



Child Protection Plan (CPP)

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**Child Protection Policy
and
Supplemental Documents**

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Child Protection Policy

Purpose

This plan aims to promote a safe environment for our children, youth, staff, and volunteers at Grace Presbyterian Church ("GPC") in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ, who said, "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)

Definitions

Child – Any person from birth through 6th grade.

Youth – Any person age 12 -17.

Minor - Any person who is under 18 years of age..

Adult - Any person who is 18 years or older.

Physical Abuse – Deliberate infliction of bodily harm, including any violence with or without the use of an implement.

Sexual Abuse – Deliberate use of a child/youth for sexual stimulation, acts, or exploitation.

Emotional Abuse – Consistent and/or extreme crushing of the spirit with verbal attacks, threats, or humiliation.

Neglect - With respect to a minor, neglect means neglect within the meaning of Section 63.2-100 of the *Code of Virginia*. This could include the failure to provide for the physical, mental or emotional needs of the minor, or to provide appropriate care and supervision of the minor, in relation to a minor's age and level of development.

Implementation

The Ministry Coordinator shall carry out the provisions of this document under the session's oversight. Duties shall include the following.

1. Ensure that all provisions of the CPP are followed.
2. Ensure that all who come in regular contact with children or youth are familiar with the CPP, including nursery volunteers, Sunday School teachers and assistants, Youth Group volunteers, usher/greeter team leaders, pastors, elders, deacons, and paid staff.
3. Recommend refinements, to the Session, to the CPP as needed.

Reducing the Risk of Abuse

GPC requires the following safety measures (1) to guard against child abuse in the ministry settings of GPC, whether physical or virtual, (2) to avoid situations that could lead to allegations of abuse, and (3) to assist the church in responding to any such allegations.

1. **Screening.**

A. Before commencing any service to children, each adult child/youth work volunteer, usher/greeter team leader, employee, and officer of GPC must:

- Complete the MinistrySafe Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (which includes a series of online videos) and pass an online test.
- Complete and sign an online application to work with children/youth. The application asks for general information, prior church membership, prior church volunteer work, references, and other questions pertaining to child safety. It shall be retained on file for the duration of the applicant's service at GPC, and for one year following his/her departure. (Young people ages 12-17 who wish to volunteer for ministries involving the care of children are required to fill out a different application ([Form A PDF](#), [Form A Fillable PDF](#)).
- Read and sign to agree to abide by the CPP
- Undergo a criminal background check which shall be re-run at three-year intervals. (Applicants must submit: "Grace Church Background Check Disclosure Form" or complete an online form sent from our child protection provider to facilitate this check.)
- Take part in an in-person Interview which shall include identity verification with a valid driver's license or state-issued identification card to serve as photo identification. ([Form B](#)).

B. Approved volunteers who do not work with children/youth at GPC for five years from the date of their background check expiration shall be deemed no longer to have approval and must be rescreened to resume working with children/youth.

2. **Training.** Church officers and employees, as well as adult volunteers for child/youth work, shall be required to undergo training in child safety, which shall include instruction on identifying, recording, and reporting reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect. This training shall be part of the initial screening process outlined in "Screening" above. Volunteers shall undergo refresher training in child safety periodically.
3. **Interview.** A private, in-person meeting (approx. 30 min.) shall be held to assess the applicant's suitability for working with children/youth at GPC. In the event that an in-person meeting is not possible, a video conference meeting will be acceptable. An Elder (or Pastor) shall conduct the interview for male applicants. The Ministry Coordinator (or another Session approved female member) shall conduct the interview for female applicants. (see [Form B](#))

4. **Six-month rule.** Each volunteer working with children/youth must have been a member of GPC for at least six (6) months prior to serving.
5. **Session approval of volunteers.** Each volunteer working with Sunday School or Youth Group must be specifically approved by the session. Potential nursery volunteers will be vetted by the elder overseeing the nursery ministry.
6. **Two-adult rule.** Church-sponsored programs that involve children/youth on and off-site must have at least two approved, unrelated adults in each room, including virtual meetings or rooms, where children/youth are present unless otherwise noted.

