

Children's Ministry Manual



Children's Ministry Vision

Children's ministry exists to help parents shepherd their children by

1. Providing loving, safe, and caring interaction with their children,
2. Teaching children the Gospel, and
3. Teaching children the character of God.

For God to be worshipped and glorified, children's ministry will attempt to evangelize children as well as teach them the character of God in age-appropriate ways. In a safe and clean environment, children's ministry will provide an attractive, captivating, and enjoyable place for children to learn about God.

Children's ministry evangelizes children, equips servants, and encourages parents.

Thank you so much for being willing to serve in such a critical ministry. Especially in a church like ours, with so many children and a heart for another generation, you are a needed and valuable part of the work of the church.

We take very seriously but joyfully our responsibility to care for the children of our church, from their spiritual needs to their physical safety. Because of that concern, this manual attempts to outline key procedures and policies without being overly prescriptive for every situation. Please use common sense and initiative to protect and care for the children you minister to.

General Expectations

All children's ministry workers should

- Love children and parents.
- Desire to serve with faithfulness, humility, and joy.
- Be a member of Grace Church of the Valley.
- Complete a children's ministry application.
- Have pastoral approval of ministry application.
- Agree to allow us to run a background check.
- Interact with children, parents, fellow workers, and children's ministry staff in a kind and loving way.
- Ensure that our facilities are a safe and enjoyable place for every child.
- Immediately report all suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior to children's ministry leadership.
- Immediately report all incidents, accidents, illnesses, and emergencies to children's ministry leadership.
- Follow and enforce all children's ministry policies.

Approval Process

Membership

Becoming a children's ministry worker begins with becoming a member at GCV. Every children's ministry worker should be a member of Grace Church, completing all membership requirements and approved by the elders.

Minors (under the age of 18) do not have to be confirmed as members. Pastoral leadership can also waive this requirement if it can be verified that the applicant was approved as an adult to work with children in another congregation and is in good standing with that congregation.

Application

All children's ministry workers should complete the GCV Children's Ministry Application, which includes a request for two non-family references, agreement with the GCV doctrinal statement, and consent to a background check.

Background Check

Every children's ministry worker must agree to allow us to run a background check, provided free through [backgroundchecks.com](https://www.backgroundchecks.com). Without a background check, you will not be placed on the approved workers' list.

Scheduling

Our desire is to schedule you for the times and classrooms you most want to serve while asking you to miss no more than three worship services in a three-month rotation. To help make this possible, please respond to any scheduling emails or requests promptly. As much as possible, please check your personal calendar carefully so you can fully commit to the times you are scheduled for.

If you are unable to serve on your scheduled time, please arrange for your own replacement. Trading with another worker or finding a sub are the two ways to replace yourself. Please remember that an adult should be replaced by another adult, not a youth worker. Please communicate any changes to the nursery scheduler.

Arrival/Departure

Please arrive faithfully no later than 15 minutes before the service you are scheduled for. Being on time for parents as well as for the good of your fellow workers is a great expression of love for others. Especially for the 10:30 service, remember that the Sunday school workers cannot leave until you arrive.

Do not leave a class until replacement workers have arrived or every child has been checked out.

Classroom Responsibilities

Before the Service

Check safety, supplies, snacks, and that nursery linens are in place so teachers are ready to lovingly and calmly greet the children and parents.

Wear your name tag so parents can feel comfortable knowing who the children's ministry workers are.

During the Service

Check in each child, kindly greeting parents and recording instructions concerning the child's allergies and specific needs. Encourage parents to place one sticker on their child, then put the second sticker in the attendance notebook.

Keep an eye on entryways at all times and maintain a constant head count. Throughout the service, place all handheld toys and linens that have been used into the tubs for cleaning.

After the Service

- Check security tag before releasing each child. Please check every security tag (even parents that you know). Only a person with the correct security tag may pick up a child.
- Put toys away in labeled containers. Clean toys from tubs with disinfectant wipes.
- Wipe down tables and chairs.
- Place all dirty linens in laundry bag to be laundered during the week.

