

GRACE CHURCH

BLESSING NATIONS | REACHING GENERATIONS

Child Safety Plan

Grace Church Children's Ministry
Spring 2016

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INTRODUCTION

As Children's Ministry workers, we are a reflection of God's love to the kids and families that we serve. Because of that, we take our responsibility very seriously as shepherds and teachers. The guidelines set forth in this document have been created to ensure that we are providing a safe and nurturing environment for all of the children we serve.

Our hope is that these policies will serve as a guide for those caring for our precious children and as an encouragement to parents who are entrusting their children to our care. The standard of excellence that we are striving for is founded upon a biblical understanding of purity in relationships. These policies are for the protection of volunteers, the church, and especially the children.

As Children's Ministry workers, we are not only to avoid sin, but also the appearance of sin (Ephesians 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:22-23, 2 Corinthians 6:3). Child abuse is a problem today in the world and, sadly, in the church. It is essential that we provide a safe, secure, and loving environment for children where God is honored in every relationship and where parents feel comfortable leaving their children with us. These policies are intended to be a helpful resource in addressing the issues related to the safety of children. Although the topics addressed in this document can be difficult to think about, our hope is that they will begin an ongoing conversation that will provide our Children's Ministry workers with a framework of accountability and a means of responding in the event that they have questions or concerns. All workers are expected to adhere to these policies, regardless of their area of ministry.

In our service as Children's Ministry workers, it is vital that we are educated on the impact of abuse and neglect, and that we do whatever we can to prevent it. This information is intended to strengthen our resolve and commitment to protect children, not to incite fear. Bringing light to an area which is so often shrouded in darkness creates a much better atmosphere for sharing the Word of God.

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light: in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

-1 John 1:5-7

We will be diligent in screening volunteers, establishing clear guidance for our time with children at Grace, and outlining a plan for addressing issues needing further attention (identifying/reporting abuse, responding to allegations, etc.).

Any exceptions to these policies must have the prior consent of the parents involved, the Children's Ministry Director, and the Team of Elders or their appointed designee.

Throughout this policy a child will be defined as anyone under the age of 13, while youth will be defined as those ages 13-18 who serve in our Children's Ministry. Those who volunteer in our Children's Ministry will be referred to as both "volunteers" and "workers." For the purposes of this document, these terms will be used interchangeably and are meant to refer to all those who serve children in any capacity.

"He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge."

-Proverbs 14:26

VOLUNTEER QUALIFICATIONS

In order to do all we can to protect the children in our care, we place a high priority on the careful recruitment, screening, placement, and ongoing supervision/training of all of our staff and Children's Ministry workers. Because of the number of workers and teams and the ever-evolving needs throughout the Children's Ministry, circumstances may arise where exceptions may be made. Any such exceptions should only be made in consultation with the Children's Ministry Director and, where specifically noted below, the approval of Elder/Deacons or their appointed designee.

- Anyone desiring to step into a teaching or leading role must have regularly attended Grace Church for at least six months. Volunteers who are not members (or pursuing membership) may not serve in teaching or leading roles. They may serve in non-teaching roles, but should be regular attenders of the church, have been through the application process (as outlined below), and must serve alongside a member of Grace Church.
- People related to each other (spouses, siblings, parent/child teams, etc.) may serve together provided there is a third non-related volunteer serving alongside them. (As a general guideline, we encourage family members to serve on separate teams.)
- All volunteer workers must be 18 years of age or older unless working under the supervision of an adult who has met the qualifications in these policies.
- All volunteers who work with children must complete a Children's Ministry Worker Application, submit two references, and meet with a Children's Ministry leader.
- A Criminal Records and/or Central Registry Check will be done on all church staff and volunteers who work with children. Any person meeting any of the following conditions will be prohibited from working with children or youth:
 - Any person who has been denied legal custody of children for reasons of abuse or neglect.
 - Any person who has been convicted of any felony, violent crime, or any crime against a child.
 - Any person who has been disciplined for, or convicted of, any unlawful sexual conduct, abuse, child abuse, child neglect and/or child sexual abuse. (This includes any person who is currently a defendant under process for any of the offenses previously identified.)
 - Any person who is currently registered, or has ever been required to register, as a sex offender in any jurisdiction, or whose name has ever appeared on a Sex Offender Registry.
 - Any individual who does not fall under the conditions cited above, but who has been either accused of, or charged with, any criminal activity and/or abuse/neglect of a child but not convicted must be approved by the Elders/Deacons, on a case by case basis, before they can be permitted to work with children.
- All people working with children must review the Child Safety Plan Materials and sign a document stating that they have reviewed the documents and understand the expectations and safety guidelines when working with children at Grace Church.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The safety of children is a priority of Grace Church. As a result, we recognize that great care must be given to help ensure that those who are placed in positions of trust, leadership, and responsibility with children are prepared and suited for such work. Volunteers working with children and youth must complete the following screening process prior to serving in Children's Ministry. Children's Ministry Staff/Leaders who recruit and supervise workers are responsible for managing the following process:

- 1) **Initial Application:** Every volunteer in Children's Ministry must complete the ministry application online. The Ministry Team Application can be found at www.gracemp.org/kids.
- 2) **References:** Children's Ministry Leaders will contact at least 2 references. At least one of the references must be someone who is not a part of Grace Church. (The names and contact information of references will be given by the potential volunteer.)
 - Exceptions may be made for those who have been serving in other roles/involved at Grace Church for more than one year.
 - As a general rule of thumb, references will always be checked for those who have been in attendance for less than 1 year.
- 3) **Personal Meeting/Interview:** Potential volunteers will meet with the Children's Ministry Director or the leader responsible for the ministry area in which they desire to serve. Every effort will be made to match an individual's interests and abilities with the ministry's need. This meeting will include discussion about the potential volunteer's relationship with God, the application materials, details of the Child Safety Plan, and the expectations and needs of the team they are interested in. The potential volunteer and Children's Ministry team leader may agree that it would be beneficial to meet again before determining a placement on a team.
- 4) **Background Checks:** Potential volunteers will undergo a background check, which will include a check of Michigan's Central Registry. Volunteers will be screened based on national recommendations for volunteers who serve youth. In addition to conditions listed on the previous page, convictions for the following crimes will prompt a determination that an applicant does not meet the criteria to serve with children at Grace Church:
 - Any felony (A crime punishable by confinement greater than one year)
 - Defined on the basis of exposure for the offense for which the defendant was convicted, pled guilty or pled no contest. If pled down, then the crime to which the defendant ultimately pled.
 - Defined as all crimes punishable by greater than one year in jail or prison, regardless of how characterized by jurisdiction.
 - Any lesser crime involving force or threat of force against a person
 - Any lesser crime in which sexual relations is an element, including "victimless" crimes of a sexual nature (including pornography)
 - Any lesser crime involving cruelty to animals
 - Any lesser crime involving a minor
 - Any lesser crime involving controlled substances will be investigated further. (Special consideration may be given to crimes associated with controlled substances that predate the application process by at least 10 years.)
- 5) **Placement:** Workers that do not meet the background check criteria, or a volunteer that has an area of concern identified from another step of the screening process, will not be approved to serve in Children's Ministry. Grace Church maintains the right to decline potential volunteers or terminate an existing volunteer at any time for any reason.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES, continued

6) Screening Exceptions:

- Youth Volunteers – Grace Church recognizes that inviting youth to work with children can be valuable to both the youth and the children they are serving. Youth volunteers must also be screened; however, youth references may be from church members or staff. Whenever possible, outside references will still be sought. Because youth criminal history will not show up on criminal databases, a background check is not required. Parents of youth will be contacted. All other elements of the screening process should be completed.
- Substitute Workers – Inviting others to assist in Children’s Ministry as “substitute workers” is necessary from time to time. We recognize that this can be good for those who are helping out, for the workers who serve on a regular basis, and for the kids. While substitute workers do not need to complete the screening process, they are expected to follow the policies outlined in this document. Substitute workers should always be serving under the supervision of a member at Grace Church. Exceptions should be cleared in advance with the ministry leader or Children’s Ministry director.
- Criminal History – Grace Church believes that redemption is possible and that, in some cases, an individual who has had a history of criminal activity may be approved to work with children. However, no registered sex offenders will be eligible to serve as an employee or volunteer with children at Grace Church. No exceptions will be made.

