



Grace
Evangelical
Church
S H A R J A H

Youth Protection Policy

Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah

Revised & Approved February 2019

For the use of Grace Evangelical Church Youth Ministry

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Welcome!

This document outlines the protection policy for the Youth Ministry at Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah. It is our goal to work alongside parents for the spiritual good of their teenage Youth by teaching them God's Word, showing them how to apply it, and helping them to follow Christ during a key stage of their lives.

This handbook is designed to familiarize parents and Youth Volunteers with our Youth Protection Policy. The specifications contained in this handbook apply to our Youth Group Meetings, any Church-organized off-campus events, and all one-to-one Church-sanctioned Youth-related meetings.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Will Drake at: will@gracesharjah.com.

I. Definition of Terms

Personnel

- The Pastor Over Youth Ministry – The Elder charged with responsibility to shepherd the Youth Ministry at Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah.
- Elder – A Church member appointed by the congregation of Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah to currently serve in the role of “Elder” according to the Church constitution.
- Elder Board – The body of Church members currently serving in the capacity of Elders at Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah.
- Staff Member – Anyone employed by Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah.
- Volunteer – A member of Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah who volunteers to work with the Youth at Youth Group Meetings.
- Mentor – A member of Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah who volunteers to spend regular time with Youth for their spiritual benefit and is under the authority, purview, and guidance of the Youth's parents and the Pastor Over Youth Ministry.
- Worker - Anyone who is an approved volunteer, parent, or elder of GECS.

Other

- GECS or the Church – Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah, located in the UAE.
- Youth – adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 who participate in any fashion in the Youth Ministry and/or engage in any Church-related activity with a Youth Worker.
- Grace Youth Ministry or Grace Youth – A ministry of Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah for Youth, ages 12 through 18, and their parents which is organized by the Pastor Over Youth Ministry. Youth Ministry includes Youth Nights, any Church-organized off-campus events, and One-to-One Youth Mentorship Meetings.
- Youth Nights – Organized meetings of Youth and their parents participating in Grace Youth as scheduled by the Pastor Over Youth Ministry. Such meetings include meetings in homes or “outside” events.
- One-to-One Youth Discipleship Meetings – Meetings between a Mentor and a Youth as organized by, overseen by the Pastor Over Youth Ministry and the Youth's parent.
- Grace Youth Meetings – Includes both Youth Nights and One-to-One Youth Mentorship Meetings.

II. Youth Protection Summary

Our first concern is that the Youth are safe while they are in our care. To this end we:

- Screen all Youth Workers.
- Require parents who are not restricted due to life circumstances to be actively involved in our regular Youth Meetings and special events.
- Provide yearly training for parents and volunteers.

III. Parameters for the Youth Protection Policy

This Youth Protection Policy applies to Youth who are voluntarily placed by parents under the responsibility of the Church for Grace Youth Meetings.

Any form of abuse, harm, neglect or other problems related to Youth at home, school, or in any bible-study or activity not during an organized Youth Nights or One-to-One Youth Discipleship Meeting is *not* covered by this policy and will be referred immediately to the elders of Grace Evangelical Church Sharjah for further consideration and investigation.

IV. Screening

Ensuring a safe environment begins long before a Grace Youth Meeting. Every Youth Volunteer applicant who wishes to serve in Grace Youth is required to go through a screening process.

A. Screening Procedure

To ensure safe and quality care, GECS has established several criteria that all Youth Workers must meet in order to work with our Youth:

- All Youth Workers must be members in good standing at GECS.
- All Youth Volunteers must have completed the “Grace Youth Information And Covenant” application and have been approved for participation by the Senior Pastor and the Pastor Over Youth Ministry.
- All reference checks must be satisfactorily completed. Other appropriate screening checks may be completed, subject to the discretion of the elders.
- All completed records of screening procedures will be kept securely along with the original application.
- Potential Youth Volunteers will provide references who can testify to their character.

GECS reserves the right to reject any applicant for any reason, including but not limited to: Refusing or failing to complete screening; failing to provide requested information; providing information that is subsequently determined as false or misleading; sin or suffering issues that compromise the applicant’s ability to care for Youth; misdemeanor or felony or criminal convictions; and obtaining information from references that suggest the applicant is not suitable to help with Youth. Any GECS member who learns of or has knowledge of prior acts of misconduct by an applicant must report that knowledge to the Pastor Over Youth Ministry. All approved Youth Volunteers must agree to abide by the policies laid out in this document and any other policies put in place by the elders for the good of our Youth. GECS reserves the right to remove any Youth Volunteer who fails to agree or comply with the Grace Youth Ministry policies.

V. Arrival and Departure from Youth Group Meetings

Specific guidelines will be followed as it concerns arrival and departure times to and from the GECS Youth Group Meetings.