Modesty

When deciding what to wear, consider what will be visible when sitting, bending, or leaning over. There should not be any cleavage, upper thigh, midriff (front or back), or undergarments exposed.

Health Guidelines

Children should not be in children's ministry if any of the following is true:

- has green mucus.
- has a fever over 100 degrees.
- has been vomiting in the last 48 hours.
- has head lice.
- has pink eye.
- has a communicable disease (measles, chicken pox, etc).

If a child exhibits any sign of illness, call the parents.

To help minimize the spread of sickness, anti-bacterial gel is provided in each classroom. Use sanitizer before snacks, after bathroom trips, and after sneezes and coughs.

Safety Guidelines

Worker-to-Child Ratios

Infants	one worker for every three children (ideal) one worker for every four children (max)
Crawlers & Walkers	one worker for every four children (ideal) one worker for every six children (max)
14–29 months	one worker for every six children (ideal) one worker for every nine children (max)

Toddlers	one worker for every eight children (ideal) one worker for every twelve children (max)
4–10 years	one worker for every 15 children (ideal) one worker for every 20 children (max)

Note: Children’s ministry leadership has the right to evaluate the needs of each room and to exceed the max numbers listed in the above ratios.

Emergency Procedures

In an emergency, call 911, the children’s ministry leader, and/or the nurse on duty.

In an evacuation, the lead teacher should take the attendance records. Care should be taken to get every child from the room safely and quickly to the outside safety zones.

Teaching

The teaching moment is the key of all children’s ministry events. Far from providing babysitting or childcare alone, children’s ministry exists to teach God’s Word to children of all ages.

Recognize Parents’ Primary Responsibility

The biblical basis for this concept is found in Ephesians 6:1–3 and Deuteronomy 6:6–9. At Grace, we want to constantly consider that the children we minister to are their parents’ primary responsibility.

Verbalize parents’ responsibility.

Examples include

- “I’m so glad you are here today because your dad and mom want you to learn more about the Bible, and today is one day we get to help them.”
- “Thank you for bringing your child to Seeds today. We’re grateful for our chance to come alongside what you’ve been doing all week.”

Direct discipline to the parents.

- If a child repeatedly and willfully breaks class rules, have them sit apart from the other children. If you make a child sit in a timeout, always talk to their parents when they come to pick them up. Calmly, without judgmentalism or fanfare, explain to the parent what happened and then allow the parent to deal with their child as they see fit. Remember, they are the parents, not you.
- If a child stubbornly, violently, or distractingly refuses to obey you, locate the parents and ask them deal with the child.

Think correctly about your role.

- Teachers at Grace provide a valuable service to parents and kids; however, we are not each child's parent, pastor, or only hope. We are assistants, not the coach; servants, not the king or queen; labor, not the management.
- Parents teach their children all week long. We have only a few hours on Sunday. Let's make the most of our time, studying carefully and giving our energy fully. At the same time, let's not have an inflated view of our own self-importance. Children's ministry is for humble servants.

Complement Teaching from Home

Children's ministry must not be about competing with biblical teaching or leadership in the home. It must come alongside it.

Therefore:

- Teach core Bible principles, not personal opinions.
- Tread carefully concerning applications good Christian people can and do disagree on.
- Never publicly disagree with, belittle, or attack parents' views in front of their children. Even if you are "right," the damage is almost never worth the price for the child.

Child Abuse Policies

Abuse Tolerance

GCV has a **zero tolerance for abuse**. It is the responsibility of every staff member and volunteer at GCV to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

Those who accept the special responsibility of working with children at Grace Church agree to

- treat children with respect and dignity.
- do their best to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation from occurring to children participating in activities.
- not engage in or condone acts of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
- report any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations.

