



GRACE FELLOWSHIP STUDENT MINISTRY POLICIES

WELCOME

Welcome to Grace Fellowship Student Ministry!

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

The pages of this handbook provide a general overview of procedures and guidelines for leaders and staff members providing services to students from 6th through 12th grades at Grace Fellowship. Our policies are intended to create a safe environment for students, protecting students, 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 our students.

Sincerely,

Debi Foley
Grace Fellowship Student Ministry Pastor

GRACE FELLOWSHIP STUDENT SAFETY SYSTEM

Because we desire to protect students involved in our ministries, all leaders and staff members must complete the Grace Fellowship screening process, including a background check. All leaders must be approved by the student ministry staff in order to serve.

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 staff members and minor-serving leaders to complete Sexual Abuse Awareness Training. This training may be completed online and must be renewed every two years.

STEP TWO: SCREENING PROCESS

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

- Employment Application (employees only);
- Leader Application
- Ministry Interview
- Reference Checks

A leader must attend Grace Fellowship services for six months before being eligible to serve in positions providing ministry services to minors.

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 our policy requirements.

STEP FOUR: CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

All staff members and leaders working with minors must undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required. 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

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.

ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Student ministry maintains the highest standards in order to protect both the leaders and students in our ministry. Anyone working with students at Grace Fellowship is subject to the supervision and evaluation of the ministry staff and must follow these guidelines. Staff members and leaders in supervisory positions must diligently enforce all policies.

Grace Fellowship staff reserves the right to dismiss volunteers 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 student will be immediately suspended from participation in ministry to students. Any person found to have violated this policy may be prohibited from *future* participation in all activities and programming involving minors. If the person is an employee, such conduct may result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a policy violation is grounds for termination of an employee. Leaders who fail to report a policy violation may be restricted from participation in any future activities involving minors at Grace Fellowship.

Staff members and leaders should discuss immediately with their supervisor any inappropriate action or breaking of this policy and will seek counsel from the church leadership and attorney, if needed.

REPORTING ABUSE OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Grace Fellowship is committed to protecting the students in this ministry from any form of abuse and has a Zero-Tolerance Policy that prohibits any act of sexual, emotional or physical abuse. This zero-tolerance policy requires all Grace Fellowship employees and leaders (those who work directly with students) to immediately report any occurrence (or suspected occurrence) of child abuse to a member of our staff. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors 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 a staff member or leader may witness behavior intended to groom a child for sexual abuse. Please report

'grooming' behavior, policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to an immediate supervisor, such that the church may take appropriate action to safeguard students 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 CPS Emergency Response 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 OR CPS *DIRECTLY*. Instead, it is meant to facilitate reporting, protect children 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 an immediate supervisor or a member of the Grace Fellowship Safety Committee. 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 supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the ministry program area is monitored during youth 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 adults should supervise students at all times.

Avoid being alone with an individual student in any room or during any ministry program. If one supervising adult must leave a group of students, another leader or employee must be notified so that the *Two Adult 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 student, move to a room or building occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: if a middle school student 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 student alone, do it in the hallway or a highly visible area, or have another leader with you. After every ministry event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

Avoid distractions that would impact your ability to effectively supervise students and maintain situational awareness (i.e., use of cell phones, wearing headphones).

SECURITY

After every ministry programming event, ensure that every room, area and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

STAFF MEMBER / VOLUNTEER TO STUDENT RATIO

Grace Fellowship is committed to providing appropriate supervision in all ministry programs. Accordingly, the following leader-to-student **minimum ratios** will be observed:

- 1 - 10 students at least 2 staff members or leaders (2 adult rule)
- 11 - 29 students at least 2 staff members or leaders
- 30+ students at least 3 staff members or leaders

Grace Fellowship practices the “Two Adult Rule” which requires a reasonable number of adult leaders (minimum of two) to be maintained when supervising students. A married couple or two family members would only account for “one” in this “Two Adult Rule”.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their student is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their student’s program will be required to complete the Grace Fellowship leader application and screening process.

