

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY
GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PLANO, TEXAS
(Revised and Session Approved February 2024)
Statement of Purpose and Procedures for Safeguarding
The Well-being of Children*, Youth* and Adults

The members of Grace Presbyterian Church of Plano, Texas believe that we are called by God to create a safe haven for all children and youth*. For those called to work with children and youth, established guidelines and procedures are put in place for the mutual benefit of both adults, and children and youth in their care. During each Baptism of an infant, youth or adult and reception of each person into this covenant community of faith, the members of this church pledge to uphold that person in the spirit of Jesus Christ and to teach, strengthen and support the individual's relationship with the household of God. Therefore, the members of this church are committed to the safety, welfare, and protection of all children and youth as they participate in its activities and programs.

**Those under the age of 18 years (as defined by the Texas Law)*

Grace Presbyterian Church's Child Protection Policy seeks to prevent any form of endangerment, abuse, neglect, or harassment, whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or sexual, by any employee, teacher or volunteer. **This policy is applicable while engaged in church sponsored activities or programs on or off church property**, or as a result of relationships and access to children and youth developed through church programs. These policies and procedures are also intended to respect the rights and afford due process to persons accused of improper conduct.

Therefore, all of our church activities and programs, regardless of location involving children and youth, will seek to uphold our commitment to the sanctity of the children and youth of Grace Presbyterian Church, whether members or guests, and will be subject to the following policy:

Selection of Volunteers

- No person will be recommended to the Session as a volunteer of children or youth activities until such person has been an active member of Grace Presbyterian Church for three (3) months (unless otherwise approved in advance by the Session).
- An interview by the Associate Pastor of Family Ministries, the Associate Pastor of Adult Discipleship/Nurture, or the Head of Staff is required.
- A security background check must be submitted and approved.
- Volunteers must complete child safety training by watching a video on child abuse awareness and passing a quiz on the material prior to working with children or youth.

Guidelines for Volunteers

- As often as is possible and practicable, two non-related adults will be assigned to supervise or lead all activities involving children or youth. *If a volunteer needs to be alone with a child or youth, that contact should take place in a public setting, and with the knowledge of another staff member (for example: at the far end of a dining hall, or on one end of the basketball court away from activities). The situation should be observable and interruptible.*
- A Check-In/Check-Out procedure is in place for nursery childcare during Sunday worship services utilizing text messages. All children in non-worship childcare will have a check-in/check-out procedure to follow.
- When taking children or youth to any event/program that involves any overnight stays, the two adult policy will be the goal. Specific arrangements that may make this policy impossible to enforce (i.e. hotel rooms for large groups, cabins with very small numbers of same-gender attendees) will be approved at the discretion of the Associate Pastor for Family Ministry. If the organization's policy is stricter than that of Grace PC, theirs will be used as default.
- When transporting children or youth to/from any church sponsored event, only adults (21 years and older) will be drivers. No participants in any Youth Ministry event or program will be allowed to transport other youth, even if they are 18 years old or older. If parents give permission to have an older sibling drive a younger sibling, no other non-family youth may be in the vehicle.
- Every attempt will be made to caravan vehicles and travel together in case of any emergency on the road.
- Any exception to what is stated in the policy must be approved by the Associate Pastor for Family Ministry.

Medications Policy

Medications Policy – It is the policy of Grace Presbyterian Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent at home. Exceptions include:

- Children or youth with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions). Parents of such children should address their situation with a staff member of the Family Ministry team to develop a plan of action.
- Children or youth attending an overnight event (such as a weekend retreat or camp). Parents are required to turn in all medications, clearly marked, to the ministry leader for administering. Parents of middle and high school youth are required to inform the ministry leader of the medication. It is the discretion of the ministry lead and the parent exactly who administers their medication. If the organization's policy is stricter than that of Grace PC, theirs will be used as default.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of Grace Presbyterian Church not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Workers should

consult with a staff member of the Family Ministry team if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Examples of appropriate discipline include:

- Use a firm, gentle voice when addressing any offense, clearly describing the unacceptable behavior and the desired behavior.
- Redirection.
- Time outs or withdrawal from the activity.

Reporting Injuries

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed.

