

# **Grace Lutheran Church and School Safe Practices Policy**

## **Definitions**

Relationships among people are at the foundation of Christian ministry and, as such, are central to the life of the church. Defining healthy and safe relationships through guidelines, policies and codes of conduct is not meant, in any way, to undermine the strength and importance of personal interaction in our ministries. Rather, it is to assist in more clearly defining behaviors and practices that allow the church to more fully demonstrate its love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

### **Children**

A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years old.

### **Youth**

A youth is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.

### **Vulnerable Adults**

Any person over the age of 18 who is unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

### **Church and School Personnel**

For the purposes of these guidelines, the following are included in the definition of Church personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the church:

1. Pastors, teachers and administrators
2. All paid personnel whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by Grace Lutheran Church and School. For example: After-school programs, theater groups, counselors, D90 personnel, band or orchestra leaders, and coaches (not limited to).
3. Any paid personnel whose living quarters are on the grounds of Grace Lutheran Church and School.

## **Church and School Volunteers Who Regularly Work With and Around Children or Youth**

1. All clergy whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities more often than occasionally.  
Examples: mentors, Youth Ministry Team leaders
3. Adults who participate in overnight activities with children or youth no matter the frequency.
4. Volunteer Church personnel whose work regularly takes them throughout the facility or grounds or who have keys giving them access to the buildings on the grounds.
5. Parents who are potentially alone with children. Examples: Lunch supervisors, field trip chaperones, and scribes.
6. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities an anticipated six times or more a year.

## **Church and School Volunteers Who Occasionally Work With and Around Children or Youth**

1. All persons who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities infrequently, generally no more than six times a year or for one program or activity during a year that lasts less than a month. For example:
  - assisting with preparation of the Christmas Eve service
  - teaching one "unit" for confirmation
  - Sunday school
  - VBS
  - School room parents
2. All persons who provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle infrequently, generally no more than three times a year. (i.e. driving to camp, synod gatherings, service projects, sports, games, etc.)  
\*Permission Slip required.

## **Safe Practices Committee**

The Safe Practices Committee consists of the Associate Pastor, Children's Ministry Coordinator, and School Principal.

## Types of Abuse

**Child neglect:** Failure to meet the child's basic physical, environmental, emotional and nutritional needs, failure to provide what is necessary for a child's well-being, or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

**Emotional abuse:** Verbal or nonverbal violence that uses emotions to criticize, embarrass, shame, blame, or otherwise manipulate a child or youth. Emotional abuse results in an observable and/or material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.

**Physical abuse:** Physical violence toward a child. Physical abuse is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.

**Sexual abuse or sexual molestation:** Any sexual contact with a child by an adult or an older youth. These acts may range from touching of the penis, vagina, buttocks, or breast/chest area to sexual intercourse. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth. Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.

**Drug and alcohol abuse:** Children, youth, or adults that show up at church or school under the influence of alcohol or drugs, who bring these substances with them on church retreats, camp or other activities or those who are reported by peers to be intoxicated.

**Bullying:** Bullying is defined as the **repeated intimidation** of others by the real or threatened infliction of physical, verbal, written, electronically transmitted, or emotional abuse, or through attacks on the property of another. It may include, but not be limited to, actions such as verbal taunts, name-calling and put-downs. It may include ethnically based or gender-based verbal put-downs, retaliation, stalking, public humiliation, exclusion from peer groups, or extortion of money or possessions.

Four main types of bullying are:

**Physical:** When one person or a group picks on or harasses another person in a physical way.

**Verbal:** Persistent put-downs related to appearance, ability, gender, race, or sexual orientation.

**Emotional/social:** Rejecting, humiliating, ranking, isolating or embarrassing others.

**Cyber:** Repeatedly hurting someone through the use of technology.

Such behavior is considered bullying whether it takes place on or off school property, at any school-sponsored function, or on a school bus. It is important to recognize that bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that is repeated. **Isolated incidents should not be labeled as bullying.**

### **Code of Conduct of Church and School Personnel**

Relationships in ministry should, ideally, always be experienced as caring and without intention to do harm or allow harm to occur. This code of behavior is recommended to help Grace Lutheran Church and School create safe environments for children, youth, and vulnerable adults and for those who minister with them. All Church and School personnel are expected to:

- understand that the church will not tolerate abuse of children and youth and agree to comply in spirit and in action with this position.
- agree to not physically, sexually or emotionally abuse or neglect a child or youth.
- respond to children and youth with respect, consideration and equal treatment, regardless of sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture or socioeconomic status.
- serve as a positive role model for children and youth by maintaining an attitude of respect, patience, and maturity. Avoid even the appearance of favoritism or impropriety.