Parental Contact

Parents will be contacted if a student becomes ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in ministry programs.

DISCIPLINE

No physical discipline may be used for behavior management of students, including spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, biting or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors.

In the event of a fight or physical altercation, verbally redirect those involved and avoid physical intervention unless necessary for the safety of *other* students. In these instances, staff members and leaders are allowed to restrain a student with appropriate physical force, as needed. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and a Student Ministry Staff Member. Any behavior problems will be handled in the following sequence:

1. The student will be asked to correct the behavior.
2. A staff member will talk with the student to discuss the problem behavior.
3. Parents will be notified of discipline or behavior problems.
4. The student will not be allowed to attend a ministry event. (This is a final measure, but not desired.)

If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so) or the student's parent will be contacted to pick up the student. Any damage of property will be reported to parents, who will be responsible for repairs, including damage incurred at off-campus ministry events.

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 your ministry supervisor. There is no "harmless put-down" where bullying is concerned.

1. *First Offense:* Issue a warning to the student and a general reminder to the group that this kind of interaction is inappropriate. Try not to embarrass or chastise.
2. *Second Offense:* Pull the offending student(s) from the group (in a seen or supervised location) and discuss the inappropriate interaction or behavior. Set clear parameters and behavioral goals. Let the student know that the next step is communication with a pastor and the student's parents. Notify an immediate supervisor of ANY signs of bullying or verbal abuse.

- a. Privately, but with another adult present, confirm that a student 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 STUDENT OUT IN FRONT OF THE GROUP: be discreet.
3. *Third Offense*: Send the student to a pastor for a phone call to his or her parents and possible removal from the trip, camp or event.

RESTROOM POLICIES

Be aware if a student repeatedly leaves to use the restroom and stays there for unusual periods of time. Report this behavior to a supervisor. In public contexts, send students to use the restroom in groups of at least three, when possible.

EMPLOYEE / VOLUNTEER POLICIES

TOBACCO USE

Please abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of students or their parents, or during Grace Fellowship ministry activities or programs, whether on campus or away. Grace Fellowship is a tobacco-free facility.

INTOXICANTS

Staff members and leaders are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drug while in any church facility, while traveling with students, or while working with or supervising minors during any Grace Fellowship program or activity.

NUDITY

Never be nude in the presence of students in ministry programs.

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Please dress in modest, comfortable attire. First impressions are important; please take this into consideration when you are serving.

- No revealing swimsuits
- No revealing / form-fitting clothes
- No shirts with low necklines or that show midriff
- No short dresses, skirts or shorts

ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS

Meeting the emotional or spiritual needs of students may occasionally involve interaction on an individual basis. Please observe the following guidelines when interacting with minors:

The Two Adult Rule should be diligently followed during ministry programs: do not interact *alone* with an individual student in any room or building. In the event you find yourself alone with a single student, move to a room or area occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others.

One-to-one meetings with an individual student must occur at a time when others are present and where interactions can be easily observed. *Example:* If a student desires additional conversation after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or leaders are present, or into a public space.

If a closed-door meeting must occur, it should occur on church property, with a second adult present. The door must remain unlocked, and any window treatments *open*.

Never hold a one-to-one meeting with a student who is the opposite gender.

Any ongoing meetings with students (such as counseling, one-to-one discipleship, etc.) should be discussed with a Student Ministry Staff Member and should comply with the Two Adult Rule OR occur in a public, easily observed location.

Staff members and leaders may not date (or have *any* sort of romantic interaction with) students in the student ministry.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED CONVERSATIONS

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

However, it is expected that from time-to-time student ministry discussions and lessons may address issues related to purity, dating, sex and human sexuality. These lessons will convey to the students the church's views on these topics.

