

Grace Church Child Protection Program

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Background

In 1997 a church-wide Child Protection Program was developed and implemented by staff members and volunteers of Grace Church. The approval of this proactive program by church leadership was aimed at the following:

- To safeguard the children and youth of our church from becoming victims of abuse.
- To protect church staff and volunteers from being falsely accused of abuse.
- To limit the extent of the church's legal risk and liability due to abuse.

Maintaining a safe, secure environment for children, youth, staff, and volunteers sets the stage for accomplishing our primary objectives in Children's/Youth Ministries: to lead children into the kingdom and then to train and encourage them to become fully devoted followers of Christ. In Matthew 19:14 our Lord Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Implementation of the procedures contained within this policy will reduce the likelihood of an undesirable event from occurring—an event which could perhaps become an obstacle preventing a child from coming to know and love their Heavenly Father.

Position

All children are unique, precious creations of God—made to know Him, to love Him, and to glorify Him. Individually and as a corporate church body it is our aim to protect the children that God has entrusted to our care. Accordingly, we do not condone abuse of any kind: verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual.

*Sections contain information according to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) website.

Understanding Child Abuse

***Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse occurs when a parent or a person responsible for the child's welfare:

- Inflicts a physical injury to a child that is non-accidental, including bruises, bites, bone fractures, cuts, welts, and burns
- Inflicts excessive corporal punishment (NOTE: If a parent or caretaker causes physical injury during overly harsh discipline, it does not matter that he or she did not intend to hurt the child.)
- Gives or allows a controlled substance to be given to a child under 18 years of age

Signs

- Some children show obvious, outward signs of abuse, such as: unexplained marks on the body (cuts, bruises, welts, burns, black eyes, fractures or dislocations)
- Bruises or welts in various stages of healing, or in clusters or patterns in the shape of an object, like a belt or an electrical cord
- Pattern burns, such as cigarette burns, iron burns, burns in the shape of a specific object, or scald burns in an immersion pattern
- Marks hidden from typically exposed areas of skin
- Behavioral changes, including: Extreme vigilance or watchfulness, Bullying smaller children, Poor social interactions with peers, Extreme fear of parents or caregivers (e.g. does not want to go home), Harming animals

***Child Neglect**

Child Neglect occurs when a parent or responsible caretaker fails to provide these minimum requirements for their child:

- Adequate supervision
- Medical care/attention
- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter

Poverty does not necessarily equate with neglect. Most parents are able to provide the minimum requirements for their child.

Possible Signs:

- Often hungry in the morning
- Poor hygiene
- Evidence of no or poor supervision
- Underweight, poor growth, failure to thrive
- Dressed inappropriately for the weather
- Erratic attendance at school

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse refers to any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the stimulation of the perpetrator. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child with an age difference of more than 5 years.

Categories of Child Sexual Abuse

- Involving touching such as: inappropriate kissing; fondling; oral, genital, and anal penetration; consensual intercourse involving at least one minor; and forcible rape.
- Not involve touching include: verbal comments, pornographic videos, obscene telephone calls, exhibitionism, and allowing children to witness sexual activity.

*Signs

- Sexual knowledge beyond what is age appropriate
- Recurring pain, injury, infection or itching in genital or anal areas or urinary tract
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Unexplained regression or fear
- Sexual acting out behavior: a child forcing another person to do things that are sexual in nature or performing acts upon him/herself

(Some children will NOT display any overt behavioral changes. Predators often abuse children in ways that do not leave physical signs.)

Statistics – The full extent of child sexual abuse in our country is not known. Research shows that a very high percentage of children who have been sexually abused do not report the incident(s) and most disclosure by abused children is unintentional. Current estimates suggest that from 500,000 to 1,500,000 children are sexually abused each year in this country resulting in approximately 38 million survivors of child sexual abuse residing in America today.

Various studies show that nearly one out of every three girls and one out of every six boys will fall victim to one or more types of sexual abuse by the age of 12.

The Profile of a Child Molester – The stereotype that children are usually molested by strangers lurking in restrooms is not only inaccurate, but dangerously contributes to a false sense of security.

- At least 80% of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim with most abuse occurring within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- Males are reported to be the offenders in over 90% of cases.
- The usual sex offender is between 20-30 years of age.
- The majority of sex offenders develop deviant interest before the age of 18.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of adolescent sex offenders in recent years in the general population. Furthermore, research of abuse occurring in church settings show that the perpetrator was a minor in one out of every five cases.
- Molesters may have very well developed social skills with children.
- Child abusers are often married and have children.
- Statistics show approximately 2 out of 3 molesters who have been caught perpetrate again in the future.

Child Protection Principles

Our goal of leading children to Christ can best be accomplished when parents and guardians are confident that their children are safe at church and church-related activities.

We have the additional goal of protecting our workers against false accusation. Persons who have been falsely accused of child abuse can be impacted for life, even if the claims are proven false.

