

# Child Safety

Issue Date: 9/15/2021

Revision A: 11/10/2021

Procedure #: 1010

## **PURPOSE:**

To clarify the procedures for ensuring the protection and proper care of the children who are present in our gatherings and at our events.

## **SCOPE:**

This policy applies to all functions and gatherings of Redeeming Grace Church.

## **DEFINITIONS:**

Child: Any person under the age of 18.

Worker: Any person who have been cleared and authorized to supervise children's activities in the church. Workers must either be over the age of 18, or over the age of 16 with a child care certification, and who have completed required background checks.

## **KEY BIBLE TEXTS:**

Matthew 18:6,10; Rom. 13:1-4; Eph. 4:25; Heb. 13:17; Pr. 31:9

## **POLICY:**

### CRITICAL THINGS TO NOTE

The chief child safety rule is this: **never be alone with a child under any circumstances**. This is the most important piece of instruction to remember from this policy document.

Regarding children in diapers: For the safety of our children, only parents/guardians are allowed to change diapers. Parents will be notified (preferably via text message) should their child need to be changed. If a parent desires not to be notified of the need for a diaper change, they should note that preference on the child's security sticker. If a diaper change is required under those circumstances, however, the children's workers will leave the wet or dirty diaper on the child for the remainder of the worship service.

Regarding children using the bathroom: For the safety of our children, no child under age 9 will be permitted to use the bathroom unless accompanied by a parent/guardian. Parents/guardians should take their children to the bathroom prior to dropping them off to minimize the chance their child will need to use the bathroom during the service. If a child under age 9 still needs to use the bathroom during the service, the children's worker will text the parent to notify them of the need. The parent will then need to bring their portion of the child security sticker (with matching number) with them to pick up their child. This guideline applies even if the child is able to use the bathroom without assistance. As stated above, under no circumstances should a children's worker ever go into the bathroom alone with a child. Children ages 9 and older will be permitted to leave the room by themselves to use the bathroom.

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## ABUSE TOLERANCE

Redeeming Grace Church has a zero tolerance for abuse in ministry programs and ministry activities. It is the responsibility of every staff and volunteer at Redeeming Grace Church to act in the best interest of all children in every program.

In the event that staff or volunteers observe any inappropriate behaviors (i.e. policy violations, neglectful supervision, poor role-modeling, etc.) or suspected abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) it is their responsibility to immediately report their observations to the Children's Ministry Director or one of the pastor/elders.

## REPORTING SUSPICIOUS OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Redeeming Grace Church is committed to providing a safe, secure environment for children and their families. To this end, any report of inappropriate behaviors or suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in accordance with this policy and state law, to the Elder Board, the Police Department, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agency.

An element of the safe environment referenced above includes the fostering of a culture of reporting relevant information to a supervisor. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to a supervisor.

## BACKGROUND CHECKS

For Sunday morning activities that take place in a public church building, all individuals serving with children must have background checks completed prior to serving. For Community Groups and other officially sanctioned church gatherings that take place in homes and are of a more informal nature, two adults must be present with the children at all times, and at least one of the two adults assigned to watch children must have a background check completed.

## ENFORCEMENT OF POLICIES

Redeeming Grace Church staff members and volunteers who supervise other staff members or volunteers are charged with the diligent enforcement of all Redeeming Grace Church policies. Violations of these policies are grounds for immediate dismissal, disciplinary action, or reassignment from Children's Ministry's positions for both volunteers and staff members. Final decisions related to policy violations will be the responsibility of the church's Elders.

## REPORTING VIOLATION OF POLICY

To maintain a safe environment for our children, Redeeming Grace Church staff members and volunteers must be aware of their individual responsibility to report any questionable circumstance, observation, act, omission, or situation that is a violation of these policies. All questions or concerns related to inappropriate, suspicious, or suspected grooming behavior should be directed to the church's Elders.

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## CONSEQUENCES 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 and subject to Church discipline. This suspension will continue during any investigation by law enforcement or Child Protective agencies.

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

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 Redeeming Grace Church.

## REPORTING SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Staff members and volunteers at Redeeming Grace Church are required to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or co-worker, to the immediate supervisor of the area or the church's Elders.

A staff member or volunteer will immediately notify the Children's Ministry Director or church elder, who will make a report to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. In no way does any provision in this policy discourage any staff member or volunteer from reporting a suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.

Staff members and volunteers are required to verbally report an incident to supervisory staff as soon as possible after the incident. After receiving a report from a staff member or volunteer in Children's Ministries, the church Elders will speak with the person or volunteer to whom the child spoke to get detailed information about the entire conversation.

## RESPONSE TO REPORT OF ABUSE

The Elders will take appropriate action on behalf of the church when a report of abuse occurs.

## BUILDING SAFETY

No child will ever be left unattended in the Children's area during children's ministry programming or classes. Children's Ministries staff members or volunteers are prohibited from being alone with an individual child in any room or building. In the event a staff member or volunteer finds himself/herself alone with a single child, that staff member or volunteer will take the child to a room or building occupied by others.

After every programming event, Children's Ministries staff members and volunteers must ensure every room and restroom is checked prior to leaving.

