GRACE COMMUNITY
CHURCH
huntsville

Children's Ministry Policy & Procedures Manual

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Children's Ministry Overview & Philosophy

Introduction to the Vision

Anything worth doing is worth doing well, and children's ministry is no exception. Our children's ministry exists to come alongside parents in their role of reaching children with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Children are the "generation to come" (Psalm 78:4). They will be the adult ministry of the future. They will be the fathers and mothers of the future. They will be the ambassadors of Christ for the future. They will be the leaders of the church in the future. They will be the ones who proclaim the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into His glorious light in the future (1 Peter 2:9). So, our role in the present, as a local church, is to teach, guide, model, pray for, and facilitate their understanding of His excellencies now. Our role is to make disciples now. Our role is to do the work of ministry now so that they can in the future.

Biblically, the church is called to make disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). So, the goal of children's ministry is to be used by the Spirit of God to make disciples of Christ who worship God for who He is: His greatness, power, majesty, love, mercy, grace, knowledge, etc.; and for what He has done: creating the universe, creating us, providing us with salvation, future glory. All of these things are what we as disciples worship God for. Furthermore, true disciples seek to follow all that Christ has commanded—knowing that the way of Christlikeness is good and God-glorifying. Children's ministry seeks to apply these same truths at age-appropriate levels from the earliest age all the way to adulthood. *Disciples love and follow Jesus Christ*. <u>This is the goal of children's ministry</u>, and it is the goal that all aspects of children's ministry should line up with. This is the vision.

Explaining the Vision

Children's ministry is an extension of our overall ministry as a local church. We are made up of people from various backgrounds with one main purpose—to glorify God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:11). God does everything for His glory and saves sinners for His own glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). In 1 Peter 2:9, we read that we were saved as a people for His own possession, so "that [we] might proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light." As ministers to children, we have no less a calling than this. That is the goal of our ministry—to proclaim His excellencies. His "excellencies" is another way of describing His "glory" (Isaiah 42:8, 12; 43:20-21).

Since God does all things for His glory, our philosophy of ministry to children must be God-centered rather than man-centered. If His excellencies, or "glory," is the subject matter that we are to make known to children, then certainly the excellencies of God are discovered in the Word of God. So, the anchor of children's ministry is the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 4:11;). As believers, God has opened our eyes to see His glory and fame. In 1 Peter 2:9, He calls it "His marvelous light." As we behold His glory, we are stunned; we stand in awe. That's what God does when He saves a people; He lets them see Him for who He is. And now He wants us to turn around and tell others what we see. His excellencies refer to His character (the attributes of God or who He is) and what He has done, is doing, and will do.

In other words, a God-centered children's ministry will seek to proclaim to children the person and actions of God (Psalm 78:1-4). The Bible explains that He has done this ultimately through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-3 teaches that Jesus Christ is the climax of all of God's revelation about Himself. Jesus Himself declared that all of the Old Testament pointed to Him and spoke of Him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46; John 5:39,46). Therefore, our proclamation of the glory of God to children must center on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We are not just about proclaiming objective truths to children about God, but very specifically we want to carry out the mandate of Christ Himself to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). In what must have been some of the last words from Jesus to the apostles, He gave them what would be the purpose or mission of the church, and He prefaced it with a resounding statement that would undergird their pursuit of fulfilling the mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). This is King Jesus with imperial majesty giving the apostles and the church their marching orders. Essentially, He said, "Since I am the King, and I possess sovereignty over every corner of humanity, go make disciples of me." And Jesus promised to be with us as we seek to fulfill this mission (Matthew 28:20).

Making Disciples

What Is a Disciple?

A disciple is someone who has made a conscious choice to follow a person in a master/student relationship with the goal of becoming like the master.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6:40

The word "disciple" is a comprehensive term, and it is fitting that Jesus' *commission* of the church is to "make disciples." It includes evangelism, which is presenting the gospel to unbelievers and calling them to repent (turn from sin and turn to God) and trust the work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Then it is a process of training believers to be followers of Christ, which is why Jesus adds the words, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). A *disciple* is a person convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, who became his/her substitute on the cross and now lives forevermore; and by being thus persuaded has now pledged allegiance to this living Christ—proclaiming, "Jesus is Lord." A disciple is a worshipper of God through Christ and seeks to glorify God by following Christ. Making disciples according to this understanding is our goal of children's ministry. We believe that God will do this by His Spirit if we faithfully seek to fulfill this goal.

