



BECOMING A CHILD-SAFE SHORT-TERM MISSIONS TEAM

The value God places on children is clear and woven throughout the whole Bible. Children, like all humanity, are created in the image of God and have inalienable worth and dignity. As followers and imitators of Christ, we have a mandate to protect and uphold the rights of children in all settings – including our short-term missions (STM) trips.

Most STM teams will interact with children at some stage during their trip, whether it is in a school, day care centre or in the local community. Although our intention is to help these children, good intentions only translate into good outcomes for children when we are deliberate about thinking through the consequences of our actions – both positive and negative, and commit to being a **child-safe team**.

CHILD-SAFE MISSION TEAM: What does it mean? Being a child-safe team member is a commitment to:

1. Put children's wellbeing first (above the dreams and desires of the team)

This means our actions and activities should be child-centric (focused on children's best interests), rather than team-centric (focused on fulfilling team members' desires for certain experiences).

- ✓ Be willing to work behind to scenes rather than seeking direct contact with children where it is not appropriate.
- ✗ Replace children's long-term caregivers and support networks for the duration of the trip.

2. DO NO HARM

You can avoid doing unintentional harm by: acknowledging that issues are complex and cannot be solved by a STM team, seeking to learn rather than defaulting to assumptions about what children need, upholding clear boundaries when interacting with children, and thinking about the long-term impact of your actions on children.

- ✓ Go on a STM trip with a desire to learn.
- ✗ Do not assume you have all the answers, make decision for children, determine their needs or develop new programs and interventions for them.

3. Use the skills you have to benefit children (but not the skills you don't)

Only engage in activities that you have the relevant qualifications, skills and experience for. Always ask yourself whether it would be appropriate for you to conduct that activity in your own country – if not it is unlikely to be appropriate overseas.

- ✓ Help out with basic administration, IT or maintenance tasks for organisations that work with children.
- ✗ Counsel traumatised children.



4. Enhance children's long-term outcomes

Rather than trying to 'care' for children yourself on a STM trip, use your time to focus on supporting and strengthening the people that can provide the children with stable long-term care – their families, primary caregivers and communities.

- ✓ Volunteer in a family strengthening program, such as helping families set up vegetable gardens.
- ✗ Volunteer in an orphanage.

5. Support and strengthen the capacity of local organisations and children's workers

Rather than replacing the roles of local staff (which can be harmful to children and undermining for local workers), focus on building the capacity of local staff, which will be more beneficial to children in the long-run.

- ✓ Teach children's workers new games and activities they can run in their children's program.
- ✗ Take over the teacher's role.

6. Advocate for children and their families

Learn from your STM experience so when you return home you can be a more informed donor, a better prayer-partner and an advocate for the issues facing children and families.

- ✓ Continue to speak up for children and the organisations working with them upon your return home.
- ✗ Return to normality and do nothing more with the experience or knowledge gained.

7. Abide by child protection policies and procedures at all times

These are in place to keep children safe and minimise the risk of harm – following them demonstrates you value children and are committed to keeping them safe.

- ✓ Only interact with children when there is at least one other adult present.
- ✗ Spend time alone with a child.

8. Report all concerns about children's safety to the appropriate people or authorities

When faced with a concern for a child's safety you may want to intervene and help the child yourself. However, without the local knowledge and understanding you may respond inappropriately and cause more harm than good. Always report to the people that are set up to deal with these concerns.

- ✓ Report the incident to the local child protection agency.
- ✗ Intervene in the situation and try to fix the issue yourself.

