

Grace Community Church Child Protection Policy

Mission

It is the goal of Grace Community Church to provide a safe environment for the spiritual development as well as physical and emotional well-being of all children and youth participating in church activities. This policy is designed to help encourage proper relationships, protect youth and adult volunteers, and to keep all parties above reproach. All volunteers must be given a copy of this policy and are expected to comply with it.

Terms

1. Children in this document will be defined as persons from birth through the 6th grade (about 12 years old).
2. Youth in this document are defined as persons from 7th-12th grade (about 13 to 18 years old).
3. This policy applies to all ministries involving children and youth at GCC. This includes, but is not limited to, Sunday morning classes, AWANA, special events, etc.

Selection of Volunteers

1. Adult Volunteers

- a. Adult volunteers must submit and clear the following:
 - i. Read the "Grace Community Church Child Protection Policy."
 - ii. Fill out the "Children's and Youth Ministry Volunteer Application (for adults)"
 - iii. Submit fingerprints using the "Request for Live Scan Service."
 - iv. Complete the Mandatory Reporter Training for Volunteers (every 2 years)
- b. All volunteer applicants are required to regularly attend Grace Community Church for a minimum of six months. Preference is given to members of the church.
- c. Applications and Live Scan results will be kept confidential. Information on applications will only be shared with staff as needed, and Live Scan results will only be viewed by the "Custodian of Records," as required by law.
- d. The Pastor, Youth Ministry Director and Children's Ministry Director (or qualified church staff members) will review all applications, check at least two references and determine whether the applicant is suitable to volunteer.
- e. No person will be allowed to work with children or youth who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children.

2. Youth Volunteers

- a. Read the "Grace Community Church Child Protection Policy."
- b. Must complete the "Grace Community Church Youth Volunteer Application."
- c. Must be at least 7th grade
- d. Must be at least 16 years old to volunteer in the nursery AND

- i. They have written permission of their parent(s) and the Children’s Ministry Director, and
 - ii. Have taken a suitable child safety training course
 - iii. Agrees to always be under the strict supervision of a qualified adult
- e. The Youth Ministry Director and Children’s Ministry Director (or qualified church staff members) will review all applications, check two references, and determine whether the applicant is suitable to volunteer.
- f. Youth volunteers must always serve under the direct supervision of an adult volunteer.

Policies and Procedures

1. Rooms

- a. Doors will remain unlocked when children are present.
- b. Blinds will be open.
- c. An adult will never be in a room alone with a child that is not his/her own.
- d. A Youth volunteer will never be in a room alone with a child that is not a sibling.
 - i. Youth must always be supervised when children (other than siblings) are present.

2. Numbers of Volunteers

- a. A minimum of 2 volunteers must be present in all classes from birth to 12th grade.
- b. Ideally, there should never be more than 12 students per adult.

3. Classroom Discipline

- a. Volunteers need to clearly define the rules to students.
- b. Use Galatians 5:22-23 (fruit of the Spirit) to guide children to correct behavior
- c. Consequences for disobeying
 - i. Verbal warning
 - ii. Move to different seat or time out
 - iii. Pull child aside to discuss behavior
 - iv. Call parent or escort child to parent
 - If behavior continues for more than one class, a parent may be asked to sit in with the child during the next class, if needed.
- d. If a child needs to be restrained, a volunteer may do so, but must use only the amount of force required to keep the child from harming himself or others. A bear hug or taking a child by the hand or arm are appropriate restraining measures.
- e. Spanking or hitting are not acceptable under ANY circumstances.

4. General Boundaries

- a. Boundaries serve as an excellent example for all and maintain focus while removing distractions.
 - i. Female leaders will work closely with and minister to females, and male leaders will work closely with and minister to males.
 - ii. Physical contact with students should be minimal and above reproach.
- b. Emotional Boundaries
 - i. Don't confide your personal or emotional concerns with students.
 - ii. Don't be a confidant for any student of the opposite sex.

- iii. If you feel like a student has developed any level of closeness with you, you need to share this with leadership as well as the parent(s) so there can be accountability and boundaries given (even same-sex relationships).
- iv. All leader/student friendships should be open to the scrutiny of other leaders and parents.

