



Children's Ministry Handbook and Policy and Procedures Manual

Grace Community Church Children's Ministry Handbook

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to provide policies and procedures for the Children's Ministry of Grace and the employees and leaders who work in that ministry. Changes may be made from time to time to the policies and procedures contained in this handbook without prior written or oral notice. These visions and values are consistent with our doctrinal statements as found on our website at <https://come2grace.org/what-we-believe>.

We believe that spiritual growth happens best in an atmosphere of emotional safety, physical security, and sanitary conditions. We are committed to exceptional standards in these areas.



LEADER APPLICATION PROCESS

Because we love children and desire to protect them, Grace requires all leaders working with children to complete the following leader application steps.

1. Application

All children's ministry leaders must complete the Leader Application, including providing references and filling out the information for a background check through Checkr (Invite provided and cost covered by church).

2. Reference Check

References might be contacted and asked to assess the applicant's suitability/capability for working with children. A minimum of two references must be received prior to a leader beginning to serve in a classroom.

3. Policies & Procedures

Leaders are required to review the policies contained in this manual and initial and sign in the appropriate locations indicating that he or she has read and understood the material and agrees to comply with policy requirements.

4. Criminal History Check

Grace utilizes the services of Checkr a reputable public data screening firm in order to check the background of all volunteers and employees for possible criminal history and/or registered sex offender information.

Individuals who have been arrested for, charged with, are on deferred adjudication or regular probation for, or have been convicted of sexually oriented or sex related crimes, either misdemeanor or felony, cannot serve in any area of children's ministry. Grace utilizes a comprehensive background check and relies upon the truthful answers of applicants and their references for this information.

Grace Staff members are also required to have updated background checks, even if they are not serving with kids on a regular basis.

5. Interview

All Children's Ministry leaders must be willing to submit to an interview by either a Director or Coordinator. Grace reserves the right to revoke any leader's ability to serve in the Children's Ministry with or without notice at any time for any reason or for no reason at all.

SECTION 2: CHILD ABUSE AND PROTECTION

POLICY AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Grace supports and maintains a zero tolerance policy against child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect include physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment, or maltreatment. Sexual abuse is defined as the use, persuasion, or coercion of any child to engage in any sexually explicit conduct (or any simulation of such conduct) for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of the actor or for producing any visual depiction of such conduct.

It is against the law and against Grace's policy for any volunteer or employed staff, male or female, to physically, sexually, or mentally abuse or neglect any child.

Grace reserves the right to refuse membership, to dismiss, or to exclude from affiliation with Grace any volunteer or employee who is or has been convicted of child abuse or neglect of any child. a Grace will neither condone nor tolerate:

- Infliction of bodily injury upon any child or physically or sexually abusive behavior towards a child.
- Physical neglect of children, including failure to provide adequate safety measures, care, and supervision in relation to church activities.
- Emotional mistreatment of children, including verbal abuse and/or verbal attacks.

Grace staff members have been trained to recognize behaviors intended to "groom" children for sexual abuse. These behaviors will be immediately investigated and reported to the appropriate authorities.

Duties of Serving as a Leader

Child abuse is a serious crime, and Grace will initiate and cooperate where appropriate in the investigation, reporting and prosecution of child abuse in any form as required by law and which is consistent with our mission to protect children. You are under the following obligations as a leader:

All leaders and employees are under the obligation to immediately report to Children's Ministry staff and document any incident of abuse of which they have knowledge of or which they have observed. Any person making such a report shall keep the information strictly confidential.

INVESTIGATION

1. Incident of abuse defined

An “incident of abuse” means any occurrence in which any person:

- Has threatened to inflict or has inflicted physical injury upon a child, youth worker, or vulnerable adult, other than by accidental means, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
Commits or allows to be committed any sexual offense against a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- With respect to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult makes any kind of sexual advance, or makes a request for sexual favors, or engages in sexually motivated physical contact, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.
- Exposes a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or is reasonably suspected to have done so.

2. Imminent threat

In all cases where an imminent threat of continued or actual abuse exists, any witness shall immediately contact a Grace staff member or elder to request that immediate steps be taken to ensure the safety of the alleged victim. After the safety of the alleged victim has been secured, the person witnessing or with knowledge of the incident of abuse shall complete a written report of the incident of abuse and submit the report to the Children’s Director (or in his/her absence other appropriate staff or member of the Board of Elders) and Grace’s legal counsel. A written report can include any form of available communication including any hard copy or electronic form that provides the required information including an email report to the Children’s Director.

