

# SOUTHERN CROSS KIDS' CAMPS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES POLICY

Most of the children who experience SCKC for the first time have never attended a week-long residential camp or SCKC Club. The environment that should pervade at all SCKC linked activities should be positive, affirming and supportive.

SCKC co-operates with Child Welfare Agencies to support their care and safety of the children.

While SCKC is a faith-based organisation, we cannot proselytise the children (pressure the children to change their beliefs) who are entrusted to each Camp and Club by the organisation who referred them. However, we do live out our faith in front of them. From time to time in our programs we will share simple truths of the Bible, explain what the Bible means to us personally, and answer any questions the children may have concerning our own beliefs. We will not dictate that they must comply with our teaching, or coerce them to convert to Christianity.

Most children in this age group and category desire to please the adults they respect. Some of the children we serve have come from a "religious" and "abusive" home life. We risk abusing their trust if we ask them to make a personal decision as part of a large group. We will not do such a thing.

If a child asks questions of his or her Buddy about the stories taught in J-Zone or in the materials presented, the volunteers can give a personal example or explanation out of Scripture to answer that and any follow up questions.

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.

## **Our whole organisation, including every Camp and Club is affected by what every other Camp and Club does.**

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.

When you are using the Southern Cross Kids' Camp name, you have an obligation to follow the policies and principles that accompany the use of that name.

Before reading about the restrictions of the Seven Religious Practices, put yourself in the place of an average child we serve at SCKC.

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.

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.

This is the perspective of many of the children we serve at Camp and Club.

We must understand the vast differences between where we are coming from and where they may be coming from.

We must also understand that God can, in fact, transform a child with any background, from any perspective, with any level of abuse, with or without US.

You do not need any of the **Seven Religious Practices** to take place in order for Godly transformation to take place.

## SEVEN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Things volunteers **ABSOLUTELY MUST NOT DO** at SCKC

The first two 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 the **adult volunteers** performing these actions **with the children**.

### 1. NO WATER BAPTISM

- 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.
- 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.

### 2. NO COMMUNION

- 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.
- 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.

### 3. NO ALTAR CALLS

- 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.

- 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.
- There is no record of Jesus holding an altar call and most Christians consider Him to have been successful.
- Because these children are under State supervision, we cannot force the children to change their beliefs.
- **Altar calls are common for “church kids” at “church camp”.**  
**These are “community kids” at a “community camp” so there will be no altar calls.**
- 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.

#### 4. NO ‘LAYING ON’ OF HANDS IN PRAYER

- 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. 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.
- 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.

#### 5. NO CASTING OUT OF DEMONS

- Same principles as above in #4.
- 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?
- Even if this is a common practice for you in your regular church setting, this **IS NOT** acceptable at SCKC.
- Remember, you have no control over how this will be described when the child arrives back home.

#### 6. NO SPEAKING IN TONGUES

- 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.
- Volunteers may wish to practice this on their own, but it is not to be done in the presence of children.

#### 7. NO ANNOINTING WITH OIL

- 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.

- 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.
- Volunteers may anoint each other, but not the children or in the presence of the children.

### **Concluding Words on the Seven Religious Practices**

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!

**Remember this is not a “church camp for church kids”; this is a  
“community camp for community kids”.**

Let's remember that God is bigger than these restrictions. God can, in His miraculous ways, do things bigger than we can imagine.

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”.

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!”

The thief only had a “moment” with Christ, and his eternity was changed forever.

We can provide Moments that Matter for kids and they don't have to include these seven practices.

### **What can you do about faith at SCKC?**

We have listed the practices that cannot be done. Here are some areas where faith can be evident at Camp and Club.

### **Question Evangelism – “When the Children Ask”**

Joshua 4

1. “After crossing the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua saying, “Take for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge

tonight...Let this be a sign among you, so that **when your children ask** later, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' then you shall 'tell them'...."

This is our first model, **when the children ask** about biblical, spiritual, or faith beliefs, then we can answer their questions. We can't force our beliefs, but we can answer questions.