- For minor injuries, scrapes and bruises workers will provide First Aid (band-aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
- For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
- Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an accident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional. (Appendix F)

Security/Background Checks

Security background checks (Appendix E) for persons 18 and older will be conducted by Grace Presbyterian Church staff. The results of the background check will be reviewed by the staff member who authorized the background check. If after this initial review, the staff member determines that further review should be made, the staff member will consult with one of the Pastors on staff at Grace Presbyterian Church.

The results of the security background check will not be disclosed to anyone other than one of the Pastors on staff without the expressed written permission of the employee or volunteer for children and youth activities (except as may be required by law).

Grace Presbyterian Church does not keep any hard copies of the background check forms or results. These documents are stored in the Protect My Ministry secure cloud server and are not accessible without Protect My Ministry login credentials.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify an employee or volunteer from participating in the leadership or sponsorship of any children or youth activity or program.

Any indictment, or any conviction for: murder; aggravated assault; sexual abuse; sexual assault (rape); aggravated sexual assault; injury to a child; incest; indecency with a child; inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child;

possession or promotion of child pornography; the sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor; employment harmful to children; or abandonment or endangerment of a child.

All other convictions or charges for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the Business Administrator and the Head of Staff if necessary to determine whether such convictions or charges will disqualify an employee or volunteer from participation in any child or youth activity. If an applicant disputes information that appears in his or her criminal history record transcript, he or she may appeal through the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The Security background checks of all employees, teachers and volunteers who work with children and youth in the programs and activities of the church, will be updated **every 3 years** by the means approved in this policy.

Response to Allegation of Child Abuse

- This church will not tolerate or accept any act or omission as specifically described in the **Prohibited Acts**.
- Any violation of the policy shall be reported in accordance with **Reporting Violation of Policy**.
- Grace Presbyterian Church shall have a Response Team which will consist of the Head of Staff and two (2) elders who will consult with an attorney, as necessary. All inquiries by any media will be directed to the Head of Staff or his/her designate.
- Grace Presbyterian Church will immediately remove all access to children and youth for an accused person. The accused is entitled to prompt and fair disposition of such serious charges.
- It is the policy and practice of Grace Presbyterian Church to follow all laws and regulations of the Texas Family Code designed for the protection of children and youth.

Prohibited Acts (Appendix C)

The following acts are prohibited by this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any Grace Presbyterian Church activity or program, whether on or off church premises. Any observation or personal knowledge of such violations must be immediately reported to any of the following: Head of Staff, Associate Pastor of Adult Discipleship/Nurture, Associate Pastor for Family Ministry, or designated program staff **after** the safety of the child, children or youth involved has been assured.

- Any direct observation or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child, youth or adult.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child or youth.

- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child, children or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the church.
- Presence of or possession of obscene, pornographic or sexually graphic materials at any function of the church, with the exception of sex education materials approved by the church.
- Possession, consumption or being under the influence of alcohol or any prohibited substance while leading or participating in a children's or youth function sponsored by Grace Presbyterian Church regardless of the location.

Reporting Violation of Policy

In order to maintain an environment free of destructive acts toward all children and youth, the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of Grace Presbyterian Church must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstances, observation, act, omission, or situation thought to be in violation of this Policy. All questions or concerns of any suspected prohibited act (including, but not limited to possible indicators of abuse in Appendix A) involving a child or youth shall be reported immediately to the Head of Staff, Associate Pastor of Adult Discipleship/Nurture, Associate Pastor for Family Ministry, or designated program staff or, in extenuating circumstances, Grace Presbytery's General Presbyter. If there are any questions about reporting, contact Child Protective Services or the local Police Department (see Appendix D – Legal Requirements for Reporting Abuse or Neglect of a Child).

In the event anyone personally witnesses an occurrence in violation of this Policy, that person will be asked to complete an **Incident Report** (Appendix B). Anyone who witnesses such an occurrence should consider the following recommendations as to how such a situation should be handled to insure the security of the child or youth involved and to protect against physical, emotional or psychological injury to all persons involved. The following are the steps to take in case of any occurrence of a violation of the Policy:

- **Report the incident immediately to the Head of Staff, Associate Pastor of Adult Discipleship/Nurture, Associate Pastor for Family Ministry, local police department and/or Child Protective Services.**
- **Do not leave the child, children or youth alone to report the incident. Personally secure their safety.**
- **Do not personally confront the alleged or accused violator of the policy.**

- **Complete an Incident Report immediately, recorded verbatim.**

In the event a child or youth reports abusive conduct while engaged in a church sponsored activity or involving the staff, employees, teachers, parents and volunteers of the church, regardless of where the conduct occurred, the person initially contacted by the child should contact the designated persons as previously listed and complete an Incident Report. Record verbatim in the Incident Report the specific words first spoken by the child or youth and the conduct and demeanor observed concerning the incident.