3. Grace Staff Internal Reporting Procedure

The staff member receiving a report of an incident of abuse shall contact the Children’s Director (or in his/her absence, other appropriate staff or any member of the Board of Elders). The reporter shall provide information regarding all relevant facts with respect to the incident of abuse. Upon receiving a report of an incident of abuse, the person receiving the report, together with the reporter, shall prepare a written report of the incident and submit a copy of the report to Grace’s legal counsel. The written report can take the form of email communication provided it contains the information necessary to understand the incident and take action on it. However, in all cases where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom a report should be made, he or she shall be considered absent for the purposes of this reporting procedure and the report should be submitted to another appropriate Grace representative and to Grace’s legal counsel.

4. Responding to the report

When someone receives a report of an incident of abuse, he or she shall immediately take steps to ensure the continuing safety of the alleged victim (for example, if the accused perpetrator has continuing access to the alleged victim (e.g., teacher-student), immediate action shall be taken). After the continuing safety of the alleged victim has been secured, and after the report has been appropriately documented, the person receiving the report shall:

- Immediately contact the Children's Ministry Director or any member of the Board of Elders who will then contact the parents or guardian of the alleged victim to inform them of the incident.
- Immediately the Children's Ministry Director will contact any member of the Board of Elders who will contact the Grace Community Church legal counsel. The legal counsel shall retain outside counsel to conduct an investigation, which shall be completed within **72 hours of the report of abuse**, for the purpose of determining if there is reasonable cause to believe an abuse incident occurred.
- Take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer has no contact with the alleged victim pending investigation.
- Take all steps necessary to ensure that the alleged wrongdoer is barred from further work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults pending the investigation.

Leaders and staff members are obligated to participate with the investigation described above to the extent required by their knowledge of the facts and circumstances and if necessary cooperate with law enforcement investigators.

REPORTING

Conclusion of abuse

If Grace's legal counsel concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that abuse may have occurred, Grace's legal counsel shall:

- Report the incident of abuse to any other appropriate authorities.
- Conduct all further investigations as directed by the Board of Elders.
- Advise the Board of Elders to report the conclusion to Law Enforcement.

Obligation to report to Law Enforcement

In all cases of actual or imminent threat of continuing abuse, the Children's Director, or a member of the Board of Elders shall dial 911 for immediate assistance. Further, nothing about the procedures required by this manual shall suggest that any person who has a suspicion of actual or imminent threat of continuing abuse is restrained from contacting authorities. An individual's decision to contact authorities is theirs alone to make. The intent of this manual is to set forth appropriate procedures that balance the need for immediate notification of actual or imminent threats of continuing abuse against the need to properly investigate allegations of possible abuse.

In all cases where the investigation has determined reasonable cause exists to believe that a child or youth has been or may be abused or neglected by either known or unknown persons inside or outside of Grace, the Grace legal counsel or staff member shall make a report to the local law enforcement agency's child abuse investigators within 24 hours of the determination that such reasonable cause exists.

If in doubt regarding whether a report should be made, Grace shall err on the side of making the call and shall telephone the agency and discuss the situation with an investigator to determine whether the report should be made. The Grace legal counsel or staff member shall make a written record of the name and the title of the investigator with whom he or she spoke and the recommendation made by the investigator, then submit a copy of the written record to the Children's Director.

Additionally, Grace's legal counsel shall provide a written account to the Board of Elders.

Conclusion of no abuse

If after the completion of the above investigation, Grace's legal counsel concludes that there is not reasonable cause to believe the abuse may have occurred, Grace's legal counsel shall provide a written report to the Board of Elders documenting the conclusions reached and the basis for those conclusions. The contents of the report presented by legal counsel where no abuse was found shall be confidential unless requested by law enforcement officials.

The written report shall:

- Identify the alleged victim, the alleged wrongdoer, and all witnesses identified and contacted.
- Set forth the allegations and the steps taken to investigate the allegations.
- Set forth the facts revealed by each significant witness.
- Set forth the temporary actions to be taken by the Board of Elders as well as a recommendation of additional actions to be taken by the Board of Elders.



