

Grace Covenant Church

**2236 Salem Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23456**

Child Protection Policy

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Section I: Purpose

We members of Grace Covenant Church (GCC) recognize the great privilege and responsibility that are assumed in the stewardship of children under our care. We are committed to creating a healthy, safe and loving environment that strives to ensure the welfare of those to whom we are ministering. Insofar as possible, we seek to protect children, volunteers, and staff who participate in GCC children's ministries through adherence to general childcare procedures and standards of conduct between adults and children. We do not desire to exasperate, but rather to be above reproach in this regard, and to make every effort to ensure that trust, accountability, and integrity are championed. Therefore, all persons with responsibility in regard to children at GCC are subject to the guidelines and codes of conduct as outlined in the following document.

Section II: Defining Our Terms

For the purposes of this policy, terms will be defined as follows:

Child: The terms "child," "children," "minor(s)," or "youth" are used to refer to all persons who are younger than eighteen years of age.

Children's/Youth Ministry: Any ministry within GCC which includes positions of trust with children, such as Nursery, Children's Discipleship, and/or Youth Fellowship.

CPP: Child Protection Policy

CPS: Child Protective Services

GCC: Grace Covenant Church

Ministry-Approved Worker/Caregiver: A volunteer or staff member who has been approved through the GCC screening process to serve in this capacity.

Off-Campus Activities: Any event that takes place off of GCC property which includes, but is not limited to, GCC member homes and/or public venues.

On-Campus Activities: Any event or activity which takes place in the GCC building or outside property.

PDA: Public displays of affection.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse occurs when a caretaker creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon a child a physical injury by other than accidental means or creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment of bodily functions, including, but not limited to, a child who is with his/her parent or other person responsible for his/her care.

Sexual Abuse: Inappropriately exposing or subjecting a child to sexual contact, activity, or behavior. In general it includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation regardless of whether or not the child has consented.

Staff: A person who is hired to work at GCC for monetary compensation.

Supervisors/Ministry Leaders: Persons accountable for overseeing an area of ministry such as nursery, or children's discipleship classes. Supervisors answer directly to the elders.

Volunteer: A person who provides service to GCC without monetary compensation.

Section III: Accountability

A. Screening

1. All persons who are seeking to participate in Children's/Youth Ministry are required to:

*Complete an Application for Children's Ministry

*Complete a Background Check Authorization

*Sign a CPP Acknowledgement Form, indicating that the CPP training has been completed.

2. An elder will conduct a review of all applications and forms prior to the installment of volunteers and staff into the Children's/Youth Ministry. GCC elders have sole discretion in determining what constitutes a disqualifying offense on a case-by-case basis. Convictions, pending charges (based on offenses involving children, violence, indecency, or dishonesty), and failure to disclose information as asked on the application will result in a disqualifying event.

B. Staff and Volunteer Training

1. Explanation of the CPP as well as ministry training will be conducted annually or on an as-needed basis for all those in positions of trust with children and youth.
2. Ministry leaders will be responsible for arranging and implementing training, which will include an overview of the policies contained within the CPP.
3. The review and potential updating of the CPP by ministry leaders will be required annually.
4. Youth helpers (minor children of members) will be exempt from the application and background check requirements, but must work under the authority of a ministry-approved adult.

C. Member Awareness

1. The congregation shall be informed of the CPP as well as any updates when they occur.
2. A copy will be provided to each family, to each volunteer and/or staff working with children, and be made available on the GCC website.

Section IV. Caregiver Standards of Personal Conduct and Supervision

It is the duty of all those who are active in children's/youth ministry to guard the physical and emotional well-being of those under their care and to be discerning of the signs which would indicate otherwise.

A. Children are not to be left unattended in the nursery or the classrooms. There must be at least one ministry-approved adult or parent present when children abide in these areas, whether or not there is a service or function occurring.

B. In the event that a ministry activity takes place outside during classroom hours, there must be at least two ministry-approved workers (staff, volunteer, or helper) present.

C. Children who are first grade and under must be accompanied in pairs of the same gender to the restroom by a female (only) staff, volunteer, or helper while under the care of a ministry-approved worker. The female attendee will wait outside of the restroom, unless assistance is needed. In this case, the main bathroom door must remain open. Diapering will only be performed by a female when the parents are not present.

D. Deference to others' feelings must be given in regard to common expressions of affection and affirmation such as hugs and pats on the back. Appropriate physical contact must not be excessive or imposed upon an unwilling individual.

E. In disciplinary situations, it is never appropriate for staff, volunteers, or helpers to physically/verbally abuse a child or exert corporal punishment. Communication between teachers and parents is essential in this regard. The following guidelines are to be followed in the event of a disciplinary scenario:

1. "Put off the old, put on the new." If a child is behaving disrespectfully, the teacher will explain the unacceptable behavior, while giving an expectation for proper behavior. For example, "We don't throw crayons, we use them for coloring."
2. If the disrespectful behavior continues, the child may be placed in area of the open classroom where he/she must sit or finish an activity alone for a brief period of time.
3. If the disruptive behavior continues further, the child will be escorted by a helper to his/her parents.