How Is Making Disciples of Children Best Carried Out?[1]

The Role of the Church:

We believe that God, in His wisdom, designed the church as the most effective way to make disciples. His design is seen in the fact that He gifted individuals in the church to carry out the ministry of the local church. Paul describes this reality in Ephesians 4. Christ gave gifts to people (vv. 7-8). The gifts are the extension of His body here on earth because after He rose from the dead, He ascended to heaven. He left His church here on earth to carry out the mission of making disciples that we have been describing. According to verse 10, God wisely orchestrated the church in this fashion in order that Christ might be supreme. In verse 11, Paul gives a sweeping list of the gifting of leadership within the church; then, he explains the reason for doing this in verses 12-16. The goal of this process is for leaders to invest in the members of the church so that they mature in the knowledge, love, and worship of Christ so that they, in turn, can do the work of ministry. This is a key component. The church must be led by faithful leaders who are used by God to make full-grown disciples who will do the work of ministry. Thus, God wants disciples of Christ who are mature and fruitful for His glory (cf. Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:14).

The Role of Parents:

With that said, making disciples of children is a two-fold endeavor in which both parents and the local church play a part. Parents hold the primary responsibility of discipling their children. The New Testament instruction regarding children places the responsibility of training children on their fathers and mothers in Ephesians 6:1-4 and Colossians 3:20-21. The ultimate burden is placed on fathers. Thus, it is wrong for parents to believe that it is the church's responsibility to disciple their children. The Bible does not shy away from recording the effects of parents who abdicated their role of training their children to follow God (Eli in 1 Samuel 2; David in 2 Samuel 13-18). [2]

However, the church is responsible for discipling/equipping the fathers and the mothers so that they will be able to carry out their responsibilities as parents. Furthermore, God has uniquely gifted other members of the church to come alongside and assist parents. "We have children's ministries in the church to strengthen, confirm, and reinforce what parents are teaching."[3] Properly understood, our goal in children's ministries should be the same as parents. However, our influence should be secondary if parents are following the revealed will of God in Scripture.

In summary, the children's ministry of Grace Community Church exists to proclaim the excellencies of God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Although the Scriptures clearly portray parents as having the primary responsibility in this endeavor, we believe that God has uniquely gifted individuals within our church to serve alongside parents in a complementary fashion to help accomplish this goal.

Teaching

Having laid the foundation of our purpose and vision for children's ministry, it is important that we seek to lay out a Biblically informed method of accomplishing this goal. The Bible is very

[1] Much of this section, at least in its subheadings, was informed by Phillip F. Foley, *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology: A Training Manual for Children's Ministry Workers* (Vallejo: Exalting Christ Publishing, 2009).
[2] Ibid., 7.
[3] Ibid., 10.

clear that the primary method God has ordained to affect change in and shape human hearts is through teaching. A simple perusal of the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy as well as Titus will prove this point well (1 Tim 1:3; 4:6,11,13; 5:7; 6:2-3; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1-2; Tit 2:1,3,15). However, in those same books, there is an emphasis on modeling by example as well (1 Tim 4:12,15-16; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:21-26; 3:10-11; Tit 2:7-8,10). So, we see two harmonizing means that God uses to make and grow disciples: teaching and imitation of example.

Word-Centered

We believe that the teaching of God's Word to children is of utmost importance for making disciples of Jesus Christ who worship God. The Spirit of God uses the Word to awaken the hearts of unbelievers to the saving truth found in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:19-23; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). It is the Word of God that the Spirit uses to give understanding to children (Psalm 119:130; 19:7-8). Therefore, the content of our teaching is to be rooted in and faithful to the Word of God. Furthermore, this presupposes that our instruction must be the result of faithful *study* of what He has said (2 Timothy 2:15).

Christ-Centered

Jesus Christ is the message and centerpiece of the Word of God. He is the fulfillment of the Word of God. He is the Living Word. He speaks the very Word of God. Everything that God wants to communicate to people is climaxed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Luke 24:44-46; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Revelation 19:13). "The Bible is a book about the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:44). It is centered in His redemptive work for man. "*Thus, when we teach the Bible our goal is to show how it relates to Christ and His glorious work*."[4] Merely teaching Bible stories that are not connected to God's plan of redeeming sinful people still falls short of faithfully teaching God's Word.

Bryan Chapell wrote:

> Just as Paul's preaching involved more than the message of the incarnation and atonement—and yet kept all subjects in proper relation to God's redemption through Christ—so also *Christ-centered [t]eaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ*. The grace of God culminating in the person and work of Jesus unfolds in many dimensions throughout the pages of Scripture. The goal of the [t]eacher is not to find novel ways of identifying Christ in every text (or naming Jesus in every [lesson]) but to show how each text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ..... Jesus said that all Scripture is about him. This does not mean that every phrase, punctuation mark, or verse directly reveals Christ but rather that all passages in their context disclose his nature and/or necessity.[5]

It is very easy for teaching in children's ministry to descend to moralism—"do this and do that, don't do this and don't do that." Part of this is due to the fact that many of the apparent noticeable problems with children are behavioral. However, failing to adopt a biblical approach

[4] Emphasis mine, *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 24.

