

Volunteer Guidelines & Child Protection Policy



GRACECHURCH
at willow valley

Our Purpose

Our aim is to partner with parents and caregivers in discipling children to know God, grow in their faith, and joyfully serve the church and community. We pray that every child would come to a personal relationship with Christ, fulfilling our church's mission to see *the lost saved and the saved transformed by the power of the gospel*.

This policy allows us to ensure the safety of our children so that we can provide a safe environment in which they can grow physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Parameters:

This Child Protection Policy (CPP) applies to children from birth to 5th grade who are voluntarily placed by parents/guardians under the responsibility of Grace Church at Willow Valley for the church's public worship services or specific children's ministry-related, church-sponsored activities.

Definitions:

- **Adults** are individuals eighteen years or older.
- **Minors** are individuals under eighteen years of age.
- **Volunteers** are adults who work with children and are not in the employment of the church.
- **Staff** are paid employees of the church. All staff members are required to complete a background check, regardless whether they work directly with children.

Protecting the Children Before They Arrive

Because we care deeply about the safety and well-being of every child entrusted to us, Grace Church employs the following training and screening procedures to help ensure a secure and nurturing environment.

- All volunteers must regularly attend for 3 months prior to serving.
- The minimum age to serve in Children's Ministry is 6th grade for Nursery and Toddlers and 9th grade for Preschool and Elementary.
- All minors must serve alongside an adult.
- All potential volunteers must: 1) fill out the "Volunteer Application for Children's Ministry" and have it approved by the Children's Ministry director; 2) Read and affirm our Child Protection Policy; 3) Pass the following background checks:

Criminal Record Check, Child Abuse History, FBI Fingerprinting or PA Residency Affidavit. The church will cover the cost of all required clearances

- All adults (staff and volunteer) are considered mandatory reporters and must complete mandated reporter training.

Each year, the Children's Ministry Director leads a mandatory training for all current and prospective volunteers to review key safety procedures, ministry expectations, and best practices for serving children.

Substitute Communication

- If you are unable to serve on your scheduled day, please make every effort to find a replacement and email the Children's Ministry Director.
- If possible, do this *24–48 hours* in advance to allow time for adjustments.
- If you're unable to find someone to swap with, contact the Children's Ministry Director *as soon as possible* to help coordinate coverage.

Protecting the Children as They Arrive and Depart

Upon arrival at Grace Church, parents or guardians must check in all children in 5th grade or younger at the check-in cart located downstairs at the entrance to the Children's Wing. Each child will receive a name sticker to wear during the service, and the parent will receive a matching security tag, which must be presented at pickup.

- The parent/guardian tag must be presented when picking up the children.
- Only children whose names appear on the security tag may be picked up.
- Any non-parent/guardian (older sibling/grandparent, etc.) who wishes to pick up a child must have the security tag in their possession and show it when picking up a child.

Protecting the Children While They are in Our Care

The Two-Adult Rule

- A minimum of two adult ministry personnel must be present in each classroom.
- At least one adult volunteer in each classroom should be female.
- If a volunteer must leave the room with a child due to special circumstances, they must remain within sight of another volunteer or staff member, or stay in a public area.
- Only approved and designated adult workers are allowed in the children's classrooms.

Adult-to-Child Ratios

The following ratios are provided as guidelines for equipping each classroom with the appropriate number of volunteers for its age groups:

- Infants (birth-24 months) = 1:3 (*adult:child*).
- Toddler & Preschool = 1:5
- Elementary age = 1:10

When children's classes or programs are in session, the interior doors and windows should allow for unobstructed views from the outside of everyone inside the room.

Diapering Guidelines

- Diaper changing procedures are posted in the nursery diaper changing area.
- If possible, it is strongly encouraged that diaper changing be done by the child's parent.
- Diaper changing is only to be done by volunteers and must be conducted within view of other ministry personnel.

Restroom Guidelines

- Preschool Children:
 - Preschool children are not to go to the bathroom alone.
 - 2 ministry personnel will escort a group of children to the bathroom.
 - No ministry personnel will ever be alone with a child in an unsupervised bathroom.
 - Preschoolers must use only the bathrooms in the children's wing, and the door must always be propped open.
 - Female volunteers may assist both genders in the bathroom following the above guidelines; male volunteers may only assist boys.
- Elementary Children:
 - Elementary children may only use the bathrooms in the children's wing and the door must always be propped open.
 - Elementary children are not to be sent to the bathroom alone (except in the case of Room 107 where the bathroom is clearly visible). They should be accompanied by a buddy of the same gender and age group.
 - When escorting a group to the bathroom, volunteers will escort the children to the bathroom. They should remain outside the bathroom door and wait for the children before escorting them back to the classroom.

Physical Touch

- Age- and developmentally-appropriate physical touch is encouraged as a healthy expression of care for the child and a reflection of God's love. *Examples include: holding a crying infant, high-fives, fist bumps, hand shakes, putting arm around shoulder of a child when comforting or quieting is needed.*
- Except for changing diapers according to policy, there must be no touching of children in any area that would be covered by shorts and a t-shirt.
- Volunteers should avoid interaction that could be misunderstood as inappropriate, including but not limited to: forcing kids to sit on your lap, tickling, wrestling, horseplay, holding a child's face when talking to him/her.

Discipline

- When misbehavior occurs, don't be surprised (Prov. 22:15) and view it as an opportunity to administer truth and love.
- Keep in mind that many misbehaviors can be prevented by the use of clear, consistent directions and expectations.
- No physical discipline of children is allowed. No child should be restrained except for that time necessary to prevent self-harm or harm of others.
- Volunteers are expected to familiarize themselves with and consistently follow the discipline procedures outlined below.
 - After two warnings, a child may be separated from group activities within the classroom.
 - If the behavior continues, the child may be moved to the hallway, where the Children's Ministry Director will ensure appropriate supervision.
 - Ongoing misbehavior will result in the Director contacting the parent or guardian for pickup.
 - *Anytime a child is dismissed from the room, parents will be notified.*

Food & Drinks

- Snacks may be provided by the church, any additional food or drinks brought into the Children's Wing must be approved by the CM Director.
- A list of the children in each classroom with allergies will be available.
- At check-in on their first visit, parents will be informed of potential snack offerings and must complete the allergy section on the provided information sheet.
- Snacks brought for an individual child should not be shared with others.

Sickness

- Children must be fever and symptom free for 24 hours before coming to Children's ministry, which includes being off fever-reducing medications.
- If a child has a generalized body rash (such as hand-food-mouth-disease), diagnosis must be confirmed by a physician and the child should not be brought into the class (exception: localized rashes such as eczema).
- Volunteers will contact the CM Director and a parent/guardian if a child shows signs of sickness.

Clean Up and Tear Down

- Each classroom has labeled bins for supplies and toys. Before leaving, return everything to its appropriate place.
- Wipe down all tables and trash.

Emergency Situations

- Fire/Emergency evacuation procedures are available in all the rooms.
- In the event of an emergency, please follow the instructions of the Safety Team and adhere to all established emergency protocols. They are trained to respond to a variety of situations and will guide you and the children to safety. Remain calm, stay with your group, and assist as needed until the situation is resolved.