Charges of child abuse have widespread influence on nearly all aspects of the church. Among them:

- **Legal** – Allegations of child abuse can result in lengthy legal conflicts, with both the church and possibly church leaders being held liable for negligence.
- **Financial** – Lawsuits brought against churches can result in staggering legal costs.
- **Relational** – Child abuse cases typically bring about disunity to the church body. Divisions among members, helplessness, blame, distrust of current and future leadership, and anger displaced onto unrelated issues are commonly associated problems.
- **Ministry** – Child abuse cases severely compromise the ministry of the church. Scripture tells us that a good name is more desirable than riches—and as such is necessary to protect.

Safety Keeping children and youth from potentially harmful activities and maintaining facilities and equipment are ways that our church family can protect its young people.

Discipline Examples of positive forms of discipline that are adaptable to the age of the child/youth would include: verbal warnings, separation from peers, loss of privileges, and involving parents/guardians in the discipline process.

Speech While serving children and youth, our staff and volunteers are to follow the biblical admonishments **to be verbally encouraging, to express kindness and compassion, and to refrain from unwholesome speech.** We will also be particularly mindful of the speech of children to each other.

Sexual Conduct Child sexual abuse clearly violates scriptural mandates and we believe in taking protective measures to prevent its occurrence in our Children's and Youth Ministries at Grace Church.

Screening

- **Application Form** Application forms are confidential and will be kept on file with only necessary individuals having access to the information.
- **Contact of References**
- **Criminal Background Check** will be conducted on all potential volunteers and staff members who are 18 years and older. Documentation will be made of all contacts.
- **Interview** – An interview shall be conducted at the discretion of the appropriate staff member or ministry coordinator prior to the individual's ministry starting date.
- **Training** – All adults 18 years and older desiring to serve or work in Children's/Youth Ministries are required to participate in Child Protection Program training prior to their ministry starting date.
- **Youth Volunteers & Paid Workers** – Youth volunteers/paid workers 14-17 years of age are required to complete and submit a Youth Application Form prior to their ministry starting date. Youth are required to participate in Child Protection Program training with the consent of a parent/guardian.
- **Criminal Abuse Violators** – Although other factors may disqualify an applicant, it is the policy of Grace Church that individuals who have been convicted or who have plead guilty to sexual, physical, or any other type of abuse are not permitted to serve in Children's/Youth Ministries. This policy is not about forgiveness; it is about the protection of our children, the individual, and the church.

Supervisory Procedures

Security Check-in System Check-in takes place for Sunday morning and AWANA, minimally. Workers with children and youth will be trained on specific systems. Children are not to be released to anyone but those with proper claims.

Open Door Policy – All Children's/Youth Ministry events at Grace Church operate under an Open Door Policy. The following adults are invited to visit and observe any Children's/Youth program in which their children are participating, at any time, unannounced:

- Parents/guardians of children/youth in our church family
- Parents/guardians with visiting children/youth
- Relevant church staff members and ministry coordinators

Other interested individuals wishing to observe our Children's/Youth programs may request to schedule a visit in advance by contacting the church.

Identification of High Risk Situations –These are situations in which abuse or false allegations might be more likely to occur due to isolation, the ages of the child(ren)/youth, the nature of the events taking place, or other risk factors. Some examples of High Risk Situations would include:

- Any situation in which a child or youth might potentially be alone with a volunteer.
- All overnight events that include children and/or youth.
- All church-sponsored events that involve traveling with children and/or youth off of church property.
- Supervising children/youth in locations that are isolated or not easily observed such as in a restroom or in a room with a windowless door.
- Working with young children who are unable or unlikely to communicate problems such as babies, toddlers and preschoolers.
- Any situation in which a volunteer is assisting a child by changing clothing, changing diapers, or by taking him or her to the restroom.
- Children at higher risk are: Preschool children, children with disabilities, and youth who are homosexual/transgender/questioning their sexuality.

Two Workers + Be Visible

The best defense in avoiding potential problems in High Risk Situations is through use of a **Two Workers + Be Visible** approach:

First - When supervising a child or group of children, make every possible attempt to have a minimum of **two trained workers present** who have been cleared through the screening process, and

Second - If you must be the only person supervising a child or group of children, **always be visible** to observers.

It is particularly important not to be alone with a child in a restroom. Use door prop or take general “restroom break” involving entire class.

Supervision of Children & Youth Volunteers/Paid Workers – It is our position that many benefits accompany the involvement of upper elementary aged children and youth in Children's Ministries. However, because children and youth are **minors**, we believe it is best they have adult supervision whenever possible as they serve or work with other children.

Churchwide Events – Children and youth, whether volunteers or paid workers, are to be personally supervised at all times by at least one adult during regularly scheduled churchwide events. This includes involvement in the Nursery and Toddler Room on Sunday mornings, Children's Church, Sunday School, AWANA, Vacation Bible School, business or other churchwide meetings, special services, and special events.

Childcare will be offered for churchwide events only when appropriate numbers of adult caregivers that have completed the screening process can be obtained.