[5] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 279.

in relation to the needs of children is a fatal flaw of the church and detrimental to parents and children. The only remedy that God offers sinful humans, regardless of their age, is found in the person and work of His Son. The biblical wisdom that reflects the path of blessing for people can only be applied to the new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and that is accessed only through saving faith in Christ. Furthermore, the ability to obey the commands of God for holiness can only be found through the indwelling Spirit who takes up residence in a true child of God.

Heart-Oriented

Jesus clearly taught that sinful words and actions come from the heart. Therefore, contrary to the thinking of the world, it is not the circumstances that surround a child that cause sinful behavior but rather each child's own sinful heart (Matthew 15:10-20). That does not mean that circumstances and home environment do not play a role in the development and magnitude of sin in a child. Certainly, a home where a child is exposed to rampant sin will provide all sorts of avenues for the sin nature to express itself. However, the primary source of trouble for children lies within each one of them. It is the heart that is in rebellion against God and estranged from Him (Psalm 58:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Colossians 1:21). Therefore, our teaching will not be aimed at the head only but at the heart as well. Mere head knowledge can easily produce a Pharisee but not a follower of Jesus Christ (Matthew 15:8). Rather, a new birth must occur for a child to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our hope and prayer are that God would be pleased to accompany the means that we use in teaching our children and produce true conversion and a life of true holiness, not simply conformity to external rules (Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27).

To reach this goal, we as parents and teachers must model what it means to love God and His word. We cannot teach our children something we have not experienced. We must have a passion for God and for obeying His word. With Paul, we should be able to say to our children, "Join in following my example" (Phil 3:17).[6]

Spirit-Empowered

In John 15:1-8 Jesus taught His disciples that only by abiding in Him would they bear fruit. That applies not only to our own personal growth but fruitfulness in ministry as well. Paul confessed that no good thing dwelled in his flesh (Romans 7:18). In the next chapter, he laid out the key to living a fruitful life for Christ—life in the Spirit. Our abiding in Christ, living by the Word, and depending on the Spirit are intricately entwined (John 16:13-15). Apart from the Spirit's work in our lives and ministry through our teaching, we will experience no fruit in our labors. Therefore, we must bathe our preparation and teaching time in prayer for the Spirit to work through us and in our children. The Spirit Himself actually delights in performing the miraculous work of causing people to see the glory of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (2 Corinthians 3:2-18). So, we have much hope as we labor according to His method and His power that He will produce fruit in His timing. We must view our ministry as a long-term commitment to labor for the glory of Christ to be made known in the coming generation (Psalm 22:30-31).

[6] *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 17.

Imitating

Repeatedly in the Gospel Narratives (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we see Jesus calling people to be His disciples. Inevitably, there were two words that Jesus continually used to extend this call: "Follow Me" (e.g., Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21). In the most basic sense, following would mean to walk the same path. However, the idea of following a master as a disciple would entail imitating his way of thinking, acting, and prioritizing his life. Jesus certainly has this in mind when He calls individuals to come and follow Him (cf. John 10:27; 12:26). The apostle Paul knew this full well, and he too used this same principle in seeking to call disciples to growth. Often, he called others to join in following his example as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 4:17; 11:1; Philippians 3:17), as well as exhorting believers to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1).

As we minister to children, our pattern should be no different. Our goal is to be used by the Spirit to make disciples of Christ who wholeheartedly worship God and become faithful servants in Christ's church. So, we will *teach* in such a manner that is consistent with what the Spirit will use to bring this about. However, we must see the importance of living in step with what we are calling children to do. We cannot ask them to follow in us what we ourselves are not experiencing. It is for this reason that it is vital that we regularly experience the power of Christ through His Word (personal study, sitting under sound preaching and teaching), corporate worship through singing, fellowship with His church, and prayer. "Children benefit and learn from the example of the godly people around them."[7] Biblically, parents have the primary role of modeling this, but this can be greatly reinforced by the frequent interaction of other adults who also model this example. If children are only surrounded by others their own age or adults who are not a faithful representation of disciples of Christ, will this provide the optimum atmosphere to learn how to follow Christ?[8] When children see parents and teachers who consistently live as passionate worshipers of Christ who love His Word, love His people, and love to serve, it helps to cast a mold for their entire lives to follow. Lord, give us grace to faithfully cast this mold.