If a volunteer discloses a criminal history in their questionnaire and personal interview and a staff person would still like to place them on a Children’s Ministry team, the following steps should be taken:

- The disclosed history will be verified with the background check.
- Two additional references (4 total, two may be from within Grace Church) will be contacted.
- The exception must be reviewed and approved by the Children’s Ministry Director.
- The Elder/Deacons should be made aware of any instances of a volunteer serving under this exception.

Some Other Important Notes Related to Volunteer Applications:

- **Confidentiality:** All personal information that has been voluntarily disclosed, the result of the criminal records check, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be considered confidential. The results of the criminal records check will be reviewed by the Children’s Ministry Director. Anyone authorized by Grace Church to collect and store volunteer information is expected to adhere to strict confidentiality guidelines.
- **Re-Appointment:** Volunteers are approved annually for re-appointment to their current positions. Criminal records checks will be updated every 12-24 months.
- **Regular Review of the Child Safety Guidelines:** All Children’s Ministry Workers will be asked to review the Child Safety Guidelines annually and sign an accompanying document to acknowledge their understanding of the expectations and safety procedures. All new workers will review these documents with a Children’s Ministry leader and sign this document before they are placed on a Children’s Ministry team and begin serving as a Children’s Ministry worker.

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Grace Church Children's Ministry Child Safety Plan

To be read and signed by any individual serving in any capacity with children at Grace Church.

As Children's Ministry workers, we are a reflection of God's love to the kids and families we serve. Because of that, we take our responsibility very seriously as shepherds and teachers. The guidelines set forth in this document have been created to ensure that we are providing a safe and nurturing environment for all of the children we serve. It is essential that all of these policies be observed with great diligence. Please read the following summary of the policies and procedures, which have been outlined with much greater detail in our Child Safety Plan, and sign and date at the bottom of the page.

Volunteer Application, References, and Background Check

All individuals working with children on behalf of Grace Church must complete the Ministry Team Application Form on our webpage and supply the names and contact information of two references. These references will be checked and a background check will also be done. This is required in order to serve in Children's Ministry at Grace Church.

Two-Adult Policy

Grace Church adheres to a two-adult policy when caring for children. No child in our care should ever be alone with an adult. While the purpose of the Two-Adult Policy is first and foremost to protect our kids and reduce the risk of harm, it also protects our workers and ensures that we remain above-reproach in this area.

Closing Registration

Children should only be released from church activities and services to the parent(s), legal guardian, or other adult that signed them in. If there is any confusion, it is important to involve the Team Leader and to ensure that the child is only released to the adult(s) that signed them in.

Emergency Evacuation

In the event that we have to leave the building during an event or service, the Children's Ministry workers in each room should gather all of the kids together, do a quick head count to make sure that all of the kids are accounted for, and then exit the building as quickly as possible using the nearest exit. The meeting place for all ministries is the parking lot behind the building next door to our North (towards Taco Bell).

Reporting

If you hear a child mention something that causes concern, please notify your Team Leader or the Children's Ministry Director that same day. (If this happens on Sunday morning, please let someone know before leaving if at all possible.)

Personal Responsibility

Our Child Safety Plan at Grace Church is dependent on the collective efforts and shared responsibility of all of our Children's Ministry workers. Each of us has a personal responsibility to do absolutely everything that we can to ensure that our kids are free to grow in their faith in an environment that is safe and secure. If something just doesn't look, feel, or seem right, it's essential that you pay attention to that feeling and enter in to help and/or seek clarity. While this may not always be comfortable, the safety of our kids depends on it.

I, _____ (Print Full Name), have read the Child Safety Plan and prayerfully commit to adhere to all of the policies and procedures outlined there. By signing this document, I authorize Grace Church to verify all information contained in my Children's Ministry Application (where applicable), and to complete a criminal background check as part of the routine screening processes outlined in the Child Safety Plan. I also commit to doing everything within my power to ensure the safety and security of our kids at Grace Church.

Signature

Date

Thanks for your interest in the Child Safety Plan here at Grace. We hope that this portion of our Child Safety Plan has helped to communicate our heart to keep all children safe and secure while they are with us as well as answer any questions you may have had. If you looked closely at the Table of Contents, you may have noticed that this sample is just a portion of our entire Child Safety Plan here at Grace. If you are interested in discussing the plan further or would like to view more information regarding the complete plan, please contact our Children's Ministry Director at ryan@gracemp.org and he will be happy to discuss the plan with you further and hopefully answer any remaining questions you may have.