



# Student Ministry Policies

Specific policies are in place to protect leaders and students and to promote a healthy ministry.

This policy is applicable to all individuals having direct contact with the youth of The Church at Canyon Creek, including but not limited to, pastors, staff, teachers, volunteers, and chaperones.

## Volunteer and Staff Qualifications

All Student Ministry staff and volunteers must adhere to the policies found in this document. The Church at Canyon Creek conducts a background check on all Student Ministry volunteers and staff before their start date. The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence at The Church at Canyon Creek.

## Discipline

Adults will employ only positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourages, builds self-esteem, self-control and self-direction. Examples of positive discipline include:

- Use praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior
- Reminding youth of behavior expectations by using clear, positive statements
- Redirecting behavior using positive statements
- Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate for the youth's age and development.

Student Ministry staff or volunteers should never speak harsh words, insults, belittling comments, threatening words or any other verbal humiliation to students. If a problem arises with a student, communicate with Student Ministry leadership.

## Communication and Social Media

Social networking sites, texting, e-mailing and other forms of electronic communication are a reality in the lives of most of our students. They offer an opportunity to develop and deepen relationships in new ways and are therefore a vital part of youth ministry work. But their improper use can produce serious consequences.

The following required practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Be mindful that our calling is to meet students where they are, model healthy boundaries, and care for students' safety.

- Employee and volunteer youth workers who want to communicate with minors using text messaging, e-mail, social networking websites or other forms of electronic media must agree to follow the guidelines set forth by The Church at Canyon Creek Student Ministry.
- Student Ministry volunteers may not transmit any content that is illicit, abusive, pornographic, emotionally or sexually suggestive, discriminatory, harassing, or disrespectful when communicating with each other or with minors involved in ministry.
- Student Ministry staff and volunteers must exercise caution and discernment when posting on social media that includes students within our student ministry. Never post personal information pertaining to a minor. Leaders should always communicate clearly with parents of students. Parents should communicate with Student Ministry staff and leadership if they desire their student to be excluded from any online posting or communication.
- Use prudent judgment in the time you contact students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 10:00 PM.
- Implement personal boundaries
  - Discretion should be used when communicating one on one with a student and content should only be ministry related.
  - Do not text, email, or correspond through social media with someone of the opposite sex who is not officially a part of the scope of your ministry.
  - When communicating with students, never use "personal language." For example, instead of saying "I missed you this week at church" say "we missed you this week at church." This eliminates possible misunderstandings and puts the emphasis on the group.
  - If a student texts you after hours and it's not an emergency – wait until morning to reply
- If you choose to utilize any social networking site to communicate with students associated with The Church at Canyon Creek youth group, invite other Canyon Creek youth volunteers or staff to view and respond to the content.
  - When possible, communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public social networking areas.
  - When ongoing pastoral communications are one on one (ie: emails, FB messages, texting, etc), it should only be occasional and never excessive. When initiating communication, include a third party when possible. Who communication is with and frequency should be disclosed to the parent or a supervisor. Clear communication and oversight is required.
  - We highly discourage forms of social media that do not maintain a history or thread of communication. (Example: Snapchat)
- Student Ministry staff and volunteers serve as leaders who represent our ministry. As such, leaders must be responsible with their own conduct while using social media. This includes personal, professional, and ministry related interactions.

- Only post photos on social media that are appropriate. Remember that your students are watching you and your actions so please post photos that are wholesome. (Example: Swimsuit pics)
- Be careful that what you write would not impair your ability to serve with the church, lead your students, speak with credibility to other churches, or represent us in the community. Remember that frustrations are best expressed in person, not over social media. Sarcasm does not usually translate well, so be careful how you use humor.
- Respect your audience. Be thoughtful. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conversation that would not be acceptable in our ministry.

**Communication is a CRUCIAL part of any youth ministry but follow guidelines set forth here along with wisdom, patience, and care when communicating with students, parents, and each other.**

## **Displays of Affection/ Physical Touch**

Adults involved in The Church at Canyon Creek Student Ministry activities must assume the full burden for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries in all youth ministry relationships.

### **Appropriate Displays of Affection when interacting with students:**

Use of appropriate physical contact in a public setting to show support, encouragement and healthy affection toward youth who are receptive to this form of emotional expression is acceptable.

