

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

REVISED 9/2018

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CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
Revised 9/2018

1. Vision and Mission of Children’s Ministry at Grace Bible Church

Our ministry exists to make more and better disciples of the children of Grace Bible Church and the surrounding community.

2. Purpose for the Policy

The Gospel of Mark (10:13-16) records that when people brought children to Jesus he welcomed the children, took them in his arms, and blessed them. In the same way, it is our desire to bring children to Jesus. Therefore, this Child Protection Policy (CPP) exists to:

2.1. Protect Children

Because of our love for children and the dangers to children that exist in our society, this policy is designed to provide (to the greatest extent possible) for the safety and security of all children who are served by the ministries of Grace Bible Church.

2.2. Assure Parents

We recognize God has given parents the primary privilege and responsibility of rearing their children to maturity and that protecting their children from harm is inherent to that process. This policy is intended to provide assurance to parents that we will be careful and diligent in doing our part to help raise their children.

2.3. Assist Church Leaders

This policy is also designed to assist church leaders in recruiting volunteers for ministry to children, equipping those volunteers for effective ministry, and addressing any issues that may arise.

2.4. Guide Volunteers

Finally, this policy is designed to provide safety and clarity for volunteers who serve in ministry to children. We desire to minimize any vulnerability to unwarranted accusations of improper behavior that our church, church staff, and volunteers may experience as they fulfill their ministerial duties.

3. Parameters for the Policy

This policy applies to “regular” church-sponsored events and activities (e.g. Kids for Christ, Generations of Grace, worship services, midweek gatherings, etc.) and to “special” church-sponsored events and activities (e.g. vacation Bible school, retreats, etc.). This policy also

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applies to “babysitting” for on-campus, church-sponsored events even when not defined as children’s ministry.

In addition, the CPP applies to everyone working directly with children at Grace Bible Church, whether in a voluntary or paid capacity.

Parents are responsible for their children when they are on church property or at off-site events where no official child or youth supervision is provided. Non-church sponsored activities, even if they occur on the Grace Bible Church property, or are sponsored by Grace Bible Church families do not fall under the scope of this policy. This would include life group gatherings, birthday parties, graduation parties, weddings, etc.

4. Personnel Summary

4.1. Elder Board

The elder board consists of vocational and non-vocational elders who are called by God and affirmed by the congregation to lead, oversee, and shepherd the congregation. The elder board has final authority and responsibility over the children’s ministry and has approved all policies and procedures contained in this CPP.

4.2. Deacon Board

The deacon board consists of deacons elected by the congregation to supervise, maintain, and secure the finances, property, and facilities of the church. Select members of the deacon board constitute the church’s Grace S.A.F.E. Team, which is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of those participating in our children’s ministry during Sunday morning services.

4.3. Church Staff

Church staff are paid employees of the church. All church staff, whether full-time or part-time, who have direct contact with children are required to receive a background check.

4.4. Volunteers

Volunteers are those who work with children and are not in the employment of the church. All volunteers who serve in children’s ministry are required to go through both the children’s ministry training and screening procedures before they serve. Volunteers include nursery workers, team leaders, gate keepers, teachers, classroom helpers, and anyone else who serves directly with children. The term “volunteer” will be used

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throughout this policy manual as an all-encompassing term for anyone who serves the children and is not church staff.

4.5. Children

This policy applies to all ministries involving children as defined by Ohio state law: “a person under the age of eighteen or a person under twenty-one years of age with a developmental disability or physical impairment.” It also applies to youth older than 17 who are still in high school.

These are hereafter referred to as “children” or “youth” in this policy.

5. General Guidelines and Expectations

5.1. Expectations of All Staff and Volunteers

All children’s ministry staff and volunteers share a responsibility for loving children as Christ loves them, for making more and better disciples of children as Christ commissioned, and for setting an example of proper Christian conduct in the way we live our lives. Therefore, all staff and volunteers are required to review and follow this Child Protection Policy.

Ministry leaders, church staff, and volunteers who become aware of a violation of the Child Protection Policy are required to take all necessary steps to ensure future compliance with the policy (e.g. provide a reminder, give an admonition, notify the children’s ministry leader or elder board). In the process of ensuring compliance with the CPP, it may become necessary to remove church staff and volunteers from their positions.