A. Arrival

Parents are encourage to attend Youth Nights at least 1-2 times per month. It is the parents responsibility to arrange transportation for their Youth. The Pastor over Youth Ministry can assist in arranging rides at the parent's discretion and permission.

B. Departure

Parents are encouraged to pick up their Youth immediately after the conclusion of the Youth Night. In the event that a parent is unable to pick up their Youth, the Pastor over Youth Ministry can assist in arranging rides at the parent's discretion and permission. If a parent cannot be contacted and has not arrived to pick up their Youth, the Pastor over Youth Ministry will consult with an elder and the remaining parents to figure out how best to handle the situation.

VI. Protecting Youth During Youth Nights

A. Rules Common to All Youth Group Meetings

- A single Youth may not be alone with a single Youth Worker in route to a meeting or activity location.
- If a Youth Group Meeting is held in a private residence:
 - It must be at the home of a GECS member; and
 - The Pastor Over Youth Ministry should have approved the event.
- At least one of the GECS members who host the Youth in their private residence must be Youth Worker approved.
- When off-site events are held in private residences, at least two Youth Volunteers must be present, including at least one male and one female Youth Worker. An exception to this rule may be made if the event is a male-only event or female-only event. In such a case, two Youth Workers of the same sex must be present.

A. Two Youth Worker Rule

- At least two qualified Youth Workers must be present at Youth Nights at all times. Ideally, one of the Youth Worker must be a man and the other must be a woman.
- Youth should never under any circumstance be alone with another youth who is not their sibling or an adult who is not their guardian.

B. Youth-to-Youth Worker Ratios

- In addition to always having two Youth Workers present during Youth Nights, there should always be at least one (1) Youth Worker for every ten (10) Youth.
- The Pastor Over Youth Ministry should be notified if more Youth Workers are needed in order to maintain these ratios.

C. Restroom Guidelines

- Youth Workers should not be alone with a Youth in the restroom for any reason.
- Anatomic males may not use female restrooms. Anatomic females may not use male restrooms. This rule applies to both Youth Workers as well as Youth.

VII. Protecting Youth During Special Events

Youth will never be taken to any event or outside activity without their parents'/guardians' clear consent.

A. Rules Common to All Special Events

- Parents will be notified of pertinent information surrounding any trips, including transportation, addresses, contact numbers, any applicable accommodations, and specific activities.
- Parents should notify attending Youth Workers of any medication or special instructions involved in caring for their Youth.
- A single Youth may not be alone with a single Youth Worker in route to a meeting or activity location.
- If a Youth Group Meeting is held in a private residence:
 - It must be at the home of a GECS member; and
 - The Pastor Over Youth Ministry should have approved the event.
- At least one of the GECS members who host the Youth in their private residence must be Youth Worker approved.
- When off-site events are held in private residences, at least two Youth Volunteers must be present, including at least one male and one female Youth Worker. An exception to this rule may be made if the event is a male-only event or female-only event. In such a case, two Youth Workers of the same sex must be present.
- For any off-site activity, a ratio of at least one (1) Youth Worker for every ten (10) Youth must be present.
- Youth Volunteers should not be alone with a Youth in the restroom for any reason.
- Anatomic males may not use female restrooms. Anatomic females may not use male restrooms. This rule applies to both Youth Volunteers as well as Youth.

B. Overnight Activities

- If Youth are sleeping in the same room as a Youth Worker, there must be at least two (2) other Youth Workers present in the room.
- A Youth Worker may not sleep in the same bed or sleeping bag as one of the Youth.
- Female sleeping quarters will only be supervised by female Youth Workers, and male sleeping quarters will only be supervised by male Youth Workers.
- If the activity is co-ed, male and female Youth will sleep in separate places. Youth Workers will ensure that male and female Youth remain separate throughout the night.
- If a Youth is anatomically male, he may not sleep in the female sleeping quarters. If a Youth is anatomically female, she may not sleep in the male sleeping quarters.
- Youth will not be left alone in a room without adult supervision or may be alone with an adult for any reason.
- If restrooms or shower accommodations are far from the living quarters, Youth will be assigned partners of the same sex to walk with them to the restroom or shower location.

VIII. One-to-One Youth Mentorship

Grace Youth may coordinate, with the parent's permission, a mentoring relationship between a Youth and a Mentor. If so:

- Mentors will go through the screening process described above and common to all other Youth Volunteers.
- Parents must give verbal consent for the mentoring relationship to begin.
- Mentors must be of the same sex as the Youth.
- Mentors should always spend time with the Youth in public, not private settings.
- Youth may not sleep at a Mentor's home unless specifically permitted by the Youth's parent(s).
- Mentors may not provide rides to a Youth unless specifically permitted by the Youth's parent(s).