However, adults must exercise good judgment and never force any physical contact on any youth. Examples of appropriate displays of affection may include: holding hands during prayers or when a person is upset, side-hugs, hand-shakes, high-fives, hand slaps and fist bumps, verbal praise, arms around shoulders, pats on the shoulder/back.

### **Inappropriate Displays of Affection when interacting with students:**

Any form of sexual contact or contact perceived as stimulating, kissing, initiating full frontal hugs or "bear hugs" with members of the opposite gender, massages, lying down or sleeping beside a student in the same bed, tickling or wrestling, touching or hugging from behind, showing affection, especially in isolated/inappropriate areas such as bedrooms, closets, restricted or private rooms, comments that relate to physique or body development, patting on the thigh, knee or leg, inappropriate or lengthy embraces, piggyback rides.

## **Opposite Gender**

Avoid being alone with someone of the opposite sex. It is our policy that male leaders should seek to minister to male students and female leaders should seek to minister to female students.

In instances where such interaction needs to occur (for Student Pastor and staff for example), ensure that such interaction only occurs during church office hours and on the church facility. If meeting one on one for pastoral purposes, leave the door open or ensure it has a window. If church

office and facility is not an option to meet one on one (at a youth event for example), this must be done in a visible area and with the knowledge of additional leadership. Aside from these exceptions, at no time should a leader meet one on one with a student of the opposite gender in a public or private location.

In conversations with anyone of the opposite gender, do not joke, use flirtatious, sexual language that would commonly be interpreted as inappropriate. Also, use caution in complimenting outward appearance.

Do not initiate physical affection with people of the opposite sex such as frontal hugs and shoulder rubs. Side hugs, handshakes, and high fives are safer forms of affection. Always communicate clearly with Student Ministry leadership and parents of students.

While these guidelines primarily focus upon interaction with the opposite sex, leaders should always exercise great caution when meeting one on one with students of the same sex especially in cases where that student has communicated a struggle with same sex attraction.

## **Two Adult Rule**

Two or more adults are to be present during any Church at Canyon Creek sponsored youth activity. For your protection, leaders should not spend time alone with students except in visible places. In these instances of discipleship or counseling, male leaders should minister to male students and female leaders should minister to female students. This interaction should occur in an area that is visible to others and with the knowledge of another adult. Again, aside from the exceptions listed above, at no time should a leader meet one on one with a student of the opposite gender in a public or private location.

## **Transportation**

For Student Ministry events, all youth must ride in vehicles driven by authorized adults which must:

- Be at least 21 years old
- Have a valid Driver license, qualified for the vehicle being operated.
- Have no record of convictions for the past five years for DUI, driving with a suspended or revoked driver's license or reckless endangerment.
- Have proof of insurance
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a youth other than his/her own child, except as discussed in the "Exceptional Situations" section below.
- Therefore, no fewer than three persons, one of them an adult, should occupy a vehicle traveling to/from an activity.
- Ensure vehicles are not filled beyond capacity for their use.
- Refrain from cell phone use while driving a vehicle or any other careless driving.
- Obey all traffic laws and are to make every reasonable effort to assure the safety of their passengers, including seat belts for every passenger. Texas law requires that every minor wear a seat belt.

- Must understand emergency contact procedures and maintain contact with the person in charge of event. (e.g. cell phone)

## **Overnight Stays**

Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is a clean, safe environment provided for sleeping, showering, bathing, dressing and all other aspects of being away for a period of time. Adults must always respect the privacy of youth and each other. Likewise, youth must respect the privacy of adults and each other.

When the youth group event includes both males and females, and stays overnight, both male and female adults must be present.

Sleeping areas and access to bathroom facilities should be segregated between males and females. Every sleeping unit (hotel room, dorm room, cabin, tent, etc) should have either two adults of the same gender as the youth, no adults, or one adult and more than one youth. No sleeping units will have one adult and one student (unless that student is their own child). Adults are not allowed to share a bed with a youth unless it is their own child. In addition, no males in female rooms or females in male rooms during youth ministry events. If separate bathroom facilities are not available, times for male and female and youth/adults use should be scheduled.

In booking hotel rooms, reservations should be made, if possible, with all rooms on the same floor or location in the hotel. Adjacent rooms allow for enhanced supervision and safety. No youth(s) should be allowed to leave the premises without authorized and appropriate adult supervision. Curfews must be established and adhered to by all participants.