5. Appropriate Touch

- a. Grace Community Church is committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing, and safe environment for our children's ministry that protects our children from abuse and our paid and volunteer staff from misunderstandings. The following standards are to be carefully followed by all staff, volunteers and youth.
 - i. Appropriate forms of affection:
 - 1. Brief hugs – side hugs are more appropriate than front hugs
 - 2. Encouraging pats on the shoulder or upper back
 - 3. Handshakes
 - 4. High-fives and hand slapping or fist bumps
 - 5. Verbal praise
 - 6. Holding hands during prayer
 - ii. Inappropriate forms of affection include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
 - 2. Holding child on lap beyond preschool age (or holding closer than appropriate)
 - 3. Stroking or rubbing any part of the body other than the head, back or shoulders for the purpose of soothing a young child
 - 4. Kisses
 - 5. Showing affection in isolated areas
 - 6. Any form of unwanted touch (even if normally considered appropriate)**
 - 7. Giving gifts or money to individual children without parental permission or awareness

6. Meeting Guidelines

- a. Private meetings should be with the same sex or avoided.
 - i. Meetings should be in clear view of others or in a public place.
- b. No meals or car rides alone with the opposite sex
- c. Always have a third party if required to travel together.

7. Communications

- a. No phone calls, text messages, or social media or any communication with the opposite sex, unless spouse or parent is included.
- b. Don't communicate anything (verbally or in writing) that you would not be comfortable sharing publicly.
- c. Never ask a student to refrain from sharing something with, or keep secrets from, their parents, other leaders or trusted adults.

8. Bathrooms

- a. Children in the nursery or the preschool/kindergarten classroom may need help in the bathroom.

- i. Only females over the age of 16 may help a child in the bathroom that is not related to them.
 - ii. The volunteer must leave the door cracked so another volunteer may see in.
 - b. Children should be encouraged to use the bathroom before class.
 - c. During class, children in 1st through 6th grade classes will:
 - i. be escorted to the bathroom in the Education building in groups of 2 or more by an adult who will wait in the hallway until the children are finished.
 - ii. Or will use the “buddy system,” unless it is dark, then an adult must escort them.
 - iii. Or if there are not enough adults to escort children, then the whole class will be given the opportunity to use the bathroom as a group.
 - d. Bathrooms in the GCC sanctuary must always remain available for adult use. This applies to adults involved in children’s ministry as well as those who are not. If children need to use the sanctuary bathrooms, they should go in groups of 2 or more and a volunteer may choose to wait outside the bathroom or outside the stalls near the sinks.
 - i. Boys will use the men’s restroom
 - ii. Girls will use the women’s restroom
 - iii. Young boys may only use the women’s restroom when accompanied by their mother.

9. Diaper Changing

- a. Only females over the age of 18 may change diapers, unless the infant's parent(s) give permission.
- b. Diapers will be changed only on the changing table in view of other volunteers.
- c. Parents may choose to change diapers themselves. Contact the parent if you are unsure of their preference.

10. Release of Children from Volunteer Care

- a. Children from birth until 3rd grade must be checked in and picked up by a parent or designated guardian.
- b. Children from 4th to 6th grades will be released at the end of a class or activity and will be instructed to immediately find their parents.
- c. For events that take place after dark, a volunteer should accompany all children outside and make sure they get to their parents.
- d. If parents are late picking up their children, a volunteer may escort the child, using the most direct path, to find their parents.

Reporting

1. Reporting violations of policy

- a. Always bring accusations, incidents, or concerns to the Senior Pastor, Elders, Youth Director/Pastor or Children’s Ministry Director immediately.
- b. Report any behavior or relationships that might make a reasonable person feel uncomfortable or that you think requires further scrutiny.
- c. It is never gossip to report inappropriate behavior.

2. Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting

- a. Report any incident or reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect.
- b. Do not treat any suspicion as frivolous.
- c. Notify the Pastor, Youth Director/Pastor or Children's Ministry Director immediately.
- d. Cooperate fully with law enforcement officials.

3. Reporting Form

- a. The person making a report should fill out the "Suspected Child Abuse Report" form and include the following:
 - i. The name and address of the child.
 - ii. The name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of the child.
 - iii. Any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect.

4. Confidentiality

- a. All reports of child abuse or neglect shall be held in absolute confidence. No person shall communicate any information concerning the alleged event to any person except as necessary to cooperate with church policy and any official investigation. Any breach of this confidentiality by an employee of the church shall be cause for appropriate discipline.
- b. The Pastor, Youth Director or Children's Ministry Director, in consultation with the official conducting the investigation may authorize limited additional disclosure if necessary to protect other children from harm in the near future, particularly where the person responsible for the abuse cannot be identified, but in no case shall the identity of any persons involved be disclosed except as required by law.
- c. No person shall attempt to conduct an investigation either through examination or interrogation of any person(s) involved. It is only acceptable to obtain the necessary amount of information to have cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected.
- d. Interviews shall be conducted only by authorized officials of the agency to whom the suspected crime has been reported or, when appropriate, by legal counsel or persons representing the church in an official capacity.
- e. All employees and volunteers of the church shall cooperate with the official investigation as requested.