Students may have questions/struggles in this area and desire to confide in a trusted adult leader for guidance. Proceed with great caution, teach with sensitivity and from a biblical perspective.

- Avoid discussing anything of a sexual nature with students of the opposite gender.
- If a student's questions or comments on a sexual matter become too detailed or explicit in a group setting, the leader should use discretion and set up another time to meet with this student. For any follow up meeting: inform a student ministry staff member *first*, comply with the Two Adult Rule OR meet in a public, easily observed location.
- When in doubt as to whether a conversation could be interpreted as a "sexually oriented conversation," treat the conversation as such and follow this policy. When possible, clarify the question/topic with a Student Ministry Staff Member.

SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS

Sexually oriented materials (images or videos) are prohibited on church property or in the presence of students participating in any ministry program.

PHYSICAL INTERACTION / APPROPRIATE DISPLAYS OF AFFECTIONS

Appropriate touch is needed and encouraged, but it is vital that staff members and leaders do not blur or cross the lines. In light of this, the following guidelines should be observed:

- Physical contact in any form should be above reproach, for the benefit of the student, and never based upon *your* emotional needs.
- Your personal behavior must foster trust at all times.
- Pat a hand, shoulder or back in an encouraging manner.
- Side hugs: in public view and kept brief. When hugging someone of the opposite gender, hugs should be limited to side-hugs.
- Look for opportunities to give plenty of “high fives” and “fist bumps”, unless this makes a student feel uncomfortable.
- Shake hands, or put an arm around the student’s shoulder, briefly.

AVOID the following interactions:

- A sexual relationship with a student is never acceptable.
- Never touch a student in sensitive areas (breasts, buttocks, genitals) even if a student has been injured in one of these areas. Never allow casual contact in these areas, under or over clothing.
- No sitting on laps.
- No hand-holding, unless part of a worship/prayer service or a group game.
- Never touch in anger or disgust.
- Never touch in a manner that may be construed as sexually suggestive.
- Avoid touching a student between the navel and the knees.
- Never carry a student piggy-back, or on your shoulders.
- Never kiss a student, or give (or receive) a massage.
- Never place hands beneath a student’s clothing to play, rub, or comfort.
- Never tickle, participate in ‘horse-play’ or wrestle with a student.

Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant student, except in cases of necessary restraint for the protection of the child or others.

A student’s preference *not* to be touched must be respected.

Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of others. It is much less likely that touch will be misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.

VERBAL INTERACTION

Verbal interaction with students should be positive and uplifting. All verbal interaction should be encouraging, constructive, and mindful of our mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of students.

To this end, do not talk to students in a way that is or could be construed as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Do not swear in the presence of students.

In general, verbal interaction should occur in a location where others may observe what is happening. At no time should a student and adult disappear behind a closed door or interact in an area which cannot be seen by others.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

All communication with students must be above reproach and indicative of healthy boundaries. As with any communication, the content of any electronic communication should be readily available to share with the student ministry leader or a parent.

As a best practice, refrain from sending individual direct messages to students of the opposite gender on social media applications. As a best practice, utilize Group Me or group texting when texting a student of the opposite gender.

TEXTING

Texting between ministry leaders and students is permissible only as outlined below. In general, texts should occur in 'group' form, whenever possible. Though students will often reply individually, make effort to text in group form and encourage replies to the group. When possible, ministry leaders should send and receive texts using a ministry-provided device/account.

Prudent judgment must be used in the timing and content of texts. **Do not text before 7am or after 10pm** unless the texting occurs as part of a programmed ministry activity. Do not share photos and/or videos of a sexual or suggestive nature.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via texts.

COMMUNICATION APPLICATIONS

It is permissible for the ministry to use applications that have messaging features (i.e., Instagram, Facebook Messenger) – a ministry account. At least one other ministry leader must have credentials to access the application and regularly review the messaging, comments and postings.