LEADER/CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Grace intends to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of leaders and children. As a precaution and to ensure strict accountability from one adult to another, leaders must follow these rules:

1. Two Leader Policy

Grace Children's Ministry requires that a minimum of two leaders will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during a church activity regardless of the number of participants, location or activity. At least one of these must be an adult. Some school age classes may have only one adult in attendance as the teacher while the class is in session. In these instances doors to the classrooms will remain open.

At no time should an adult ever be in a room or an enclosed area alone with any child. If a leader needs to leave a group of children, a trustee or staff member must be notified so that the two leader policy can be upheld. This is for the protection of the child(ren) as well as the teacher/staff. **In short, never be alone with a child.**

2. Visibility & Security

It is important that all interaction between children and leaders happens in a location where others can observe what is going on for safety and accountability purposes. At no time should a child and leader disappear behind a closed door with no visibility to outsiders. All, areas where children and leaders are present at Grace the doors are equipped with a window. These windows are never to be covered.

3. Restroom Policy

Leaders should provide assistance to a child using the restroom only if the child is three years or younger or has special needs requiring extra assistance. Only female leaders should provide this assistance. Help the kids thoroughly wash their hands. Make sure the restroom area is left clean.

For elementary age kids, one leader will check the restroom before the child enters and close the door while the child goes into the stall. The leader remains outside the restroom.

4. Physical contact

Grace is committed to protecting children in its care and recognizes that appropriate touch is part of a positive, nurturing environment in a healthy children's ministry. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by Grace leaders.

Using good judgment, the following are appropriate ways to touch kids:

- walking hand in hand
- an arm around the shoulder
- short congratulatory or greeting hugs
- a brief, assuring pat on the back or shoulder
- handshakes, high-fives, and knuckles

The following are actions a leader should NEVER take:

- never touch a child in anger or disgust
- never touch a child in any manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive
- never touch a child between the navel and the knee
- never touch a child's private parts (with the exception of diaper or bathroom procedures)

Lap Sitting:

- No lap sitting at all in elementary (Kindergarten and up)

Physical contact in any form should be above reproach. The personal behavior of staff members and leaders must foster trust at all times.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected, except in cases where the child's safety or the safety of others is in question.

6. Verbal interactions

Verbal interactions between leaders and children should be positive and uplifting. Grace leaders should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, leaders should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

In addition, leaders are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.



SECTION 3: SAFETY & SECURITY

SECURITY

Please follow these rules to make sure our children are safe:

1. Stranger in the hall

Only parents, Children's Ministry leaders, church staff, and children are allowed in the Children's Ministry area. All other adults (including any other church members) should be asked to come back later when the kids have left.

If there are any questions or concerns associated with a stranger in the area, a staff member or elder should be notified immediately to question the stranger.

2. Check-in policy

Children must have either a computer-generated or handwritten security nametag to be admitted into a classroom. Leaders must also write down contact information for a parent for all classrooms kindergarten and younger. Remind the parent to keep their cell phone on their person and that their security tag is necessary for pick-up.

3. Check out policy

A child may not be released unless a parent has the security tag which corresponds to the name tag on that child. If an adult attempts to pick up a child without the corresponding security tag, the leader on duty must ask to see the adult's driver's license. If the adult's relationship to the child can be validated, then the leader may release the child. In the case that the adult's relationship to the child cannot be verified, then a staff member or elder must be notified to make the decision to release a child.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Be able to account for every child in your classroom, by name, at all times.

In case of an emergency, do the following:

1. Hazardous weather

In the event of dangerous weather leaders should follow the guidelines below. Further instructions will be given by a staff member.

- Stay calm.
- Move your classroom in a quiet and orderly manner to the designated interior area according to the map in your classroom.
- If applicable, take your clipboard, paper roster, and walkie-talkie.
- Choose an activity to keep children calm.
- Await further instructions.

2. Fire

- Stay calm! We will periodically run a fire drill. However, if you hear the fire alarm, assume it is real and begin evacuating the children.
- Familiarize yourself with all the fire exits. Evacuation plans are posted in hallway.
- Evacuate the children in the infants, crawlers, and walkers rooms by using the cribs, or any other rolling device.
- Put babies in each crib, no more than 4 babies recommended per crib. Have one adult stay with each crib.
- Check the room for stragglers. Close the door. If applicable, take your handwritten list of the children in your room with you and check off each child after you have evacuated the building.

Parental Release: Parents may stay with you and assist, but they MAY NOT take their child and leave during an emergency situation! Parents may not claim their children until after an all-clear signal has been given and when a supervisor releases the child to a parent. The parent must have the matching security tag or show photo ID before checking out the child.