Consequences for Violation of Policy

Any person accused of committing a **Prohibited Act**, whether a staff member, employee, member or volunteer, will immediately be suspended from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church. Employees and staff members will be suspended with pay. Such suspension shall continue during any investigation by the church, law enforcement or child protection agencies.

Any person found to have committed a **Prohibited Act**, shall be prohibited from future participation in all children's and youth activities and programs of Grace Presbyterian Church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct will result in termination of employment.

As required by Texas law, all reports of abuse will be forwarded in a timely manner to the appropriate child protection and law enforcement authorities. Such reporting must be accomplished in addition to complying with this Child Protection Policy.

Failure to report a Prohibited Act in a timely manner to the designated person shall be considered a procedural violation of the Child Protection Policy and shall be grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee and suspension and dismissal from participation in all children and youth activities and programs of the church by any person.

When the allegations involve a member of the clergy, the provisions of Grace Presbytery's "Guidelines for Responding to Allegations of Clergy Sexual Misconduct" will be put into operation and the guidance of the Church's discipline will be followed.

Mechanisms for Evaluation and Dissemination

This policy is to be reviewed annually in January and updated as needed. Copies of this policy are to be provided to all new staff and volunteers as part of the screening and training for positions involved with direct contact with children and youth. Updates to the policy will be communicated to all staff, leaders and parents when changes are made.

APPENDIX A

Possible Indicators Of Abuse

Neglect

Behavioral Indicators:

1. Is truant or tardy often or arrives early and stays late.
2. Begs or steals food.
3. Attempts suicide.
4. Uses or abuses alcohol and/or other drugs.
5. Is extremely dependent or detached.
6. Engages in delinquent behavior, such as prostitution or stealing.
7. Appears to be exhausted.
8. States frequent or continual absence of parent or guardian.

Physical Indicators:

1. Frequently is dirty, unwashed, hungry, or inappropriately dressed.
2. Engages in dangerous activities (possibly because he/she generally is unsupervised).
3. Is tired and listless
4. Has unattended physical problems.
5. May appear to be overworked and/or exploited.

Sexual Abuse

Behavioral Indicators:

1. Is reluctant to change clothes in front of others.
2. Is withdrawn.
3. Exhibits unusual sexual behavior and/or knowledge beyond that which is common for his/her developmental stage.
4. Has poor peer relationships.
5. Either avoids or seeks out adults.
6. Is pseudo-mature.
7. Is manipulative.
8. Is self-conscious.
9. Has problems with authority and rules.
10. Exhibits eating disorders.
11. Is self-mutilating.
12. Is obsessively clean.
13. Uses or abuses alcohol and/or other drugs.
14. Exhibits delinquent behavior such as running away from home.
15. Exhibits extreme compliance or defiance.
16. Is fearful or anxious.
17. Exhibits suicidal gestures and/or attempts suicide.
18. Is promiscuous.
19. Engages in fantasy or infantile behavior

20. Is unwilling to participate in sports activities.
21. Has school difficulties.

Physical Indicators:

1. Has pain and/or itching in the genital area.
2. Has bruises or bleeding in the genital area.
3. Has venereal disease.
4. Has swollen private parts.
5. Has difficulty walking or sitting.
6. Has torn, bloody, and/or stained underclothing.
7. Experiences pain when urinating.
8. Is pregnant.
9. Has vaginal or penile discharge.
10. Wets the bed.

APPENDIX B

Incident Report Form

Reason for Report _____

Date of Incident _____ Time _____

Name of Reporter _____ Title _____

Name(s) of Child(ren)/Youth _____

Age(s) of Child(ren)/Youth _____

Quote The Child's/Youth's First Words Verbatim:

Briefly Describe The Child's/Youth's Demeanor/Appearance:

Briefly Describe What Happened:

What Action Did You Take?