F. In the event that GCC hosts an off-campus activity, the same rules for personal conduct apply. Should an overnight trip take place, the following standards will be upheld:

1. Sleeping quarters will be kept separate for males and females with an adult/adults of the same gender chaperoning. Under no circumstance will one non-parental guardian be permitted to sleep in isolated quarters with one child.
2. Spouses or significant others may not be the sole supervisors for an overnight activity.
3. A special Event Permission and Release Form must be completed before each special off-campus event in order for the child/youth to be able to attend.
4. PDA amongst youth is prohibited.

Section V. Parental Requirements

A. Each child who regularly attends GCC must have a completed GCC Children's Discipleship Registration Form on file. This form will be updated annually or on an as needed basis.

B. Visitors with children under the age of 12 who plan on availing themselves of the nursery or children's discipleship classes must complete a Visitor Information Card. This card will provide allergy and contact information to ensure the safety of our guests. It will be replaced with a GCC Children's Discipleship Registration Form should the visitor choose to become a regular attendee.

C. In an effort to maximize safety and minimize interruptions, parents are asked to take care of the restroom needs/diapering of their children to the best of their ability before dropping children off.

D. A ministry-approved worker must be present before parents drop their children off in the nursery or a classroom.

E. If parents choose to bring snacks from home, GCC respectfully asks that they would be nut-free.

F. Parents should make every effort to pick their children up within 10 minutes of the conclusion of a class or service. Children under the age of 7 will remain in the nursery or classroom until a parent or guardian comes to pick them up. In the event that a parent is tardy, a ministry-approved worker may bring the child to the parent.

G. Only parents/guardians or parent/guardian approved alternates as indicated by the parent will be allowed to pick children up at the end of a session.

H. In an effort to preserve the health and well-being of everybody at GCC, we would ask that parents observe the following Well-Child Policy:

1. Please do not bring your child into the Nursery or Classrooms if he/she has...
 - * a fever 100 degrees F or greater. The child must be fever-free without fever-reducing medication for at least 24 hours.
 - * experienced vomiting or diarrhea within the past 24 hours.
 - * any discharge from the eyes or nose that is not clear.
 - * a persistent, wet or barking cough.
 - * a sore throat. In the case of a strep infection, child must have completed a minimum 24-hour cycle of antibiotics.
 - * an oozy rash.
 - * any communicable disease or infestation (such as lice).

2. Parents of children with serious allergies or other noteworthy conditions must indicate in writing at check-in, as well as verbally alert caregivers to potential issues.

3. Caregivers are not permitted to administer medications other than an Epi-Pen, in an emergency as defined by the parent. Parents are asked to take care of medicinal needs before placing children into the the care of a children's ministry worker.

Section VI. Universal Precautions

Because there is no foolproof way of determining carriers of infectious diseases, certain universal precautions must be taken in order to protect the health and safety of children and caretakers alike. The following precautions will be taken:

*Always wear disposable, non-latex gloves when dealing with bodily fluids.

*Body Fluid Kits should be used for any accidents involving significant amounts of bodily fluids (e.g. Vomit, blood spills, large urine or defecation accidents, etc.) One kit will be in each classroom, as well as in the nursery and janitor closet.

*To clean small urine accidents, blot area with disposable paper towels and spray with a sanitizing solution.

*Wash/sanitize hands before and after any contact with bodily fluids including wiping noses, changing diapers, cleaning vomit or potty accidents, and treating blood spills.

*All soiled linens/towels must be washed thoroughly in hot water.

*At the end of each service, disinfect the room (toys, changing table, table tops, etc.) with a sanitizing solution and allow to air dry.

*In the event of an accident, a Child Injury Report must be filled out for all injuries, whether minor or major.

Section VII. Child Abuse Response Plan

Any caregiver who has reason to believe that abuse or misconduct has taken place as defined by this policy will immediately report to the appropriate supervisor (Nursery, Children's/Youth Ministry, etc.). Every allegation will be treated seriously, and with the utmost care. Strict discretion will be taken into account concerning all information and identities involved in an allegation. The following steps will be taken:

A. The supervisor will notify the elders.

B. The parents/guardians will be notified unless they are under scrutiny for said abuse or misconduct.

C. Virginia law states that a person who suspects child abuse must report it to Child Protective Services (Virginia Department of Social Services CPS Hotline: **800-552-7096**). The elders will make the official report to authorities. The person who has witnessed the abuse will be present and provide a statement to the authorities, if needed.

D. Written documentation of the allegation will be made by the elders, supervisor, and witness. The following information will be included:

1. The name, age, gender, and address of the victim.
2. The name, age, gender, and address of the alleged perpetrator.
3. The nature of the abuse (e.g., physical, emotional, and/or sexual misconduct) alleged to have occurred.
4. How many times the alleged misconduct occurred.
5. The date and location of the incident.
6. The relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator.
7. Other evidence that supports the allegation (eyewitnesses, confessions, etc.)

E. After cooperation and consultation with the proper authorities, elders will determine the appropriate actions to be taken in light of the situation within the membership of the church.

F. For a more comprehensive overview of Virginia CPS statues and guidelines, please refer to Appendix A.

Appendix

A. Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Guidelines in Virginia

Please visit www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index2.cgi and/or www.childwelfare.gov for more information. There are several user-friendly publications that are available for download on these sites.