5.2. Training and Screening Procedures

5.2.1. Volunteer Screening

All volunteers must complete a screening process which includes the following:

5.2.1.1. Six-Month Waiting Period

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving direct contact with children until she/he has been involved with Grace Bible Church for a minimum of six months. This time of evaluation between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

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5.2.1.2. Volunteer Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a written application (see Appendix for a copy of the application). The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous church affiliation, reference and employment information, disclosure of any previous criminal convictions, as well as personal history with abuse and sinful habits. The completed application will be maintained in confidence on file at Grace Bible Church.

5.2.1.3. Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview will be scheduled with the applicant to review the application and to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

5.2.1.4. Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. The references given should be able to speak to the applicant's character and suitability to work with children. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at Grace Bible Church.

5.2.1.5. Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all pastors, elders, and deacons of Grace Bible Church as well as any staff or volunteer position involving direct contact with children.

All new volunteers will complete their background screening on-line. All volunteers will be rescreened every three years, or on an interval determined necessary by the elder board.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the elder board, or their designee, on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children (e.g. child abuse, neglect, or exploitation) and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency, and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to

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disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

The criminal background screening results will be reviewed by designated personnel and ministry leaders in our church and maintained in confidence on file at Grace Bible Church.

5.2.1.6. Church Membership

While volunteers can serve in the children's ministry without being a member of Grace Bible Church, all volunteers who desire to teach in the children's ministry must be a member of Grace Bible Church in good standing.

5.2.2. Volunteer Training

5.2.2.1. New Volunteer Orientation

All new children's ministry volunteers are required to attend a new volunteer orientation. The orientation will give an overview of the children's ministry, introduce the new volunteer to our vision and philosophy of children's ministry, discuss our church's position on child evangelism, provide our volunteer and classroom expectations, work through the child protection policy, and inform the volunteer about child abuse and neglect.

5.2.2.2. Semi-Annual Children's Ministry Safety Seminar

Twice a year, our children's ministry will host a children's ministry safety seminar that includes training on CPR, first aid, child safety and sexual abuse prevention/reporting, and classroom procedures for an active shooter, fire, or hazardous weather situation. All children's ministry staff and volunteers are required to attend at least one of these sessions each year.

5.2.2.3. Children's Ministry Role-Specific Training

Team leaders will hold role-specific training sessions throughout the year for teachers, nursery workers, gate keepers, and classroom helpers. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend as many training sessions as possible to grow and succeed in their current role.

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5.3. Expectations for Classroom Settings

5.3.1. The Two-Adult Rule

Because isolation and lack of accountability provide an opportunity for abuse, it is our goal that a minimum of two workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. We encourage older students to serve as children's ministry volunteers. A youth, age 14 or older, may count as an adult under the Two-Adult Rule. However, all teenagers must be under the supervision of an adult and must never be left alone with children.

For church sponsored activities with children under 12 years old, a minimum of one adult and one helper 14 years of age or older must be present at all times.

For church sponsored activities with children 12 to 17 years old, a minimum of two adult workers must be present at all times.

To facilitate the two-adult rule, volunteers should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to their scheduled class, program, or activity. For our 11am children's ministry programs, volunteers need to leave the worship service during the last song and quickly make their way to their scheduled location.

Volunteers must remain at their scheduled location until all the children in their care have been picked up by a parent or guardian.

5.3.2. Visibility

When classes or programs are in session, classroom door windows must provide an unobstructed view into the classroom, and classroom doors must remain unlocked. When classes or programs are not in session, classroom doors must remain open.

5.3.3. Discipline

Staff and volunteers are prohibited from administering corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, hitting, shaking, or other physical discipline of children. Appropriate physical restraint should only be used when there is no other reasonable means to prevent children from harming themselves or others.

All correction should be discrete, fair, and consistent; in the classroom (not in the hallway); and never outside of the sight of others. When a child becomes

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disorderly or disruptive, volunteers will seek to redirect the child or to verbally admonish the child. If the child is unresponsive to redirection or verbal correction, the volunteer will ask the gate keepers to summon the child's parent or guardian. If a child is repeatedly disorderly or disruptive, the children's ministry leader will meet with the child's parent or guardian to discuss the child's behavior. If the disruptive behavior continues, the children's ministry leader may require the child to remain with his/her parent or guardian instead of participating in the children's ministry.

Volunteers should report all serious disciplinary issues/actions to the children's ministry leader, including when a parent or guardian is summoned.

5.3.4. Physical Touch

Physical touch is an essential and appropriate part of nurturing, but must be age and developmentally appropriate. Staff and volunteers must always be aware of and sensitive to differences in sexual development, culture, family backgrounds, individual personalities, and special needs. Staff and volunteers must always conduct themselves in a manner that is above reproach.

