FOCUS
Volunteer Handbook

Revised April 2021
Volunteer Cheat Sheet

- We need for volunteers to help provide a warm, inclusive environment.
- We ask that you be flexible, attentive, and positive when interacting with our kids.
- It is very important that everyone at FOCUS programs follows the Rule of 3. This means that you should never be by yourself with a child. If you need to leave the room with a child, grab another volunteer or staff!
- It is also important that you remember to keep all child information private. This includes name, age, medical info, date of birth, and pictures. Please do not discuss our kids outside of the program.
- Please be receptive to input and instructions from our staff. And please feel free to ask us questions if you are ever confused about anything.
- When you are interacting with our kids, try to always be engaging them through the activity that you are currently doing.
- If a kid is not participating, challenge them to participate initially. They may just need a nudge to get involved. We will not force our kids to participate but we do try to get them involved in all activities.
- Make sure you are talking to them, asking them questions, even if they can’t talk back to you.
- Speak with them on a level that is appropriate for their age – no baby talk for older kids, teens, and young adults.
- If our kids do need help participating, there are a couple of ways we would love for you to engage them. First is through verbal encouragement and praise. We want them to feel supported, especially if they are trying something for the first time. If a child needs physical help to do an activity, we practice the “hand-over-hand” method. The volunteer’s hand goes over the child’s hand so that the child is still getting the experience of the activity. We ask that you never completely do an activity for a child – we want them to get the experience.
- If you notice any negative behaviors that a child is exhibiting, we ask that you try to redirect that energy into the current activity. If this does not work, please let the FOCUS staff know so that we can work with the child to come up with a solution. If a behavior plan is put into place, we ask that you help us follow it.
- If you are bringing your own food for an activity (day camp, respite, etc.) we ask that you do not bring any nuts or nut-products.
- If you are not feeling well, we ask that you stay home from the activity. Many of our kids have weaker immune systems and they may not be able to fight off your bug. Please let us know as soon as possible if you don’t feel well!
- We occasionally need volunteers to help with family or parent events. Some of these roles might include helping register/check-in families at an event, helping set-up for an event or tear down after a program, helping serve food or take pictures during an event.

COVID-19 Safety Procedures

- Volunteers should wear appropriate face coverings over the mouth and nose while at the FOCUS program except when eating or drinking. This includes when campers are not around and only staff/volunteers are present.
- Volunteers will be asked to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 in the days leading up to their program: check with FOCUS on what the requirements are for the specific program.
- Volunteers should follow all other COVID-19 safety procedures communicated to them – FOCUS will continue to release information and guidance for programs as officials release new information to the public.
Purpose of Handbook

We are so excited you have joined the FOCUS family. Our motto “comfort, hope, fun, equip” guides everything we do. FOCUS strives to provide the best programs and volunteers are a huge part of that! We are so grateful that you are dedicating your time and energy to our families. This Volunteer Handbook will provide information outlining FOCUS’s history, policies, and safety regulations. Volunteers should utilize this handbook as a reference throughout their time as a volunteer with FOCUS.

Mission, Staff, Background Information

Mission
Our mission is to embrace and equip families of children with disabilities to make everyday life better.

Meeting the Need
FOCUS began in 1983 when two medically fragile children shared a hospital room. These children had no specific diagnosis and their parents had little support or resources. These parents became friends and found comfort, hope, and information together. They founded FOCUS to help other parents navigate the world of children with different needs. Through the years, FOCUS expanded to offer multiple programs to children, teens, and young adults with disabilities AND to their families.

FOCUS reaches over 4,500 families in and around metro Atlanta. We listen, comfort, and care. We inform and educate. We organize fun, accessible programs for children, teens, young adults, and families. We offer grants for equipment that makes everyday life a little easier. FOCUS depends on our community of volunteers to implement programs that help us accomplish our mission.

Our Families
When a child is diagnosed with a disability or medical condition, parents are thrown into a new world of medical specialists, frequent hospitalizations, and ongoing therapies. They might watch their child undergo painful medical procedures or hear a prognosis that sounds hopeless. FOCUS serves as a hand and informational support during this time. As the children grow; FOCUS continues to help families navigate the world of having a child with disabilities as well as provide recreational and family activities.

Our kids are all unique and super in their own way. At our program you may see varying physical abilities like a speed racer in a power chair, a spectacular dancer using a walker to assist them, or a child who just needs a hand to complete their superstar task. At FOCUS, we celebrate our kids and their unique differences. Our goal is to provide them with a safe, fun, and adapted program. Thank you for helping us make that happen!