All members, visitors, and guests at GCV are expected to follow our policies. The intention of these policies is to protect, not to substantially interfere with the nurturing, teaching, and supervising of children.

Definitions

child: for the purposes of this policy, any individual under the age of 18.

adult: any person age 18 or older.

staff: anyone who works for GCV for salary or wages.

volunteer: anyone who provides services for the Church and receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or other pecuniary benefits.

child abuse: injury of a child by an adult or older child that is not accidental. It may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, or sexual abuse.

child physical abuse: the non-accidental bodily injury of a child through physical contact or mistreatment.

child sexual abuse: any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator, in other words, “any sexual activity with a child” (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992). Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. It includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

sexual abuse perpetrated by an adult: any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child and an adult. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult or child. Sexual behavior between a child and an adult is always considered to be forced, whether or not the child consents to it.

sexual abuse perpetrated by a child: any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between children when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child has power over the other child. This includes any activity that is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children.

Types of child sexual abuse that involve touching include

- Fondling
- Oral, genital, and anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Forcible rape

Types of child sexual abuse that do not involve touching include

- Verbal comments
- Pornographic videos and photography
- Obscene phone calls
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

child emotional abuse: any language directed toward a child by an adult that is intended to cause emotional anxiety, pain, or other severe emotional disturbance. It is

mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

neglect: the failure to provide for a child's basic needs or the failure to protect a child from harm.

economic exploitation: the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child's belongings or money.

Supervision

Two-Adult Rule

- Two trained adults will be present at all of GCV's activities and classes involving children. A person new to the church, participating less than six months in activities of the church, must work with a trained adult for any activities with children. During Sunday School, when children are attending classes in the spaces separated by dividers, it is permissible to have one adult present in each divided space, as long as there are at least two trained adults present in the larger room.
- If absolutely necessary, a teacher or nursery caregiver may work alone if there is visual access to the room (open door or room with a window in the door).
- Exceptions may be made to this two-adult rule when teenage workers are approved to work with a trained adult.

Physical Contact

GCV is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, GCV has implemented a 'physical contact policy' which promotes a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministries while protecting children. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by anyone working in Children's Ministries programs:

- Side-to-side hugging, pats on the back, and other forms of appropriate physical affection (such as high-fives) between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
- Infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children may be held when in need of attention or comfort. Toddlers and preschoolers should be held on the knees rather than on the lap.
- Inappropriate touching and displays of affection are forbidden (touch or interaction with children in any way that is intended to be sexually stimulating). Any activity of this type is illegal, as well as a violation of trust and completely inappropriate. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching, or displays of affection should be immediately reported to children's ministry leadership.
- Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child and should never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.

- Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other children or children’s staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
- Physical contact in any form should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of staff members or volunteers in Children’s Ministries must foster trust at all times. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
- Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child’s preference not to be touched must be respected. No child should be made to feel guilty if they do not wish to participate in these expressions of affection. Children will be made aware that they are free to participate or not, as they feel comfortable.
- Corporal punishment or verbal abuse is never permitted. **No form of physical discipline is acceptable.** This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behaviors by children. Children are to be disciplined using time-outs and other non-physical methods of behavior management.

Open Classrooms

Church staff, parents, and church members may visit classrooms and child-care rooms at any time without prior notice. Children’s ministry leaders will make periodic observation of childcare rooms and classrooms during the times when children’s programs are being conducted.

Classroom Discipline

All adults participating in programs involving contact with children will be guided by the following constructive discipline guidelines in order to maintain classroom safety and order:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, verbally redirect the child before physically intervening. With younger children some physical redirection may be necessary (for example, removing a toy from the hands of a child that is hitting another). Tell the child specifically what he or she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., “We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building.” If this is not effective, the child should be guided to another activity.
2. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed in an area of the room where he or she will work alone, away from the other students—but not alone with an adult—for a brief period of time, the number of minutes not to exceed the age of the child.
 - Provide the child with a simple, understandable reason for the time-out, and provide the child with clear explanation of your expectations. (“Jamie, you didn’t stop hitting Chris when I asked you to, so you need to sit quietly in the

blue chair for three minutes.”) In addition, be verbally reassuring, as being removed from the group will likely upset the child.

