

FOOTHILLS CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Children & Youth Safe Ministry Policy

Sunday Worship • Sunday Morning Classes • Youth Groups

1. Purpose and Scope

Foothills Christian Church is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, observable, and well-supervised environment for children and students participating in church ministries. This policy establishes minimum expectations for screening and supervision, adult-to-child ratios, check-in and release, personal-device use, incident reporting, and response to safety concerns.

This policy applies to all paid staff, volunteers, ministry leaders, and other adults serving in or supervising children's and student ministry spaces. It applies to Sunday worship classes, nursery, Sunday morning classes, youth groups, and other church programs serving minors unless a more restrictive program-specific policy applies.

2. Core Safety Standards

- Children and students will be supervised at all times during scheduled children's and youth ministry programming. No child will be left unattended in a ministry area.
- At least two trained, screened adults must be present whenever minors are being supervised in a ministry space. The Two-Adult Rule is a minimum requirement, not a target.
- Adults will avoid one-on-one situations with a child or student whenever reasonably possible and will use observable and interruptible locations for conversations or assistance.
- Staff and volunteers will remain attentive to the children in their care. Personal cell-phone use and other distractions that interfere with supervision are prohibited during ministry programming except for ministry duties, communication, or emergencies.
- Staff and volunteers must promptly report policy violations, concerning behavior, suspected abuse or neglect, injuries, missing-child situations, and other significant incidents to the appropriate ministry supervisor.

3. Adult-to-Child Supervision Ratios

Foothills Christian Church will maintain the following minimum adult-to-child ratios. These ratios are based on the Insurance Board SafeConduct recommendations and are adapted for church use. When a group contains mixed ages, the lower/more protective applicable ratio will be used. Ratios may be increased when the activity, room, developmental needs, or other circumstances warrant.

Age / Program Group	Maximum Children per Adult	Minimum Adults in Space
Nursery: birth–12 months	3:1	2
Toddlers: approximately 1–3 years	5:1	2
Preschool: approximately 3–5 years	8:1	2
Kindergarten–3rd grade	10:1	2

4th–6th grade	12:1	2
Youth: age 12 and older	20:1	2

Example: two toddlers still require two adults even though the numerical ratio could otherwise be met by one adult. If staffing falls below the required ratio, the ministry leader must immediately secure additional qualified adult coverage or pause the activity until the ratio is restored.

High school-age youth and older may serve as ministry assistants in children's ministry areas only after completing the church's required screening and training. A high school-age youth assistant may not replace an adult, may not count toward the required adult-to-child ratio, and may not count toward the minimum two-adult requirement.

4. Sunday Check-In and Child Release

Required Check-In

- Parents or legal guardians must check their children in for Sunday morning classes and nursery using the church's designated sign-in/check-in tablets.
- The check-in record must identify the child and provide the information needed by ministry staff to supervise and contact the parent/guardian if necessary.
- The parent/guardian will receive a pickup/claim ticket or other designated claim credential for each child checked in.

Release and Pick-Up

- Children will be released only to the parent, legal guardian, or person authorized by the parent/guardian in the church's check-in system.
- When there is any uncertainty about who may pick up a child, staff will not release the child until the ministry supervisor has resolved the question.

Personal Cell Phone and Electronic Device Policy

Foothills Christian Church limits personal phone use during children's and student ministry to reduce distractions, protect privacy, and promote active participation. Emergency communication remains available through ministry leaders.

Sunday Worship Classes — 5th Grade and Below

Children in 5th grade and below may not use personal cell phones or other personal communication devices during classes offered during Sunday worship. Devices should remain with parents/guardians.

Sunday Morning Class — 6th–8th Grade

Students in 6th through 8th grade may not use personal cell phones during the Sunday morning class. A designated basket will be available at the beginning of class for students to place their phones together. Phones will remain in the basket until class is dismissed.