5.3.4.1. Appropriate Physical Touch

Physical touch between a volunteer and a child is appropriate when it is a non-demanding, gentle touch of the shoulders, hands, arms, head, or back. Appropriate physical touch expresses love and affirmation and is not for the satisfaction or pleasure of the volunteer.

Examples of positive and appropriate physical touch:

- Brief hugs or side hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- "High-fives," hand slapping, and fist bumps
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders, and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate

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5.3.4.2. Inappropriate Physical Touch

Physical touch between a volunteer and a child is not appropriate when it includes demanding hugs or kisses, or touching the chest, genital regions, thighs, or buttocks. Inappropriate physical contact includes any kind of contact which is done for the pleasure or satisfaction of the volunteer.

Examples of inappropriate physical touch:

- Frontal, lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over four-years-old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bathrooms, closets, or empty classrooms
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, "You sure are developing," or "You look really hot in those jeans."
- Snapping bras or giving "wedgies" or similar touch of underwear whether or not it is covered by other clothing

In addition to inappropriate physical touch, staff and volunteers should not give gifts or money to individual children or youth.

5.3.5. Food and Drinks

Volunteers may provide a light snack and water to our children during their time in our care. If a child has a food allergy or other dietary restriction, parents are responsible for communicating this to the gate keeper on duty and placing a red allergy bracelet on their child's arm each week. While we will try to provide a

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snack that conforms to the child's dietary restriction, that may not be feasible, and parents may need to send appropriate snacks with their child each week.

6. Protective Rules and Safety Guidelines

6.1. Sickness and Wellness

6.1.1. Sick Child

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe learning environment for the volunteers and children of our church. Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place their child under our care. In general, children with the following symptoms should not be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, or vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Children who are observed by our volunteers to be ill will be separated from other children. The volunteer will then notify the gate keeper on duty, and the gate keeper will summon the parent or guardian to pick up the child for the remainder of the day. If a child becomes seriously ill, the gate keeper will also radio the Grace S.A.F.E Team. If warranted by the situation, the deacon security team will call emergency medical personnel.

Volunteers should take responsible steps to help both them and the children in their care to avoid contact with blood, saliva, or other bodily fluids.

Biohazard kits are available in each classroom and at the gate keeper station for volunteers to use to contain and cleanup bodily fluids.

6.1.2. Medications Policy

Staff and volunteers will not administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent or guardian.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with the children's ministry leader to develop a plan of action.

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6.1.3. Accidental Injuries

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

- For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, volunteers will provide first aid (ice packs, Band-Aids, antibiotic ointment, etc.) as appropriate. A first aid kit is kept at the gate keeper station, and all workers are to be familiar with the location and content of this kit. If a child receives first aid, the child's parent or guardian should be notified of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, the volunteer should notify the gate keeper on duty. The gate keeper will radio the deacon security team, immediately summon the child's parent or guardian, and notify the children's ministry leader. If warranted by circumstances, the deacon security team will call emergency medical personnel.
- In the case of injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple first aid, once the child has received appropriate medical attention, the volunteer will complete an incident report form and forward it to the children's ministry leader within 24 hours of the incident.

6.2. Check-in and Check-out Process

6.2.1. Check-in Process

Parents are responsible for their child until their child is checked into and once their child is checked out of a children's ministry program. The children's ministry is staffed to receive children beginning 15 minutes before each service. Parents should use the check-in computers at the entrance of the children's ministry to check in each of their children. The check-in system will print a name badge for each child as well as a security badge for the parent to pick up their child after the service. Gate keepers will need to create a guest badge for children of visitors.

Children must wear their name badge at all times while under the care of the children's ministry. If a child refuses to wear the badge, volunteers should ask the gate keeper to summon the child's parent or guardian.

Parents who drop off their children to the nursery will also receive a pager that the nursery workers can use to notify the parent if needed.

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6.2.2. Check-out Process

When a parent or guardian comes to pick up their child, they must first show their security badge to the gate keeper, then they must next show their security badge to the helper or teacher in the room where their child is located. Only after the classroom helper or teacher verifies the number on the security badge matches the number on the child's badge will they release the child to the parent or guardian.

If a parent or guardian loses their security badge, they must show their state-issued ID or driver's license to the gate keeper. The gate keeper, in turn, will verify that the individual is listed as the parent or as a trusted person who is able to pick up the child.

Children will not be released from their classroom until a parent, guardian, or trusted person comes to pick-up the child.