Training Workers

Every worker or servant within our ministry to children is important and every worker should be viewed within a discipleship context. We are all on this journey. Leaders have been discipled by someone in the past and are still growing in their understanding of Christ as well as their own fruitfulness in ministry. We were all young believers at some point. We all had to learn and develop in our skills of ministry and leadership. With this in mind, we need to cultivate a *mindset of discipleship* among our ministry teams even while we are seeking to make disciples of children. So, the goal for each of us is to seek to invest in other believers by equipping them to serve in a more fruitful manner. This includes nurturing their character and ministry skills. To put it another way, we should always be seeking to develop our replacement: either for someone to literally replace us, should the Lord move us to another ministry role, or to further multiply our ministry to children as the need arises. If we look to the understanding and teaching of the master disciple-maker, Jesus Himself, we see that He modeled this very principle: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). This is what we want to accomplish in our training—fully trained workers and leaders who will

[7] *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 18.
[8] Ibid.

be like their teachers. Having obtained this result, what will that fully trained worker then do? The person will then fully train someone else, who will in turn fully train someone else, and the process will continue. This may perhaps be the single greatest reason that Jesus gave the church the mandate to make disciples. How many times have movements started and restarted over the history of the church? Yet the method is simple, timeless, and guaranteed to accomplish the goal of spreading the glory of Jesus Christ across the globe—local churches made up of saved people, who make fully trained disciples, who then reproduce themselves.

Tim Ingrum summarizes this well:

> ...Jesus focused a great deal of his time and attention on gathering and training a select few men. Scripture records Jesus personally calling several of these disciples (Mark 1:16-20; cf. John 1:43; Matt 9:9) ...Though he called all his listeners to come and learn from him (Matt 11:29-30), his ministry was marked by an undeniable emphasis on investing deeply on this small group of twelve disciples. [9]

So, as we minister at a broader level to *many* children, we need to be intentional in investing in *individual* leaders, teachers, and helpers to further develop future disciples.

The idea of multiplying leadership is not novel with Jesus, although He certainly gave the church its mandate in this area. Jethro instructed his son-in-law, the great leader Moses, to find men who would help him bear the tremendous responsibility of shepherding Israel. He told him to look for *able* men who *fear God*, who are *trustworthy*, and *honest* (Exodus 18:21-23). These priorities point to a person's character. In the New Testament, there arose a need for more servant leaders within the church, and their qualifications were that they should be of "*good repute*, *full of the Spirit*, and *of wisdom*" (Acts 6:3). Paul told Timothy to practice the very process that Paul had groomed him through: "entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

The people we want serving in Children's ministry are to be marked by certain characteristics. These qualities include faithfulness, teachability, Christlikeness, humility, love for Jesus Christ, and love for others. Giftedness is greatly appreciated, but even this can be developed (usually) if these others are in place. However, no amount of giftedness can make up for a lack of these other necessary character traits. Although a lack of giftedness *may* contribute to less fruit, a lack of character often *does* contribute to great damage in ministry. So, it is important that we as leaders seek to be proactive and intentional in identifying others whom we can train and develop as ministers to children.

There are a number of things that we can do to facilitate the process of identifying future servants in children's ministry.[10] Prayer is the first place to start. Jesus told His disciples to do this for the monumental task of spreading the announcement that the King and the kingdom were at hand: "And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray

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[9] Tim Ingrum, "Children's Ministry as a Disciple-Making Effort" (paper presented for PT 705 Discipleship at The Cornerstone Seminary, Vallejo, California, November 12, 2013), 3.

[10] Much of this has been adapted from a list compiled by Jeremy Jackson, Children's Ministry Director at Community Bible Church in Vallejo, CA, that he presented to children's ministry leaders.

earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'" (Luke 10:2). This is not just a verse for motivational preaching. It should be an earnest plea that God would grant power to carry out the very thing He already wants to do. Furthermore, we should seek to build relationships with people. Look for those within your community group who need to serve. Seek to build a discipleship relationship with someone, then ask them to come alongside you and serve in children's ministry. Build relationships with the parents of the children in your ministry. When we are looking for new workers, try to emphasize that it is an "opportunity to serve" rather than a "need to fill." However, it is important that we stress the need to "choose" those we want to invest in. It is precisely for this reason that we prioritize looking for "qualified" individuals who are growing in Christlikeness. Again, when we speak of "qualified" individuals, we are not primarily referring to exceptional giftedness. Rather, we are looking for those who are faithful, teachable, Christ-like, humble, lovers of Jesus, and lovers of others. Finally, Pray. If we have needs, God is the Provider. He provides for our needs, and we need to ask Him to meet these needs.

After identifying someone to train for serving, how can we then develop his or her gifts and encourage growth in maturity? The apostle Paul gave an insightful glance into the power of example, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Philippians 3:17). The imitation stage is a process of growth and development. It starts by allowing someone to watch you serve and teach, then allowing them to serve in the ways you are currently ministering. Allow them to teach a portion of the lesson and later an entire lesson. The final goal is to give people their own class to lead so that they can reproduce what was instilled in them.[11] This is the process of discipleship.