Youth Group — 8th Grade and Below

Students in 8th grade and below may not use personal cell phones during youth group. A designated basket will be available at the beginning of the youth group for students to place their phones together. Phones will remain stored until the youth group is dismissed.

Exceptions and Enforcement

- A student may use a phone when a ministry leader specifically authorizes it for a ministry activity or when needed for an emergency.
- A parent/guardian should contact the ministry leader rather than attempting to communicate with a student by phone during class or youth group, except in an emergency.
- If a student refuses to follow the phone policy, the leader will calmly redirect the student and dismiss the student back to parents/guardians.
- Medical, accessibility, or other documented needs that require access to a device will be handled by the ministry leader in coordination with the parent/guardian.

6. Supervision Outside Scheduled Programming

Parents and legal guardians are responsible for the supervision and care of their children and youth outside of scheduled children's and youth programming. This includes fellowship time, time before and after worship services, meal or social gatherings, and other periods when a child or youth is not checked into or participating in a scheduled ministry program.

Children and youth are not permitted to remain unattended in classrooms, hallways, lobbies, fellowship spaces, playgrounds, parking areas, or other church spaces when they are not participating in scheduled programming. A child or youth may not simply be left in another area if he or she chooses not to participate in a scheduled class, youth group, or other ministry activity.

Parents and guardians are expected to remain with, directly supervise, or make appropriate arrangements for the supervision of their children and youth during these unscheduled periods.

If staff or volunteers encounter a child or youth who is unattended outside scheduled programming, they will take reasonable steps to keep the child or youth in a safe, observable location and will promptly locate or contact the parent/guardian. Staff and volunteers should not assume ongoing responsibility for children who are not checked into a scheduled ministry program.

When a child or youth is checked into a scheduled ministry program, the church assumes the supervision responsibilities described in this policy until the child is properly released according to the applicable check-in and pickup procedures.

7. General Supervision Practices

- Ministry rooms and activity areas must be observable and routinely monitored.
- Adults will maintain line-of-sight or otherwise appropriate supervision of children and students.
- Restrooms and other higher-risk areas will be monitored according to church procedures, with adults remaining outside private areas except where assistance is necessary and permitted.
- Mixed-age groups will receive increased supervision, and the lower applicable ratio will be followed.
- Before leaving a ministry area, leaders will check the room and any associated areas used by children to ensure that no child remains behind.

8. Incident Report Procedure

An incident report is required for significant injuries, missing-child situations, suspected or alleged abuse or neglect, inappropriate or suspicious behavior, significant policy violations, serious behavioral events, property or safety incidents that could affect a child, and any event the ministry leader believes should be documented.

Immediate Response

- Protect the child or student first. Obtain emergency medical assistance when necessary.
- If a child is missing, immediately secure the ministry area, notify the ministry supervisor.
- Separate involved individuals when appropriate and safe to do so, while maintaining required supervision and avoiding unnecessary confrontation.

Notification

- Notify the ministry supervisor/Children's Ministry or Student Ministry leader as soon as possible.
- If the concern involves suspected or alleged child abuse or neglect, the person who receives the information or observes the concern must follow all applicable mandatory-reporting requirements. Internal notification does not replace any legal duty to report directly to the appropriate authorities.
- When appropriate, notify the parent/guardian of injuries, illness, serious behavioral concerns, or other incidents affecting their child, while protecting the confidentiality of other children and families.
- If the concern involves a staff member or volunteer, the ministry supervisor will immediately notify the designated church leadership/safety authority and follow the church's investigation and suspension procedures.

Written Documentation

The person who observed or received the information should complete an Incident Report as soon as practical, preferably before leaving the church that day. The report should contain facts, not conclusions.