6.3. Restroom Procedures

6.3.1. General Restroom Guidelines

Children five years of age or younger must be escorted to the bathroom. Volunteers should escort these young children as a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The volunteers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The volunteers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the volunteer should open the bathroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the volunteer should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The volunteer should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The volunteer should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, volunteers should never be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the bathroom before arriving at class.

6.3.2. Nursery Diaper Changing Policy

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Only female volunteers or a child's parent / guardian are permitted to change a child's diaper or to take toddlers who are potty-training to the nursery bathroom.

When changing diapers, volunteers should follow the diaper-changing procedures posted at each changing station. For the health and safety of our volunteers and children, volunteers are encouraged to use gloves while changing diapers.

6.4. Transportation Guidelines

Drivers who are transporting children / youth for a church sponsored and approved trip/event/activity in their own personal vehicles must comply with the following:

1. All drivers must have a copy of their driver's license and valid car insurance card on file at the church office. All documents must be valid at time of driving.
2. The church will acquire and review the driving records of all drivers. These records will be reviewed at least bi-annually. Any driver that has been convicted of 3 or more moving violations within a 12-month period, two or more accidents in the past 3 years, or more than one accident in any one year will not be allowed to transport children / youth to church sponsored and approved activities.
3. Any driver with the following citations will not be allowed to transport children / youth to church sponsored and approved activities:
 - Operating a motor vehicle during a time of suspension or revocation,
 - Operating a motor vehicle without a license
 - Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs
 - Reckless driving
 - Negligent homicide arising out of the use of a motor vehicle
 - Aggravated assault with a motor vehicle
4. All drivers must be at least 21 years of age and not older than 75 years old.
5. All drivers are prohibited from using cellular telephones while the vehicle is moving.
6. All drivers are required to obey all traffic laws at all times.
7. All vehicle occupants are required to wear seat belts at all times.
8. No vehicle can transport more occupants than the number of seat belts available in the vehicle.
9. Any child younger than 8 years old and less than 4'9" tall (or whatever is required by the current Ohio Revised Code) is required to use a child or booster seat. This seat may not be installed in the front passenger seat. All car/booster seats must be installed per manufacturer's recommendations.

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10. All drivers must sign a copy of the church transportation policy indicating that they have reviewed the policy in its entirety and agree to abide by it. The signed copy must be left in the church office prior to the trip/event/activity.
11. All drivers understand that their insurance will be considered primary in case of a claim. The church's insurance will be considered secondary.
12. Drivers should never be alone with a minor in a vehicle. Multiple passengers must be in each vehicle for church sponsored events.
13. A driver shall not drive more than 8 hours in one day in the transportation of children / youth for church sponsored events.

6.5. Photography / Social Media

To protect the privacy and security of all children attending Grace Bible Church events, it is our policy to not post or distribute photos / videos of children attending a church event / activity to any outside organization or social media site without written permission from the child's parents / guardians.

6.6. Off-site or Out-of-Town Event Guidelines

Any off-site, out-of-town, or overnight church-sponsored activity involving children or youth requires written permission from the parent(s) / guardian(s).

Sleeping arrangements for all overnight church-sponsored trips must include separate sleeping areas for male and female children or youth. No one of the opposite gender is permitted to be in another sleeping area at any time without proper adult supervision. No child will be assigned a sleeping area by themselves.

At least one adult leader over 21 shall be provided for each sleeping location. Adult leaders will not be alone in the sleeping area with a child at any time.

Adult leaders will not expose any private parts or be naked in the presence of any minor at any time. Bathing and changing should be done in private away from the view of minors.

6.7. Emergency Response Plan and Evacuation Procedures

6.7.1. Fire

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In the case of a fire, volunteers should count all children in their classroom and then escort them out of the building following the evacuation route posted in each classroom. Volunteers should assist children to walk quickly and quietly from the building through the lawn to the baseball field on the east side of the property (or to the basketball court if the baseball field is deemed unsafe). Children should not be led through the parking lot.

Once arriving at the baseball field, volunteers should recount their children and report any missing children to the Grace S.A.F.E. Team.

Children will only be released to parents at the baseball field or basketball court.

6.7.2. Hazardous Weather

In the case of hazardous weather, volunteers should count all children in their classroom then escort them quickly and quietly to the designated tornado safety area posted in each classroom. Volunteers should assist children to assume a safe tornado position (seated, facing wall, bent over, hands on head) until the all-clear is given by a member of the Grace S.A.F.E Team.