Youth Helpers

Ministering to children, particularly younger children, has many joys, but it also requires a great deal of labor. Overseeing the many necessary practical details of a classroom is necessary for providing an environment which will contribute to children hearing the message we proclaim. In light of this, youth helpers can be a wonderful aid to adults in ministering to children by providing assistance in many ways.[12] There are certainly cases where they have already experienced the saving grace of God in their lives and know Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, we need to evaluate each potential helper according to a pattern of character that will not undermine the vision we have embraced for ministering to children here at Grace, which includes proclaiming the glory of God, making disciples of Christ, and training ministers who actively serve. We ask that anyone desiring to be a youth helper maintain a pattern of proven character. The character traits to verify before placing a potential youth helper in a rotation of serving should be as follows: they should be teachable, respectful, able to follow instructions, and possess the desire and work ethic to help maintain an atmosphere that will maximize the opportunity to proclaim the gospel and the Word of God. A young person, who fits these qualifications, is at least 12 years of age, and has the consent of his/her parent(s), may serve in our early childhood.

[11] *Vision, Philosophy, & Theology*, 49.

[12] It should be noted that the opportunity to serve in Children's Ministry is not intended to be a means for young people to avoid the preaching of the Word and corporate worship, but rather an outlet and occasion to serve and develop as a disciple.

Teachers/adult helpers have the responsibility to encourage and train youth helpers in their role of serving within the class. Given the range of maturity levels, some helpers will need greater guidance than others, so assessment of their abilities is a key component in this process. Give them clear instruction for tasks, and when they master them, give them more responsibilities. Praise them when they are a complement to your role of ministry. Encourage their strengths. If there are areas that need to be developed, gently and graciously encourage them to grow in these areas. Continually affirm them and their importance on your team. If character problems are present and a youth helper is not responding to gracious correction, then communicate with the leader(s) over your class. Again, youth helpers have to be committed to helping the teacher/adult helper carry out our vision of ministering Christ to children. If they detract from our ministry and demonstrate character qualities that are working against our goal of proclaiming the gospel, then they would have to be asked not to serve until adequate growth is demonstrated. In this case, the youth helper's parent(s) would need to be notified and encouraged in this shepherding opportunity.

Children's Ministry Safety Policy

General Safety

Grace Community Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for staff, volunteers, students, and their families. The procedures outlined in this document are intended to facilitate a safe, nurturing, and encouraging environment in which students can grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and with others.

Abuse/Neglect

Grace Community Church has **zero tolerance for abuse or neglect of any kind**. All observations, suspicions, or allegations of abuse or neglect of any individual under the age of 18 will be reported to the appropriate authorities, as dictated by state law and the procedures outlined in this manual. For key definitions and indicators of sexual abuse and neglect, see Appendix 1.

Bullying

Grace Community Church has **zero tolerance for bullying of any kind**. All observations, suspicions, or allegations of bullying should be reported based on the procedures outlined in this manual. For key definitions and common forms of bullying, see Appendix 2.

Reporting

It is our policy, in accordance with GCC's beliefs and state law, to report ALL suspicions or allegations of abuse of any kind. Furthermore, any violations of the policy and procedures outlined in this manual, including "grooming" behavior or any other suspicious behavior, should be reported immediately based on the procedures outlined in this manual.

Adherence

Children's Ministry staff and volunteers are charged to diligently uphold the policy and procedures detailed in this manual. Violations of these policies will be taken seriously. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the GCC elders.

Children's Ministry Safety Procedures

Children's Ministry Staff & Volunteer Placement

Because we want to protect staff, volunteers, and students involved in our ministry, we require all staff members and volunteers working with children to complete the necessary steps below in their entirety before ministry work or volunteer placement begins. Completion of these steps does not guarantee a place of service within the Children's Ministry. Placement within the Children's Ministry will ultimately be the decision of the Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader, with input from the GCC elders when needed.

STEP ONE: Screening Process

Prospective Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers are required to complete our Volunteer Screening Process, which includes:

- Membership or pursuit of membership at Grace Community Church
- Regular involvement in a GCC Community Group and/or Men's/Women's Group
- Completion of GCC's Children's Ministry Volunteer Application Packet

STEP TWO: Policy & Procedures

Prospective Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers are required to review the policy and procedures contained in this manual and sign the application packet indicating that he/she has read, understands, and agrees to comply with the entirety of its contents. Existing Children's Ministry staff and volunteers are required to review this manual on an annual basis and sign the appropriate form indicating that he/she has read, understands, and agrees to comply with the entirety of its contents.

STEP THREE: Statement of Faith

Prospective Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers are required to review GCC's Statement of Faith and sign the application packet indicating that he/she has read, understands, and agrees to teach in agreement with our Statement of Faith.

STEP FOUR: Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

To equip staff members and volunteers with information necessary to recognize abuser characteristics and grooming behavior, Grace Community Church requires all prospective Children's Ministry staff and volunteers to complete Ministry Safe's "Sexual Abuse Awareness Training." This training will be renewed every two years.

