

Southern Cross Kids' Camps Religious Practices Policy

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Drafted by:	Moores	Board Approved:	04 / 2024
Responsible person:	CEO	Scheduled review date:	2 Years

1. Title

Southern Cross Kids' Camps Religious Practices Policy (**SCKC Religious Practices Policy**)

2. Purpose

The purpose of this SCKC Religious Practices Policy is to:

- 2.1 Promote a child safe environment at Southern Cross Kids' Camps (**SCKC**) which is positive, affirming and supportive, where children are safe and feel safe.
- 2.2 Recognise that children who attend SCKC camps are 'community children attending community camps' and not 'church children attending church camps'.
- 2.3 Recognise that most children who attend SCKC camps have a desire to please the adults they respect and who are in a position of supervision and authority.
- 2.4 Recognise that some of the children who attend SCKC camps have come from a "religious" and "abusive" home life and SCKC risk abusing their trust if we ask them to make a personal decision as part of a large group.
- 2.5 Provide a clear message to all SCKC staff that they must not proselytise the children (pressure the children to change their beliefs).
- 2.6 Provide clear expectations of all SCKC staff about what they are allowed to do and are not allowed to do in relation to religious practices.
- 2.7 Provide a clear statement to all staff that they must not carry out any of the 7 religious practices detailed in this Policy.

3. Scope

The SCKC Religious Practices Policy applies to all SCKC staff working with children and young people.

4. Commitment to the safety of children and young people

- 4.1 SCKC is committed to providing children and young people with a safe and nurturing environment in which they can learn and thrive.
- 4.2 SCKC supports, values and respects all children and young people, and is committed to their safety, participation and empowerment.
- 4.3 SCKC has zero tolerance for all forms of child abuse or harm against children and young people, and all allegations will be treated seriously in accordance with our policies and procedures.
- 4.4 SCKC is committed to providing a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.
- 4.5 The safety, welfare and best interests of the child are paramount.

5. Introduction

- 5.1 Southern Cross Kids Camps (**SCKC**) is committed to promoting and protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all children. We have zero tolerance for child abuse and harm.
- 5.2 If any person believes a child is at immediate risk of child abuse or harm, telephone 000.
- 5.3 Our whole organisation, including every Camp and Club is affected by what every other Camp and Club does.
- 5.4 One Camp or Club acting inappropriately could jeopardise SCKC's reputation and the trust child welfare organisations place in us and the opportunities that Camps and Clubs provide to hundreds of children each year.
- 5.5 When staff use the Southern Cross Kids' Camp name, staff have an obligation to follow the policies and principles that accompany the use of that name.
- 5.6 Before reading about the restrictions of the Seven Religious Practices, staff should put themselves in the place of an average child SCKC serve:
 - (a) Imagine that you are eight years old and you have never been to church before. You have never read a Bible or heard the name of Jesus, you've never been prayed for nor have you ever prayed over a meal. You don't know anything about demons or disciples, speaking in tongues or speaking in public. You don't know the difference between anointing oil and car oil, being baptised by the Baptists or having communion with the Charismatics.
 - (b) You are just a kid who has been in eight homes and 10 schools, you've lost your family and you have no friends, you are trying to survive in life. Every night you fall asleep wondering why these painful events have happened to you. One day you find yourself on a bus full of unknown kids, you wind up in an unknown place, surrounded by a bunch of

unknown adults. These adults appear to be very nice but want to share with you in a matter of days, terminology and beliefs that has taken them years to fully understand themselves.

- (c) This is the perspective of many of the children we serve at Camp and Club.

- 5.7 Staff must consider the vast differences between where they are coming from and where children and young people may be coming from.
- 5.8 Staff must also consider that God can, in fact, transform a child with any background, from any perspective, with any level of abuse, with or without US.

6. Expectations on SCKC Staff in relation to religious practices

- 6.1 While SCKC is a faith-based organisation, SCKC staff must not proselytise the children (pressure the children to change their beliefs) who are entrusted to each Camp and Club by the organisation who referred them.
- 6.2 SCKC staff can live out their faith in front of the children and from time to time in SCKC programs can share simple truths of the Bible, explain what the Bible means to us personally, and answer any questions the children may have concerning their own beliefs.
- 6.3 SCKC staff must not dictate that children and young people must comply with their teaching, or coerce children and young people to convert to Christianity.
- 6.4 If a child or young person asks questions of his or her Buddy about the stories taught in J-Zone or in the materials presented, staff can give a personal example or explanation out of Scripture to answer that and any follow up questions.
- 6.5 The Director/s in leadership must train Camp and Club volunteers that they are but one small piece of the puzzle that God is assembling in a child's life. Adult volunteers must not show up with a therapeutic or spiritual agenda to "fix" or "save" the children. Our God is more creative than that.
- 6.6 The first two prohibited religious practices below, are sacraments of the church and are practiced differently in various denominations. Most, if not all of these practices, will be foreign and potentially scary to children who have not participated or seen these things practiced before in their young lives. The prohibition of these practices applies to all staff performing these actions **with the children**.