Non-churchwide Events – Whereas the ideal situation is to have adult supervision in church settings, we recognize that smaller, non-churchwide events will be scheduled when it is not feasible or possible to obtain adult caregivers. Examples might include childcare for Small Groups, Bible Studies, rehearsals, counseling sessions, meetings, work sessions, bridal and baby showers and situations when parents/guardians arrange for their own childcare on church property.

For non-church wide events, it is permissible to use child/youth caregivers within the following parameters:

- Parents/guardians should be notified in advance so they may make alternative arrangements if they so desire.
- Childcare must be scheduled in locations where children and caregivers are highly visible to outside observers at all times.
- Parents/guardians or other designated adults are encouraged to check on children frequently in these situations.

Volunteers shall keep the Child Protection Program guidelines in mind when scheduling their own substitutes. Volunteers who are unable to obtain a substitute that falls within the guidelines of this policy are required to contact the appropriate church staff member or ministry coordinator for assistance.

Overnight Events and/or Travel Off Church Property – The following procedures are to be followed when staff or volunteers supervise children and youth during overnight events and/or during travel off church property:

- Written permission from parent/guardian must be obtained.

- All individuals who will have contact with children/youth (chaperones, parents, supervisors, leaders, teachers, etc.) are to be cleared through the screening process prior to the event.
- All overnight events and events that require travel off of church property are High Risk Situations, thus it is important that church staff and volunteers adhere to the **Two Adult + Be Visible** guidelines at all times.

Exceptions for Youth – Youth staff and volunteers may meet alone with groups of junior or senior high school students so long as meetings occur where others are in the general area.

Mutual Monitoring – It is our goal to create an environment where mutual monitoring exists between all individuals involved in Children's/Youth Ministries. All church staff, volunteers, and parents are encouraged to voice their concerns when observing situations that deviate from the guidelines set forth in this policy. These corrective reminders should not be viewed as threatening or accusatory, but as beneficial in maintaining a safe environment for children and adults.

Reporting & Response Procedures

Experts in the area of church law highly recommend that churches have a reporting and response plan ready to implement should allegations of sexual misconduct arise.

Our Reporting Position

In keeping with our position that God deeply loves and highly values each child and desires their protection, it is the policy of Grace Church that all known and reasonably suspected instances of child abuse are to be reported. Grace clergy, CASAs, medical workers, school employees and others are Mandated Reporters for the state of Illinois.

Reporting Procedure

What To Report – Child abuse thrives when it goes unnoticed and often continues because it goes unreported. Examples of situations that would necessitate taking action include:

- Recognizing physical, behavioral, and/or verbal signs of abuse in a child or youth.
- Witnessing questionable or inappropriate behaviors and/or activities by a church staff member, volunteer, paid worker, parent or guardian.
- Observing deliberate and/or gross violations of Child Protection Program guidelines by church staff members, volunteers, or paid workers.

***Four Key Criteria For A Child Abuse Or Neglect (Report)**

1. The alleged victim is under the age of 18.
2. The alleged perpetrator is any individual residing in the child's home, any person responsible for the child's welfare, or anyone who came to know the child through a position of trust (could be coach, parent, teacher, etc. If harm is done to child by someone else it could still be a criminal offense but not termed abuse.)
3. A specific incident or specific set of circumstances raises suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected.
4. The child was harmed or is at substantial risk of physical or sexual injury

How To Report Child Abuse

- **Parent/guardians who suspect that their child or youth has been abused at church or at a church-related event are urged to contact a member of the pastoral staff as soon as possible.** This will allow church staff and leadership to minister to involved parties, to fully cooperate in the reporting and investigation process, and if necessary to notify insurance and legal representatives. Pastors are available to provide assistance, information, and/or support for family members during the reporting process.
- **Workers who suspect that a child has been abused or neglected by someone outside of Grace must report their suspicion to a member of the pastoral staff or children's director immediately and privately.** Grace follows Illinois DCFS guidelines for reporting. Mandated reporters should also contact pastoral staff or children's director before making their DCFS hotline call.

Our Response Philosophy

The leadership of Grace Church recognizes the serious nature of child abuse and has established the following underlying principles which will guide our actions should abuse allegations occur:

- Our first priority will be the care and safety of the child/youth.
- It is our intent to take all allegations seriously and deal with them in a forthright manner.
- It is our desire to provide care and compassion for all victims, victims' families, and other involved individuals.
- We fully intend to handle situations in a confidential manner with respect for the privacy of all involved individuals.
- We will cooperate with all civil authorities involved under the guidance of our church attorney and insurance representatives.
- Although the allegation may be unfounded, the church will follow standard procedure in requiring individuals suspected of child abuse to step out of Children's/Youth Ministries while investigations are being conducted.

Conclusion

Incorporating the guidelines of this policy into each area of ministry will take personal effort and commitment by each of us at Grace. We believe it is a small price to pay to preserve the safety of our children, the integrity of our staff and volunteers, and the reputation of Christ and His Church.

Sources

Grace Child Protection Policy 12/02 Draft

www.state.il.us/dcfs/index/shtml

Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters
Updated 9/20/06