



## CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES & PROCEDURES

### INTRODUCTION

To help protect children, Grace Baptist Church has adopted the following Child Protection Policy. This ministry has zero tolerance for child abuse of any kind. It is important that all paid staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent physical and sexual abuse against children.

The following includes the purpose and definitions for these guidelines, the outlines of protection and prevention, and an acknowledgment to be signed by those staff and volunteers working with children.

### PURPOSE

Grace Baptist Church seeks to express God's love of children and provide for their personal wholeness. This caring community seeks to prevent child abuse of any form to our children and youth and to minister to victims of abuse and their families. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures, and ministries must stand.

*And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Matthew 18:5-7*

In addition to the biblical mandate to protect children, this policy is designed to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist the church in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children and youth by means of appropriate screening procedures.

3. Inform volunteers and paid staff workers of their responsibility to--and how to--report to appropriate legal authorities any suspicions of child abuse.
4. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and paid staff.

Our goal in response to these biblical and legal mandates is to maintain a safe, secure, and loving place where children may grow and a place where caregivers, teachers, and leaders (both paid and volunteer) minister appropriately to their needs.

## **GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT**

Grace Baptist Church desires to be a safe place for all children and adults who attend any activity. Individuals they know and trust sometimes victimize children. The church is not immune to such abuse, either by its members or by those in leadership positions. Incidents of child abuse or neglect cut across racial, social, economic, and religious boundaries. Although no organization or individual can assure complete protection, this Child Protection Policy reflects Grace Baptist Church's commitment to help protect children from harm. This policy applies to all volunteer and paid workers. Grace Baptist Church will not tolerate child abuse or neglect. Your cooperation in this commitment not only reflects your concern about children's safety in this society, but also your willingness to take steps toward halting child abuse and its detrimental effects.

For the safety and protection of our children and workers, all those who participate in church-sponsored activities with children and youth are required to comply with the guidelines provided in this policy. Additionally, prior to working with the children or youth at Grace Baptist Church each person must sign the Child Protection Policy Worker Acknowledgment Form at the end of this policy, which reflects your agreement to abide by the policy's terms.

## **DEFINITIONS**

The following terms are used herein and are defined as follows:

- A. Child or Youth:** any person who has not reached his /her 18th birthday
- B. Paid Staff/Worker:** hourly, salaried, part-time or full-time employee who works with children or youth at any church-sponsored activity.
- C. Volunteer Staff/Worker:** any non-compensated individual who works with children or youth at any church-sponsored activity.
- D. Caregiver:** any compensated or volunteer worker
- E. Mandated Reporter:** any of the following who have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect: licensed marriage and family therapists; licensed professional counselors; school administrators, counselors, or teachers; members of the clergy; and

any regulated child care providers. <sup>1</sup> In addition to those required to report, any person who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect may report. <sup>2</sup>

- F. Child Abuse:** "harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher's aide, or a member of the clergy."<sup>3</sup>
- G. Child Neglect:** "harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following:
1. Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care, though financially able to do so, or by the failure to seek financial other reasonable means to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
  2. Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk." <sup>4</sup>
- H. Person responsible for the child's health or welfare:** "means a parent, legal guardian, person 18 years of age or older who resides for any length of time in the same home in which the child resides, or, except when used in section 7(2)(e) or 8(8), nonparent adult; or an owner, operator, volunteer, or employee of ... a licensed or registered child care organization."<sup>5</sup>
- I. Nonparent adult:** "a person who is 18 years of age or older and who, regardless of the person's domicile, meets all of the following criteria in relation to a child:
1. Has substantial and regular contact with the child.
  2. Has a close personal relationship with the child's parent or with a person responsible for the child's health or welfare.