IX. Youth Worker & Youth Conduct Policy

A. Youth Worker-to-Youth Interaction

We would love for our Youth Workers to build friendships with the Youth, but they must be within certain boundaries:

- No romantic involvement at all with no exceptions.
- Youth Workers may not verbally abuse Youth by speaking to them harshly or in a sexually suggestive manner.
- Youth Workers and Youth must abide by the Physical Touch Policy below.

B. Youth-to-Youth Interaction

- Youth may not separate themselves from any group during a Youth Group Meeting.
- Youth may not engage in any form of verbal, emotional, physical abuse of another.
- Youth must abide by the Physical Touch Policy below.

X. Physical Touch Policy

Two types of relationships are important to consider: Youth Worker-to-Youth and Youth-to-Youth.

A. Youth Worker-to-Youth

While appropriate physical contact with Youth can be an effective means of aiding in communication, redirecting attention, or showing godly love and care, it can also be easily misinterpreted. The following will help Youth Workers to avoid any compromise or concerns in this area and are, as such, requisites of this Youth Protection Policy:

- The following types of physical interaction between Youth Workers and Youth are prohibited: Rough-housing, wrestling, shoulder or piggy-back rides, rubbing/massaging, sitting on laps, and any other physical activity that requires extended periods of physical contact.
- Youth Workers may only touch Youth in "safe" areas and for a brief time. "Safe" areas generally include hands, arms, shoulders, upper back, or gentle pats on the top of the head. Never touch a Youth on or near any region that is private or personal.
- Youth Workers may never touch Youth out of frustration or anger. Physical discipline is not an appropriate means of correcting someone else's Youth.

B. Youth-to-Youth

- No male or female should be alone together for any Grace Youth activity.
- No inappropriate touching of any kind will be accepted. Inappropriate touching can include, but is not limited to: extended hugging, kissing, rough-housing, wrestling, shoulder or piggy-back rides, rubbing/ massaging, sitting on laps, and any other physical activity that requires extended periods of physical contact.
- Fighting will not be tolerated. Any Youth participating in violent action will be dismissed from an activity and placed into their parent's care.

XI. Appropriate Discipline

All Youth Workers are responsible for providing a loving, respectful, and orderly atmosphere in which Youth can learn, grow and interact with others. This atmosphere should be maintained by preparing beforehand, proactively directing Youth towards acceptable activities, verbally encouraging positive behavior, and, when necessary, correcting or redirecting inappropriate behavior.

Acceptable means of redirecting inappropriate behavior include correcting the Youth verbally by withholding a certain privilege or activity for a brief time, or separating a Youth from the group for a brief time (particularly if his behavior is endangering or upsetting other Youth). During correction, Youth should never be isolated with the adult. Steps of correction might include (1) removing the Youth from the situation or problem; (2) pointing out the problematic behavior; talking to the Youth about his sin and his need for Christ; (3) praying for the Youth and redirecting; (4) helping the Youth to reconcile with another Youth when appropriate. Youth Workers should view misbehavior as an opportunity to introduce Youth to the gospel. Youth Workers should never use any form of corporal punishment, and should never slap, kick, punch, spank, or hit a Youth. They should never speak harsh words, insults, belittling comments, threatening words, or any other verbal humiliation to Youth.

If a Youth's behavior is uncontrollable or the Youth does not respond to the acceptable means of discipline indicated above, the parents should immediately be contacted. If the Youth assaults, harasses or bullies other Youth, misbehaves beyond minor correction, or has a pattern of misbehavior, he or she should be immediately removed and the parents should be called. Youth Workers are allowed to physically restrain a Youth if he/she is physically endangering other Youth. The Youth Worker should report any of these problems (as well as the appropriate response taken to deal with the behavior) to the Pastor Over Youth Ministry. Reinstatement is optional and is determined by the Pastor Over Youth Ministry and the Senior Pastor. A Youth may be reinstated if the risk of re-offense has been adequately reduced.

XII. Youth Abuse and Neglect

A. Youth Protection Committee

The Youth Protection Committee consists of the Pastor Over Youth Ministry and at least two (other) GECS Elders to be determined by the Senior Pastor. Each member of the Youth Protection Committee stands ready to receive information related to suspected Youth neglect, abuse, or molestation. They are committed to addressing all allegations in accordance with the principles of Matthew 18 and in harmony with the GECS Church covenant and the laws of the UAE. Any Youth Worker, who witnesses a violation of the Youth Protection Policy short of abuse, should first notify the person violating the policy and encourage compliance. If the person violating the policy refuses to comply, a member of the Youth Protection Committee should be notified immediately. Any Youth Worker who witnesses or suspects neglect, abuse, or molestation should report their concerns immediately to a member of the Youth Protection Committee.