In the event that Church or School Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations with children or youth, personnel agree to report their observations to their supervisor.

All Church and School Personnel acknowledge their obligation and responsibility to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults and understand there may be legal requirements to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth or vulnerable adults to appropriate church leaders and state authorities in accordance with these policies.

## General Guidelines

**Staffing and supervision:** Except as specifically provided in this policy, each Sunday School class, Grace Church-sponsored youth activity, and Grace School activity, including enrichment programs, extracurricular activities, and extended daycare shall be led by at least one leader and one support helper. Grace follows a “five-years-older” rule, under which all Grace staff and leaders must be at least 60 months older than the oldest child participating in the activity.

At least two unrelated (non-family members) Church Personnel are recommended to supervise activities.

Staff members may lead an event or extracurricular activity within the church/school grounds without a second leader or support helper.

In the event of a short-staffing situation, an activity may be staffed by one leader provided that another leader without specific responsibility is present in the building, visits the short-staffed class or event periodically, and is generally available to assist as needed.

One adult should not be alone with one child or youth, when possible.

There may be times when a teacher or administrator meets with a child alone and in these situations the door should remain open and the adult and child should sit within view of the window or door. When a 1:1 meeting, with a closed door, is necessary between a student and teacher or administrator, the adult should sit in full view of the window.

Each classroom door must have a window or panel affording a clear view into the classroom.

## **Transportation Guidelines**

Each driver who drives youth unrelated to the driver during a church youth outing or Grace School field trip shall comply with Illinois law, including driver's license and insurance requirements. The driver must be between 21 and 70 years old.

The number of persons in a car shall never exceed the number of functioning seat belts in that car. Seat belts must be worn at all times.

Grace School generally does not provide transportation to or from extracurricular activities outside of regular school hours. Parents are responsible for arranging transportation to and from these activities. The leader and his/her support helpers shall keep a log of children in attendance for the activity, and record the names of who is picking a child/children up from these activities. If the adult responsible for pick-up is unknown to the leader, or a child leaves unaccounted for, the leader shall contact one or both of the parents/guardians of the child in question.

No adult should transport a child or youth alone. (Unless parents have provided written consent)

Youth should not transport another youth or child. (Youth transporting youth should only be done with written parent permission.)

## **Grace Church Youth Group Outings**

In general, parents are responsible for arranging transportation to and from church and outings. Parents may arrange alternate transportation provided the parent provides prior written communication to the youth director or event leader (i.e. permission slip, text or e-mail).

One adult should not be housed with one child or youth at a camp, youth gathering or other overnight event.

Adults should not sleep in the same bed, sleeping bags, tents, hotel rooms or other rooms with children or youth unless the adult is an immediate family member of all children or youth in the tent, hotel room or other room.

It is acceptable to have multiple adults sleeping with multiple children or youth participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge.

Dressing, undressing, bathing, or showering in the presence of children or youth is prohibited unless unavoidable in which case it must be in the presence of another adult.

Depending on the building, room, or location set-up, dressing or undressing in the presence of children may be unavoidable. Every precaution should be made to do this privately, and there must be another adult present for safety purposes. Additionally, showering or bathing in the presence of children is prohibited.

### Field Trips

Signed Permission to Participate forms (including emergency contact information and consent for treatment) should be required for all activities away from Grace.

### Chaperone Ratios

Student: Chaperone ratios should not exceed the following:

Students : Chaperones            If using public transportation

PK-SK	4:1	-----
1 <sup>st</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup>	6:1	-----
5 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup>	8:1	6:1
7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	10:1	6:1

### Early Childhood

**Bathroom visits:** It is recommended that an adult escort children under age 6 to the bathroom. Adults may choose to remain outside of the bathroom after first checking the safety of the room. When a preschool child or a child who needs assistance uses the bathroom, an adult may enter to assist. In that circumstance, the door for the bathroom must be left open while the adult is assisting.

**Diapering.** Parents are paged to come to the nursery to change their child's diaper. We do not provide diapering care.

**Pick-up.** Programs for infants and children under six years old should have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents or legal guardians or those designated by them.

### Discipline

In general, discipline must be administered carefully and sparingly, with careful consideration of a child's dignity and psychological and social development. Gentleness, respect, and understanding must guide all acts and words of discipline. Discipline will be carried out through instruction, training, and verbal corrections and should exclude derogatory language.

Using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children and youth is strictly prohibited. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting or any other physical force. Physical intervention may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to a child, youth or others.

Using harsh language, punishment, or mechanical restraint such as rope or tape for behavior management is prohibited.