STEP FOUR: Background Check

Prospective staff members and volunteers are required to complete a background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels of intensity of background checks may be required. Further, any person wishing to serve in the Children's Ministry permits Grace Community Church to conduct any and all background checks, including law enforcement agencies, bureaus, previous or current employers, and any other organization that may offer helpful information. Background checks for all existing Children's Ministry staff and volunteers will be renewed every three years.

STEP FIVE: In-Person Interview
Prospective Children's Ministry staff and volunteers are required to complete an in-person interview with a designated church leader. To promote consistency, this interview will contain a list of standard questions that all prospective staff members and volunteers will need to answer.

STEP SIX: Reporter Training (Designated individuals only)
Because we want to respond appropriately and promptly to observations, suspicions, or allegations of child abuse or neglect, we require all designated individuals to complete the Alabama Department of Human Resources "Mandated Reporter Training." This training will be renewed every two years, or anytime the training is updated based on changes to state law and legislation.

Children's Ministry Volunteer Helper Placement

Youth who desire to serve as a volunteer helper in the Children's Ministry are required to complete the necessary steps below in their entirety before ministry work or volunteer placement begins. Completion of these steps does not guarantee a place of service within the Children's Ministry. Placement within the Children's Ministry will ultimately be the decision of the Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader, with input from the GCC elders when needed.

STEP ONE: Screening Process
Youth who desire to serve in the Children's Ministry are required to complete the following screening process:

- Parents are members of Grace Community Church
- Regular participation in GCC Youth Ministry for a specified period of time
- Recommendation from Youth Ministry Pastor or leader, based on character qualifications

STEP TWO: In-Person Interview
Youth who desire to serve in the Children's Ministry are required to complete an in-person interview with two relevant Children's Ministry leaders. To promote consistency, this interview will contain a list of standard questions that all prospective Children's Ministry volunteers will need to answer.

Reporting

Abuse or Neglect
GCC's policy is to report ALL observations, suspicions, or allegations of abuse or neglect of any individual **under the age of 18**. Based on Alabama law, all Children's Ministry staff and volunteers are considered Mandatory Reporters. This means they are required, by Alabama law, to report any observation, suspicion, or allegation of abuse or neglect of any individual **under the age of 18**.

Dual Reporting
When reporting suspected child abuse or neglect, Grace Community Church suggests a "dual report" model for several reasons: (1) many adults are unfamiliar with the reporting process and necessary requirements, (2) some individuals may be fearful of the process or potential consequences of reporting, (3) observations, suspicions, and the need for reporting are not always clear.

In this model, the individual who has observed or received an allegation of abuse or neglect will immediately inform a GCC elder or the Church Administrator, as these individuals have completed Alabama DHR's Mandated Reporter Training. The elder or Church Administrator will assess the information, and if the situation warrants reporting, the individual will report the observation, suspicion, or allegation together with the individual who observed, heard, or received information causing him/her to suspect abuse or neglect. This practice is not intended to inhibit any staff member, volunteer, or any other individual from reporting to local law enforcement or Alabama DHR directly. It is intended to facilitate reporting, protect children, and support individuals who may feel hesitant or uncomfortable reporting alone. **An individual does NOT need permission from Grace Community Church to report an observation, suspicion, or allegation of child abuse or neglect.**

Direct Reporting
To make a report directly, call Huntsville Police Department at (256) 427-7009 or Alabama DHR at (256) 427-6200. If a staff member or volunteer reports directly to HPD or Alabama DHR, that individual must also report the information to a GCC elder or the Church Administrator to ensure appropriate measures are taken to ensure the safety of all congregants.

Note that "grooming behavior" often leads to abuse but does not constitute child abuse itself. Any observations, suspicions, or allegations of "grooming behavior" should be seen as a policy/procedure violation and should therefore be reported in accordance with the procedures outlined below for policy/procedure violations.

For information regarding reporting and training for Mandated Reporters, consult the Alabama Department of Human Resources website at https://dhr.alabama.gov/child-protective-services/.

Policy/Procedure Violation
In order to facilitate a safe environment, Children's Ministry staff and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of this manual. Any violation or concern should be reported immediately to the Children's Ministry Leader or an elder.

Consequences of Policy/Procedure Violation
Any person accused of committing a prohibited act or any act considered by the church to be harmful to a child will immediately be suspended from participation in the Children's Ministry. This suspension will continue during any investigation by church leadership, law enforcement, and/or child protective agencies.

Any person found to have committed a prohibited act or violation of this policy may be prohibited from future participation as a staff member or volunteer in all activities and events that involve children, students, or other vulnerable populations at Grace Community Church. If the person is a staff member or employee, such conduct may also result in termination of employment.