A. Children's Sunday School:

Doors should be propped open until both approved volunteers arrive to start the class. If a child needs to be escorted by an adult volunteer as outlined in Restroom Procedures below, the remaining adult will open the door to the classroom until they return. Classes for children up through kindergarten-age should have at least one female teacher or teacher assistant.

B. Nursery, VBS, fellowship groups, Bible studies and other church sponsored events:

This policy shall be deemed to be satisfied by an approved adult female who is paired with a youth 12-17 years old. Such youth helpers shall fill out the Youth Application for Care of Children ([Form A PDF](#), [Form A Fillable PDF](#)) and shall agree to a Youth Childcare Volunteer Code of Conduct which summarizes the relevant aspects of the CPP. Those serving in the nursery shall receive additional training in nursery policies and procedures. All volunteers providing care to minors must follow the Restroom Procedures below.

C. Youth Group:

For off-site Youth Group events and local small groups, it is understood that some youth events and small groups would be held in private homes. Hosts shall be either approved adult volunteers or background-checked members who are parents of youth. All of these off-site events must follow all related policies, including the two-adult rule.

For Youth Group events, it is understood that groups may split up into smaller groups at times for the purpose of discussion, prayer, and sharing. Each smaller group must be led by at least one screened youth group volunteer, either in an open area, or in adjacent rooms with doors open. The overall large event or meeting must follow all related policies, including the two-adult rule.

Any event where the Youth Group is providing childcare as a service to church families, must follow the Child Protection Plan. All youth present must be screened in accordance with this policy, and under the overall supervision for the event of at least two screened adults approved to work with the Youth Group. If children are cared for in a large room, the supervising adults should have a line of sight to the approved Youth Group volunteers and children at all times. If the children are cared for in separate rooms, this policy shall be deemed satisfied by an approved

adult female who is paired with an approved youth volunteer who is 12-17 years old.

D. Communication:

All private chats shall be disabled for video conference events. No private texting or emailing is permitted between minors and volunteers. A parent or unrelated, approved adult shall be included as a recipient in all digital (texts, emails, message applications, etc.) communication.

7. **Nursery Staffing.** The nursery shall be staffed by adults who have been screened and trained, with the staff supplemented by trained youth as outlined in the previous point. At least one nursery worker in each shift shall be an adult female.
8. **Check-in.** All activities for children through the 5th grade shall use a system for checking in children. This applies to all events where childcare is provided.
 - A. Nursery workers shall check-in and release children only to a parent upon return of a numbered token (pager) or by providing a nursery staff issued label that matches the child.
 - B. Children in classes up through kindergarten age shall be checked-in and out by a parent and released only to a parent or a sibling designated in advance.
 - C. Children in first grade through 5th grade may be checked in via an attendance form filled out by Sunday School Staff.
9. **Activity arrival and departure.** Youth who participate in a church activity shall remain on the premises of the designated location for the duration of that activity and may leave only with parental permission or by direction of adult workers in charge of the event. This policy shall apply also to continuous events in which one activity follows another.
10. **Transportation guidelines.** Transportation that is arranged or provided by the church for child/youth events shall include at least two unrelated, approved adults in each vehicle. Drivers must be cleared for driving by the Ministry Coordinator based on a Motor Vehicle Records Check current within three years. Drivers must have a valid driver's license and the required insurance and shall refrain from hand-held cell phone use while driving.
11. **Overnight and off-premises activities.** Children/youth must have a signed parental permission form (see [Form C](#)) to participate in church-sponsored programs or activities in which they are taken off the church premises and/or stay overnight. All such activities must be approved by either the Youth Leader or Sunday School Director and the respective elder of oversight. At least two approved, unrelated staff or volunteers must accompany an overnight event. If both boys and girls attend the overnight activity, there must be at least two male and two female approved adults present. Separate-sex sleeping quarters must be provided for male and female participants. At least two unrelated, approved adults of the same sex as those being overseen shall be assigned to each sleeping area.