Participating in or allowing others to conduct any hazing activities relating to Church and School activities is prohibited..

#### First Aid and Emergency Response Guidelines.

1. Each injury and accident involving a child that requires first aid or other medical attention must be reported by a leader to the child's parent/guardian, and the appropriate staff supervisor, if one is available, as soon as practicable.
2. If the circumstances warrant it, minor first aid will be administered immediately by a leader. Depending on the nature and severity of the injury or illness, additional medical attention, including a call to 911, may be sought, particularly if a parent cannot be located.
3. The leader involved in the incident will enter the incident in a log maintained in the office, identifying the persons involved, the time and nature of the injury or accident, the person or persons who administered first aid, and the person who reported the matter.  
\*\*\*\*Incident reports are kept at the front desk and the school office.  
Submit completed reports to your immediate supervisor.  
Supervisors turn completed reports to Mrs. Maggio, School Secretary.
4. The leader shall endeavor to make a follow-up telephone call to a parent of an injured child within 24 hours after the injury.

#### **Screening of ALL School Personnel**

1. A standard application completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks through Protect My Ministry and the code of behavior.
2. All school personnel will have a fingerprint based criminal record check through the Illinois State Police and FBI in accordance with State of Illinois law. This check is to be updated every 2 years through Protect My Ministry.
3. Sexual offender registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years. This check is to be updated annually.
4. Individual interview with the applicant conducted by appropriate Church personnel based on the purpose of the position. For example, the cantor will interview the handbell choir director or the Extended Daycare Coordinator will interview Extended Daycare staff.
5. Reference checks of persons outside of the congregation or organization who know the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant works with children.
6. Driving or motor vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.

### **Screening of ALL Church Personnel**

1. A standard application completed by the applicant that includes an authorization for the release of information to conduct background checks through Protect My Ministry and the code of behavior.
2. All church personnel will have a fingerprint based criminal record check through the Illinois State Police and FBI. This check is to be updated every 2 years through Protect My Ministry.
3. Sexual offender registry check in any state where the applicant has resided during the past seven (7) years. This check is to be updated annually.
4. Individual interview with the applicant conducted by appropriate Church personnel based on the purpose of the position. For example, the Director of Administration and Finance will interview the IT Director.

5. Reference checks of persons outside of the congregation or organization who know the applicant, preferably who know how the applicant works with children.
6. Driving or motor vehicle records check if the person may be transporting children or youth.

**Any and all Church and School volunteers who REGULARLY work with or around children or youth should be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:**

1. Complete the volunteer Google form which includes name, email address, primary phone number, activities for which one plans to volunteer, and consent that includes an acknowledgement to conduct a background check through Protect My Ministry.
2. A background check through Protect My Ministry must be completed before volunteers may serve in a role defined for this section.
3. Individual conversation between a potential volunteer and their immediate GLC/GLS supervisor.
4. New parents or church members: It is recommended that a person who has been a part of the congregation or school for less than a year work side by side with another member as a mentor while working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
5. A copy of valid driver's license and car insurance if the person will be transporting children or youth. \*Permission Slip required for children or youth being transported.

**Examples:**

Sunday School teachers, confirmation mentors, lunch supervisor, field trip chaperone, etc...

**Any and all Church and School volunteers who OCCASIONALLY work with or around children or youth should be screened and selected utilizing at least the following:**

1. Individual conversation between a potential volunteer and their immediate GLC/GLS supervisor.
2. A copy of valid driver's license and car insurance if the person will be transporting children or youth. \*Permission Slip required for children or youth being transported.

### **Flagged Background Checks**

In the event a background check flags an event, the Safe Practices Committee will meet to determine if the infraction should disqualify the person in question from employment or volunteer responsibilities.

### **Education and Training Requirements**

Child abuse prevention education and training is required for all Church Personnel and volunteers who Regularly Work with or Around Children or Youth before they start their work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and should be repeated at least once every two years. This is done through a training video module that includes a quiz and is completed online through Protect My Ministry.

### **Desirable and Undesirable Behaviors**

Christian ministries are committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment that protects children and youth from abuse and Church personnel from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate rather than leaving that decision to each individual. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows Church personnel to comfortably show positive affection in ministry and also identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth. The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church personnel working around or with children or youth.

#### **Appropriate and inappropriate affection**

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth.