FOCUS Programs

Comfort
- Monthly support groups in various locations
- Hospital Visits
- Bereavement Support
- Extra Special Saturday respite childcare

Hope
- Informational Workshops and Annual Education Conference
- Quarterly Newsletters
- Connection to resources
Fun
Summer Day Camp for special kids and siblings
Family Activities including Six Flags, GA Aquarium, Holiday Party with Santa
Family Overnight Camp
FAST Fins Adapted Swim Team
Overnight Camp for teens and young adults
Teen and Young Adult social group
Medically Fragile Events including Boo-B-Que and Valentine Party

Equip
Medical equipment assistance
Loaned beach chairs, adapted strollers and other equipment

Find Us Online!
Web site www.focus-ga.org
Instagram and Twitter @ComfortHopeFunEquip
Facebook https://www.facebook.com/FOCUSGA/

Role of Volunteer and Responsibilities

Volunteers are a very important part of our programs! When you become a volunteer, you become part of the FOCUS family and take part in providing comfort, hope, and fun to our families. Depending on the program, you may fill a variety of roles. But most important at all of our programs, we ask that you help us in keeping our kids and families safe!

To help with this, we ask that you carefully read this manual and all of our polices. Should you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to Brian Darden, Program Director, at 770-234-9111 or brian@focus-ga.org.

Attendance
We rely on volunteer help at all our programs to make them a success. This means that we expect volunteers to be consistent and dependable. It is very important that you attend programs you sign up for and show up on time ready to go. If you are going to be late, please let your FOCUS contact know. If a volunteer is absent for three (3) programs, the volunteer will not be permitted to sign up for future events.

The Rule of 3
FOCUS follows the “3 Person Rule,” and requires that all volunteers follow this rule as well. This means that volunteers and staff should never be by themselves with a FOCUS child. There must always be at least 2 staff/volunteers present. If a child asks you to leave the room, make sure to ask another staff/volunteer to join you. This rule is very important at all FOCUS programs.

Representing the Organization
Volunteers understand that their first priority is to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for all participants. Volunteers will portray a positive role model for families, including but not limited to, maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, honesty, courtesy, tact, and maturity. FOCUS will not tolerate conduct that interferes with operations, discredits FOCUS, or is offensive to participants.

Open Door Policy
FOCUS maintains a positive and pleasant environment for all volunteers and has an open-door policy. Please utilize this and come to staff with any program related questions or concerns. Bring your concerns about safety, medical needs, or behavior to FOCUS Staff. You are our extra set of hands, eyes, and ears. We recognize that interacting with our families can sometimes challenge volunteers emotionally, FOCUS staff is here to support you. This includes if you are
uncomfortable in working with an assigned child or group, or if you are sick or injured during a program. We do not want you to be in an uncomfortable situation or not receive proper care while at a FOCUS program.

**Dress Code**
Appropriate attire is expected of all volunteers at all times. Clothing should be appropriate for a family atmosphere and volunteers should remember that they are representing FOCUS. We ask that you wear comfortable clothing that you don’t mind getting a bit messy. For most programs, we will provide you with a FOCUS Volunteer t-shirt. We also recommend closed-toe shoes for your safety and comfort. Here are some general guidelines:

- No clothing/products advertising alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- No clothing/products with offensive or derogatory language
- No clothing/products offensive to ethnic, minority, or religious groups
- No low-cut pants or shirts
- No short shorts or skirts

**Sign-In**
When you arrive to the program, please check in with FOCUS staff. They will have a sign-in sheet and nametag ready for you. Be sure to ask FOCUS staff if there are any tasks or specific positions we need you to fill. We ask for security that you wear your nametag at all times, along with participants and staff. Make sure to check out with FOCUS staff when you leave.

**Personal Belongings**
Unless told otherwise, all you need to bring is a smile and a positive attitude! If you need to bring anything else, we will let you know in an email ahead of time. At our day camps, respite, and a few other programs, we will ask you to pack a lunch. Please do not pack peanut butter or any other nut products, as some of participants have severe allergies. Please do not bring any valuables with you, as many program locations do not have a secure place to lock them.

**Visitors**
Friends and relatives may not accompany you to a program unless approved by a FOCUS staff member ahead of time. This includes furry friends!