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<sup>1</sup> Michigan Compiled Law Service (MILCS) § 722.622 (g)

<sup>2</sup> MLCS § 722.624

<sup>3</sup> MLCS § 722.623 (1)(a)

<sup>4</sup> Id. at (k)

<sup>5</sup> Id. at (x)

3. Is not the child's parent or a person otherwise related to the child by blood or affinity to the third degree." <sup>6</sup>
- J. **Sexual abuse:** "engaging in sexual contact or sexual penetration as those terms are defined in section 520a of the Michigan penal code,... MCL 750.520a, with a child." <sup>7</sup>
- K. **Sexual exploitation:** "includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution, or allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the photographing, filming, or depicting of a child engaged in a listed sexual act as defined in section 145c of the Michigan penal code, MCL 750.145c." <sup>8</sup>

## PAID AND VOLUNTEER WORKER SCREENING

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Grace Baptist Church, all paid, and volunteer workers will be screened in accordance to the following procedures:

### 3 MONTH RULE

Volunteer workers must have been members or regular attendees of Grace Baptist Church for at least three months prior to the time they begin serving with children in church-sponsored activities. This is also up to the discretion of the Pastor. (Please note: most ministry-related positions of service require church membership; only a few do not.)

### STAFF/VOLUNTEER SCREENING FORM

Any paid staff and volunteers who will work with a minor must complete the staff/Volunteer Screening Form. All information provided on the forms will be verified and references will be checked.

Screening forms include a statement, which the applicant must acknowledge in writing, certifying that statements provided in the application are true and complete. Any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of the applicant or for dismissal if he or she is employed. This statement authorizes Grace Baptist Church to contact any individual or organization listed in the application. This statement also includes a liability release for any injury to reputation or otherwise that may result from the ministry's investigation into the applicant's background.

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<sup>6</sup> Id. at (v)

<sup>7</sup> Id. at (z)

<sup>8</sup> Id. at (a)(a)

## **INTERVIEW WITH PASTOR OR STAFF**

All applicants with whom the ministry is considering for a position working with children or youth will be interviewed by the pastor or staff person responsible for the area of ministry. Whenever possible, the pastor will have an associate participate in the interview.

## **BACKGROUND AND REFERENCE CHECKS**

Grace Baptist Church will conduct reference, criminal, and civil background checks on all paid staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or who directly oversee and/or exert control over minors. All criminal and civil background checks will be updated periodically. Applications and the results of any screening will be kept confidential by authorized church staff, unless otherwise required by law. All information obtained or discovered will be kept in a secure location and access to it will be restricted if possible. These materials will be archived.

No adult members of the congregation, whether volunteer or paid workers, who have been convicted of a crime against a child or certain crimes against another adult will provide services in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or youth (see "Automatic Worker Disqualification" section below).

## **EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR WORKERS**

### **APPROPRIATE CONTACT WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Physical contact with children should be kept to a minimum, including holding children, holding hands, hugging, and any one-on-one contact between any adults and children.

Inappropriate behavior will be addressed immediately. This includes but is not limited to:

An adult placing themselves in a position where they are alone and isolated with a child or children.

- An adult touching a child/youth inappropriately or asking to be touched inappropriately by a child/youth. In the event that a minor initiates physical contact and/or inappropriate touching, the worker must immediately inform the minor that such touching is inappropriate and remove themselves from the situation.
- An adult saying, or allowing to be said, inappropriate comments or jokes.

Other inappropriate behaviors might be exhibited by:

- Inappropriate or obscene phone calls or text messages, exhibitionism, displaying of pornographic material, or allowing children/youth to witness sexual activity.
- Physical discipline of a minor. Physical force shall only be used to stop a violent or

physical altercation or a verbal assault that reasonably threatens to become physical, and only the minimum amount of physical force necessary shall be used.

- An inappropriate relationship between a minor and adult. If you suspect this may be occurring, maintain clear professional boundaries and refer the minor to another individual with supervisory authority. Depending on the level of the relationship and the circumstances, an inappropriate relationship could also constitute child abuse, which must be reported to Children's Protective Services.
- Meeting in isolated environments with a child or youth for counseling.

Children and youth workers are not to go into a child's home during visitation or when picking them up for church while their parents are not home.

ALL counseling is to be done according to the official counseling policies of the church. Failure to do so could result in personal liability and false accusations.

See also age-specific guidelines below for further information about physical contact when working with children.

Workers against whom an accusation of improper behavior is made will be placed on administrative leave pending both the internal and external investigations (when appropriate). If allegations are determined to be baseless or false, the worker will be eligible for reinstatement at the discretion of the pastoral leadership. If the behavior is such that there is any reasonable suspicion of child physical or sexual abuse, appropriate legal action and, if necessary, church discipline procedures will be followed. See section later in this policy for appropriate handling of alleged sexual or physical abuse.

