

GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Approved by Session On: January 27, 2008

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Grace Presbyterian Church hereby adopts a policy of zero tolerance for child abuse. This policy applies to all activities and events sponsored by the Church which involve the participation or supervision of children under the age of 18 by a staff member of or a volunteer to the Church, wherever and whenever such activities might take place.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is:

1. To protect children involved in Grace Church-sponsored activities from child abuse and/or sexual misconduct.
2. To inform staff and volunteers about expected conduct in the presence of Grace's children, to enforce those expectations, and to thereby protect our staff and volunteers from false accusations of child abuse and/or sexual misconduct
3. To safeguard the ministry of Grace Church and to spare it from the devastation that can result from litigation.

No policy can anticipate all circumstances. This policy is intended to establish principles for safeguarding children in the ordinary course of routine church functions. It is recognized that in unexpected, unplanned for and emergency situations full compliance with the policy might be impractical or impossible. In such circumstances, deviation from this policy is permitted, but only to the extent necessary, to accommodate the circumstances.

DEFINITIONS

Child Abuse: Physical injury by other than accidental means, physical, mental or emotional injury resulting from abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, sexual abuse or exploitation of a child under the age of 18.

Volunteer: Any person who is not on the paid staff and who has been approved by the Church to conduct or assist in conducting church-sponsored activities for children.

Child: Anyone under the age of 18.

PRECAUTIONS AND DUE DILIGENCE

The primary purpose of this policy is, to the extent feasible within the resources of the Church, to prevent abuse within the framework of any Church program or ministry to children. This policy is intended to help our congregation make Grace a safe and caring place.

To create a safe environment within our church and at church-sponsored events, each church staff person and volunteer who works with the church's children or youth programs both regularly and occasionally, on or beyond the church grounds, will be screened and trained on child protection issues and practices. Only staff and approved volunteers may regularly conduct or assist in conducting church-sponsored events; provided, however, that in emergency or unexpected circumstances a person who is not an approved volunteer may assist on an occasional basis in conducting a church sponsored event for a brief period of time. By way of example, a person not approved as a volunteer may act as a driver where an approved volunteer has become unavailable. In all such cases, where practicable, parents shall be given advance notice that an unapproved person will be assisting in conducting such event.

Six month Rule: No person will be permitted to serve as a volunteer unless he or she has been a member of Grace for at least six (6) months or is recommended by two church members who have been members for at least one (1) year and have known the person they are recommending for at least one (1) year.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Staff will be responsible for implementation of this policy. The Personnel Team will have oversight of Policy matters.

PREVENTION

The following policies and practices shall be followed to lessen the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Parent Education

Parents are to be advised that:

1. Children below grade two (2) are expected to be escorted to and from their classroom or activity by a parent, guardian, another trusted adult or older sibling and not dropped off curbside.
2. Parents are expected to know what time children's events end and be available at the ending time to pick up their children promptly.
3. Parents are encouraged to meet and become familiar with their children's teacher(s) or other volunteer(s).

Screening

Staff and volunteers that regularly have contact with children under the age of 18 at Grace will be required to complete a screening application which shall include: Volunteer Application, Criminal Record Check, Child Abuse History Clearance. The information provided will be available only to those authorized to participate in the screening process and will be used exclusively for that purpose. The completed forms will be kept in a secure place. In the event of an allegation of abuse/neglect, the screening forms will be made available to other church leaders on a “need-to-know” basis.

Volunteers who successfully complete the screening process will be notified when they are approved to work with children and annually will be required to sign a statement that they have read, understood and agree to abide by Grace’s Child Protection Policy.

Supervision of Children

No Child to be Left Unsupervised: No activity at Grace Church involving children shall be permitted, unless that activity is supervised by a staff member or approved volunteer. At all church activities involving children, the Staff Member or the Volunteer in charge of the activity shall roam the building as appropriate under the circumstances to be sure that children are not unsupervised in classrooms, hallways or other areas.