6.7.3. Intruder / Active Shooter

In the case of a hostile intruder or active shooter, volunteers should immediately but calmly turn off the lights, silence any audio equipment, and close the window blinds. Volunteers should assist children to remain as calm and quiet as possible and to move away from windows and out of sight of classroom door windows.

Once law enforcement arrives, obey all commands. This may involve your being handcuffed or made to put your hands in the air. This is done for safety reasons, and once circumstances are evaluated by law enforcement, they will give you further directions to follow.

6.8. Prevention Plan for Child Neglect and Abuse

The State of Ohio defines child abuse as sexual conduct or contact with a child, physical or mental abuse, neglect, or child endangering (ORC 2151.031).

6.8.1. Sexual conduct with a child

Sexual conduct with a child occurs when there is “vaginal intercourse between a male and female; anal intercourse, fellatio, and cunnilingus between persons

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regardless of sex; and, without privilege to do so, the insertion, however slight, of any part of the body or any instrument, apparatus, or other object into the vaginal or anal opening of another. Penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete vaginal or anal intercourse.” (ORC 2907.01.A)

6.8.2. Sexual contact with a child

Sexual contact with a child occurs when there is “any touching of an erogenous zone of another, including without limitation the thigh, genitals, buttock, pubic region, or, if the person is a female, a breast, for the purpose of sexually arousing or gratifying either person.” (ORC 2907.01.B)

6.8.3. Child physical or mental abuse

Child physical or mental abuse occurs when the child “suffers physical or mental injury that harms or threatens to harm the child’s health or welfare,” and which is “inflicted other than by accidental means.” (ORC 2151.031)

6.8.4. Child neglect

Child neglect occurs when a child is abandoned or deprived of his or her essential needs, such as food, water, shelter, and parental or medical care. (ORC 2151.03)

6.8.5. Child endangering

“Creating a substantial risk to the health or safety of the child, by violating a duty of care, protection, or support” is how the State of Ohio defines child endangering. (ORC 2919.22) Conduct that can cause such a risk includes abuse, torture, excessive corporal, physical, or unwarranted discipline which creates a substantial risk of serious physical or mental harm to the child, or encouraging or forcing a child to engage in child pornography.

6.8.6. Preventing Child Neglect and Abuse

Grace Bible Church takes the protection and safety of children in our care seriously. In an effort to create the safest possible environment within Grace Bible Church, the elder board has instituted the abuse prevention measures detailed in this child protection policy. These measures include screening of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or expungements (see section 5.2.1), provision for regular training on child abuse issues to children’s ministry staff and volunteers (see section 5.2.2), use of the two-adult rule (see section 5.3.1), and standards for appropriate classroom discipline (see section 5.3.3).

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6.9. Reporting and Response Plan for Child Neglect and Abuse

6.9.1. Reporting Child Abuse

Child abuse thrives when it goes unnoticed or unreported. Often, an abusive situation continues because of someone's failure to report it. It is imperative that children's ministry staff and volunteers are alert to questionable or inappropriate behavior as well as signs of child abuse.

6.9.1.1. Questionable or Inappropriate Behavior

Questionable or inappropriate behavior often precedes acts of child abuse or molestation. Children's ministry staff and volunteers should warn each other when questionable behavior is displayed. Further, questionable behaviors should be reported to the children's ministry leader.

6.9.1.2. Signs of Child Abuse

Children's ministry staff and volunteers should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as the behavioral and verbal signs that victims may exhibit.

Physical signs may include: lacerations and bruises; nightmares; irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area; difficulty with urination; discomfort when sitting; torn or bloody underclothing; venereal disease.

Behavioral signs may include: anxiety when approaching the church; nervous or hostile behavior toward adults; sexual self-consciousness; "acting out" of sexual behavior; withdrawal from church activities and friends.

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- "I don't like [a particular church worker]."
- "[A church worker] does things to me when we're alone."
- "I don't like to be alone with [a church worker]."
- "[A church worker] fooled around with me."

6.9.1.3. When to Report Child Abuse

If a children's ministry staff member or volunteer knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect based on facts that would cause a reasonable

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person in similar circumstances to suspect, that a child was or is being abused on church property or during a church sponsored event, that individual should immediately report the situation to the children's ministry leader and to the church elder board.

Reasonable suspicion means that there is credible evidence or a discrepant or inconsistent history in explaining a child's suspected abuse. A report based on reasonable suspicion does not require proof that abuse or neglect has actually occurred or that the reporter witnessed the incident in question. Reporting is not a determination that child abuse or neglect has actually occurred; rather, it is a request for an assessment of the condition of a child.