Has The Incident Been Resolved? _____ Yes _____ No Explain: _____

Names of Witnesses: _____ Signatures of Witnesses (if possible.) _____

Reported submitted to: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Time: _____

APPENDIX C

Prohibited Acts

(also found within the body of the Child Protection Policy)

- Any direct observation or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a child, youth or adult.
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse or evidence of abusive conduct towards a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any adult and a child or youth.
- Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between a youth and a child.
- Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a child or youth.
- Physical neglect of a child, children or youth, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the church.
- Presence of or possession of obscene, pornographic or sexually graphic materials at any function of the church, with the exception of sex education materials approved by the church.
- Possession, consumption or being under the influence of alcohol or any prohibited substance while leading or participating in a children's or youth function sponsored by Grace Presbyterian Church regardless of the location.

Legal Requirements For Reporting Abuse Or Neglect Of A Child

In Texas, the legal requirements concerning the legal requirements for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of a child are primarily found in Chapter 261 of the Family Code.

1) **Defining Abuse and Neglect**

“Abuse” (§261.001(1)) is defined to include a broad laundry list of acts and omissions that could cause or permit mental or emotional or physical injury to a child, including harmful sexual conduct or use of a controlled substance. Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent physical injury or harmful sexual conduct is also defined as abuse.

Similarly, “neglect” (§261,001(4)) is broadly defined as leaving a child in or failing to remove a child from a situation where the child could be exposed to substantial risk of physical or mental harm.

2) **Reporting Abuse or Neglect**

A. **WHO?**

“A person having cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person shall immediately make a report” (§261.101(a)). This includes, without exception, individuals whose personal communications may otherwise be privileged, such as clergy, attorneys, doctors, social workers, etc. (§261.101(c)). Generally, the identity of the person making the report is confidential unless disclosed by order of a court or provided to a law enforcement officer conducting a criminal investigation. (§ 261,101(d)); §261.201) While a professional cannot delegate to or rely on another person to make the report, it appears that other persons can (§261.101(b)).

B. **WHEN?**

When a person has cause to believe there has been abuse or neglect, a report shall be made “immediately” (§261.101(a)). A professional must make a report within 48 hours after the professional “first suspects that the child has been or may be abused or neglected.” (§261.101(b)).

C. WHAT?

The report should reflect the reporter's belief that a child has been or may have been abused or neglected" (§261.102). The report shall identify, if known:

1. Name and address of the child;
2. Name and address of the person responsible for the care, custody or welfare of the child; and
3. Any other pertinent information concerning the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect. (§261.104).

D. TO WHOM?

A report shall be made to:

1. Any local or state law enforcement agency;
2. The Department of Protective and Regulatory Services; or
3. The state agency that operates or licenses the facility in which the alleged abuse or neglect occurred. (§261.103).

Regardless of where the report is initially made, it will be referred to and investigated by the Department if it involves abuse or neglect by a "person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare" or by law enforcement agencies if it involves alleged abuse or neglect by someone else. (§261.105).

E. IMMUNITIES

A person who acts in good faith to report, investigate, testify, or otherwise participate in a judicial proceeding or investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect is immune from civil or criminal liability. (§261.106). If a frivolous claim is brought against a person for reporting, the person may recover reasonable attorney's fees and other expenses related to his/her defense. (§261.108).

F. PENALTY FOR FALSE REPORT

It is a Class A misdemeanor to knowingly or intentionally make a false report. It is a felony if the person has been previously convicted of making a false report. (§261.107).

G. PENALTY FOR FAILURE TO REPORT

It is a Class B misdemeanor if a person "has cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect and knowingly fails to report." (§261.109).

Grace Presbyterian Church

Background Check Information

Your background check needs to be run in order to meet our Child Protection Policy. GPC is using Protect My Ministry for its background checks. An email with a link to fill out your information to complete a background check will be sent to you from Protect My Ministry.

After completing the form, your background check will be submitted for processing. In addition, we are asking each volunteer to watch a short video on child abuse awareness to complete the Child Safety Training. You will receive an email with the video link from protectingourkids. After you watch the video you will be required to complete a short quiz and score at least a 70% to pass.

This information needs to be updated every 3 years.

Accident Report Form

Nature of Accident _____

Date of Accident _____ Time _____

Name of Reporter _____ Title _____

Name of Victim (s) _____

Briefly Describe What Happened

Nature of Injury:

Action Taken

Names of Witnesses:

Signatures of Witnesses (if possible)

Report submitted to: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Time: _____