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Any two children together in an unseen or less easily viewed area should be redirected to another (more open) area.

## WORKER TO CHILD RATIOS

Redeeming Grace Church is committed to providing adequate supervision in all Children's Ministries programs. Accordingly, the following worker to child ratios will be observed:

Program	Workers	Children
Nursery	2	8
Preschool, 2 and 3 years old	2	12
Preschool, 4 and 5 years old	2	18
Elementary	2	20
Kids Camp	2	20

If a worker is 'out of ratio' it is his or her responsibility to immediately notify the program supervisor or the Children's Ministry Director Supervisors will make diligent efforts to find substitute workers to immediately bring worker to child ratios into compliance with Church policy. A minimum of one worker over the age of 18 must be present at all times.

## DISCIPLINE

It is Redeeming Grace Church's policy that staff members and volunteers are prohibited from using physical discipline in any manner for behavioral management of children. 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. In employing this procedure, staff members and volunteers should observe the following guidelines:

- 1) 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).
- 2) If the behavior does not cease, remove, or direct the child away from the group to a corner of the room where the group is meeting and can be seen by all.
- 3) 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.

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- 4) Provide the child with a chair to sit in or a “spot” to sit on (using a pillow, blanket, carpet square, etc.) until their time-out is complete.
- 5) Follow the rule of thumb that a time-out is ineffective if it lasts longer than one minute for every year of the child’s life (3 years old, 3 minutes).
- 6) 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 2 more minutes.”)
- 7) Praise the children once they have 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 further time-out. Follow this with praise.

Uncontrollable or unusual behavior should be reported immediately to parents and the Children’s Ministry Director.

## INTOXICANTS

Staff members and volunteers are prohibited from the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs while in any Redeeming Grace Church facility, while traveling with children, or while working with or supervising children.

## MEDICATION

No medicine will be regularly administered to a child by Redeeming Grace Church staff or volunteers. The only exceptions are activities off campus. In this case, the medication must be accompanied by a doctor’s prescription, or in the case of over-the-counter medication, a parent’s written instructions. These must be in the original bottles.

## NUDITY

Staff members and volunteers in Redeeming Grace Church’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.), staff member/volunteer will submit a plan to the Children’s Ministry Director concerning arrangements for showering or changing clothes.

## ONE-TO-ONE INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Staff members and volunteers should never conduct one-to-one, unobserved meetings or interaction with children while participating in Redeeming Grace Church’s Children’s Ministries program. Another adult who has completed the Redeeming Grace Church application and screening process should always be present.

## TRANSPORTATION

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Staff members and volunteers may from time to time be able 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 should be avoided. Staff members and volunteers should avoid transportation circumstances that leave only one child in transport.
- 2) Staff members and volunteers should avoid physical contact with children while in vehicles.
- 3) No cell phones may be utilized by the driver while driving Redeeming Grace Church vans, or vehicles owned or rented by Redeeming Grace Church, unless in an emergency.
- 4) No drivers under age 25 may drive Redeeming Grace Church owned or rented vehicles.

## PARENTAL CONTACT

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

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are encouraged to visit all services and programs in which their child is involved at Redeeming Grace Church. 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 Redeeming Grace Church will be required to complete the Redeeming Grace Church volunteer application and screening process.

## PHYSICAL CONTACT

Redeeming Grace Church is committed to protecting children in its care. To this end, Redeeming Grace Church 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:

- 1) Hugging, pats on the back and other forms of appropriate physical affection between staff members or volunteers and children are important for children's development and are generally suitable in the church setting.
- 2) Inappropriate touching and inappropriate displays of affection are forbidden. Any inappropriate physical contact, touching or displays of affection should be immediately reported to an immediate supervisor, the Children's Ministry Director or an Elder.

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- 3) Physical contact should be for the benefit of the child, and never be based upon the emotional needs of a staff member or volunteer.
- 4) Physical contact and affection should be given only in observable places or when in the presence of other staff members and volunteers. It is much less likely that touch will be inappropriate or misinterpreted when physical contact is open to observation.
- 5) 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 always foster trust. Personal conduct must be above reproach.
- 6) Do not force physical contact, touch, or affection on a reluctant child. A child's preference not to be touched must be respected.
- 7) Children's staff members and volunteers are responsible for protecting children under their supervision from inappropriate or unwanted touch by others.
- 8) Any inappropriate behavior or suspected abuse by a staff member or volunteer must be reported immediately to an immediate supervisor, the Children's Activities Director or the Senior Associate Pastor.

## 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 in the program.

## SEXUALLY ORIENTED MATERIALS

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

## VERBAL INTERACTIONS

Verbal interactions between staff members or volunteers and children should be positive and uplifting. Redeeming Grace Church 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.

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## RELEASE OF CHILDREN

At any time that a child has been entrusted to Redeeming Grace Church staff members or volunteers, the Church 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 a person who drops off a child or student has authority to pick up the child.

If staff members or volunteers are uncertain of the propriety of releasing a child, they should immediately locate or contact their immediate supervisor or the Children's Ministry Director or Preschool Coordinator before releasing the child.

Preschool parents should utilize the check in/check out system that is already in place at Redeeming Grace Church.

## 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.