- Do not physically hold the child in time-out.
 - Monitor the child through the entire time-out without giving your undivided attention. For longer time-outs give intermittent praise to reassure the child and keep them on task. (“Jamie, you’re doing a great job of sitting quietly. Just two more minutes.”)
 - Praise the child once he or she has completed the time-out and tell them that their reward is being able to rejoin the group. Remind them that repeating their initial behavior will result in more time-out. Follow this with praise.
3. If the child’s disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to a children’s ministry leader. If a child must be removed from a classroom or activity, the situation will be discussed with his or her parents since parents are primarily responsible for the care of their children.
 4. Although it is not fun or easy, please inform parents when they come to pick up their child if the child has willfully and seriously misbehaved. Describe without exaggeration, anger, or criticism what the child did and how the behavior was dealt with.

Permission Slips

Children must have parental or guardian permission in advance to participate in any overnight activity or any activity that takes place away from GCV grounds. Permission must be given in writing and signed by a parent or guardian. It must identify the name and date of the activity in which the child will be participating.

Transportation

Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be in a position to provide transportation for children. The following guidelines should be strictly observed when workers are involved in the transportation of children.

1. Children should be transported directly to their destination. Unauthorized stops to a non-public place are not permissible. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
2. Children legally required to be buckled into a car seat or booster seat must be transported using the appropriate safety seat. All other passengers shall wear a safety belt while in the vehicle.
3. This policy is not intended to prohibit staff or adult volunteers from offering a ride home to children in an emergency situation. The adult shall make reasonable attempts to contact parents or guardians prior to providing the ride. The adult providing the ride shall inform the child’s parents of the expected departure, travel, and arrival times. The child or children shall ride in the backseat.

4. No person under the age of 21 shall drive other children as part of a church activity.
5. No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving for GCV functions except in an emergency.

Overnight Activities

1. Whenever GCV children are involved in church-sponsored overnight activities, leaders must ensure that children are given appropriate privacy in the areas of sleeping, changing, and bathing. Specifically, an adult must never be permitted to sleep together in the same room or tent with a single child (without observing the two-adult rule), unless the adult is the parent of the child.
2. Children and adults must never be permitted to bathe in the same facility at the same time. Similarly, children of the opposite gender must not be permitted to change or bathe together.
3. Children of the opposite gender are not allowed to sleep in the same room together, unless they are siblings and a parent has requested this sleeping arrangement. Children of the opposite gender may be permitted to sleep in the same room only if an entire group of children, supervised by at least two trained adults, are sleeping in one big room together. In these group sleep-over situations, parents will be informed of the sleeping arrangements in advance and asked to give explicit permission for their child's participation in these events. The required written permission slip from a parent or guardian must expressly acknowledge that the activity is coed. Overnight coed activities must be chaperoned by at least one approved and trained male adult and at least one approved and trained female adult.
4. Staff members and volunteers in GCV's children's ministries should never be nude in the presence of children in their care. In the event there is a situation that may call for or contemplate the possibility of nudity (i.e., changing clothes during a pool party, weekend, or overnight retreat, etc.), the staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to the Children's Ministries director or pastor concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

Bathroom Supervision and Assistance Guidelines

Nursery children

Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following policies:

Diapering

- Only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
- Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
- Children will never be left unattended on changing tables.

- Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration sheet: “Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.”
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.
- Children should be changed on changing stations only.