3. Missing child

Time is critical if a child is reported missing. Leaders should contact a staff member or elder as soon as possible with the following information:

- Name/age/sex
- Color of hair, shirt, and skin
- Ministry where child was checked-in (stroller or walking?)



SECTION 4: HEALTH & WELLNESS GUIDELINES

MEDICAL CONCERNS

Immediately report any medical needs or concerns to a hostess, coordinator, or director. The notified person will contact the Children's Director or Trustee in charge and they decide if 911 should be called. The leader should remain calm and divert the attention of the other children. The victim should be kept quiet and still. Do not attempt to move a severely injured person unless he or she is in imminent danger.

All minor injuries should be reported to the the parent prior to the child leaving the classroom.

Medical conditions

It is Grace's desire to partner with parents in addressing medical conditions that pertain to their child's care while at church. For that reason we record and ask for any medical conditions or allergies when registering the child. That information will be printed out on each child's name tag.

Allergies

Parents are responsible for informing leaders of allergies pertaining to their child at each drop-off. The allergies will be printed out on the child's name tag.

Leaders are asked to be constantly aware of kids with allergies in their classroom. Grace is specifically cautious about peanuts for snack and prefers if we don't offer snacks containing peanuts.

Medication

Grace Kids leaders are not allowed to administer any type of medication to any child at any time.

SICK CHILDREN

At drop-off, leaders should evaluate each child for signs of illness. If there is concern, kindly ask the parent if the child has been symptom-free for 24 hours. Do not admit a child who currently or within the last 24 hours has had one or more of the following symptoms:

- fever
- productive cough
- skin infection
- unexplained rash
- unexplained diarrhea
- pink eye
- nausea or vomiting

While in class, should a child begin to exhibit any of the above-mentioned symptoms or shows other signs of illness, contact a ministry leader to evaluate the child. Symptoms due to allergies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

If a parent tells you that his or her child has exposed the class to a contagious disease (e.g. measles, chicken pox, etc.) please contact the Children's Director to handle the situation. Do not alarm other parents or children. The circumstances will be fully investigated and ministry leadership will be responsible for notifying other parents.

Area and Toy Cleaning

All classrooms will be regularly cleaned and vacuumed. In the event of an illness outbreak, classrooms and toys will receive an additional cleaning.

Infant Area only -

Equipment should be sprayed with the provided non-toxic sanitizing spray. Toys that are visibly mouthed by children should be washed under running water and sprayed with non-toxic sanitizing spray.



SECTION 5: LEADER GUIDELINES

LEADER ATTENDANCE

Grace takes seriously the obligations to its children and asks leaders to abide by the following guidelines.

1. Arrival

Leaders must arrive 30 minutes prior to the event at which they are serving unless otherwise instructed by leadership.

2. Departure

Leaders must remain at the Children's Ministry event until the last child has been picked up by a parent or until relieved by another leader. The two-leader policy will remain in effect until the last child is picked up.

3. Absences

Leaders are responsible for their assigned shifts. If a leader can't serve on their assigned shift they need to find an approved replacement and inform the ministry leader of the change.

In the event of a last-minute illness or emergency, leaders should contact their ministry leader.

LEADER EXPECTATIONS

Staff members and leaders are prohibited from the use, possession of, or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, or any illegal drugs while working with or supervising children at Grace.

Leaders must stay alert and attentive to the children at all times. Leaders may not read personal materials, talk or text on their phones, write letters or perform any other task that takes your attention away from caring for the children in your room. As social media becomes more prevalent, we ask that leaders refrain from posting pictures of children from their classroom or small group without the consent of parents and their ministry director.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at Grace. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at Grace will be required to complete the Grace leader application and screening process.

A parent will be contacted by a staff member or texted via phone in the event that the child is inconsolable, is ill or injured, has a severe disciplinary problem, or is a danger to himself/herself or other children.

Leader and Parent Communication

Grace encourages an open culture of communication. If any parent or leader has any concern about a leader or policy, they should immediately contact a Children's Ministry staff member. That staff member will report the concern to their Children's Director.

Discipline

Physical discipline, such as spanking, is never permitted. Using physical restraint to prevent a child from doing something disruptive or dangerous is permitted only as necessary and may, in some instances, be necessary. Affirmation and encouragement is always preferred.

