

CHILD & YOUTH SAFETY POLICY

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Grace Chapel
CHURCH OF CHRIST

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PURPOSE AND GOALS

PURPOSE

Grace Chapel Church maintains an absolute and unwavering commitment to ensuring the physical and emotional safety of all minors who engage in the programs of this church, or who participate in activities/events on Grace Chapel's campus. This document outlines the policies that undergird this commitment.

GOALS

1. Clear and consistent policy and procedure that empowers everyone to protect the children and youth of Grace Chapel Church from emotional, physical and sexual abuse or accidental injury.
2. Commitment to create environments on- and off-campus that minimize the possibility of a child or youth experiencing accidental injury or abuse during church-hosted activities.
3. Clear protocols for staff and volunteers to address accidental injuries to a child or youth during church hosted activities.
4. Safe outlets for adults and children to report abuse or suspicions of abuse.
5. Well-trained staff and volunteers who are committed to child & youth safety.

PURPOSE AND GOALS

6. Adults, children, and youth who are knowledgeable about child & youth safety policies and procedures.

POLICY REVIEW

The Church recognizes the importance of regularly reviewing and evaluating its Child & Youth Safety Policy to ensure its ongoing effectiveness and relevance. To this end, the policy will be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

SECTION 1

SELECTION, SCREENING AND TRAINING

1. DEFINITIONS

- 1.1 Staff:** Any person employed by the church on a full-time, part-time, or contract basis, regardless of whether they work directly with children and youth.
- 1.2 Volunteer:** Any person serving in any ministry position without compensation, at the request of Grace Chapel Church staff, ministry leaders, and/or elders.

** For purposes of this policy, “volunteer” will refer to anyone serving in ministries involving children or youth.*

2. STAFF SCREENING AND SELECTION

- 2.1** The staff screening process includes a thorough application, reference checks, background screening, and interview process, incorporating criminal background and national sex offender registry checks.
- 2.2** Each component of the screening process will be used to assess a candidate’s suitability for employment with Grace Chapel Church.

3. VOLUNTEER SCREENING AND SELECTION

- 3.1 The volunteer screening process includes reference checks, criminal background checks, and national sex offender registry checks.
- 3.2 While occasional exceptions may occur, Grace Chapel Church typically selects individuals to volunteer in the children's and youth ministries who have been members or regular attendees for at least six months and have demonstrated strong volunteerism in other church ministries.
- 3.3 A review committee determines each volunteer's suitability for service and may interview candidates to clarify any questions regarding their background.

4. GROUNDS FOR DISQUALIFICATION/REMOVAL

Grace Chapel Church reserves the right to disqualify or remove a candidate from employment or volunteer service at its discretion. Criteria for such action include any felony convictions and/or misdemeanor convictions for abuse of a minor. Final determinations will be made by a team consisting of the lead minister and elder(s), in consultation with the Family Ministry Team.

5. CHILD/YOUTH SAFETY TRAINING

All staff and volunteers overseeing children's and youth activities and programs will participate in regular safety training as follows:

- 5.1 **Darkness to Light Stewards of Children training:** This three-year certification program is offered annually to new staff and volunteers.
- 5.2 **CPR / First Aid Training:** The church will maintain a list members who are medical professionals, as well as a list of non-medical professionals who are certified in CPR and/or first aid. All members of the Family Ministry Team will maintain current certifications in CPR and first aid.
- 5.3 **Mandated Reporter Training:** This training will be offered periodically to the congregation at large. All church staff members are required to complete mandated

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reporter training; child- and youth-serving volunteers are strongly encouraged to complete the training, as well.

5.4 Ministry Training: Each child- and youth serving ministry will offer annual ministry-specific training for its staff and volunteers; ongoing training will be provided as needed.

5.5 Child Safety Policy Acknowledgement: Annually, all volunteers for children and youth ministries will be required to review the Child & Youth Safety Policy and the specific procedures related to their area of service, and will be required to sign an acknowledgement of said policy.

