



MinistrySafe®

Grace Fellowship Church Kids Ministry Policies

Welcome to Grace Fellowship Kid's Ministry!

At Grace Fellowship, we take our responsibility to care for children very seriously. These guidelines are intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children can grow in relationship with Jesus.

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for leaders and staff members serving our newborns through fifth grade at Grace Fellowship. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment, protecting children, you, and the mission of Grace Fellowship to be a "house of prayer for all nations".

After you have carefully read these policies, please sign and return the agreement form located on the last page. If you have questions, please contact your ministry director.

Thank you for serving, loving, and protecting the children at Grace Fellowship.

Sincerely,

Debi Foley
Grace Fellowship Next Gen Pastor

GRACE FELLOWSHIP KID'S MINISTRY SAFETY SYSTEM

Because we desire to protect Kids involved in our ministries, Grace Fellowship requires all volunteers and staff working with children or students (and other vulnerable populations) to complete Grace Fellowship's **FOUR SAFETY STEPS** before leader placements begin.

STEP ONE: SEXUAL ABUSE AWARENESS TRAINING

All staff members and leaders should have a basic understanding of the characteristics of sexual abusers and their behaviors in "grooming" a child for sexual abuse. Grooming is the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse.

To equip you with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behaviors, Grace Fellowship requires all leaders and staff members to complete MinistrySafe's Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This training may be completed online and will be renewed every two years.

STEP TWO: SCREENING PROCESS

Staff members and leaders serving with children and students are required to complete the Grace Fellowship Screening Process, which includes:

- Kids Serving Interest Form
- Ministry Interview
- Reference Checks

A Kid's Ministry leader must attend Grace Fellowship Church for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing ministry services to children.

STEP THREE: POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Please review these policies and sign the last page indicating that you have read and understood the material and agree to comply with Grace Fellowship policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

All staff members and leaders working with minors must undergo a criminal background check. Individuals who have committed sexually oriented or sex-related crimes may not serve in any area providing services to minors. In addition, certain other past criminal acts *may* preclude an applicant from serving minors.

Minor Safety Policy

ABUSE TOLERANCE

Grace Fellowship supports and maintains a **zero-tolerance** policy concerning child abuse and neglect. It is a violation of Texas law for any leader or staff member to physically, sexually, or emotionally abuse or neglect any minor participating in Grace Fellowship programs.

In the event that a leader observes inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to a Grace Fellowship Director or the Next Gen Pastor.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Kid's Ministry maintains the highest standards to protect both the leaders and children in our ministry. Anyone working with children at Grace Fellowship is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff and must follow these policies and guidelines.

Grace Fellowship staff reserves the right to dismiss leaders who fail to follow the policies and guidelines.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION

Any person accused of committing any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Grace Fellowship Kids Ministry. Any person found to have violated this policy may be prohibited from future participation in all activities and programming involving minors.

Failure to report a prohibited act to a Director or the Next Gen Pastor is a violation of this policy and grounds for removal.

REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS, ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

Grace Fellowship is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behavior or suspicions of abuse or neglect will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to Child Protective Services or criminal law enforcement.

Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible that you may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report 'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a Director or the Next Gen Pastor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard children in the program.

REPORTING ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

We report all suspected or alleged abuse or neglect of children to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS)

Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400

Because many adults are unfamiliar with Texas reporting requirements and may be fearful of the process, Grace Fellowship utilizes a 'tandem or dual report' model, where permitted. A 'dual report' occurs when a Grace Fellowship supervisor reports the suspicion or allegation *together* with the individual who saw, heard or received information causing him or her to suspect abuse or neglect.

THIS PRACTICE IS NOT REQUIRED OR INTENDED TO INHIBIT ANY STAFF MEMBER OR LEADER FROM REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT, CPS OR THE ABUSE HOTLINE DIRECTLY. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect students, and support individuals who may not feel able or willing to report alone.

NO PERMISSION IS NEEDED from Grace Fellowship before reporting to law enforcement personnel or the Child Abuse Hotline. In addition, a report may be made without involving or informing Grace Fellowship personnel.

While not required by state law, please report all suspicions of child abuse or neglect (or any inappropriate or 'grooming' behaviors of a colleague or coworker) to a Director or the Next Gen Pastor. This request is intended to assist the church in properly protecting students involved in Grace Fellowship programs.

When in doubt, report.

BUILDING SAFETY

Every ministry director is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during student programming. No student will ever be left unattended in a ministry area during regular programming, class, or activity. All students should be easily observable during regular programming, class, or activity.

SUPERVISION

Only screened ministry leaders, church staff members, and students are allowed in areas where ministry to students is occurring. All other adults should be asked for identification and immediately escorted out of the area. If questions or concerns arise related to any person in the area, a ministry supervisor or security team member should be notified immediately.

Two trained, screened leaders should supervise children at all times.

You should never be alone with an individual child in any room or during any ministry program. If one leader must leave a group of children, another leader or staff must be notified so that the **Two Person Rule** can be followed.

If two individuals serving in a room are related to one another, a third unrelated leader or staff member must be present.

If an unusual circumstance occurs and you find yourself alone with a single child, take the child to a room occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a child is the last in a class to be picked up by a parent, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or leaders are present.)

If you need to talk with a child alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you.

PLAYGROUNDS

On the playground, remember to circulate, watching children during play periods, giving particular attention to areas not easily seen from all viewpoints. (Example: under slides, in corners, behind structures).

Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area of the playground.

CHECK-IN

Upon check-in, each child will receive a nametag and their parent or guardian will be given a claim tag. Leaders must check each claim tag before releasing a child at pick up. A picture of the claim tag is acceptable.

If a claim tag is lost, send the parent or guardian to the Welcome Desk, where proper identification must be shown to a staff member before the child is released. (Have the child stay in the classroom; the parent may pick up the child once cleared).

RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to staff or leaders, the Church incurs responsibility for the safety and well-being of the child. Staff members and leaders must act to ensure the appropriate supervision and safety of children in their charge.

Kids's Ministries staff members or leaders are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons with the matching claim tag.

Disciplinary Policies

DISCIPLINE

It is Grace Fellowship's policy that staff members and leaders are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping,

pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. When a child is misbehaving, follow these steps:

- Go to the child and calmly ask him or her to stop the behavior. (Most children respond immediately and correct the behavior.) Give a warning and remind the child of class expectations and redirect to a positive behavior. Do this individually, when possible, try not to single out a specific child in a large group setting. **When working with younger children, some physical redirection may be necessary: for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child who is hitting another.*
- If the child repeats the action, guide them to a quiet place – separate from the other children – for a short but designated period of time. Stay within sight of others, do not be alone (or unseen) with the child.

Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the separation, and a clear explanation of your expectations.

(“Terry, you didn’t stop hitting Kelly when I asked you to, so it was necessary for me to separate you from the group.”)

- After a 3rd time, refer to a Director or the Next Gen Pastor.
- Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported to a Director or the NextGen Pastor.

NEVER...

- Never yell at a child.
- Never grab a child.
- Never threaten a child. Always follow through with your word.
- Never hit a child.
- Never confront a parent in front of others.
- Never openly humiliate a child in front of the class.

BULLYING

Verbal, physical, or emotional bullying is not acceptable in Grace Fellowship ministry programs. At the first sign of bullying in any form, act decisively, and inform a Director or the NextGen Pastor. There is no “harmless put-down” where bullying is concerned.

- **First Offense:** Issue a warning to the child and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is wrong. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
- **Second Offense:** Pull the offending child(ren) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the child know that the next step is communication with a Director or the NextGen Pastor and the child’s parents.

- Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that a child who was the target of the bullying behaviors is not in danger of continued harassment and is physically and emotionally stable. DO NOT SINGLE A CHILD OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP...be discreet.
- **Third Offense:** Send the child to a Director or the NextGen Pastor.

Restroom Policies

DO NOT USE OR OCCUPY a bathroom in use by children. Ideally, adults should use a restroom separate and apart from restrooms used by children during weekend services or when there are children present. No leader OF ANY AGE should enter or occupy a bathroom while children are using it. When no child is present, adults (and young volunteers) are allowed in a bathroom (one at a time) so long as there is another adult at the doorway keeping any child from entering.

NURSERY CHILDREN

Diapering

- Only Grace Fellowship staff, Childcare workers, the child's parent, or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children.

Toilet training

- Only Grace Fellowship staff, Childcare workers, the child's parent, or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with children.
- "Accidents" should be handled by reassuring the child. Extra clothing and diapers are available at the Welcome Desk. Only Grace Fellowship staff or Childcare workers will assist with changing the diaper or underwear and clothing.

GRADES 1-5

If a child requires immediate assistance while in the restroom, notify a member of Grace Fellowship staff. Do not go into the restroom.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Grace Fellowship staff and Childcare workers will undertake all diapering and assist with restroom needs.

If a child is over the age of 12 and needs a diaper change, the Director will call the parent to change the diaper.

Medication

Do not administer medication of any kind to any child while serving in ministry programs, including 'over the counter' drugs.

Verbal Interactions with Children

Verbal interactions between leaders and children should be positive and uplifting. Grace Fellowship 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.

One-to-One Interactions with Children

Grace Fellowship leaders should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in Kid's Ministry programming.

Physical Contact

Grace Fellowship is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, we have implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Kids Ministry while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Kids Ministry programs:

- Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between leaders and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
- Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to a Director or the NextGen Pastor.
- Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or Kids staff members and leaders. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. For example: If a child wants to sit in your lap, have them sit next to you. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
- Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
- Leaders are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
- Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a leader must be reported immediately to a Director or the NextGen Pastor.

Intoxicants

Volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any Grace Fellowship facility, or while working with or supervising children.

Tobacco Use

Grace Fellowship requires volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, or during Grace Fellowship activities or programs. Grace Fellowship is a tobacco-free facility.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and leaders are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with children and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about their own personal relationships, dating or sexual activities with any child in the program.

Sexually Oriented Material

Staff members and leaders are prohibited from possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

Personal Social Media

As a ministry leader at Grace Fellowship, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in Kids Ministry at Grace Fellowship.

Parental Involvement

PARENTAL CONTACT

Parents who leave a child in the care of Grace Fellowship staff and leaders during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Kids Ministry programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at Grace Fellowship. 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 Fellowship will be required to complete the Grace Fellowship leader interest and screening process.

Policies and Procedures Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to your ministry director.

I have received and read a copy of Grace Fellowship's Kids Ministry Policies and Procedures and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving at Grace Fellowship.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by Grace Fellowship. It is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed to me.

I acknowledge receipt of Grace Fellowship Church policies and procedures manual.

Leader's name (please print)

Leader's signature

Date: _____