Follow these rules for discipline:

1. Consistency

Discipline must be consistent to be effective. Correct a behavior the first time and every time.

2. Response

Make a prompt and individualized response to inappropriate behavior. Do not threaten a consequence without the intention to follow through.

3. Resolution

Seek to both resolve the conflict and reconcile relationships.

4. Reward

Acknowledge and reward positive behavior. Encourage children who are behaving well and following the rules.

5. Preparation

Read the lesson before you arrive at your classroom on Sunday. Often the best deterrent to discipline problems is a confident, prepared teacher. Be prepared to change activities to keep children engaged and positively interacting.

6. Prayer

Pray for your kids and your patience consistently. Ask the Lord to guide you throughout the class. A ministry leader is always available to pray with you for your class.

7. Discipline Steps

Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management. In employing this procedure, leaders should observe the following guidelines:

- a) Verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another).
- b) If the behavior does not cease, remove or direct the child to an area of the room away from the group. If the child is not noisy the hallway can be a good option as a trustee should be there. (Avoid being alone with the child).
- c) Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with a clear explanation of your expectations. ("Jamie, you didn't stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the blue chair for three minutes.") In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child. Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
- d) Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child's life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
- e) Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. If you can, use this time as an opportunity for discipleship.
- f) Once the child has completed the time-out, allow them to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in further time-out. Assure the child they are loved, you are glad they are there, and you are excited for them to return.

If the behavior continues, leaders should contact the trustee for help or contact parents. A conversation after the service with the parents might also be helpful to gain understanding and hear what they might have already done to help their child.

LEADER TRAINING

Ongoing training is an important, effective, and required step in fulfilling your responsibility as a leader.

1. New Leader Training

Each new leader shall attend one informational meeting regarding his/her area of ministry.

2. Ongoing Training

Leaders are required to attend any ongoing training sessions as designated by the Coordinator or Director of his/her area of ministry.

3. Periodic Training

From time to time, Grace will provide training sessions to address specific needs and/or topics of interest for leaders.

4. Ministry grid Training

Grace uses Ministry Grid to provide Sexual Abuse Awareness Training online for all of our leaders.

We ask that all leaders serving with us take advantage of this training.



NURSERY POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Children age: Infant up to age 3.

1. Diaper procedures

Children in diapers should have their diapers changed on an as-needed basis **with the permission of the parent**. Ask parent at drop off if you have permission to change diaper. If not we will get them during the service to change their kids diaper if needed.

Adult leaders must adhere to the following procedure when changing diapers:

- Never move away from or turn your back on the changing table while changing a diaper.
- Dispose of diaper in provided trash can.
- Disinfect your hands after changing diapers.
- Disinfect diaper changing area at the end of each service if necessary.

Only female leaders are to change diapers. Male leaders should care for other children in the room while a female leader changes diapers.

2. Diaper Bags & Backpacks

All diaper bags and backpacks accompanying a child must be clearly labeled with the child's name either prior to or upon arrival. An extra name tag will be provided at check in. All bottles, cups, pacifiers, diapers should also be labeled when removed from the bag. We cannot risk giving a bottle, cup or pacifier to the wrong child. Use masking tape if needed to label the bottles and other items.

3. Bottles & Snacks

Bottles: Document all parent-provided feeding instructions (times, quantities, etc). on the white board. All infant bottles must be plastic with pre-measured, ready to be mixed formula. (We do not measure out formula. This is a parent's responsibility.) Water can be added to the pre-measured formula in the bottle provided.

Water: Infants should not be offered any water unless specifically requested by the parent to do so.

Snacks: Snacks are provided, if a parent chooses to bring a snack make sure it doesn't contain anything related to any kids allergies that are there that day. Please make sure hands are clean when preparing and distributing snacks. Remember to offer a prayer of thanksgiving before the children eat their snacks. Older children can be asked if anyone wants to pray or the leader can lead all the children in a simple prayer. Do not withhold snack as a punishment or force a snack if the child doesn't want to eat or drink.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AGREEMENT

I have received and read a copy of Grace Community Church's Children's Ministries Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual.

I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving at Grace.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by Grace.

I acknowledge and understand that the materials and guidelines contained in this handbook in no way express or imply a contractual employment relationship between me and Grace. If applying as a volunteer, I acknowledge and agree that I will receive no monetary compensation for hours worked.

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

I acknowledge receipt of the Grace Kids policies and procedures manual.

Date

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Director of Children's Ministry