Toilet training

- No child will be forced to toilet train.
- Only female nursery workers or the child’s parent or legal guardian will participate in toilet training efforts with a child of either sex.
- When children are taken into bathrooms, the door will be left partially open.
- Young children will never be left unattended in bathrooms.
- Parents should be consulted on each child’s progress in the toilet training process before they leave the child with volunteers or staff members. Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in the nursery will be recorded on the registration form. (“Georgia can use the toilet, but she needs to be reminded. Ask her if she needs to go.”)
- Children should be assisted in straightening their clothing before returning to the room with other children.
- “Accidents” should be handled by reassuring the child and completing the changing of diapers or underwear and clothing, as needed.
- Workers may assist a child with wiping if needed.

Preschoolers and school-age children

Parents of preschool-age children should take their children to the restroom immediately before dropping them off for care. This will assist the classroom volunteers in providing proper supervision and meeting worker-to-child ratios within the classroom at all times.

School-age children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed. (However, children should receive the minimum amount of assistance needed based upon their individual capabilities.) Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom.

If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him or her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he or she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance. If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall.

Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

Special needs

Parents will offer instruction to staff members or volunteers to change the diapers of special-needs individuals. Parents or legal guardians will change the diapers of all special-needs individuals over the age of 4.

Personal Conduct

Intoxicants

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any GCV facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children.

Sexually-Oriented Conversations

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

Sexually-Oriented Materials

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries at GCV are prohibited from possessing any sexually-oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children.

Tobacco Use

GCV requires staff members and volunteers to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products in church facilities, while in the presence of children or their parents, and during GCV activities and programs. GCV maintains tobacco-free facilities.

Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. GCV staff members and volunteers should strive to keep verbal interactions encouraging, constructive, and mindful of their mission of aiding parents in the spiritual growth and development of children.

To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to children in a way that is or could be construed by any reasonable observer as harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. In addition, staff members and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of children.

Procedural Guidelines

Supervision

Staff members and volunteers in Children's Ministries are expected to provide adequate supervision for children in their care while working in church programs.

Digital Privacy

A key ingredient for a safe and healthy experience is the respect for privacy. Advances in technology have enabled new forms of social interaction that may extend beyond the appropriate use of cameras or recording devices.

- To ensure full participation and the opportunity for a positive experience, children may be prohibited from bringing handheld electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, laptops, iPods, tablets, etc.) to youth events or other church-sponsored functions.
- Children and adults shall not send sexually explicit or suggestive texts, images, videos, or other content electronically. Children and adults shall not post sexually-explicit materials on websites or social media sites.
- Children and adults can opt out of having their photos appear on the GCV website to protect privacy.

Identification Badges

All individuals approved to work in Children's Ministries will be easily recognized by a church-issued name tag. No individual without a name tag is permitted to work with the children.

Medication

To the greatest extent possible, parents should plan to administer routine medications at home. Certain essential medications such as inhalers, epi-pens, and seizure medications may be administered by a staff member when the prescription is secured in its original container. The only exceptions to this policy are diaper ointments and insect bite creams.

Release of Children

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

Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are responsible for releasing children in their care only to parents, legal guardians, or other persons designated by parents or legal guardians at the close of services or activities.

It is presumed that a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

In the event that staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact a children's ministry leader or pastor before releasing the child.

GCV uses printed identification stickers for children and parents. No person may pick up a child without a printed identification sticker matching the child's sticker. If the sticker has been misplaced, the parent or guardian must show a photo ID to pick up the child. Siblings may pick up a child with the appropriate identification sticker.

Parental Conduct

Parental Contact

Parents who leave a child in the care of GCV staff members and volunteers during church services or activities will be contacted if their child becomes ill or injured or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministries programs.

Parental Involvement

Parents are encouraged to visit any and all services and programs in which their child is involved at GCV. Parents have an open invitation to observe all programs and activities in which their child is involved. However, parents who desire to participate in or have continuous, ongoing contact with their children's programs at GCV will be required to complete the GCV volunteer application and screening process.

Reporting and Responding to Abuse

Anyone who **witnesses** or learns of the physical or sexual abuse of a child shall immediately report it to the police and then notify the children's ministry pastor. A person may learn of the physical abuse by direct observation or by being told of the abuse by the victim or perpetrator.