7. Prohibited Religious Practices

- 7.1 6.1 SCKC staff **ABSOLUTELY MUST NOT** carry out or do any of the following 7 Religious Practices under any circumstances:

(a) Water Baptism

- (i) Because SCKC is privileged to minister to children who are in the care of child welfare organisations, no religious preference can be forced on the children. Water baptism is a sacrament practiced in very different ways in different denominations. It becomes very distinctive as a result.
- (ii) Children who come from certain religious backgrounds may not be able to be baptised by anyone other than a person of their “faith” or not at all until a certain age. For us to baptise them could be a violation of their faith, even if they ask for it.

(b) Communion

- (i) Communion is a sacrament practiced in various denominations in different ways. Sharing communion in the way in which your church does it with a child of Catholic, Muslim or Jewish heritage, could violate their faith or religious practices and is inappropriate.
- (ii) Communion can be shared with buddies and staff during a devotional time in preparation for Camp or Club. It is not practiced with the children involved.

(c) Altar Calls

- (i) Altar calls are normal for many of the churches involved with SCKC and is something recognised as an important part of claiming faith in Jesus Christ for many Christians.
 - (A) Surveys indicate that up to 1/3 of Camp and Club leaders accepted Christ by responding to an altar call. That means that 2/3 found Christ some other way. If 2/3 of Camp and Club leaders accepted Christ in a method other than an altar call, certainly these children can too.
 - (B) There is no record of Jesus holding an altar call and most Christians consider Him to have been successful.
 - (C) Because these children are under State supervision, we cannot force the children to change their beliefs.
- (ii) Altar calls are common for “church kids” at “church camp”.
- (iii) These are “community kids” at a “community camp” so there will be no altar calls.
 - (A) The children have already been victimised. To expect them to comply with what could be considered to be coercive, is not allowed. They are not likely to have much

understanding as to why they are
responding to an altar call.

- (d) “Laying On” of the Hands in Prayer
 - (i) Some children have been hurt by “hands” through physical or sexual abuse. “Touching hands” may not mean the same to them as it means to people whose faith tradition involves the laying on of hands. This practice may be foreign and **scary** to the children. The prohibition of laying on of hands also applies to “prayer lines”, “healing lines” or surrounding a child with a few adults who all lay hands and begin praying.
 - (ii) In your church setting, with a parent present, these may be acceptable, but not at SCKC. Prayer is effective. It is not necessary to lay your hands on them for prayer to be effective.
 - (A) Remember: Once the child leaves Camp and Club and goes home, you will not be there to fully explain all that took place when the child describes how you “laid hands on them” and the full context of what that meant.
- (e) Casting out of Demons
 - (i) Same principles as above in #4.
 - (ii) Children of abuse may display behaviour that is very different from what church volunteers are used to. It does not mean they are possessed. The vast majority of SCKC volunteers are not prepared to enter into the religious practice of “casting out demons”. Most adults consider this to be very scary, how much more so would a child who does not have the same perspective that adults do?
 - (iii) Even if this is a common practice for you in your regular church setting, this **IS NOT** acceptable at SCKC.
 - (iv) Remember, you have no control over how this will be described when the child arrives back home.
- (f) Speaking in Tongues
 - (i) This is a religious practice experienced by only certain denominations, and in most cases, would be foreign and scary to children at SCKC. Again, you have no control over how this will be described when the child arrives back home simply because it is difficult for adults and children to understand.
 - (ii) Volunteers may wish to practice this on their own, but it is not to be done in the presence of children.

- (g) Anointing with Oil
 - (i) a) The patriarchs of old in the Old Testament first practiced anointing with oil. This was done as a symbol of God's blessing being placed upon them. Some churches still perform this practice today in prayers of healing and blessing of individuals.
 - (A) This could be another practice that would be foreign, potentially scary to children and completely misunderstood by others who were not there or who don't understand the Biblical history and practice. It may also be a practice that is in violation of a child's existing religious beliefs.
 - (B) Volunteers may anoint each other, but not the children or in the presence of the children.

7.2 Concluding Words on the Seven Religious Practices

- (a) At a National level, we have told child welfare agencies that we will not perform these Seven Religious Practices at SCKC. If a local Camp and Club decides to perform any of these against the rules, it will make ALL SCKC Camps and Clubs look bad and disingenuous.

If we have said we won't do them – then do not do them!

- (b) Let's remember that God is bigger than these restrictions. God can, in His miraculous ways, do things bigger than we can imagine.
- (c) His love can work in ways more powerful than we can see and in ways that are beyond these policies. Let yourself be amazed at what can happen as you simply prepare yourself and follow Joshua Chapter 4, "when the children ask".
- (d) None of these practices are necessary to have a successful Camp or Club. At the end of the day, remember the thief on the cross in Luke 23:42-43. The thief on the cross did not get baptised, or take communion or do any of these seven practices, yet his life was changed for eternity when he simply asked, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!"
- (e) The thief only had a "moment" with Christ, and his eternity was changed forever.
- (f) We can provide Moments that Matter for kids and they don't have to include these seven practices.

8. Breach of the SCKC Religious Practices Policy

- 8.1 Breaches of this Policy may result in disciplinary action including termination or dismissal from SCKC.

- 8.2 Allegations of breach of this Policy may also constitute a breach of the SCKC Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct and will be managed in accordance with any Child Safety Policy and Procedure, relevant Reportable Conduct Scheme and may be the subject of a referral to Police or other government authority.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The SCKC Religious Practices Policy will be reviewed on an as needs basis, or every two years.