Space Consideration: Each room or space where children are being cared for or are involved in activities shall have an unobstructed window in the door or every door which does not have a window shall be left open at all times during children activities. **All activities shall occur in open view.**

Prior Notification: Staff members or volunteers in charge of a particular activity shall, at all times, give prior notice and full information regarding the activity or event to parents or guardians.

Open Door Policy: Parents, volunteers or staff of the church may visit and observe child programs at any time.

Bathroom Procedure for Pre-school Children: An adult should accompany children to the bathroom rather than a child volunteer. The adult shall use discretion in making that decision. The person accompanying the child may enter the bathroom if the child needs assistance or supervision, but will not enter the stall with a child unless the child needs assistance or there is an emergency.

The outside bathroom door must be kept ajar when staff or a volunteer is inside with children. If the child needs assistance or there is an emergency with any child, the stall door is to be left open. When taking a group to the bathroom and the teacher is in the bathroom, all the children shall remain inside until everyone has used the facilities and then leave as a group.

Two Unrelated Person Preference: The presence of two staff and/or volunteers, at least one of whom must be 18 years old or older, is preferred for all events involving children. Whenever feasible, the two volunteers/staff members should not be related to each other.

Rule of Three: At all times when there are children and adults present in the same room, there should be a minimum of three persons present (two adults and one child or one adult and two children).

Any time an adult is having a private conversation with a child (e.g., during a confirmation retreat where a pastor is discussing one's spiritual journey), it should take place only in an area with other adults or children nearby and only with prior notification to the child's guardian or prior approval of the Head of Staff unless such notice or approval is impracticable under the circumstances. In the event the one-on-one is with the Head of Staff, such conference shall occur with prior notification of the child's parent or guardian unless impractical under the circumstances. In all cases of one-on-one meetings, the door to the room where the meeting takes place shall remain open at all times.

Parental Permission Rule: Children must have written parental permission for involvement in church-sponsored programs and activities away from the church location. Grace staff shall ensure that any other organization hosting Grace children have implemented an effective abuse/neglect policy.

Trips and Retreats: There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats and other times that children gather at or away from the church building. Three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency, there will be adequate supervision.

There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children. Parents will be made aware of housing accommodations.

In situations where two adults are not available per room where children are staying overnight, no adult of a different gender may stay alone in a specific room with the children. In those circumstances where adults are not staying in the rooms with the children, special measures must be taken to assure the children's safety and supervision, such as adult hall monitors and periodic room checks by at least one adult of the same gender as those being checked. The person in charge of each trip and/or retreat shall carry completed permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care and contact information on how to reach a parent or guardian in the event of an emergency.

Transportation: The following rules apply when transportation by volunteers is being provided for children for designated church activities from the church to a church-sponsored event and back:

1. The designated leader of the event must know the driver.
2. The designated leader of the event will not permit any adult to drive who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
3. Driver must be at least 21 years of age.
4. Driver must have a valid driver's license for the class of vehicle they are operating. A copy of each driver's license and proof of insurance must be furnished in advance and kept on file.
5. Driver must have proof of insurance.
6. Driver must be accompanied by least two children in the vehicle or prior parental permission obtained.
7. All persons must wear seat belts or be in an appropriate and properly installed infant or child seat.
8. Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.

Regular drivers are considered volunteers for purposes of this policy and must complete the screening process. A person acting as a driver only and only for a particular occasion need not be trained as a volunteer under this policy so long as they meet the requirements of Paragraph 1-7 above. The designated leader of the event shall assure compliance. A copy of the valid driver's license and insurance card must be filed with the Church before a regular driver is approved to drive on church-sponsored activities.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN

The church shall provide regularly scheduled (at least annual) review of these policies and practices and other current issues related to child protection for all volunteers and staff. Initial training is required for all volunteers and staff. At least annually, each volunteer and staff member shall certify in writing that he/she has received, read, and will abide by this policy. Volunteers and staff shall also be required to attend such additional training as staff determines.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING ABUSE OF CHILDREN

When abuse/neglect is suspected by individuals outside the church family:

The care and safety of the child and family is our first priority, consistent with not subjecting anyone to false charges of abuse.