Avoid discussion of ANY sexual topic via social media. Do not comment or reply to a student's post that is inappropriate or questionable. All interaction should be above

reproach and reflect the integrity and values of Grace Fellowship Student Ministry.

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA

As a ministry leader, maintain a high moral standard in your social media presence. Inappropriate social media content may be a basis for suspension from participation in student ministry at Grace Fellowship. Please be cautious about the content of the posts on your personal social media. Please ensure that photos or videos posted on social media reflect Grace Fellowship ministry guidelines related to alcohol, tobacco and modesty (dress, posture and content).

TRANSPORTATION

Staff members and leaders may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for students. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when ministry leaders are involved in the transportation of students:

- Students should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place must be avoided.
- Avoid transportation circumstances that leave only *one student* in transport.
- Avoid physical contact with students while in vehicles.
- Absent an emergency, **cell phones may not be used by drivers** while transporting minors (other than navigation applications for directions). In an emergency, stop the vehicle to use the cell phone, unless a stop cannot safely occur. Texting or other cell phone use is strictly prohibited while driving.
- No drivers under age 25 may drive Grace Fellowship owned or rented vehicles.
- In transportation, the TWO ADULT RULE or 'RULE OF 3' must be followed.
- Avoid transporting a single student.
- Never be alone in a vehicle with a student of the opposite sex.
- Never instruct a student to drive other students to a ministry event.
- Transport only the number of students for whom you have seatbelts.
- Seatbelts should be worn at all times while in the vehicle.
- No one should be double-buckled.
- Use extra caution when driving students.

OUT-OF-PROGRAM CONTACT WITH STUDENTS

Grace Fellowship safety standards established to protect students and ensure healthy relationships should be respected *outside* ministry programs as well. In addition to ministry safety standards, the following policies should be respected in all interactions with students occurring *outside* ministry programs.

- Never be alone with a minor in an unobserved context or location.
- Limit connections by gender. Do not initiate or maintain contact with students of the opposite gender.
- Any dating or sexual relationship of any kind with a minor is strictly prohibited.

- **Never** spend the night at a student's home or invite a student to spend the night at your home.
- Do not spend the night in an 'away' location with any student (vacation , etc.).

PLANNING EVENTS FOR GROUPS

When planning a group event outside of regular programming, leaders should keep parents and staff members informed of details and abide by Grace Fellowship policies. Some events may require a release form.

OVERNIGHT EVENTS

Some Student Ministry activities/events require overnight sleeping arrangements for students, staff members and leaders (i.e. camp, mission trips, etc.). All programmed overnights must be approved by a ministry supervisor and receive permission from parents. No overnights are allowed on Grace Fellowship property unless part of a ministry-sponsored event. No overnight between any church staff member or leader and an *unrelated* minor may occur in any context. If pre-existing family relationships exist wherein overnights may occur between 'family friends', these relationships must be communicated to a ministry supervisor.

MEDICATION

Do not administer medication of any kind to any student while serving in ministry programs, including 'over the counter' drugs. For certain trips or activities (i.e., mission trips, beach/ski retreats), Grace Fellowship will assign leaders that will dispense appropriate medications consistent with other policies and signed parent permission forms.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AGREEMENT

This page is to be signed, detached, and delivered to the Ministry Supervisor.

Staff members and leaders are required to read and understand this student safety policy. Additionally, each staff member and leader must execute an acknowledgment form that this policy has been read, understood, and will be followed. Staff members and leaders who fail to adhere to this policy may be asked to step down from their role.

I have received and read a copy of Grace Fellowship Student Ministry Policies and Procedures on the date listed below, and I understand the importance of the matters set forth herein. I understand and agree to abide by these policies during my service at Grace Fellowship.

I understand that these policies may be modified or eliminated at any time by Grace Fellowship.

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

Finally, I understand that it is my responsibility to review new guidelines that are created and distributed.

Staff member or leader's name (please print)

Staff member or leader's signature

Date