

Grace Baptist Church
Child Abuse Prevention & Ministry Care Provider Policy

1. Purpose

In following the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ to “let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14) and of God’s word to defend the defenseless (Proverbs 31:8,9; others), it is the purpose of the members and staff of Grace Baptist Church of Santa Maria to provide a safe and secure environment for preschoolers, children, youth and mentally handicapped persons entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage those preschoolers, children, youth, and their families to come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, and to grow in their relationship with Him.

A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our preschoolers, children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Grace Baptist Church of Santa Maria.

Our objective with this Policy is to focus on those who have regular, ongoing contact with minors as part of the ministries of Grace Baptist Church, under the name of Grace Baptist Church, or who use the facilities of Grace Baptist Church.

2. Scope

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of preschoolers, children, youth, and mentally handicapped persons. We also require adherence to these policies by all persons or groups who use our facilities on a regular basis or who are attached to our church as one of its ministries whether on site or off site. There are no exceptions to this.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

“Minor” shall be defined as any individual under the age of 18, or whose mental capacity is that of a minor – this may also be specified as a particular sub-group of minors such as “preschooler,” “child,” “children,” or “youth.”

“Adult” shall be defined as any individual at least 18 years of age unless still attending high school at age 18.

“Worker” shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid position given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors.

“Teenage Worker” shall be defined as any worker at least 12 years old, but under the age of 18, enlisted to assist with the care of minors.

“Emergency Worker” shall be defined as any person asked on a last minute basis to work with minors who has not been able to complete the application process.

“Child Abuse” shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (see below for some specifics concerning sexual abuse) of a minor.

4. What is Child Sexual Abuse?

The precise legal definition of child sexual abuse or molestation varies from state to state, but in general includes any form of sexual contact or exploitation in which a minor is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator. In more common sense, child sexual abuse is:

“Any sexual activity with a child-whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.” (National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, 1992)

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the actions. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

5. Understanding Symptoms of Molestation:

Physical signs may include lacerations and bruises, nightmares, irritation, pain, or injury to the genital area, difficulty with urination, discomfort when sitting, torn or bloody underclothing, sexually transmitted disease.

Behavioral signs may include anxiety when approaching church or nursery area, nervous or hostile behavior toward adults, sexual self-consciousness, “acting out” of sexual behavior, withdrawal from church activities and friends.

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- ◆ “ I don’t like { a particular church worker }”
- ◆ “ {A church worker } does things to me when we are alone”
- ◆ “ I don’t like to be alone with {a church worker}”
- ◆ “ {A church worker} fooled around with me”

6. Recruiting and Selecting Workers:

1. Workers must be sure of their salvation, consistent in their walk with the Lord, and sincerely interested in reaching others for Christ.
2. All employees of Grace Baptist Church of Santa Maria will be required to complete an Employment Application.
3. Grace Baptist Church generally observes a six-month waiting period before new volunteers are allowed to work with minors. Exceptions to this include volunteers from other churches, observation by those interested in serving or by parents/family, employees/interns/people brought in from outside the church, and some cases when attendees come with high recommendations and have been screened to the best of our abilities. Due to the nature of the length of stay of our military, volunteers who are currently in the military are only required a 2-month waiting period
4. All employees and volunteers who desire to work with minors shall complete the Worker Application Process. This form includes a Criminal Records Check Authorization. This form also includes an agreement to follow our Child Abuse Prevention Policy. While this process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background and reference checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.
5. All employees and volunteers who work with youth and children shall undergo fingerprint verification.
6. A responsible staff member or ministry director shall interview all prospective workers. Our standard interview form is to be used, filled out, and kept in the employee or volunteer file (see process prescribed below).
7. Prior employment and volunteer service and personal references will be checked with a record made of contacts with references and prior churches. References must not be relatives. The person serving as a reference also should have known the individual for some length of time. Records of reference checks are to be kept in the employee or volunteer file.
8. A separate file will be maintained permanently on each worker, whether paid or a volunteer.
9. The applicant’s name will be checked against Megan’s Law Registered Sex Offender Database.
10. Obtain the appropriate criminal background searches, as follows:

- A. National (FBI) criminal background search on all employees, including clergy.
 - B. Statewide (DOJ) criminal background search on all volunteers involved in working with children or youth. A search must be obtained for each state a volunteer has lived in during the last seven years, at a minimum.
11. Any applicant who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they would have contact with minors.
 12. Grace Baptist Church of Santa Maria must treat as strictly confidential all applications and records of contacts with churches or references. Such information should be marked “confidential,” and access is restricted to those qualified persons with a legitimate interest in the information.
 13. Volunteer youth workers must be at least 2 years older than the minors under their care.
 14. When an employee or volunteer is engaged to work with minors, they will be photographed and the picture will be kept with the person’s application.
 15. At the applicant’s request, Grace Baptist Church of Santa Maria shall allow the applicant to review his/her criminal history record and transcript at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain and/or copy his/her transcript. The church shall immediately notify the Volunteer Center or other qualified agency if an internal grievance (applicant disputes) is filed by an applicant because of incorrect information or other reasons related to criminal histories provided by the agency. The church shall submit, in a reasonable time period, the Criminal History Record Resolution Request or a similar document to the agency.
 16. Teenagers under the age of 18 wanting to serve as teen workers in any capacity with activities, studies, or programs for preschoolers or children must complete the same process as our adult workers.
 17. Exceptions
 - A. Parents & family (unless regular workers or known problems) are always welcome to observe the ministry to their families. If parents or family members wish to participate/observe on a regular basis, however, they need to undergo the worker application process.
 - B. In the rare cases that emergency workers are needed on a short term basis and with last minute notice, we will do our best to complete as much of the application process as possible.

7. Worker Training

Each new worker will be given a copy of this Policy and must attend next available training orientation that will include a segment on the Grace Baptist Church Child Abuse Prevention Policy. This training will include written and video presentations. This will help workers identify child abuse in the future if they see signs of it.

8. Disqualifications

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship, or supervising of any activities or programs with minors:

Any violation or lack of compliance to our church covenant or statement of faith.

Any conviction for:

- ◆ Criminal homicide;
- ◆ Aggravated assault;
- ◆ Crimes related to the possession, use, or sale of drugs or controlled substances;
- ◆ Sexual abuse;
- ◆ Sexual assault (rape);
- ◆ Aggravated sexual assault;
- ◆ Injury to a child;
- ◆ Incest;
- ◆ Indecency with a child;
- ◆ Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child;
- ◆ Possession or promotion of child pornography;
- ◆ The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor;
- ◆ Employment harmful to children;
- ◆ Abandonment or endangerment of a child;
- ◆ Kidnapping or unlawful restraint;
- ◆ Public lewdness or indecent exposure; and
- ◆ Enticing a child.

All charges for these crimes, or charges or convictions for any other crimes not listed above, will be reviewed by those trained for interpretation of the criminal history record transcript and approved by the church for reviewing applicant transcripts. Only qualified persons as stated above may view information obtained on the criminal history record transcript.

9. Violations of the Policy

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any church activity or program, and are to be immediately reported to the designated program staff after the safety of the child, children, youth, or minor involved has been assured:

- ◆ Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
- ◆ Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
- ◆ Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.

- ◆ Infliction or physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor.
- ◆ Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of Grace Baptist Church.
- ◆ Mental or emotional injury to a minor caused or exacerbated by a worker.
- ◆ The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of Grace Baptist Church.
- ◆ The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
- ◆ The consumption of or being under the influence of illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at Grace Baptist Church.