6.9.2. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

When Grace Bible 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, the children's ministry leader and the elder board will assume that such complaints are made in good faith. Persons making such complaints should have no doubt that Grace Bible Church takes them seriously and will take appropriate action.

When it becomes necessary to report suspected child abuse or neglect, the protection of children must be the most important concern. It is the legal responsibility of any person with responsibility for the care of children to report all cases of child abuse they observe, and further, to report visible signs of alleged abuse. Failure to report could lead to liability on the part of the church, the observer, or both.

Because we believe the safety and protection of children are vitally important, Grace Bible Church has adopted the following guidelines for reporting:

1. Treat each allegation of child abuse seriously.
2. Attempt to assure the safety and protection of persons who have been harmed.
3. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
4. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in handling the allegation. As part of the documentation, the following information should be collected and confidentially maintained:

- The name, age, gender, and address of the victim.

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- The name, age, gender, and address of the alleged perpetrator.
 - The nature of the abuse / sexual misconduct alleged to have occurred.
 - How many times the alleged misconduct occurred.
 - The date(s) and location(s) of the incident(s).
 - The relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator.
 - Other evidence that supports the allegation (eyewitnesses, medical exams, confessions, etc.).
5. Immediately notify the children's ministry leader and the elder board. After receiving the report and allegation of child abuse, if the elder board has reasonable cause to suspect based on facts that would cause a reasonable person in similar circumstances to suspect, that a child was or is being abused on church property or during a church sponsored event, the elder board will
- Immediately notify the Fairfield County Sheriff and Child Protective Services of the allegation and fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident.
 - Immediately notify the parents of the alleged victim if it is not known that they have previous knowledge of the allegations.
 - Immediately notify the church's insurance company and complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
6. The pastors and elders will extend whatever care and resources are necessary to the alleged victim, the accused, and their families. In providing care, the pastors or elders should under no circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate an official investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or negating the allegation.
7. Treat the accused with dignity and respect. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person will be immediately relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is concluded. The accused should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses. Based on the results of the investigation, their duties may be reinstated or permanently terminated. A paid elder or staff member who admits to the abuse will be terminated immediately consistent with the church bylaws.
8. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the elder board.

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9. If the media or other parties contact a church official about a pending allegation of child abuse, they should be referred to the senior pastor (or to the person designated by the elder board). Only the senior pastor or designee should make comments about the allegations. They will use the text of a prepared public statement to answer the press and to convey news to the congregation. The prepared statement shall be made only after consultation with the church's attorney and will include the steps the church has taken to protect children, such as the development and implementation of this child protection policy, and the care and concern the church has for all parties involved. The privacy and confidentiality of all involved shall continue to be of primary concern.

6.10. Guidelines for How the Church Handles Sexual Offenders Who Regularly Attend or Join the Church

When a convicted sexual offender wants to attend Grace Bible Church and participate in church worship and other ministry activities the following should occur:

1. The Grace S.A.F.E team will launch a response team for handling allegations and information regarding the sex offender. This should include contacting the offender's parole officer and the local prosecutor's office to find out the specific terms of his or her probation. Also, the deacon board or its designee should review court documents or other records to verify the offender's past offenses.
2. The church's security team will establish a chaperone team to provide security and accountability for the sex offender during worship and ministry activities. The chaperone team should ensure that the offender does not engage with any children or teenagers or visit the children's ministry or youth classes at the church.
3. If the offender continues to attend, he or she should be contacted and alerted that he or she is not allowed to be at the church without a chaperone.
4. If the offender continues to attend and his/her conviction was for offenses against children, the parents in the church should also be informed.
5. Under no circumstances will the offender be permitted to serve in any capacity that brings them into direct contact with children or teens.

If a sexual offender desires to become a member of Grace Bible Church, these additional steps should be taken:

6. The elder board will determine whether bringing the offender into church membership will cause harm or division within the church. The offender may be asked to find another church.

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7. The elder board will have the offender agree to and sign a code of conduct. These conduct guidelines will require that the offender do the following:
 - Agree to a thorough background check
 - Verify and detail all past abuses
 - Allow the elder board to disclose this information to the congregation
 - Refrain from any communication or activities with children or teens, both inside and outside of the church
 - Agree to be accompanied by a chaperone whenever the offender is at church
 - Agree to the church's prioritizing the needs of the abused

8. The elder board will warn the offender that any violation of these terms could result in church discipline and a barring from the church.