



GRACE CHURCH
MOUNT PLEASANT

Child Safety Plan

Grace Church Children's Ministry

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⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.

¹⁰ ***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

¹¹ ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*** ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ ***"I am the good shepherd;*** I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—***and I lay down my life for the sheep.***

-John 10:7-15



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Grace Church Children's Ministry

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 as shepherds and teachers very seriously. 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 (1) a guide for those caring for our precious children and (2) an encouragement to parents who entrust their children to our care. These policies are founded upon a biblical understanding of purity in relationships and have been created for the protection of our 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 in our world today 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 to those serving in Children's Ministry at Grace Church and a clarion call, clearly defining our standards of excellence as they relate to safety and security within our Children's Ministry.

Although the topics addressed in this document can be difficult to discuss, they are meant to provide our Children's Ministry workers with a framework of accountability and a means of responding in the event they have questions or concerns. All workers are expected to adhere to these policies.

In our service as Children's Ministry workers, it is vital that we are educated about the impact of abuse and neglect, and that we do whatever we can to prevent it. As such, this information is intended to strengthen our resolve and commitment to protect children. We believe that bringing these topics into the light will help to create a 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 following 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, and a 'youth' will be defined as those who are ages 13-18 and 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 at Grace Church.

"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 everything we can to protect the children in our care, we place a high priority on the careful recruitment, screening, placement, and ongoing supervision and training of all of staff and Children's Ministry workers at Grace Church. 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 the Team of Elders 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 adult 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 accused of, or charged with, any criminal activity and/or abuse/neglect of a child but not convicted must be approved by the Team of Elders, on a case-by-case basis, before being permitted to work with children at Grace Church.
- 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 our children is a priority at Grace Church. We recognize that great care must be taken to help ensure that those who are placed in positions of trust, leadership, and responsibility with children are prepared and suited for this 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 Team Application form online. The Ministry Team Application can be found at gracemp.org.
- 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:** Volunteers will be screened based on national recommendations for volunteers who serve youth. Potential volunteers will undergo a background check, which will always include a check of Michigan's Central Registry as well as periodic national criminal background checks. In addition to the conditions listed on the previous page, convictions for the following crimes will mean 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 10 years or more.)
- 5) **Placement:** Workers that do not meet the background check criteria, or a potential volunteer who 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 the value of youth serving in our Children's Ministry. 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 will be completed.
- **Substitute Workers** – Inviting others to assist in Children's Ministry as a "substitute worker" is necessary from time to time. We recognize that this can be good for those who are helping out, for 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. Substitute workers will only be allowed to serve under the leadership and direct supervision of an established leader or team member.
- **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 suitable 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 or personal interview and the leader involved still believes they would be an appropriate placement on a Children's Ministry team, the following steps should be taken:

- The disclosed history will be verified with a 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 Team of Elders will be part of the discussion involving any instances where a volunteer is seeking to serve in Children's Ministry under this exception.

Some Other Important Notes Related to Volunteer Applications:

- **Confidentiality:** All personal information acquired through the application process (i.e. information that has been voluntarily disclosed, discovered as the result of the criminal records check, or that comes into question because of 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 and a designee responsible for managing these documents. 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 every 12-18 months 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.

VISIBLE MINISTRY POLICIES

As a ministry we want to provide a safe and loving environment. In order to do so, we have set the following parameters that keep kids safe and greatly reduce the opportunity for suspicion of wrongdoing. This is precisely the reason our rooms were intentionally designed to maximize visibility; large openings at registration, glass walls and doors, blinds that still allow for some visibility. These structural considerations, as well as the information below, will help ensure the safety of the children, as well as accountability for our Children's Ministry workers.