### **Some positive and appropriate forms of touching and affection**

- Brief hugs. Preferred hugs are side-to-side hugs, one-arm hugs and a-frame hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-Fives” and hand slapping
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for huddles with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

### **Inappropriate or harmful forms of touching and affection**

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses of any kind
- Holding children over five years old on the lap
- Any sexualized touching
  - Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers.
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as sleeping areas, closets, staff-only areas, bathrooms, locker rooms, or other private rooms.
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection or physical contact
- Comments or compliments that relate to physique or body development. (spoken, written, or electronic)
  - “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans”
  - Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear

### **Other Harmful Behavior**

Inappropriate behaviors and interactions can be detected and stopped. Some behavior may be inherently harmful to children or youth or are the types used by child molesters

to groom children, youth and their parents, or may create the conditions where abuse can occur more easily. Furthermore, some behaviors and interactions are potentially harmful to children or youth in and of themselves.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Using, possessing, distributing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while serving as sponsors, participating or assisting with programs or activities specifically for children or youth.
2. Dating or becoming romantically involved with a child or youth.
3. Having sexual contact with a child or youth.
4. Leaving youth or children unsupervised or giving them an inappropriate amount of responsibility.
5. Adults sharing inappropriate jokes, stories or personal confessions with children or youth. This includes conversations about their own sexual activities, dreams and fantasies, or discussing their use of sexually oriented or explicit materials such as pornography, videos or materials on or from the internet with children or youth.
6. Dancing, games, skits, or jokes that make fun of a person's gender, ethnicity, socio-economic reality or sexual orientation.
7. Possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc.) on church property or in the presence of children or youth except as expressly permitted as part of a pre-authorized educational program.
8. Using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.
9. Giving gifts or sending special or private emails or other communications to only certain children/youth outside of an appropriate mentoring relationship.
10. Private scheduled meals, outings or events just with one child or youth.

### **Action Plans**

### **Confidentiality**

When a youth asks if you can keep a secret, you should tell them that you are not able to make that commitment. Assure them that you care about them and that you want to hear what they have to say. This includes abuse, suicide threats or information regarding crimes.

**Action plan when you suspect abuse:**

1. Continue to love and support the child or youth. Do not try to defend or support a position, just listen to the child.
2. Document your concerns.
3. Share concerns with your immediate supervisor or pastor.
4. Follow mandated reporting procedures.
5. Seek to have appropriate follow- up care by you or others in church.

**Reporting Inappropriate Behavior, Policy Violations or Abuse**

1. When Church Personnel observe any inappropriate behaviors, behaviors that are inconsistent with the policy, they should promptly report their observations.
2. Such inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations that relate to interactions with children or youth should be reported:
  - A telephone call, email, or meeting with the immediate supervisor of that person
3. All reports of inappropriate behavior or policy violations with children or youth need to be taken seriously.
4. Church Personnel may be legally required to report known or suspected abuse of children or youth to the appropriate state authorities.
5. Failure to report suspected abuse of children or youth may be a crime. Reports may be made confidentially or anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. Simply stated, “in good faith” means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.
6. Reports of suspected or known abuse that involve ordained ministers of word and sacrament reported to the Bishop or Assistants to the Bishop through a telephone call, or meeting.

**Guidelines for Counseling and Advising Children and Youth**

Unless you are a trained, certified, professional counselor, you are not qualified to handle every situation that may arise as you serve children and youth in ministry.

**Issues that should be referred to your Pastor and/or to a trained professional after responsible reporting include:**

1. Emotional or mental health concerns  
Example: expressing desire to end one's life.
2. Drug & Alcohol Abuse

### **Social Media**

"Social media are a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people." -Doreen Moran, Digital and Social Marketing

#### **“Friending”**

Friending high school youth is a powerful ministry tool when used appropriately. When adults “friend” people under age 18 they should also request to “friend” their parents. Involving parents in this decision is important. An example of this request:

I would like to request to be your child's friend on Facebook and/or Twitter. I prefer “friending” both youth and their parents as part of my practice to promote transparency and appropriate adult – youth relationships. I encourage you to monitor all of your child's social media practice. I am happy to support you in navigating social media with your youth.

This practice promotes the safety of high school youth while providing good accountability with the adults who work with youth.

#### **Posts**

Social media, by its very definition, is a public forum. There is no privacy in social media, even with the use of security settings. Think before you post. Would you say this in a room filled with congregation members? With youth? Be aware of unintended consequences or interpretation of posts.

### **Groups or Pages**

Consider communities that gather on Facebook in the same way you would in a community gathered in a room or a home. Youth Pages or Groups should be monitored by members of the Youth Ministry Team.

### **Enforcement and Dissemination of this Policy**

It is the responsibility of the Safe Practices Committee to both enforce and disseminate the above policy to all parties for which it applies. The Director of Administration and Finance is responsible for the initiation of background checks and the collection of documents related to this policy.