Anyone who **suspects** any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of a child shall report it immediately to the children's ministry pastor. Written documentation of the facts should be gathered as quickly and comprehensively as possible. If the adult involved is a children's ministry leader or pastor, then the chairman of the elders shall be notified. A person may suspect abuse by noting signs of abuse or by being told of abuse by another person. Some signs of sexual abuse are as follows:

Physical Signs

- Unusual lacerations and bruises
- Irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area
- Difficulty with urination
- Discomfort when sitting
- Torn or bloody underclothing
- Venereal disease

Behavioral Signs

- A sudden change in behavior
- Nervous or hostile behavior toward adults
- Avoiding a person or situation that the child would normally have been involved in
- Sexual self-consciousness
- “Acting out” of sexual behavior

Verbal Signs

- “_____ does things to me when we're alone.”
- "I don't like to be alone with _____.”
- “_____ fooled around with me.”
- “_____ says mean things to me.”

Other examples of inappropriate behaviors or policy violations include seeking private time with children that is outside the scope of the programs at GCV, taking children on outings or overnight trips without other adults, swearing in front of children, making suggestive comments to children, or putting volunteers in positions to work with children without the required application or screening.

An alleged perpetrator will be removed from any position involving contact with children at GCV until the allegation is resolved. The children’s ministry pastor will maintain a confidential written record of each such report and will use appropriate judgment in designating a person or a team to gather additional information.

During the information gathering, the pastor will notify parents or guardians of alleged victims and those accused of allegations, as necessary, and will make proper reports to government and law enforcement authorities.

It is GCV policy to forward reports of child abuse to the appropriate governmental authority, as required by state law and church regulations. GCV will cooperate fully with government authorities in the investigations of allegations of child abuse. All persons involved in reporting or investigating any alleged incident of abuse shall hold information received in strict confidence, subject to such disclosures as are required under church procedures or by law.

Church staff and volunteers are required to report known or suspected abuse of children to the appropriate state authorities. Failure to report suspected abuse of children may be a crime. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, “in good faith” means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.

No Retaliation

No church member, staff member, or volunteer will be discredited, criticized, or disciplined for making a good-faith report of suspected child abuse or neglect. Pastoral Staff and children's ministry leadership will make every effort to protect the privacy of the reporter as well as the privacy of the children involved.

Consequence of Violation

Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will be immediately suspended from participation in Children's Ministries. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or child protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act will be removed from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and programs that involve children, students, or vulnerable populations at GCV. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a prohibited act to the designated person is a violation of this policy and grounds for termination of employment of a staff member or employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students, or vulnerable populations at GCV.

Policy for *Accused* Sex Offenders

While recognizing that we have a legal and moral obligation to assume an accused person is "innocent until proven guilty," we also have a responsibility to act wisely in regard to allegations of any sort of sexual abuse. Because we believe that we have biblical responsibilities to minister to the accused, to the victims, and to the congregation, we will take precautionary steps to protect all the involved parties.

Therefore, while the accused is on church property for any church or school-related event, we will ensure that at least one, and preferably two, mature members of the congregation will be observing the accused at all times to ensure that no children are harmed and also to protect the accused from further accusations of misconduct that may be directed at him or her. Furthermore, no accused person may actively minister to young people in an official capacity while under investigation.

Policy for *Convicted* Sex Offenders

We will comply with the law.

Children's ministry leadership or a member of the pastoral staff will speak with the offender's probation officer and with the local prosecutor's office to determine whether the offender can lawfully attend services or other functions at which children are present. If the offender is prohibited from attending public gatherings at which children are present, we will inform the offender that under no circumstances will the church

participate in a violation of the law. Once these boundary lines are clearly drawn, we can then determine how to meet the offender's spiritual needs.

We should consult with the sex offender's treatment provider.