Failure to report a prohibited act or policy violation is grounds for termination of an

employee. Volunteers who fail to report a prohibited act or policy violation may be restricted from participation in any activities involving children, students, or other vulnerable populations at Grace Community Church.

Bullying

Bullying of any kind (verbal, social, physical, cyber, etc.) is prohibited at Grace Community Church. No Children's Ministry student shall engage in bullying, violence, threats, or intimidation of another student. Observations, suspicions, or allegations of bullying should be reported immediately to the Children's Ministry Leader or an elder.

See Appendix 2 for key definitions and common forms of bullying.

Discipline

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for behavior management of children or students. 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 students. If a student is unruly or fails to comply with verbal warnings or instructions from staff or volunteers, that student will be asked to leave (if not endangered by doing so), or the student's parent or guardian will be contacted to pick up the student. In the event of a fight or physical altercation, staff members or volunteers will verbally redirect students involved and will try to avoid physical intervention. Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to a Children's Ministry leader and the student's parents.

Event Safety

Approval

All Children's Ministry events (e.g., class party, etc.) must be approved by the Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader **prior** to the event. It is the responsibility of the Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader to ensure that all events comply with all of the policy and procedures outlined in this manual.

Hosting

Anyone hosting a Children's Ministry event must complete the "Children's Ministry Staff & Volunteer Placement" process, as outlined above.

Supervision

The Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader or delegated volunteer is responsible for ensuring that the Children's Ministry area is appropriately supervised and monitored during Sunday morning services. No child or group of children should ever be left unattended or unsupervised during Children's Ministry class hours.

Staff members and volunteers must be in easily observable spaces with students at all times and are prohibited from being alone with an individual student at any time. If a staff member or volunteer finds him/herself alone with a single student, that staff member or volunteer will take the student to a room or area occupied by others, or to a location easily observed by others. (Example: If a student desires additional conversation or counsel with a staff member or

volunteer after regular programming has concluded, move to an adjoining room where other staff members or volunteers are present, or into a public space.)

After every on-campus event, Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom are checked and cleared before leaving.

Interaction Outside Children's Ministry

Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers are to abide by the policy and procedures outlined in this manual in relation to interactions with students that occur outside the context of the formal GCC Children's Ministry. In addition to what is detailed in this manual, the following guidelines should be observed in all interactions with GCC students outside the context of the Children's Ministry:

Guidelines:

- A staff member or volunteer should never be alone with a GCC minor in an unobserved context or location.
- A staff member or volunteer should never spend the night at a student's home or invite a student to spend the night at their home.
- A staff member or volunteer should not have connection to or communication with any student through social media, online gaming, or any other form of online media or communication.

Intoxicants/Substances

Staff/Volunteers

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or any illegal drugs while at the church or any church event, or while traveling with students.

Students

Similarly, Children's Ministry students are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or any illegal drugs while at the church or any church event. If a staff member or volunteer suspects that a student is in violation of this procedure, the Children's Ministry Leader or event leader should be notified immediately.

Medication

A staff member, volunteer, or student may not administer medication to any student while serving in the Children's Ministry except in accordance with an authorization form signed by the parent or guardian specifying the medication, the frequency, and the dosage.

Parental Contact

Parents whose student is participating in Children's Ministry activities and programs will be contacted if their child becomes severely ill, injured, or has a severe disciplinary problem while participating in Children's Ministry programs.

Parental Involvement

Due to our requirement that all of our volunteers for Children's Ministry complete a multi-layered screening process to serve in our classrooms, we do not allow parents who have not also completed that same process to be in the class with their children. If parents would like to visit a classroom after the children have been dismissed or at another time, we will accommodate that desire so that they can see the classroom set up. A Children's Ministry Leader or Teacher can also meet with parents to answer any questions they might have.

Physical Contact

Grace Community Church is committed to protecting students in its care. To this end, we have a set of guidelines for physical contact that promote a positive, nurturing environment for our Children's Ministry. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Children's Ministry staff members and volunteers.

Guidelines:

- All physical contact with minors must be above reproach. Contact should never give even the appearance of wrongdoing. The personal behavior of adults must foster trust at all times.
- Inappropriate touching and displays of affection are prohibited.
- Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places, when in the presence of other adults, and only when adults personally know the parents and children well. It is far less likely that touch will be misinterpreted as such when it is open to observation.
- Physical contact of any kind should never be forced upon a minor.
- Any inappropriate physical contact and/or display of affection should be reported immediately to the Community Group Overseer or an elder.

Sexually Oriented Conversations

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in any sexually oriented conversations with students and are not permitted to discuss any inappropriate or explicit information about the staff member's or volunteer's own personal relationships, dating, or sexual activities.

Sexually Oriented Materials

Staff

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from possessing or displaying to a student any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, pictures, films, etc.) on church property or at the location of any ministry event. In addition, transmission of such material to a student through electronic or other means is strictly prohibited.