- Date, time, and location of the incident.
- Names of the child/student and adults or other persons directly involved.
- Names of witnesses.
- A factual description of what was observed, heard, or reported, using the person's own words when relevant.
- Any injury, first aid, medical care, or emergency response provided.
- Actions taken to protect the child and restore safe supervision.
- Who was notified, when they were notified, and any required external report made.
- Parent/guardian notification, if applicable.
- Name and signature of the person completing the report and the supervisor who received it.

Confidentiality and Follow-Up

- Incident reports will be stored securely and shared only with persons who have a legitimate need to know.
- Staff and volunteers will not discuss allegations or incidents casually with other families, volunteers, or children.
- Church leadership will review significant incidents for follow-up, additional supervision, training, policy changes, or other corrective action.
- A report is documentation of an incident or concern; it is not a finding of guilt.

9. Policy Violations and Corrective Action

Staff and volunteers are expected to enforce this policy consistently. A violation may result in coaching, retraining, removal from a ministry assignment, suspension from service, or other corrective action appropriate to the circumstances. Conduct that may place a child at risk will be addressed immediately.

10. High School Youth Ministry Assistants

Foothills Christian Church permits screened and trained high school-age youth and older to serve as assistants in children's ministry areas. This role is intended to provide supervised ministry experience and practical assistance to adult leaders; it does not transfer adult supervisory responsibility to a youth assistant.

Only one high school-age youth assistant may serve in a single children's ministry area at one time. For example, one high school youth may serve with the Children's Worship and Wonder class on a given Sunday. A second high school youth assistant may not be assigned to that same ministry area during that service.

A high school youth assistant must be at least four years older than the children in the ministry area being served. When a room serves a mixed-age group, the youngest age/grade served will determine the minimum four-year age difference. If the four-year age difference cannot be met, the youth may not serve in that area.

High school youth assistants remain minors and therefore may not be left alone with children, may not provide solo supervision, may not be the only leader responsible for a room, and may not escort children to the restroom or otherwise assume duties reserved for screened adult leaders.

At least two qualified adults must remain present in the ministry area at all times, and all applicable adult-to-child ratios must continue to be met independently of the high school youth assistant.

High school youth assistants will receive training appropriate to their role, including supervision expectations, boundaries, reporting concerns, emergency procedures, and the church's phone and electronic-device policy.

11. Staff and Volunteer Responsibilities

- Complete the church's required screening, background-check, safety training, and policy acknowledgment before serving in children's or student ministry, as applicable.
- Know and follow the supervision ratios and Two-Adult Rule.
- Ensure that high school youth assistants are never counted toward adult ratios, the minimum two-adult requirement, or used as solo supervisors.
- Remain attentive and avoid personal phone use or other distractions that interfere with supervision.
- Follow check-in, pickup, phone-storage, restroom, transition, and incident-report procedures.
- Immediately report concerns, policy violations, suspicious behavior, or suspected abuse/neglect to the appropriate leader and to authorities when legally required.

12. Parent and Guardian Responsibilities

- Complete the required child/family information and emergency-contact information in the church's check-in system.
- Check children into Sunday morning classes and nursery using the designated sign-in tablets.

- Keep the pickup/claim ticket until the child is released.
- Follow the church's age-specific phone expectations and support leaders when those expectations are enforced.
- Inform ministry leaders of relevant medical, developmental, behavioral, or safety information needed to care appropriately for the child.
- Parents and legal guardians are responsible for the supervision and care of their children and youth outside of scheduled children's and youth programming.

13. Incident Report Form — Minimum Fields

Foothills Christian Church should maintain a standardized Incident Report form containing the following fields:

- Incident date / time / location
- Ministry / class / youth group
- Child/student name and age/grade
- Adults/staff/volunteers involved
- Witnesses
- Type of incident
- Objective description of what occurred
- Exact words reported by a child/student, when relevant
- Injury/first aid/medical response
- Immediate safety actions
- Supervisor notified and time
- Parent/guardian notified and time
- External report made, if required, and by whom
- Follow-up required
- Person completing report / date / signature
- Supervisor review / date / signature