## **AUTHORIZATION AND CONSENT**

All church outings and activities, as well as transportation to and from those activities, must be approved by a member of the pastoral staff. These activities must be documented on the official church calendar.

Do everything you can to keep the parents informed about and involved in their child's activities. Parents or legal guardians must sign authorization and consent forms for all activities that take minors off the church campus.

Transportation for church-related activities will be done by authorized church personnel only. If and When multiple vehicles are used, they are to stay together as a group, following the directions of the church's authorized coordinator. If you ask another adult to drive other than authorized church personnel, you make yourself personally liable as well as the church.

## **AUTOMATIC WORKER DISQUALIFICATION**

No person may be entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or may directly oversee and/or exert control over minors who has been convicted of the offenses outlined below, been on a probated sentence or received deferred adjudication for any offense outlined below, or is presently pending any criminal charges for any offense outlined below until a determination of guilt or innocence has been made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication. The following offenses disqualify a person from care, supervision, control, or oversight of minors:

- Any offense against minors as defined by state law.
- A misdemeanor or felony offense as defined by state law that is classified as sexual assault, indecency with a minor or adult, assault of a minor or adult, injury to a minor or adult, abandoning or endangering a minor, sexual performance with a minor or adult, possession or promoting child pornography, enticing a minor, bigamy, incest, drug-related offenses, family violence, or any crime similar in nature to the foregoing.

## **GENERAL SUPERVISION PROCEDURES**

### **TWO-ADULT RULE**

- At least two previously screened volunteer or staff adults, preferably unrelated, must be present at all children's classrooms, nurseries, and church activities, including transportation to and from an activity. This includes activities on-site as well as off the church property.
- All volunteers for events and classes must be approved in advance by the leader of the organization sponsoring the activity. If a scheduled volunteer is unable to attend an event at the last minute, only pre-approved and properly screened volunteers may provide supervision.
- Parental permission must be obtained in written form before any adult is allowed to be alone with a child, including transportation to or from an activity.
- If a child initiates a private conversation with an adult without parental approval, a second adult, preferably of the same gender as the child, should be present. If this is not possible, the door to the room must be left open, with another adult nearby.
- If adequate supervision is not available, activities will be cancelled.

## **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH**

Children's and youth workers are prohibited from emailing, texting, or sending private messages through social media sites or otherwise to children or teens with whom they work at the ministry. Any communications must be sent to a group rather than to individuals, or messages should be communicated through parents or guardians. Any messages sent to children/teens must also be sent to parents at the same time.

## **CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE**

All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is (e.g., for young children, "We do not throw the blocks. We use blocks for building."). If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child's parents or legal guardians should be contacted. If they are not available, the child may be taken to the children's ministry director and left under his or her supervision along with another adult. No corporal discipline is to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be recorded on a disciplinary incident form and discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

The church does not tolerate assault, threats, harassment, or abuse against church or school personnel or students. Verbal or written threats, racial/ ethno-cultural harassment, physical and/or sexual harassment, or abuse perpetrated by anyone in the ministry is unacceptable. The church supports efforts designed to protect the welfare of staff and students. In dealing with matters of alleged assault, threats, harassment or abuse, the dignity and rights of all are to be preserved and respected. The church is to be characterized by a safe and harmonious working environment in which the needs and well-being of every individual is paramount.

Violent behavior shall not be tolerated and will be dealt with accordingly:

#### **Students under the age of twelve:**

Where children in this age group are behaving in a violent manner and are non-responsive to instruction telling them to stop their behavior, staff members shall use the minimum amount of force necessary to prevent injury to persons or property within the vicinity of the violent person(s). The parents of the child must be involved in any action plan for remediation. The decision to report to the police will be made by the senior pastor or his designee unless the incident could constitute abuse, in which case it becomes a mandatory reporting situation. The staff member is to immediately report to the pastoral staff and Children's Protective Services any incidents involving sexual assault, serious injury, and serious damage.