**Cell Phones and Social Media**
We want programs to be engaging, active, and fun for families and volunteers. Please put your phone on silent and refrain from using it while you are volunteering. If you have an emergency and need to contact someone, please let a FOCUS staff member know so you can step out.

Cell phones should not be used to take pictures. Pictures and names of campers should not be shared on social media for any reason. You are welcome to follow FOCUS on social media to stay up to date. We invite you to post photos of **yourself** and tag FOCUS! We just ask that it does not include participants to protect their private information.

**Community Service Forms & Volunteer Hours**
We are happy to sign your volunteer service hours forms or provide you with one on FOCUS letterhead. Please ask a FOCUS staff member to do so at the completion of a program or email the form to your FOCUS staff contact at any time.

**Confidentiality and HIPAA**
You will be working closely with our campers and their families, and may learn information that should be kept private. It is very important that you keep all of this information confidential, and do not discuss it outside of camp.
Types of information you should not share: name, date of birth, age, diagnosis, medical information, pictures of campers, contact information.

FOCUS abides by HIPAA policies and procedures as they relate to our individuals and their families as closely as we can. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) is a federal law that sets a national standard to protect medical records and other personal health information. This includes any information, whether oral, written, or electronic received with or about parties involved. The following is considered protected information about patients: names, addresses, dates, telephone/fax numbers, social security numbers, medical record numbers, patient account numbers, insurance plan numbers, vehicle information, license numbers, medical equipment numbers, photographs, fingerprints, e-mail/ Internet addresses.

HIPAA allows us to share patient information for the purpose of TREATMENT (providing care to patients), PAYMENT (getting paid for caring for patients), and OPERATIONS (normal business activities). Outside categories involve participant consent before information is shared.

Protecting the confidential health information of patients is the responsibility of everyone involved in the treatment and healing process, including volunteers. Be sensitive to patient confidential information. By completing and signing the handbook agreement, a volunteer agrees to uphold HIPAA as it relates to FOCUS families.

Change of Contact Information
You are an important part of the FOCUS community. It is essential to keep our records accurate in order to contact you. Let us know if there are any changes to your personal information including: address, email, phone number, or name. We primarily communicate through emails so be on the lookout for various opportunities.

Abuse Prevention
FOCUS will take every precaution to ensure a child’s safety and will commit to reporting any instance of child abuse or neglect through the proper channels. FOCUS conducts criminal background checks on all employees and volunteers 18 years and older. All background information is kept confidential.

The Official Code of Georgia 19-7-5 mandates the reporting of child abuse when anyone has cause to believe or cause to suspect that a child has been abused. Mandated reporters are required to make a report when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is a victim of child abuse. Mandated reporters must not try to determine whether abuse has happened. They are not investigators and should not ask questions about what happened, who did it, and so forth beyond reaching the threshold of reasonable cause to suspect that the child has been abused.

If a volunteer suspects that a child has been the victim of abuse, he/she should immediately share this information with a FOCUS staff member in a private manner.

Professionalism and Relationships with Participants
Volunteers are prohibited from contacting children and their parents outside of activities sponsored by FOCUS. Even if you bond with a family or child, do not share contact information. If parents talk to you about their problems or illnesses, be a listener! It goes a long way. If you are uncomfortable feel free to direct parents/guardians to FOCUS staff.

Before touching children’s belongings (including wheelchairs) make sure to ask for permission. Many of the items they keep are an extension of their bodies.

Volunteers are expected to maintain high ethical and professional standards in interactions with families. While it is acceptable to express affection for participants with a simple hug, FOCUS volunteers must be careful to not act or touch
an individual in any way that could be misconstrued by the child, parents, peers, or anyone else. Be sure to maintain personal space, kids are welcome to sit next to you but not in your lap.

**Prohibited Violence**
FOCUS does not tolerate violence in our programs. Violence includes physical altercations, coercion, pushing or shoving, horseplay, intimidation, stalking, and threats of violence. Inappropriate comments about violence may result in immediate dismissal.

FOCUS strictly prohibits weapons and even weapon-like toys at all programs. FOCUS has a no-tolerance policy in regard to weapons, firearms, mace, knives of any sort, brass knuckles, martial arts equipment, clubs or bats, explosives, or weapon-like toys or instruments. Weapons include any object that could reasonably be used to inflict serious bodily injury.