10. Supervisory Policies and Safety Procedures:

1. Two adult workers (an adult supervisor/ worker is anyone over 18 years of age) should be present (in the same proximity and preferably the same room) during all church activities. This rule reduces the risk of sexual molestation and also reduces the risk of false accusations of molestation by individuals seeking a quick legal settlement. **We do not allow a minor to ever be alone with one adult on our premises (the last two individuals on the property) or in any sponsored activity unless it is a counseling situation.**
2. A responsible supervisor will randomly monitor all children's activities. Supervisors should make frequent, unannounced visits.
3. When a classroom is in use the main door shall always remain unlocked. Blinds or curtains shall remain open whenever it is possible. During evening hours a light shall remain on unless some part of the ministry program requires them to be turned off (e. g., media presentations or special games). If there is only one adult in a room with minors, the door is to remain open at all times no matter the inconvenience to privacy or ministry unless there is an unobstructed window (not including exterior windows) that allows observation of the room.
4. Younger children (0-23 months) but not all minors, require child identification. Use the church nursery identification procedure. Children should only be released to a properly identified and preauthorized adult.
5. **Youth and children's activities** should not take place in private rooms, offices, or isolated parts of a building, excluding certain counseling situations.
6. **Counseling guidelines** for ministers, staff members and volunteers include:
 - A. Counseling is any one on one situation and some group situations beyond the scope of normal conversations pertaining to the involved ministry/age group.
 - B. Counseling should take place in as accountable of a setting as possible.
 - C. In private rooms, doors will remain open if at all possible. If not possible, all interior windows will remain unobstructed.
 - D. Volunteers will not counsel members of the opposite gender unless another adult (preferably of the opposite gender) is present.
 - E. Confidentiality will be maintained except in regard to mandatory reporting, some parental involvement/notification situations and ministry notification

situations (notifying ministry leaders). The first is obligatory, the latter two are at the discretion of the counselor and ministry leader.

- F. Our preference for the counseling of minors is parental consent, but this is not a requirement.
- G. While matters of counseling should be kept confidential, accountability is equally important.
- 7. If at all possible, obtain parental permission before going out alone with a minor, or spending time with the minor in an unsupervised situation. Children should always have parental permission for involvement in all church activities held outside of Santa Maria (use appropriate church form).
- 8. No dating is permitted between an adult volunteer worker and a member of the group of minors they are supervising.
- 9. Never use corporal punishment. Physical punishment is inappropriate in any church setting. No matter how slight, physical punishment may appear to others as abuse.
- 10. Be cautious of the appropriate use of physical affection with minors. While harmless, a hug, rub on the back, or other form of physical affection may appear “questionable” to others. More intimate physical contact (kissing, for example) is off limits. Leaders of both sexes should avoid being alone with a minor, especially in a windowless room with the door closed. If for any reason a minor needs to change his or her clothes, more than one leader should be present. Common sense and discretion are the greatest preventative tools.
- 11. Respectful language always is expected before, during, and after activities.
- 12. Alcohol and illegal drugs are strictly prohibited from all church activities. Any illegal actions will be turned over to the local legal authorities.

11. Handling Suspicions Of Abuse

Any person having cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report their belief in accordance with this procedure. Non-accusatory reports (reports that identify the victim of abuse or neglect whether or not the person responsible for the abuse or neglect is known) shall be made to the local or state law enforcement agency by calling 911 and/or contacting Child Protection Services. We require all workers (from paid staff to volunteers) to completely comply with child abuse reporting requirements. Our policy is that we are all mandatory reporters and that no accusation or suspicion is to be treated frivolously or disregarded.

Our basic procedure is to:

- 1) contact the ministry director
- 2) take the appropriate steps in contacting the proper authorities and documenting the accusation appropriately
- 3) minister to all persons involved in an appropriate fashion, particularly the abused.

Some specific situations and scenarios are addressed below.

REPORTING FOR VOLUNTEER WORKERS AND HELPERS

1. All volunteer workers and helpers shall immediately document and report the following, as well as any other indications which may suggest the occurrence of child abuse or neglect.
 - Observed incidents of inappropriate touching, inappropriate hugging or kissing, sexual conduct or fondling; exposure of sexual organs; loud or prolonged reprimanding; grabbing, hitting or kicking with the intent of injury.
 - Injuries to children which seem to be beyond the range of normal childhood activity: excessive bruises, missing hair, burn marks, limps.
 - Allegations by children of being beaten, sexually or verbally abused.
 - Children being inadequately dressed for inclement weather.
2. A written report shall be made to the ministry director (Director of Children's Ministry, Awana Commander, Youth Pastor, etc.) or Senior Pastor. **Workers and helpers shall not talk about this information with anyone else.**
3. If the person receiving the report is a volunteer at the church, they should confer with the pastoral staff member overseeing their area of ministry and/or with the Senior Pastor who will assist them in contacting the appropriate authorities.