SECTION 2

CHILD SAFETY FOR BIRTH–5TH GRADE

The following policy and protocols will be followed during all activities and programs hosted by Grace Chapel Church where children ages birth–5th grade are not directly supervised by their parents/guardians:

1. POLICIES FOR ALL CHILDREN (BIRTH–5TH GRADE)

- 1.1 Children's ministry volunteers are not permitted to administer medications. Parents of children with special circumstances must address their needs with the children's minister to develop an action plan.
- 1.2 Parents are encouraged to change diapers or take their children to the restroom before drop-off. If a child needs to use the restroom during church-hosted activities, the caregiver will follow the written instructions in the GC Kids Ministry Procedures.
- 1.3 Disciplinary procedures are outlined in the GC Kids Ministry Procedures. Children's ministry volunteers and staff are strictly prohibited from using any type of corporal punishment to discipline a child.
- 1.4 To ensure the health and safety of all children, volunteers and staff, any child exhibiting symptoms outlined in the sick child procedures will not be permitted in any GC

CHILD SAFETY FOR BIRTH–5TH GRADE

Kids environments. If symptoms develop after drop-off, the parent/guardian will be contacted to retrieve their child.

- 1.5 Any violation of these child safety policies must be promptly reported to the children's minister.

2. ADDITIONAL POLICIES FOR NURSERY

Nursery environments cater to children two years old and younger. These classes are grouped by developmental level rather than age. A coordinator will always be on duty to oversee and assist nursery staff and volunteers.

- 2.1 All children will be checked in to the nursery and receive a nametag with parent/guardian phone number and allergy information.
- 2.2 If a child becomes inconsolable, the parents will be located or will receive a text message to their designated phone number.
- 2.3 The caregiver-to-child ratio in the nursery will not exceed 1:3 for non-walkers and 1:4 for walkers.
- 2.4 Each nursery room will have: 1) two adults, or 2) one adult and two additional volunteers (6th grade or older) who are assigned to the group at all times.
- 2.5 Staffed nursery environments are allergy-friendly; no outside food is permitted, and all snacks provided are gluten- and peanut-free.
- 2.6 Every nursery room contains a whiteboard to list individual sleeping, feeding, and other special instructions for each child.
- 2.7 Accidental injuries will be addressed according to the GC Kids Ministry Procedures in the Volunteer Handbook.
- 2.8 Prevention and reporting of abuse or suspicions of abuse will be addressed according to the policies in Section 4 of this document.

3. ADDITIONAL POLICIES FOR PRESCHOOL–5TH GRADE

- 3.1** All children will be checked in and have a name tag printed at one of the designated check-in kiosks, located in the lobby and Kids Hallway. Guests will register at the Nursery Desk to receive their name tags and a welcome bag.
- 3.2** The leader-to-child ratio in Pre-K classes (ages 3–4) will not exceed 1:8, and in K–5th grade classes (ages 5–11) will not exceed 1:10.
- 3.3** Each room will have no fewer than three volunteers, 6th grade or older, assigned to the group at all times. At least one of these volunteers will be an adult.
- 3.4** Accidental injuries will be addressed according to the GC Kids Ministry Procedures in the Volunteer Handbook.
- 3.5** Prevention and reporting of abuse or suspicions of abuse will be addressed according to the policies in Section 4 of this document.

SECTION 3

YOUTH SAFETY FOR 6TH-12TH GRADE

The following policy and protocols will be implemented during all activities and programs hosted by Grace Chapel Church for youth in grades 6 through 12 when they are not directly supervised by their parents/guardians:

1. **Group Supervision:** All church-hosted activities, whether on- or off-campus, will follow the “3-or-More” rule, ensuring all participants are in groups of at least three people.
2. **One-to-One Discipleship:** The church acknowledges the importance of one-to-one discipleship relationships between minors and youth ministry leaders. Adult leaders will adhere to the meeting procedures outlined in the GC Youth Ministry Procedures in the Volunteer Handbook.
3. **Youth Small Group Meetings:** Youth Small Group meetings will include at least three people when using a closed space. Groups with only two people may meet in open areas or merge with other groups.
4. **Off-Campus Activities:** During activities hosted off-campus, there will be a minimum of two adult leaders, with a ratio of one adult for every ten youth.
5. **Accidental Injuries:** Accidental injuries will be addressed according to the GC Youth Ministry Procedures in the Volunteer Handbook.