### **Exceptional Situations**

Only under the rarest and most unusual circumstances should an adult be alone in a car, room, or other accommodation with a youth. This might include a case where a youth is ill or in a bona fide medical emergency. In this case, the adult should make every effort to enlist the help of another youth or adult to be present and assist or inform student ministry leadership. Note however, the welfare of the youth takes precedence and whatever action is necessary and appropriate must be taken.

If there is a unique need for an adult to talk with a youth in private, the adult should choose a quiet place that is in plain, public view. Examples of this may include open areas around the church (courtyards or hotel lobbies if on a trip), short walks down a sidewalk, a restaurant or other location where people are present in the area. In these cases, our interaction policies both with opposite gender and same gender must be followed.

Adults need to acknowledge that there is potential for sexual abuse and/or harassment by outside parties and must take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of all youth.

# Reporting Procedures

When dealing with students, there are times when Student Ministry volunteers become aware of difficult situations involving students. It's important to have a clear understanding of what situations require clear reporting to Youth Pastor, parents, and appropriate authorities and what situations require discernment in reporting. The following guidance should be followed.

## Clear Reporting Required

### Abuse

Any leader who has reason to believe or evidence that a student is a victim of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect has a duty to report. This duty to report is not limited to events or activities at The Church at Canyon Creek or when under our supervision. Leaders should talk to the Youth Pastor and together determine next steps. Next steps include communicating to appropriate authorities, parents, and the Executive Pastor.

### Suicidal thoughts/intentions

Any leader who is aware of a student threatening to hurt himself/herself must report this to the Youth Pastor and together determine next steps. Next steps include communicating to appropriate authorities, parents, and the Executive Pastor.

### Personal Crisis/Endangerment

Any leader who is aware of a student dealing with a personal crisis that can be life threatening in nature (Examples: pregnancy, drug/alcohol abuse, criminal activity, intent on harming someone else) must be reported to the Youth Pastor and together determine next steps. Next steps include communicating to appropriate authorities, parents, and the Executive Pastor.

## Reporting Requiring Discernment

*Pornography, sexuality issues, alcohol use, drug use, depression, etc.*

In dealing with these issues in which there is no law that requires reporting, discernment must be exercised. A good principle would be to encourage open dialogue between parents and students. The goal is never to "keep secrets" from parents, but to be a safe place for the student during this time in their lives. One goal of our leaders is to be a shepherd to these students. Another goal is to be a support to the parents of our students. So, we must exercise discernment as we balance these two goals. The best course of action would often be to encourage students to talk with parents about issues they're dealing with. In most cases, parents will be instrumental in navigating these issues. However, if leaders communicated to parents every time something was shared, the students might stop sharing altogether, believing that they are all alone. That's why discernment is important. In dealing with students, there are times when it is absolutely the right step to talk with parents. Others, perhaps not. If unsure, talk with the Youth Pastor and together we will determine next steps.

# Student Ministry Confidentiality Policy

When dealing with students, there needs to be clear guidelines for managing confidentiality. Student Ministry leaders (staff, table leaders, Deep End leaders, other volunteer leaders) have an important role in being a support for the students within our ministry. At times, students will confide in leaders. Other times, our leaders might simply observe or become aware of situations of greater gravity. What are the steps taken in such instances?

## Follow key principles

### **Establish trust with students**

Trust is a very important factor in dealing with students. It is common for a student to confide in an adult volunteer before they confide in their parents. A leader's role is to listen, offer guidance and encouragement, and to establish ground rules as it relates to confidentiality. When needed, contact the Youth Pastor with any issues that need to be reported or of major concern.

### **Communicate ground rules**

As leaders, we want to be open to our students, but we also want to be clear with respect to the information they share with us. It's important that we communicate clearly. Leaders should never promise confidentiality no matter what. We will be confidential unless it's information that involves situations where clear reporting is required (abuse, suicidal thoughts/intentions, or personal crisis/endangerment). In nearly all situations, we want to reassure students that there will be no surprises; meaning, before we take next steps (communicating with parents for example), we will communicate that with the student. In this way, we can still maintain trust with students.

### **Involve appropriate adults**

When clear reporting is required, communication with the Youth Pastor is essential. Together, the Youth Pastor and volunteer leader will determine next steps. When communicating with parents, priority will always be to encourage students to talk directly with parents. There will always be a willingness to go with students to communicate with parents. If students are unwilling, then student ministry leadership will communicate with parents. As required, CPS or other needed organizations will be contacted. Other appropriate adults might include school counselors, professional counselors, etc. The Executive Pastor should also be informed when situations require it.