Any staff or volunteer is encouraged to discuss areas of concern about abuse/neglect of a child with pastoral staff at any time. The pastoral staff should be shown any physical signs of abuse/neglect of a child as soon as possible. If there is a suspicion of abuse/neglect, it will be reported to appropriate public authorities. Any investigation by the Church will be conducted in a confidential manner consistent with the Church's obligation to report suspected abuse to public authorities.

The parent(s) or legal guardian of the victim will be notified by a pastoral staff member (Head of Staff preferably) and steps taken to assure the safety of the child until the parent(s) arrive. **It is important to emphasize that the appropriate authorities might have to be notified even if the parent(s) do not wish the incident to be reported.** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, pastoral staff will contact the appropriate authorities and follow their advice about notification of the parents.

When church staff or volunteer is suspected of being the abuser:

Anyone who suspects abuse by a volunteer or staff must report it to a pastoral staff member. Immediate verbal report shall be made to the appropriate public authority as required by law. Any written report required by law will be made within the period proscribed by law.

The parent(s) of the victim will be notified by an appropriate staff member and steps taken to assure the safety of the child until the parent(s) arrive.

An appropriate staff member will tell the accused that a report has been made. That volunteer or staff member will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties, pending investigation of the charges. If a staff member, a decision will be made by Session to either maintain or suspend his or her salary until the allegations are cleared or substantiated. The church will cooperate fully with all appropriate authorities as required by law. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the investigation would be premature.

Grace's insurance company will be notified promptly.

All reports should be documented in writing and brought to the attention of the Head of Staff and Personnel Team or the Personnel Team alone if the accused is the Head of Staff.

Failure to Report:

Knowing and willful failure to report suspected child abuse/neglect is itself a violation of this policy and will result in disciplinary action as to staff and removal or suspension of a volunteer's right to serve in positions involving children, in each case, as determined by the Head of Staff after consultation with Session.

DISCIPLINE

No Violation

If an investigation of a reported or suspected occurrence of child abuse reveals no abuse occurred, the accused volunteer or staff and the complaining party, will be informed that an investigation has been conducted and that the allegation is not substantiated. The employee will be reinstated in good standing including back pay and benefits, if suspended during the investigation. The volunteer will be returned to his/her prior status as such.

Violation

If an investigation substantiates the claim of abuse against a volunteer, that volunteer will be prohibited from working with children in any of the church's ministries.

If an investigation substantiates the claim of abuse against an employee, that employee will be subject to immediate termination. The employee may appeal this action to the Personnel Team and then to Session. The decision of the Session is binding. If the claim of abuse is made against an ordained person, that person shall be subject to church discipline in accordance with the Book of Order.

Policy Administration

The administration of this policy rests with the Session of Grace Presbyterian Church. The Session has assigned the oversight of this policy to the Personnel Team of the Session.

Abuse Investigation Team

Session shall create and maintain an abuse investigation team that consists of one (1) full-time pastor, one (1) church member active in children and/or student ministry and one or more church members with a professional background in health services, legal services or mental health.

All allegations of abuse and neglect shall be provided to the investigation team and the investigation team and no other person or group within the church shall investigate such allegations. The investigation team will meet as soon as possible after allegations are made, but in no event later than seventy-two (72) hours after the initial report of abuse or neglect. The investigation team will review all facts and interview the accuser, the accused and all persons

identified as having witnessed the abuse or neglect. The investigation team will not disclose the allegation beyond a “need-to-know” in order to properly conduct the investigation.

The investigation team will determine whether the church has any obligation to report the allegation under law and, if so, such report shall be made by the Head of Staff or other designated representative of the church. If the investigation team determines that there is reason to believe that the allegations are founded, but do not require report to any public authority, then the investigation team will make a recommendation to Session as to what corrective or disciplinary action should be undertaken. If the investigation team determines that the allegations are unfounded, it should report that finding to the accuser, the accused and to Session.

The investigation team will conduct its investigation as expeditiously as is practicable under the circumstances.