YOUTH SAFETY FOR 6TH–12TH GRADE

6. **Annual Family Ministry Covenant:** Annually, leaders and minors will sign a Family Ministry Covenant, which includes an acknowledgement of disciplinary procedures. (Corporal punishment of any type is strictly prohibited.)
7. **Abuse Prevention and Reporting:** Prevention and reporting of abuse or suspicions of abuse will be addressed according to the policies in Section 4 of this document.
8. **Transportation Policy:** Adult leaders are prohibited from transporting an individual, unrelated minor alone in a vehicle.
9. **Pick-Up Protocol:** During pick-up times at the end of events and meetings, at least two adult leaders will remain present until all minors have departed.

Any violation of these Youth Ministry policies must be promptly reported to the Youth Minister.

SECTION 4

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Grace Chapel Church is committed to protecting all children and youth from sexual abuse.

Church leaders will mobilize the entire congregation to work together to ensure the safety of our children and youth. The policies outlined below address common situations where abusers identify, groom, and abuse victims, and provide guidance for responding and reporting if abuse is suspected.

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1 Minor: In this section of the policy, the term “minor” applies to any child or youth under age 18, and any high school student participating in Youth Ministry activities who is 18 or older.

1.2 Child Sexual Abuse: Child sexual abuse includes any type of sexual activity involving a minor; as minors cannot legally consent to sexual activity. This includes physical contact, producing or viewing pornographic images, sharing sexually suggestive or explicit dialogue via phone, text, or digital device, trafficking, and any other contact of a sexual nature that is physically or emotionally harmful to a child. Note that the legal age of consent in Georgia varies from age 16–18, depending on the offense.

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND REPSONSE

1.3 Georgia Law: Georgia law on sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking of children is clearly defined in the following sections of state legal code:

- OCGA 19-15-1 (reference lines 11 and 12)
- OCGA 16-6
- OCGA 16-12-100

1.4 Church Policies: Grace Chapel Church's policies regarding consent extend beyond the letter of the law to include any act of a sexual nature (physical or digital) between an adult and a child or youth participating in church-hosted programs, whether these acts occur under or outside of church purview.

2. PREVENTION OF SEXUAL ABUSE

2.1 Respect for Personal Boundaries: Staff and volunteers will be trained and will take the lead in fostering a church culture that encourages body autonomy for all children and youth.

2.2 Safety in Numbers:

- a) All church-hosted activities will comply with the caregiver-to-child ratios outlined in this document.
- b) Isolated one-to-one interactions are prohibited, including between adults and minors and minors with each other, both on church property or during any off-property church-hosted activity. Detailed instructions are provided in the GC Family Ministry Volunteer Handbook.
- c) All church-hosted activities will be supervised by at least two adults. If there is a shortage of staff or volunteers, groups of children will be combined to ensure adequate adult supervision.
- d) Restroom doors will remain propped open during times when children are participating in activities in the church building.
- e) Parents or guardians must provide direct supervision when children are not engaged in a church-hosted activity.

SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND REPSONSE

- f) Children's and Youth Ministry staff (or another designated staff member or screened volunteer) will serve as monitors during activities hosted by their ministries, ensuring that safety policies and procedures are being followed by all staff and volunteers.

2.3 Digital Interactions:

- a) Initiating one-to-one digital interactions between adults and minors is prohibited., including any adult associated with Grace Chapel Church. Detailed instructions are in the GC Youth Ministry Procedures.
- b) Texting, email, and social media groups will include multiple adults.
- c) Adults will not proactively follow/friend minors on social media.
- d) Adults will not accept follow/friend requests from a minor without explicit consent from the minor's parent/guardian.
- e) Adults will not post photos or videos of youth on personal social media without parent/guardian permission.
- f) If a minor seeks counsel from an adult via digital means, another adult will be included in the communications.
- g) Digital communication between adults and minors that includes any content of a sexual, violent, hateful, immoral, or illegal nature is strictly prohibited.