**Harassment**
FOCUS strives to protect the rights and dignity of each individual it serves and of every volunteer who assists in providing services. FOCUS will maintain a fair and productive environment where participants will treat each other with respect, dignity, and courtesy, free of unlawful and improper harassment. FOCUS defines the term harassment as unwelcome or unsolicited verbal, physical, or sexual conduct that is a term or condition of engagement, used as the basis for volunteer decisions, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

FOCUS expects volunteers to treat everyone they meet through programs with courtesy and respect. We will not tolerate threatening, abusive, or vulgar language from individuals while they are at a FOCUS function. Please be sure to use appropriate language and topics of conversation while at FOCUS programs. In addition, volunteers should be aware that it is important to respect the religious and cultural differences of our families.

**Smoking Policy**
In order to provide a safe and healthy environment for our families, FOCUS prohibits smoking inside its programs. Breaks for smoking may only occur with a FOCUS staff’s permission. Volunteers who violate these rules may not be asked to future programs.

**Substance Abuse or Illegal Substances**
FOCUS commits to protecting the safety, health, and well-being of all individuals in programs. Alcohol abuse and drug use pose a significant threat to these goals. FOCUS has established a drug-free workplace program that balances respect for individuals with the need to maintain an alcohol and drug-free environment. This policy recognizes that volunteer involvement with alcohol and other drugs can be very disruptive; adversely affect the quality of work and performance of volunteers; pose serious health risks to users, other volunteers, and particularly FOCUS children and families; and have a negative impact on productivity and morale. Volunteers should not use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs during programs. If a volunteer violates the policy, the volunteer will be asked to leave the program.

**Anti-discrimination Policy**
FOCUS has a strong commitment that all volunteers should enjoy an environment free from all forms of discrimination. We welcome people of all race, color, sex/gender, religion, age, national origin, disability, handicap, sexual orientation, citizenship status, veteran status, marital status, or any other protected category. Any person who commits such a violation may be subject to personal liability, as well as dismissal by FOCUS. FOCUS is a diverse organization and acts on respect for various groups, your beliefs may differ from other volunteers, participants, or staff so be mindful during conversations.
Program Safety

Safety Regulations and Emergency Procedures
We strive to keep FOCUS programs safe for our participants. This requires everyone is accountable for identifying and responding to risks. FOCUS has procedures in place for emergencies.

Medical Attention: The supervisor or nurse should call 911 and provide the address of the building, her/his name, and the nature of the problem.

Fire Drills: FOCUS staff should know the locations of fire exits, alarms, and extinguishers. Employees and volunteers should observe the following procedures, particularly in programs where children are involved:

- Have a ready plan to transport non-ambulatory children out of the building quickly, such as the use of wagons, blankets, or small cribs.
- At the sound of the alarm, get the sign-in sheet and begin grouping families/children together. Keep groups together while leaving the room to go outside.
- Call for help if needed.
- One employee should carry the sign-in sheet, check for any remaining children, and leave the room last.
- Outside the building, she/he should take attendance, and no one should leave the group.
- Supervisory and nursing staff should assist as needed.

Fire Prevention: Volunteers should not use extension cords or devices which might over-extend electrical capacity. Neither should they use matches or a lighter when working with children. They will report any faulty electrical equipment or outlets to the onsite supervisor.

Severe Weather: Bad weather or hazardous commuting conditions may occasionally make it impossible for volunteers to report to activities on time. However, volunteers should make a diligent effort to report to work when conditions have improved. If a volunteer determines that she/he is unable to report to the program because of the conditions, she/he should inform a FOCUS employee as soon as possible. If it becomes necessary to shut down the activity due to weather or other emergency, FOCUS will make every effort to notify volunteers. In the event of severe weather, such as a tornado, FOCUS staff will evacuate all participants to the center of the building and take cover against the walls. One employee will check for any remaining children, leave the room last, and take attendance upon regrouping. If weather compromises the health and safety of families at a FOCUS program, staff will end the event early.

Bomb Threat/Gas Leak: If FOCUS receives a bomb threat, staff will evacuate all participants in the same manner as the fire drill plan.

Lost Child: Report the missing child to the supervisor. The supervisor and any available employees or volunteers will begin an active search. If the child cannot be located, the supervisor will call the child’s parents and 911.

