**Safe Sanctuary Policy**

**Grace Fellowship Church**

**For Volunteers (Adults)**

**Revised May 16, 2022**

##### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

Grace Fellowship is committed to providing an environment that is as safe as possible for children and students who participate in any Grace Fellowship Ministry. Also, Grace Fellowship is committed to taking the necessary precautions to protect any person working in a Grace Fellowship Ministry from false accusations or suspicions.

This policy exists to provide our guidelines and expectation to help (i) prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or appearance of abuse of children and students and (ii) protect staff and volunteers from false accusations and/or suspicions.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. We will foster awareness of appropriate and inappropriate behavior with or in the presence of, children and students. Grace Fellowship, as part of the body of Christ, will demonstrate Christian love and respect for one another.
2. Grace Fellowship recognizes that certain volunteers have exceptional talents for teaching and supporting the growth and development of children/students, and wishes to encourage them to use their spiritual gifts. At the same time, however, Grace Fellowship has set certain criteria for those volunteers who choose to serve in Ministries in order to promote and protect the well being of children/students.
3. Grace Fellowship will rely on God’s wisdom in developing, implementing and carrying out God’s will though this policy. Compassion and truth will be the guiding forces behind this policy and any actions or decisions related thereto.
4. We must all be on the same page and of the same mind in regard this policy. Wisdom mandates that this policy be fully understood and fully followed by every member of our congregation and church family. This will enable church staff and leadership to seek to ensure the care and safety of every child and student entrusted to us.

**BEHAVIOR**

The following behaviors are prohibited for Staff and Volunteers:

* Threatening or intentionally inflicting emotional or physical injury
* Committing any sexual offense or engaging in any sexual contact
* Making any kind of sexual advance or making a request for sexual favors
* Engaging in verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature, e.g. back rubs, massages, kissing, or similar contact
* Physical discipline, such as spanking
* Public use of tobacco at a church-sponsored or related event
* Alcohol consumption before or at any church-sponsored or related event
* Use or possession of illegal drugs
* Possession of firearms or other weapons at any church-sponsored or related event
* Use of foul or offensive language at any church-sponsored or related event

The above notwithstanding, touching to comfort or affirm a child in an age-appropriate manner is permitted. Side- by-side hugs are suggested instead of full body contact. Appropriate touching need not be completely avoided, but is acceptable only in public. Volunteers shall be aware of how it looks and how the person being contacted may interpret the contact.

**Approval/Disapproval Process**

1. Begins with completion of all requisite forms and documents, including approval for Grace Fellowship to run a national criminal background check on any potential volunteer or staff member.

2. Volunteers shall be members of Grace Fellowship or a regular attender for six (6) or more months prior to beginning service. Exceptions will be allowed only if the volunteer provides a recommendation letter from a pastor and/or relevant staff person at a prior church of applicant, or if written recommendations are received from three (3) current members of Grace Fellowship, who have been members for more than one (1) year.

3. Persons known by Grace Fellowship to have a Criminal History of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve with children or students under any circumstances, and shall not be allowed to serve in any other area of Ministry without the written authorization of at least two members of the Grace Fellowship Pastoral Team:

* Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
* Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.

4. Persons may begin volunteering in a Ministry when;

* The application paper work and certification is complete and the person is found to meet the  acceptance standards (including a “clear” national criminal background check), or
* In the case of a volunteer under the age of 18, the application paperwork is complete and the applicable staff member has checked at least two (2) of the references. Persons found to be out of compliance following the completion of the certification and acceptance process shall be immediately removed from serving in any Ministry.
* All required training has been successfully completed and our database system reflects that the volunteer has been fully “Safe Sanctuary Certified”

**GENERAL POLICY**

**Staffing**

1. A minimum of two (2) adult volunteers and/or staff shall be present in any room where children are participating. Exceptions to this rule may include:

* Escorting children between on-campus buildings or in hallways
* Monitoring the arrival or departure of children
* In cases of emergency care

**On Campus Policies**

1. Doors to rooms shall be kept open or, in the case of rooms with Dutch doors, the top half of the door shall be kept open. It is acceptable to close the door to a room is there is a window to the hallway that allows observation of activities in the room. Under no circumstances shall a Volunteer or Staff be alone with a child behind a closed door with no window. With the exception of rooms where there are Special Needs Persons, doors shall never be locked while occupied by volunteers and children, unless such doors are of the “Dutch Door” variety, and the top portion of said doors are left completely open.
2. Classes shall remain in the assigned room location. If there is to be a change of location, a sign shall be posted on the door providing notice of any change of location.
3. Volunteers shall wear their ministry-issued nametags while working on campus in a Ministry.

**ADDITIONAL POLICIES FOR MINISTRIES OF CHILDREN BELOW GRADE SIX**

1. Volunteers shall immediately notify a member of the Children or Student Ministry staff (as applicable) of any incident of abuse or violation of the above policies. However, in cases where the alleged wrongdoer is the person to whom notification should be given, he or she shall be considered absent for purposes of this reporting procedure, and the notification shall be made to that person’s immediate supervisor.
2. Where an imminent threat of continued or additional abuse exists, any volunteer with knowledge or information about such abuse shall immediately contact another adult and take steps to ensure the safety of the student or child. In connection herewith, any needed emergency healthcare shall be provided, such as (1) first aid, (2) emergency services, and/or (3) transport to a hospital emergency room. The alleged victim shall be immediately removed from contact with the suspected abuser. The and well-being of the child or student is paramount before any reporting.
3. The Grace Fellowship positive identity security system shall be used for all children ages grade 5 and younger so that the person picking up the child can be positively matched. The only exception to this is the Grace Fellowship Preschool, which has an alternative method for positively matching the child to their parent/guardian.

**ADDITIONAL POLICIES FOR STUDENT MINISTRIES**

The two (2) volunteer rule shall be followed, except as noted below:

1. Planned one-on-one volunteer/youth lunches: provided they are held in public places and shall only occur if (1) permission has been given by the parent, (2) the applicable staff member (Director level or higher) has been notified, and (3) separate transportation is used.
2. Student/Staff conferences: provided (1) the conference is for a relatively brief time, (2) the staffer informs another staff member (Director level or higher) at the beginning and end of the meeting, and (3) the on-campus policies are followed.

**ADDITIONAL POLICIES CONCERNING DRIVING, TRIPS AND OVERNIGHT STAYS**

**Driving Rules**

1. When one vehicle is used for an event, the two-adult rule applies. When multiple vehicles are used for an event, a single volunteer may drive if all the vehicles travel together. All reasonable efforts must be made for all vehicles traveling together in this circumstance to stay within sight of one another.
2. Occupants of vehicles shall wear seatbelts. Buses not equipped with seatbelts are exempt.
3. Children, twelve (12) years and younger, shall not sit in the front seat of vehicles with air bags.
4. Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
5. Individuals shall be at least twenty-one (21) years of age to drive. Drivers must have a valid Texas driver’s license and proof of insurance covering at least liability and un-insured motorist.

**Overnight and Trip Rules**

The two-adult rule shall be followed throughout the trip. The total number of adults on each trip will be adjusted according to the requirement of the planned activities. The ratio of adults to youth shall be approximately 1:6. Additionally, if the group of students contains both males and females, there shall be at least one (1) female adult and one (1) male adult on the trip.