2. Our second model is Genesis 33:13-14

Jacob was returning with his entire family and belongings; it was a very large group on the move. Esau met them part way in the wilderness to finish the trip with them. Jacob said to Esau: "...go on ahead, **I will go at the pace of the children.**" He recognised the children could not travel as fast as the adults, so he went at a slower pace with them. Certainly God can do miracles and allow the children to have accelerated spiritual knowledge, but the majority of children we have seen, need to go at a slower pace, even for their spiritual growth and understanding.

Enough biblical material is shared in the program that if the child is interested and they ask questions, then the adult volunteers can answer those questions.

The key to Question Evangelism is:

**When the children ask**, we will answer their questions, **at their pace.**

How can we expect these children, who come from a spiritual vacuum, devoid of many religious experiences, to move at the same 'spiritual' pace that we are accustomed to?

The volunteers must be trained to look for 'teachable moments' and be ready 'when the child asks' to give an account of their Christian faith and share what Christ's love has done for them. It may happen at the most unexpected times in the program! When we follow a relationship model, we build relationships with the kids through the Camp and Club experiences, and when they "ask" then we answer their questions. It works!

## TEACHABLE MOMENTS

There are many ways to share the love of Christ with others during the SCKC programs.

### Finding Teachable Moments

**Prayer can be offered at mealtimes.** This is a very non-threatening way to encourage the kids to begin to pray to God and thank Him for something very important to them - food.

**30/30 Time.** Many children become more reflective when they are in a quiet restful situation. The children may "open up" and want to talk more during these times than when they are busy hurrying about being distracted by lots of activities.

**Camper Activity Books & Club Books.** During down times, at the end of the day these books can be fun, insightful, a source of encouragement, and a faith builder for kids. Many times the material will promote questions on the part of children, and the volunteers can then respond appropriately.

**During Activity Centres & Events.** These times are the bedrock of SCKC relationship building, and can accomplish impactful things with the child.

Wise volunteers will LOOK for ways to relate something very ordinary, i.e. if an animal farm comes to camp “it’s amazing how farm animals are so different. God must have known what He was doing when he made them”. This becomes a **‘teachable moment.’**

**Singing Songs.** Music can be a “healing salve” to a wounded soul.

Songs like “I Will Change Your Name,” give a child hope that something good will come out of it.

Songs can replace worrisome thoughts and fears that children are plagued with because of their circumstances.

Psalms 40: 1-3 closes with this phrase “and He put a new song in my mouth—a song of praise to our God.”

Explaining the meaning of the words to Christian songs can help the child understand the meaning as they sing the song. It is important to note that song choice is important. Ensure that songs can be readily understood by the kids and have appropriate wording for non-church children. Let us not put words or concepts in their mouths that they do not understand or “own”.

**Bible Reading.** Reading God’s Word to the children and explaining the words can be ‘teachable moments.’ Caution: if the child cannot read, do not force the issue; simply read the verses for him/her. Buddies/leaders should be able to interpret what the scripture is saying to make it meaningful for the child. A volunteer sharing their favourite scriptures is a powerful way to share individual faith and the scriptures that mean the most in their lives.

**Review of the Day.** At the end the day or your time together, it can be a powerful moment to review what has happened. A volunteer could ask, “What were some of your favourite things about today?” OR “What are some of the things we learned today?” Let the children reflect on their feelings about the day. You may hear “I’ll always remember where I caught my FIRST fish!” or “I learned to hammer in nails today at woodworking.” These are memories and skills that the volunteers can use to encourage the child in many ways.

Volunteers should be encouraged to find ways to incorporate into the conversation an appreciation for God’s provisions of the day or how good God has been to them.

Saying a brief prayer before bedtime at camp can bring peace and calm to a frightened child. Asking God to quiet us and help us sleep can be a comforting thought for a child who is “afraid to go to sleep” or “afraid of the dark.”

This is called directed or guided conversation, but it is not forced conversation! It empowers the child and lets them know they are worthy of being listened to and affirmed by an adult.