B. Response to Abuse and Neglect

Anyone who suspects, witnesses, or has any reason to believe that a Youth has been or is likely to be harmed or threatened with abuse in any form or neglect should contact the Pastor Over Youth Ministry or any Elder of GECS. This reporting includes questionable behavior (overly flirtatious behavior, shoulder massages or other intimate acts, etc.) and/or possible offenses (volunteers observing actual abuse or possible evidence of abuse, like abrasions, lacerations, etc.). Any elder who receives the allegations about abuse or neglect will report this to the Youth Protection Committee immediately.

When considering whether to report or not, it is important to consider if there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse. “Reasonable suspicion” implies that a reasonable person seeing a similar bruise or hearing a similar story would come to a similar understanding about the probable cause of the bruise or assault or abuse. Reasonable suspicion suggests that reasonable people have sufficient general knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate interactions to be suspicious about a particular incident.

What should a Youth Worker do when they observe an incident that may be abusive? Immediately intervene to protect the Youth. The observer should also write out a report about the incident. If, after being contacted, authorities choose not to respond, keep on on-going log of the suspected person’s behavior and anything else that is relevant on the person or the Youth or their relationship.

C. Reporting Abuse

GECS will ensure that a caring response is always provided to any suspicion or witnessing of abuse. Every allegation will be taken seriously. GECS will be especially proactive when dealing with any report of abuse. Proper guidelines for such complaints will be followed diligently and exhaustively. The victim(s) and victim’s family will be cared for by the Church in whatever way is available. Situations will be handled forthrightly with due respect for all parties’ privacy and confidentiality.

The Church will seek professional assistance when deemed appropriate by the Youth Protection Committee and/or the Elder Board of GECS. Notification will be limited to those who need to know about the allegation and to those who can provide assistance in responding to abuse. The Church may:

- Report suspicions or firsthand accounts or any knowledge of abuse to civil authorities.
- Notify denominational leaders, or any other outside officials.
- Notify Church Mentors, counselors or medical personnel in order to obtain ongoing care for the victim(s) and victim’s families.

Credible Allegations of abuse, admission of child abuse by a Staff Member, Elder, Deacon, Youth Worker, or criminal conviction of abuse should:

- Immediately result in removal of the person(s) from any activity or program involving Youth; and
- Be reported to GECS’s Elder Board. This disclosure of abuse is to be done regardless of the source of the information.

The Youth Protection Committee and the Elders of GECS will decide on other appropriate responses to allegations, self-admission of guilt, or criminal conviction, some of which may include:

- Contacting the appropriate civil authorities.
- Notification of a Staff Member, a Deacon, and/or any Youth Worker.
- A report to the congregation about the allegations in any of GECS's public services or the members' meeting.
- Barring from any activities or Church programs with Youth.
- A GECS member being with the alleged perpetrator at all times during any GECS gathering or event. The alleged perpetrator will be notified of this requirement immediately after allegations are made known to Youth Protection Committee or GECS Elders.
- Disciplining (removal from membership) of the perpetrator in a members' meeting by the congregation.
- Suspension or termination of a paid Staff Member or Youth Worker position.
- Acknowledging to another organization about allegations against or termination of a Staff Member or a Youth Worker for misconduct or abuse against children.

If a Staff Member, the GECS Elders, or a member of the Youth Protection Committee learns from police that allegations of abuse are being investigated or criminal charges have been filed, the GECS Elders should:

- Try to acquire and review written documentation of allegations and information known at that point;
- Prevent contact between the accused and the accuser;
- Remove the accused from activities or programs involving Youth, pending the outcome of the investigation.

If an adult alleges an incident of abuse that happened when he was a Youth in a GECS program, then:

- Members of the Youth Protection Committee should interview the accuser and assess the potential risk. If the accused is still a member of GECS, then the Committee should follow the guidelines set out in the above paragraphs.
- If the accused is no longer a member of GECS, then the Youth Protection Committee should consult with the Elders to determine the need to report to civil authorities or any other organization that the accused may be a part of since his departure from GECS.
- Even if government officials are no longer bound to investigate due to a statute of limitations, GECS should investigate *all* allegations.

The Youth Protection Committee and the GECS Elder Board will respond to congregational concerns. The Church will work to maintain confidentiality as is appropriate.

If appropriate, the GECS Elders will respond to the media. Normally, one Elder or member will be designated by the Elder Board to speak to the media on behalf of the Church. Great care should be taken to disclose only facts and not suspicion. Great care should also be taken to protect a victim's identity.

D. Child or Teen Pornography

If a Youth Worker is suspected of viewing, producing or distributing child or teen pornography:

- He or she will be immediately removed from all contact with Youth;
- Allegations will be immediately reported to the Pastor Over Youth Ministry or any Elder of GECS;
- Appropriate response steps will be outlined and implemented by the Youth Protection Committee and the Elders at GECS, including contacting civil authorities as is appropriate.

End of Policy.