is in the relationship between solicitor and a client.)

Privacy Statement

SRE respects your personal privacy. We appreciate your concern about your personal information and believe ensuring the security of your personal information is an important part of our mandate. We strive to protect any personal information you give to SRE (address, name, email address, phone number, etc.). If we ask you to provide us with any personal information, we will tell you the purposes for which we intend to use that information. We will not collect, use, or disclose your personal information without your consent. We will not collect personal information about you unless you choose to provide that information to us. We do not use techniques that collect personal information about you without your knowledge. Your personal information is not lent or sold to anyone for any purpose. It is our intention to fully comply with the “Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act” passed by the Government of Canada in April 2000 – for your benefit and ours.