Emergency Telephone Numbers
FOCUS Office 770-234-9111
Police Department (Emergency) 911
Fire Department 911

You will be provided an emergency contact for site specific programs.
Incident Reports
As a means of risk management, we ask that you help us maintain Incident Reports. If you encounter or experience anything ‘of note’ (an accident, injury, behavior problem, almost-accident, equipment malfunction, etc.), please let FOCUS staff know. It is important that we document all incidents that occur at programs. If you are questioning if you should report an incident, you should! We will ask you to give a description of what happened, which may be used in a written report.

Contagious Diseases
In order to protect our families, staff, and other volunteers from possible exposure to any infectious diseases. Please do not come in to volunteer if you have: fever, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, upper respiratory infection, persistent cough, draining sore, chicken pox, shingles, measles, flu. If you are not feeling well please stay home, and notify your FOCUS contact of your absence.

Participants must also be symptom free from any communicable conditions to attend FOCUS program. Because diseases can spread from child to child, from child to care provider, and from provider to child, FOCUS uses universal precautions including: hand washing, wearing gloves, and coughing into the elbow.

Please email brian@focus-ga.org with any questions you may have regarding the implementation of safety protocols to prevent contagious diseases at camp, including COVID-19.

Childcare Programs
Do not punish a child, if a child’s behavior becomes difficult and you are unsure of what to do, please consult a FOCUS staff member at once. Often staff take turns with children that are high energy and require high patience. No care provider may use physical discipline in any way for behavior management of FOCUS participants.

Volunteers will use positive guidance techniques including redirection, anticipation, of and elimination of potential problems, positive reinforcement, support and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, criticism, or humiliating discipline techniques.

Please refrain from picking children up and rough housing them. Many of our children have physical limitations or are fragile, even if they may not appear so.

You may request to work with certain ages. If you prefer to work with little ones feel free to request younger groups. If you prefer siblings (those without disabilities) just ask!

Do not share food with children. Many of our kids have severe and life-threatening food allergies. Children should ONLY eat what parents have packed them. We also ask when you pack/eat food that it is nut free.

Keep an eye out for wandering children! We have some great explorers but for the safety of our children, if you see a child wander off especially during the drop off or pick up times, lunch, or recreation alert FOCUS staff.

Guide our children and lead by example. Do not drag them along. FOCUS staff and volunteers cannot physically make a child do anything – but a little encouragement goes a long way.

Stay with the group and the assigned caregiver. Our insurance regulations require that the trained caregivers supervise all activities as well as handling the feeding, diapering, and toileting. DO NOT accompany a child away from direct supervision or a trained caregiver. A volunteer should never be alone with a child for any reason.

Dismissal
The highest level of service for our families and children is expected at all times. It is an important challenge and responsibility. The following will not be tolerated and will be treated as a misconduct and cause for immediate dismissal from FOCUS programs:

- Volunteers who use alcoholic beverages, marijuana, or any illegal drugs or substances while at FOCUS programs
- A volunteer using medication which affects his or her ability to perform his/her responsibilities and thus jeopardizes the safety of participants.
- Volunteers who maintain a negative attitude.
- Voluntary discontinuance or abandonment of required duties during volunteer period.

Thank You!!!

We appreciate your commitment to FOCUS. We hope that you enjoy the journey with us to provide comfort, hope, and fun to families in and round metro Atlanta. FOCUS strives to exceed expectations and can only do so with the help of extraordinary volunteers. You are a vital resource for this organization. We could not reach as many families without the assistance and compassion of members like you. Thank you for being a part of the FOCUS family!
Handbook Agreement

I acknowledge that I have been given a copy, or access to a copy, of the FOCUS Volunteer Handbook.

I understand that this Handbook summarizes the volunteer guidelines, and that it is provided solely for my information. By signing this agreement, I am indicating that I understand the contents of the handbook and will follow procedures outlined while volunteering with FOCUS.

I understand that volunteering with FOCUS is not for a specified term and is at mutual consent. Accordingly, FOCUS or I can terminate the volunteer relationship at will, with or without cause, at any time.

I understand that the statements contained in the Handbook are not intended to create any contractual or other legal obligations. I also understand that FOCUS may modify or rescind any of its policies, or practices described in the Handbook at any time, except for those policies required by law.

I acknowledge that it is my responsibility to read and become familiar with the contents of the Handbook.

Volunteer Name (Printed) ____________________________________________

Volunteer Signature __________________________________________________________________ Date ______________________

If volunteer is under the age of 18:

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) ____________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature __________________________________________________________________ Date ______________________