#### **Students twelve or older:**

For young people ages 12-17 years, any violent incident that may be considered criminal shall be reported to the police at the discretion of the pastoral staff or as required by law. Students who are 18 years or over are considered adults, and the procedures of the state criminal code will be followed if these persons are charged and/or tried for criminal activities.



Any violent behavior, whether or not it is reported to the police, is to be reported to the pastoral staff and recorded by the staff member on an incident report containing a description of the violent incident, a reference to any call made to the police and, if applicable, reference to any disciplinary response. This information together with any letters to the student and/or parent/guardian must be filed in the church office.

## **OPEN CLASSROOMS**

Classroom doors must be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present. Speaking to a minor or minors one-on-one should be done where paid staff or volunteers are in sight of other adults. Under no circumstances should any adult worker, paid or volunteer, ever be alone with a child not his own in any closed classroom, restroom, vehicle, closet, or other area.

Classrooms or childcare rooms will be visited without prior notice by church staff or other church workers (e.g., children's ministry director). The children's ministry director or his designee will conduct brief observations of childcare rooms and classrooms of children or youth during classroom times and other meeting hours.

## **DRIVING POLICIES**

The designated leader of a church event must know each person designated to provide transportation to or from church. The driver must:

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Have a valid state driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated;
- Have no record of convictions for the past five years for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license, or reckless endangerment;
- Have proof of insurance; and
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a child not his own.

## **GIFTS**

No staff, either paid or volunteer, are to give personal gifts to individual children or young people without the prior knowledge of the parents) or responsible leadership. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, it should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts may not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

## **OVERNIGHT TRIPS**

Situations where staff members are taking children or young people out of the area for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned. Only known, proven staff

will be permitted to sponsor/chaperone the trips. Under no circumstances will one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing. At least two adults must be present in each sleeping area.

### **CLOSING**

Youth and childcare workers are to make sure no child is locked in the building after any planned church activities.

## **AGE-SPECIFIC CHILDCARE GUIDELINES**

### **NURSERY**

- A minimum of two previously screened female volunteers or staff must be present in each nursery regardless of how few children are in attendance. Workers may not leave until all children have been picked up if doing so would leave only one adult in the room.
- The windows of the nursery must remain uncovered to allow a clear view of all activities. In nurseries or classrooms with no windows, the top half of Dutch doors must always remain open when children are present in the room.
- Church nursery workers who change diapers must be ladies and must adhere to the following procedures:
  - Always use rubber gloves when changing diapers or when applying lotion.
  - Always keep a cloth or wipe between her hand and the child.
- Only lady workers may take children to the restroom. The restroom door should be left open, if possible, so the nursery worker can stand in the doorway, enabling her to supervise the child using the restroom, as well as maintaining a posture that would safeguard the worker against any accusations.
- If possible, avoid directly assisting older-aged children who may have wet or soiled their clothes.
  - Endeavor to instruct them on how to clean themselves without your direct assistance (as frustrating as that may be). You may hand the children what they need but do not directly clean or wash the older-aged child whenever possible.
- Avoid helping young children with zippers or skirts/pants/ shorts whenever possible.
- Only assigned workers are allowed to stay in the nursery or to be in the nursery area during sessions.
- Children will only be released to parents at the nursery counter using the system in place for drop-off and release. Any persons other than the child's parents or guardians, including other family members, must have written authorization to pick up the child. Such permission must be kept on file with the nursery coordinator.

- A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. Corporal discipline is never allowed.

### **PRESCHOOL MINISTRY**

- A minimum of two previously screened volunteers or staff adults must be present with each group of children, regardless of how few children are in attendance. Workers may not leave until all children have been picked up if doing so would leave only one adult in the room.
- The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms must remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
- When possible, children should be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child. If additional assistance is required, a parent or guardian must assist the child with their needs.
- Avoid helping young children with zippers or skirts/pants/shorts whenever possible.
- Children will only be released to parents at the door of the classroom using the system in place for drop-off and release. Persons other than the children's parents or guardians, including other family members, must have written authorization to pick up a child.
- When children are taken out of the classroom (playground, etc.), the teachers are to take a count of the children to ensure all are present.
- Only assigned workers are permitted to be in preschool rooms during sessions.
- A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. Corporal discipline is never allowed.
- The pastor or one delegated to do so by him must approve any children's activities that are held off-site. Written parental permission must be secured for off-site activities, and there must be a minimum of two previously screened volunteers or staff adults present. All activities of children, whether on or off the church campus, must be scheduled on the official church calendar.