If it is known that the offender is or has been in sex offender treatment, we will require the offender to sign a release so the appropriate church leaders can speak with the treatment provider. This will assist us in determining the potential dangers the offender poses to children and will also help us in meeting the needs of the offender.

We shall seek to review court and investigative records of the offender's conduct.

Children's ministry leadership or a member of the pastoral staff should review the original complaint filed against the offender, as well as any records generated as a result. In many cases, an offender may have pled guilty to sexually abusing one child in exchange for dismissing allegations of abuse against other children. At times, the offender may have even confessed to abusing other children, but the other cases may have been dismissed as part of a plea bargain. A complete review of these records will be more telling than simply examining the offender's conviction record.

We will determine the level of supervision necessary to protect children.

If the offender is considered a low risk by civil authorities and his or her treatment provider, it may be possible for the offender to attend services but only under supervision of at least one, and preferably two, mature members of the congregation who will be with the offender at all times to ensure that no children are harmed and also to protect the offender from accusations of misconduct that may be directed at him or her. If the offender is at a higher risk, or if there is any question as to risk, the church should arrange for recordings of services to be available to the offender at his or her home or another location in which he or she can be ministered to. It may be appropriate to select a group of mature men or women (depending on the gender of the offender) who will also attend these services so that the offender may have some sense of fellowship. This scenario allows the congregation to meet the offender's spiritual needs without placing any child at risk.

Even if the offender is considered a low risk, he should not be allowed to join a congregation where the victim attends services.

If the offender abused a member of the congregation or is awaiting resolution of an accusation by a member, he should be prohibited from meeting with the church. The congregation should work to find the offender another church body, but the emotional needs of the victim/accuser should always take precedent. In the case of victim and offender already being members of the same body, church leadership will use discretion and seek professional advice in advising the offender about whether he or she should remain a member of our body or seek membership in another local body. If such a step is determined to be necessary, this will be done with full disclosure to the leadership of that body. If it is necessary to find the offender a different church, it is critical to inform

the new church of the basis for the offender's removal. Otherwise, the offender may be given a "fresh start"—and access to a whole new set of potential victims.

The church leaders should inform the congregation of the offender's request to attend worship or to join the congregation and take into account the needs of the entire church body.

Offenders thrive on secrecy, and they (and the community as a whole) are best protected when there is an open discussion of their conduct and presence in services. Church leaders should not attempt to keep secret the presence of a convicted sex offender. In an age in which sex offender registries and conviction records are easily accessible online, members of the congregation will likely eventually discover an offender is present and would feel betrayed if the church leadership kept this from the members. Accordingly, the entire congregation should be informed of the situation. The church should be particularly sensitive to the concerns of parents who worry that even if an offender is shadowed and otherwise monitored in such a way as to make additional abuse difficult, the offender may nonetheless have sexual thoughts when he or she is watching children. Even more importantly, church leaders should be sensitive to the fears of survivors of abuse who may be emotionally harmed by knowing there is an offender in their midst. Close proximity to a sex offender may be a weekly, painful reminder to survivors of their own suffering. The church must minister to the offender in such a way that survivors are not re-victimized, emotionally or otherwise.

Adapted from www.netgrace.org and www.churchlawandtax.com.

Statement of Acknowledgement and Agreement

I have received and read a copy of GCV's Children's Ministries Manual and understand the importance of the material in the manual. I agree to abide by these guidelines while serving or working at GCV.

I understand the manual may be modified, and that any guideline may be amended, revised, or eliminated by GCV.

I have reviewed the duties listed in my ministry position description, and I agree to fulfill these duties. I understand I may choose to end my employment or voluntary service at GCV at any time. (If possible, I will provide two weeks' notice to my supervisor.)

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

I understand it is my responsibility to review new guidelines which may be created and distributed.

Staff Member or Volunteer's Name (please print)

Staff Member or Volunteer's Signature

Date: _____