REPORTING FOR PAID WORKERS

1. If a person is employed as a church pastor, or as a child-care worker, they are a "mandated reporter", and required by law to report any suspicion of child abuse to Child Protective Services.
2. After reporting suspected abuse to Child Protective Services, the mandated reporter is required to complete and submit the "Suspected Child Abuse Form" created by the State of California. This must be filed in a timely fashion in accordance with current laws.
3. If the suspected abuse is within the home of the child, the employee is strongly urged to report the incident to the senior pastor after calling Child Protective Services. This enables pastoral care to be offered to the family.
4. If the suspected abuse involves a paid or volunteer church worker or helper, a report must be made to the senior pastor and to law enforcement authorities (see below).

REPORTS AGAINST CHURCH WORKERS

1. If a paid or volunteer worker or helper is suspected of abuse against a minor at Grace Baptist Church, the Pastor, Director of Children's Ministry or another person in a leadership position in the children's or youth ministries must be contacted immediately. **This matter must not be discussed with any other person.**

2. The person contacted shall document the suspicion by filing a written report.
3. The person contacted shall then contact the Senior Pastor. If the suspected abuser is the Senior Pastor, contact one of the Elders or another Church Staff Member (Youth Pastor, Director of Children's Ministry, etc.)
4. The Insurance company and the police will both be notified and cooperated with immediately.
5. The worker shall be informed of the investigation and immediately placed on a leave of absence (with pay if a paid staff member).
6. An internal investigation shall be conducted to determine two things: if the accusation is true; and whether the matter is an isolated incident.
7. If the suspicion is valid, the church will provide pastoral care and intervention care for the victim and their family (psychological care, medical care).
8. If the worker or helper is exonerated in the matter, he/she will be reinstated into his/her position.

INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA

The Elder Board will designate one media representative to correspond with all media sources. No other persons including pastoral staff and volunteers should have any interaction with the media at all except to direct them to the church media representatives.

This standard is true not only for abuse but also for all incidents involving the ministries, name or facilities of Grace Baptist Church.

12. Convicted Abusers and the Church Body

The church is a place not just for the righteous but also for sinners in need of righteousness, healing and forgiveness. As such we will welcome even convicted abusers into the church body. This does not, however, mean that we will allow them to have access to our children. Yes, Christ heals and restores and grace abounds. Nevertheless we must preserve the above standards or we cannot protect the children God brings to our church nor can we then teach of the God who loves them so dearly.

1. All persons regardless of their background will be welcome at our worship services.
2. All persons will be welcome to minister and serve in appropriate ways (these do not include any ministry that incorporates any kind of contact with minors as an inherent part of the ministry even though some of these ministries may not be considered "children's" or "youth" ministry).

3. All ministry directors (Director of Children's Ministry, AWANA Commander, Youth Pastor, Senior Pastor, etc.) will be informed under strict confidentiality of the presence of convicted abusers within the congregation.

13. Insurance

The church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that covers child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the church should have the levels of coverage, which are required for limited immunity.

4. Conclusion

Churches need to be prepared. This is the legal reason for creating safety policies, but there is a deeper, more significant reason – to protect children. Policies are only printed expressions of the value placed on children. If the only reason for safety policies is to protect the organization, the church has missed Jesus' passion for children.

Some people may think that our church does not need to worry about these safety problems or that our church "knows" everyone. Remember that it is much easier to make plans and develop safety policies as a means of prevention, rather than wait until they are needed as a reaction to an abuse case.

Some churches tend to believe that trusting God means nothing bad can happen to Christians. Although Jesus does promise many things about His care and provision for us, we must not be unwise regarding children's safety. When Jesus sent His disciples out on their first missionary venture, He sent them out in pairs and told them they were like sheep among wolves. He also told them that bad things would happen to them, but that He would be with them (Matthew 10:16-19).

There is no automatic protection from evil for Christians. We are to watch and be ready. There will always be unforeseen circumstances that we must handle. Therefore, churches should build sturdy safety-policy fire blocks into the walls of its ministry to protect children.