

MINOR PARTICIPATION IN SHORT-TERM CHURCH PARTNERSHIP TRIPS

Purpose:

Recognize the increased responsibility of international travel with minors and ensure that World Orphans and affiliated church partners are working together as well and as clearly as possible to make the best decisions regarding travel with minors.

Overview and Ministry Context

At World Orphans, our ministry is built upon the foundation of wholistic care for vulnerable children, empowering the local church, and practicing wise stewardship. We believe that short-term church partnership trips should always bless, protect, and build up the local community without placing unnecessary burdens on local church partners or exposing vulnerable individuals to avoidable harm.

Because we hold the safety of both our global partners and our traveling families in the highest regard, World Orphans has established a definitive framework for minor participation on international trips. This policy ensures that all team members can fully participate in short-term missions while safeguarding the physical and emotional well-being of young children.

In the process of building Church Partnership trip teams, we rely heavily on the discernment of the US church partner leader. As accredited members of [Mission Excellence Global](#), we ask our church partners to take extra measures of thought when selecting minors to travel (see our [Best Practices for Selecting Your Team](#)) and extra measures of caution when traveling with minors.

Core Directives

1. Age Restrictions

- **Children Under Age 5:** Children under the age of five (5) are **strictly prohibited** from traveling on World Orphans short-term church partnership trips.

2. Special Approvals for Young Children (Ages 6–12)

- **Approval Process:** Children between the ages of six (6) and twelve (12) require explicit, **special approval** from World Orphans Mobilization and hosting international staff before they can be added to a team roster. If you'd like your child to join you on a Church Partnership trip, please notify your Church Partnership Director, who will then discuss with the WO Mobilization Department.
- **Chaperone Requirement:** Minors in this age bracket must travel with at least one (1) parent or legal guardian for the entire duration of the trip.

3. Parental Consent & Documentation Requirements

- Parents should consult with their child's pediatrician prior to travel to discuss the potential health risks specifically relating to traveling on a World Orphans church partnership trip.
- Parents should also refer to [CDC Guidelines](#) for travel health and safety recommendations for children.
- All minor participants (under age 18) require documented parental consent to travel internationally. Documentation rules adapt strictly to who is traveling:
 - **Both Parents Traveling:** If both parents are traveling alongside the minor, no additional consent paperwork is required.
 - **One Parent Traveling:** If only one parent is traveling, the non-traveling parent must completely fill out and **notarize** the official [World Orphans Minor Consent to Travel](#) form prior to departure.
 - **No Parent Traveling (Ages 13–17 Only):** Minors aged 13–17 traveling without either parent must have **both** non-traveling parents complete and **notarize** the [World Orphans Minor Consent to Travel](#) form.

4. Travel Best Practices and Responsibilities

- The team leader should make time to intentionally process/debrief with minors in addition to team debrief time.
- Minors should always be supervised, but should not be alone with an unrelated adult. As a best practice, maintain the rule of three. At least three individuals should be together when minors are on a team. (Ex: when visiting a church, a minor shouldn't be out of sight of at least one adult on the team and two adults in total.)
- Minors will room only with their traveling parent(s) or designated guardian.
- The team will also discuss [World Orphans Child Protection Policy](#) to safeguard any minors on the team as well as children the team interacts with in the field.

Ministry Rationale

World Orphans has enacted the above guidelines across three core areas of operational concern:

1. Prioritization of Health and Safety

- **Immature Immune Systems:** Children under five, and particularly infants, face exceptional health risks. Many infants are medically too young to receive foundational vaccinations against highly prevalent diseases in our ministry areas—including Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Measles, and Polio. Furthermore, destinations like Ethiopia and Kenya mandate a Yellow Fever vaccine for entry, a vaccine that cannot legally or safely be administered to infants under nine (9) months old. Young children are much more likely than adults to suffer significant symptoms and even death if infected.

- **Defenselessness Against Vectors:** Young children cannot use standard adult chemical insect repellents to defend against severe mosquito-borne illnesses like Dengue, Zika, Malaria, and Chikungunya. Statistically, children are significantly more susceptible to severe clinical illness and death resulting from these tropical diseases.
- **Inherent Security Environments:** The communities World Orphans serves often present elevated safety risks, including volatile political environments, kidnapping, high crime rates, and active gang activity. All trip participants must possess the developmental awareness to remain keenly observant of their surroundings and immediately follow complex instructions in an emergency situation.
- **Limited Pediatric Emergency Infrastructure:** Access to specialized pediatric intensive care units (PICUs) that handle pediatric emergencies may be limited or severely delayed due to urban traffic, logistics, or language barriers.

2. Protection of Team Dynamics and the Trip Experience

- **Parental Engagement:** Short-term trips require spiritual, emotional, and physical presence. Parents of young children naturally have to split their focus between parenting and the group's objectives, preventing them from fully engaging in trip activities.
- **Disruption of Reflective Spaces:** Children, especially young children, can inadvertently create a distracting environment during critical, sensitive activities. This includes team debriefs, complex cultural situations, and intimate conversations with global partners, which impacts the entire team's ability to engage, learn, build relationships, and grow in Christ.
- **Perception of Priority:** Bringing a young child can give local communities and hosts the false impression that we are prioritizing the personal comfort or needs of team members over the acute needs of the local partners we came to serve.

3. Physiological Strain of Culture Shock

- **Disruption of Routine:** Culture shock strains even mature adults, but it acts as a force multiplier on young bodies. Radical adjustments to jet lag, unfamiliar foods, uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, oppressive heat, and long, grueling days severely wear down a person's ability to navigate unique, stress-inducing travel scenarios.
- **Compounded Vulnerability:** These challenges are severely multiplied in small children who rely heavily on routines, predictable diets, and significantly more sleep than adults to maintain emotional and physical health.

If you have questions or concerns about Minor Participation in World Orphans Church Partnership Trips, please reach out to your Church Partnership Director to discuss further.