2.4 Awareness of the Rules:

- a) Rules about sexual abuse prevention will be included in the code of conduct documents signed annually by all volunteers.
- b) The sexual abuse prevention action steps in this policy will be reviewed annually with all minors participating in Youth Ministry activities, or when a new minor joins.
- c) Parents/guardians of children in Pre-K–5th grade will receive a document that outlines these sexual abuse prevention policies in an age-appropriate way. This document will be distributed annually (or upon their child's first participation in Children's Ministry activities). Parents/guardians will be asked to use the document as a tool for empowering their children to understand the rules, and what to do if someone breaks a rule.
- d) A summary of these policies will be available on the church website; the entire policy may be shared with anyone upon request.

3. SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE AND REPORTING

Violations of any policy will be promptly reported to a member of the Family Ministry Team.

If sexual abuse of a minor is suspected, Grace Chapel Church will respond with the victim's best interest as its highest priority. Staff and volunteers will ensure this by taking the following actions:

3.1 Comprehensive Training:

- a) All staff, and all children's and youth volunteers, will be trained to respond to allegations or suspicions of sexual abuse.
- b) Staff and volunteers will work as a team to hold each other accountable for the safety of Grace Chapel Church children and youth.
- c) Training opportunities will be made available to the congregation at large.

3.2 Reporting Protocols:

- a) Georgia mandated reporting law will be followed in all situations. Mandated reporters are required to make a report within 24 hours of the allegation or suspicion.
- b) Grace Chapel Church has designated a delegated reporter (the lead minister) who is responsible for ensuring proper handling and escalation of reports according to Georgia Law. In the lead minister's absence, a Family Ministry team member will serve as the backup delegated reporter.
- c) Parents/guardians of the minor victim will be notified immediately if an allegation is made. In cases where the accused is the parent/guardian of the victim, the victim's safety will take precedence over this procedure.
- d) Professionals will be consulted to ensure an appropriate and comprehensive response to the allegations.

3.3 Support and Response to the Victim(s):

- a) The minister (or person) in charge of the event, another staff member, or an elder will respond promptly to provide support to the minor's parents and family, as needed or appropriate.
- b) Support might include informing the parents of the situation, providing guidance, and working to ensure that the minor's emotional and physical needs are met, focusing the minor's safety and security, keeping the family informed and involved..

3.4 Support and Response to the Alleged Perpetrator:

- a) If the accused is a staff member, they will be immediately suspended with pay until the investigation is complete. Reinstatement is possible if found innocent, while employment will be terminated if found guilty.
- b) If the accused is a volunteer, they will be immediately suspended and instructed to have no contact with any children or youth in the church until the investigation is complete. Reinstatement is possible if found innocent.
- c) If the accused is a minor, the Grace Chapel Church delegated reporter will inform authorities, and representatives of the Family Ministry team will inform the parents of all involved minors.
- d) Grace Chapel Church will provide pastoral care and counseling to anyone involved in the situation, upon request.

4. COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

- 4.1 Cooperation with Authorities:** The church will fully cooperate with the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services and all other civil authorities, in the event that an investigation of any alleged incidents of misconduct against a minor is conducted, including making available all relevant information and materials.
- 4.2 Compliance:** All staff and volunteers must adhere to this policy and comply with DFCS and other civil authorities' requests for information and support. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- 4.3 Media Response:** In the event of an alleged incident of misconduct against a minor, a designated individual chosen by the elders will manage media inquiries, and will be authorized to provide information to the media in a controlled and informed manner.
- 4.4 Congregational Response:** The elders will work with the Family Ministry team and lead minister to determine if and when it is appropriate to inform the church of an alleged incident.