- All of our Children's Ministry rooms have been designed to ensure visibility. Windows and doors should be kept free of obstructions. Remember, if a door or window is made of glass, that was an intentional design feature to allow for full visibility. Please be mindful of this whenever hanging anything on the glass, setting furniture and materials up against a glass wall, or reducing visibility with window coverings that may be temporary or permanent.
- Our goal in each of our rooms is that *any* adult present in the room or in the registration area would have full visibility of *all* activities and locations in the room from *any* vantage point. Often times, this visibility can be achieved by simply shifting the placement of an easel or play structure to allow for greater visibility.
- Workers and approved visitors should be easily identified by a CM shirt and nametag at all times.
- No worker is to ever be alone with a child or a group of children.
- No child is ever to be alone with another child.
- **"Two Adult Policy"**: There should be at least two adult workers with children or youth at all times. In the event that an adult and youth are serving together on a Children's Ministry team without a second adult present, the adult should be careful to avoid situations where they are alone with the youth. They are encouraged to recruit a third person to their team. Additional suggestions for adults working with youth have been outlined in the section titled "Guidelines for Working with Children and Youth in Other Contexts" near the end of this document.
- When a child or student needs to have a private conversation with an adult, be sure to carry out the discussion in an open hallway or the back of the classroom where it is still in full view of others. This includes meetings outside of Sunday mornings. At no time should an adult be alone with a child in any room where the door is closed or in an area where they cannot be seen.
- When talking with a child before or after a service or during the week, the interaction should happen in a public place and in full view of others. These types of conversations should be infrequent and done only with the knowledge and expressed support of the child's parents and the team leader.
- After a service, teams should not send an individual worker with a child to find their parents. They should wait for the parent or follow the Two Adult Policy.
- If a child arrives early and only one adult is present, ask the parent to wait until another adult worker arrives, or walk with them to the nearest room with other workers and supervise the child there until another worker is present.
- **"When in doubt..."**: If something just doesn't look, feel, or seem right, pay attention to that feeling! It is important to question confusing or uncertain behaviors and practices, even when if/when it may be uncomfortable. If a worker observes a situation that makes them uncomfortable, they should enter in to help and/or seek clarity immediately or find someone who is willing/able to enter in. This is one of the most important things we can do to ensure our children's safety.

VOLUNTEER IDENTIFICATION

- All workers must wear a Children's Ministry shirt whenever serving in Children's Ministry. Please make this a high priority. If you need assistance ordering a shirt, please contact betsy@gracemp.org.
- Workers must also wear a nametag whenever serving in Children's Ministry. (If you notice that nametags in your room are running low, please contact kim@gracemp.org.)
- Prospective workers who are "visiting" during the service must also wear a nametag and a Children's Ministry shirt whenever possible. Team leaders should plan ahead when possible to ensure that prospective workers have the necessary identification. For assistance, please contact betsy@gracemp.org.

REGISTRATION

- The parent/guardian will be required to register their child by signing-in when they arrive.
- The worker should talk with new families to ensure that we're aware of any additional needs the child may have. This is especially important for kids with severe allergies or who require special assistance of some kind. Most often, parents will make workers aware in these instances, but it's important that we ask.
- For new families, only the parent/guardian who signs the child in will be allowed to pick up the child and sign him/her out. This is extremely important.
- When a new family is registering their child for the first time, or if the workers in the room are meeting the parents/child for the first time, a special effort should be made to introduce the parent(s) to the team leader and one additional worker. This allows the workers to connect the name and face of the parent with the child. The team leader should explain to the parents that, for the child's safety, the child will only be released to the parent who signed them in.
- Friends, relatives, or non-custodial parents may not check a child out of Children's Ministry unless they were the adults who checked the child in. Older siblings may be allowed to pick up children with the expressed permission of the parents. Team leaders may use their discretion with Grace Church members. If the workers involved have *any* questions or hesitations about allowing a child to leave with a friend or relative, the child should be kept in their ministry room until their parents arrive.
- Special concerns such as naps, bottles, bathroom needs, food allergies, etc. should be written down.
- Once the service begins, the team leader should count the number of children and workers and note it in the registration book in case of an emergency.

Interested in Learning More?

Thank you for your interest in the Child Safety Plan here at Grace. We hope this portion of our Child Safety Plan has helped give you a better sense of our commitment to keep all children safe and secure. The portion you've read is just a sample of our full Child Safety Plan here at Grace Church, which we review with our Children's Ministry workers on an annual basis.

If you're interested in discussing this further or would like more information about the complete plan, please contact our Children's Ministry Director at ryan@gracemp.org. We'd be happy to connect with you and answer any questions you may have.