Students

Students are prohibited from possessing or displaying any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, pictures, films, etc.) on church property or at the location of any ministry event.

If a leader suspects that another leader or student is in violation of this procedure, the Children's Ministry Pastor/Leader or an elder should be notified immediately.

Staff-to-Student Ratio

We are committed to providing adequate supervision for all Children's Ministry activities and events. Accordingly, the following ratios will generally be observed for Children's Ministry activities and events:

- Infant through 2-Year-Old = 1:3
- 3-Year-Old through 4-Year-Old = 1:5
- 5-Year-Old through 2nd Grade = 1:7
- 3rd Grade through 6th Grade = 1:10

Verbal Interactions

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and students should be positive and uplifting. Children's Ministry 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 students. To this end, staff members and volunteers should not talk to students 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 and volunteers are expected to refrain from swearing in the presence of students.

Appendix 1: Child Abuse/Neglect

Definitions:

- Child- any individual under the age of 19.
- Abuse- harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare. Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation.
    - Sexual abuse- includes the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or having a child assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of the conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of the conduct; or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation, or incest with children as those acts are defined by Alabama law.
    - Sexual exploitation- includes allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution and allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child for commercial purposes.
- Neglect- negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, supervision, clothing, or shelter.
- Grooming behavior – manipulative behaviors that an abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught. Note that abusers groom the victims AND the gatekeepers.

Common Grooming Behaviors:

- Gift giving
- Attracting a minor(s) with "kid magnet" activities
- Peer-like communication (opposed to adult to minor communication)
- Seeking time alone with a minor(s)
- Pushing physical boundaries
- Breaking the rules
- Justifying rule-breaking
- Playful but inappropriate touch

Emotional or behavioral signs of child sexual abuse may include:

- Depression; emotionless or passive behavior; withdrawal from family, friends, church, or school; exhibiting low self-esteem or self-loathing
- Lack of attachment to a caregiver; displaying distrust or wariness at the approach of adults, caregivers, or specific people; fear of going home that may manifest by arriving at church events early, staying late, and appearing frightened or upset when it is time to return home
- Being constantly watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Sudden changes in behavior, including academic changes
- Extremes in behavior, such as over-compliance, over-achieving or demanding behavior, extreme passivity or behaving more responsibly than would be expected of a child of that particular age

- Aggressive, destructive (e.g. fire-setting), demanding, or disruptive behavior; frequent and inexplicable anger, rebellion, or running away
- Self-degradation; self-injury (e.g., "cutting") or wearing long sleeves on hot days (to hide bruising or other injuries); suicide attempts
- Delays in emotional, cognitive, physical, or academic development
- Unwillingness to change for or participate in certain activities such as a gym night or swimming party
- Being inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or infantile (e.g., rocking or head-banging)
- Bed-wetting in children who have previously outgrown it; nightmares; difficulty sleeping
- Exhibiting high anxiety, including through physical problems associated with anxiety, such as chronic stomach pain or headaches

Consider the possibility of physical abuse if you notice:

- Frequent injuries of any kind (e.g., bruises, cuts, fractures, or burns)
- That the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause of the injury, or changes his or her story as to how the injury occurred
- Injuries that appear in distinctive patterns, such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns, or impressions of other instruments
- Injuries that present on both sides of the head or body, as accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body

Consider the possibility of neglect if a child:

- Is obviously listless, malnourished, or fatigued
- Begs, steals, or hoards food or complains frequently of hunger
- Is consistently dirty or has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Has untreated illness, injuries, health issues (e.g. unfilled cavities), or serious educational needs
- Has broken or missing eyeglasses, hearing aids, or other necessary aids or equipment
- Has an untreated need for glasses, dental care, or other medical attention
- Stays at school outside of school hours
- Is frequently absent from school or has other significant academic struggles
- Is inappropriately left unsupervised
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

Appendix 2: Common Forms of Bullying

Verbal Bullying

- Teasing
- Name-calling
- Inappropriate sexual comments
- Taunting
- Threatening to cause harm
- Other pervasive, ongoing pattern intended to intimidate, harass, or shame a minor

Social Bullying

- Exclusion – intentionally excluding a child
- Telling other children not to be friends with a particular minor
- Spreading rumors about a child
- Embarrassing a child in public
- Other pervasive, ongoing pattern intended to intimidate, harass, or shame a child

Physical Bullying

- Hitting/kicking/pinching
- Spitting
- Tripping/pushing
- Taking or breaking a child's possessions
- Making mean or rude hand gestures
- Other pervasive, ongoing pattern intended to intimidate, harass, or shame a child

Cyberbullying

- Intimidating text messages or e-mails
- Rumors by email or social networking sites
- Embarrassing pictures and/or videos
- Trolling
- Other pervasive, ongoing pattern intended to intimidate, harass, or shame a child