5. Reporting obligation

- a. Mandated reporters are defined in California Penal Code 11165.7 - Typically, it is someone that is in a paid position that involves direct contact with children as part of their job. If you require more information, please contact the Children's Ministry Director.
- b. According to California Penal Code 11165.7; 11166: "Volunteers of public or private organizations whose duties require direct contact with and supervision of children are not mandated reporters but are encouraged to obtain training in the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect and are further encouraged to report known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect" (emphasis added)
- c. If you suspect abuse, you are encouraged to call your local Department for Community Based Services office (675-7829) or the Child Abuse Hot line (800) 801-3999 or the appropriate local law enforcement agency.

6. Response to Policy Violations

- a. The Pastor, Youth or Children's Ministry Director or other staff member in charge will do their due diligence and take appropriate action. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - i. reporting the incident to other leadership or law enforcement
 - ii. fact finding/conversations with affected parties
 - iii. training, and/or
 - iv. suspension of the accused person from the performance of duties involving children or youth.
- b. The Pastor or his agent, when appropriate, will inform the victim(s) and victim's family of the steps that are being taken and continue to keep them advised of the status of any investigation.
- c. In an instance where inappropriate behavior, child abuse or neglect is confirmed, the Pastor and/or staff member/director will act according to the recommendations of law enforcement and/or legal counsel. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - i. termination from any positions held
 - ii. restriction from certain activities or
 - iii. direct supervision by church staff while on the property.
- d. The Pastor or his agent will, to the best of their ability, maintain contact with the victim(s) and their family to offer support and address any requests or concerns they may have.

- e. In instances where evidence is inconclusive, the church will take the appropriate action with the advice of legal counsel in consultation with law enforcement officials and after consideration of the affected party's concerns.
- f. A review of the Grace Community Church Child Protection Policy shall occur to determine if a revision is needed to prevent the situation from occurring again.
- g. The Pastor, in consultation with the elders and/or legal counsel, will determine the amount of information he believes is appropriate to relate to the congregation. Details of an ongoing investigation may be considered privileged until the investigation is completed.

7. Response to Reports of Abuse or Neglect

- a. Any staff member that is a mandated reporter who has cause to believe or reasonable suspicion that a child's physical or emotional health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall complete the following:
 - i. The staff member shall report to:
 - 1. the local Department for Community Based Services or
 - 2. The Child Abuse Hotline or
 - 3. Any local law enforcement agency.
 - ii. The staff member shall also inform the Pastor, Youth or Children's Ministry Director and/or a church elder.
 - iii. The Pastor, or his agent, in consultation with the chairperson of the Council of the Elders will notify the appropriate legal counsel.
 - iv. The Pastor, or his agent, will notify the church's insurance agent that an abuse report has been filed with the appropriate local or state agency.
 - v. The Pastor or his agent, based on the circumstances, will determine any other persons that need to be informed of the situation (this may include parents or legal guardians, or other necessary individuals that were not directly involved).

8. Reports Involving Paid Staff

- a. The Council of Elders will monitor any such investigation and receive any confidential information concerning the incident as may be necessary to determine issues concerning continuation of employment and compensation.
- b. A person accused of child abuse or neglect will be suspended from all church related duties involving children. This would include all childcare, teaching, transportation or sponsorship duties.

- c. The person accused should be suspended on 'paid leave' – paid staff - until the investigation is completed. This removal from duty should occur such that an innocent person is protected from false claims.
- d. If the allegation is determined to be unsubstantiated, the employee may return to their prior position.
- e. If the allegation is substantiated, the employee will be terminated and if church attendance is still possible, must submit to any rules deemed necessary by church leadership.
- f. A review of the Grace Community Church Child Protection Policy shall occur to determine if a revision is needed to prevent the situation from occurring again.

9. Preservation of records

- a. Copies of all documents relating to an event of abuse or neglect, including a list of all persons known to be present or in the vicinity shall be kept by the Administrative Pastor, his agent or record keeper.
- b. They will be reviewed to determine if the documents are complete in accordance with church policy and applicable laws.
- c. If any documents are missing, they shall make a written notation.
- d. Documents will be retained until advised that all criminal and civil investigations and actions have been completed.

10. Ministerial care

- a. The ministerial staff shall encourage and assist all affected parties and/or the families in securing appropriate counseling, care and support.
- b. In the event the abuse or neglect involves a member or employee of the church, the staff shall encourage and assist the individual in securing appropriate Pastoral care and support, including third party counseling, being mindful of the potential for a conflict of interest.
- c. All persons shall act towards the victim(s), the family and the accused in accordance with the principles of Christianity at all times.

11. Liaison with the community

- a. The Pastor or his appointed agent, will serve as the church's sole access to the media.
- b. There should be emphasis to the public on the church's position on abuse, its concern for the victim(s) and the steps being taken to address the safety of all individuals.