### **CHILDREN'S MINISTRY (FIRST THROUGH SIXTH GRADES)**

- A minimum of two previously screened adult volunteers or staff workers must be present with each group of children regardless of how few children are in attendance. Workers may not leave until all children have been picked up if doing so would leave one adult in the room.
- The windows of classroom doors and between classrooms must remain uncovered to allow a clear view of classroom activities.
- When possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Should assistance be required, the outer bathroom door must remain ajar while the teacher assists the child. If additional assistance is required, a parent or guardian must assist the child with their needs.

- A positive approach to discipline must be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the children function appropriately. Corporal punishment never allowed.
- The pastor or one delegated to do so by him must approve any children's activities that are held off-site. Written parental permission must be secured for off-site activities, and there must be a minimum of two previously screened volunteers or staff adults present. All activities of children, whether on or off the church campus, must be scheduled on the official church calendar.

### **TEEN MINISTRY (SEVENTH GRADE THROUGH AGE 17)**

- A minimum of two previously screened volunteers or staff adults must be present, regardless of how few students are in attendance.
- Organized events on or off the church campus will be staffed with a minimum of 1:10 adult to students.
- The pastor or one delegated to do so by him must be informed in advance of any youth activities that are held off-site. Written parental permission must be secured for off-site activities, and there must be a minimum of two previously screened volunteers or staff adults present. All youth activities, whether on or off the church campus, must be scheduled on the official church calendar.
- Overnight events that are attended by students of both genders must also be chaperoned by adults of both genders. At least two adults must be present in each sleeping area.
- A positive approach to discipline will be practiced. Clear, consistent, age-appropriate limits will be established to help the students function appropriately. Corporal discipline is never allowed.
- It is recognized that certain counseling and ministerial situations may preclude the presence of two adults and that the general guidelines for supervision of workers should not restrict situations where individual counsel and guidance is necessary. However, such counseling should only take place in a room where interior windows allow a clear view of the activities in the room.

## **REPORTING PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL CHILD ABUSE**

If Grace Baptist Church receives an allegation of child abuse, it will respond with the utmost concern to the victim, parent, or other party making such an allegation. The accused will be treated with dignity and support. Without clear and convincing evidence to the contrary, church personnel will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that Grace Baptist Church takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

When reasonable suspicion of child abuse (of whatever kind) exists, the protection of the child(ren) must be the most important concern. In Michigan, only certain persons are

considered mandated reporters of suspected child abuse. However, it is the policy of Grace Baptist Church to require anyone who works with children in any ministry capacity and who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is being or has been abused to report their suspicions to Children's Protective Services. If a worker were to inform the church leadership about his or her suspicions and the church leadership were to determine that the incident did not need to be reported, the worker still has an obligation to report the situation if he or she still believes reasonable suspicion of abuse exists.

What is reasonable suspicion/reasonable cause? This means that there is credible evidence of or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse.

A report based on reasonable suspicion/reasonable cause does not require proof and is not a determination that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the child's condition.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE:**

1. Treat each allegation of child abuse seriously and attempt to ensure the safety and protection of persons who may have been harmed.
2. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation.
3. Immediately notify the designated church leadership (pastor, youth minister, children's ministry director, etc.)
4. If the pastoral staff member believes that reasonable suspicion of child abuse exists, he and the original staff member must together immediately notify Children's Protective Services of the allegation. If making a call together, tell the agency phone representative that both staff members are making the call. \*\*Keep in mind that even if the pastoral staff concludes that there is no reason to believe that abuse has occurred or will occur, if the original staff member who heard of or suspected the abuse still believes there is reasonable suspicion of abuse, that staff member is obligated to report the incident to Children's Protective Services. Also note that informing a superior or pastoral staff member does not relieve the mandated reporter of his or her legal responsibility to report.
5. Within 72 hours of reporting by telephone to the Children's Protective Services, mandated reporters must also file a written report with Children's Protective Services.

State Child Abuse Hotline: Children's Protective Services (855-444-3911)