12. **Monitoring of activities.** Church staff or other church workers screened in accordance with this Child Protection Policy may visit classrooms or child care rooms at any time without prior notice. Nothing should obstruct the window that makes the interior of the room easily visible from the outside public area.
13. **Standards for relationships.** Teachers and leaders normally seek to establish personal relationships with those whom they teach, and with their parents. Physical contact is one part of normal communication in such relationships. An occasional hug or hand on the shoulder is normally acceptable. Any touching of intimate areas, or any touching that makes a person uncomfortable is unacceptable. We recognize that small children at times need to be held or carried and must sometimes be physically restrained from hurting themselves or others. When more than a brief restraint is needed, however, a parent or guardian should be brought into the situation. We also recognize that the care of infants requires diapering, which means touching in private areas. This is acceptable so long as it is done with the intention to clean and not to abuse. Diapering should be done by female volunteers in an area where it can be observed by the Nursery Coordinator and/or other approved adult workers. Nursery workers may also need to hold nursery age children to provide comfort or to read to them, and would be considered appropriate care in relation to their age and development.
14. **One-to-one meetings.** One-to-one contacts away from church property shall be conducted in public places and always with the consent of the parent or legal guardian of the child/youth. Staff members making such visits shall report them to a supervisor or pastoral colleague, and shall enter the time, location, and purpose of the visit in a visit log. If a meeting with a child/youth of the opposite sex is necessary, an adult of the same sex as the child/youth and unrelated to the staff member shall be present. No staff member shall make one-on-one visits with a child or youth of the opposite sex.
15. **Classroom Discipline.** Students engaging in disruptive behavior should be corrected verbally, moved to a different area of the classroom, or taken to their parents or guardians. In no circumstances shall teachers use corporal punishment. If a student needs to be given one-on-one feedback for the purpose of improving classroom behavior, this shall be done in a public setting in sight of others.
16. **Restroom Procedures.** These procedures should be followed in Children's Sunday School and for all church-sponsored ministries where childcare is provided including events such as VBS, Date Night, fellowship groups, and Bible studies.
- A. **Up through 5th Grade:**
- In the event that a child in 1st through the 5th grade needs to use the restroom, a worker shall escort the child to the restroom. Adult male workers shall first check to make sure the facility is safe and then wait outside until the child has finished. Adult female workers shall ordinarily wait outside but may take small children into a female restroom if necessary. For children up through Kindergarten, only adult female workers may escort or assist children.

B. Nursery:

Children using the restroom in the nursery may be assisted only by adult female volunteers, who shall leave the door open while assisting.

C. For Events in Private Homes:

In a home setting, if two screened, unrelated male volunteers are caring for children, they shall not diaper or assist them in the restroom. A parent or guardian would need to be contacted. Children may use the restroom alone if they are able to do so independently. All other policies for restroom procedures shall apply as outlined above.

17. **Injury.** Those working with children/youth shall facilitate prompt treatment of injuries that occur in connection with an activity sponsored by GPC. If the injury requires basic first aid or requires professional medical care, the worker shall fill out a Notice of Injury ([Form D](#)) and give it to the Ministry Coordinator. Parents/guardians shall be contacted immediately for any major or life-threatening injury to the child.
18. **Service of accused persons.** A person accused of abuse shall be suspended immediately from any role serving children/youth pending the outcome of an investigation by the Ministry Coordinator with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel.
19. **Known sexual offenders.** Persons known to be on the sex offender registry for offenses against minors may join or regularly attend only if the elders determine that GPC has the resources to responsibly undertake their supervision, care, and rehabilitation; otherwise they shall be encouraged to affiliate with a congregation having such resources.

Reporting Potential Abuse or Neglect

All allegations of abuse or neglect shall be treated seriously. If there is an allegation of abuse or neglect in connection with an activity sponsored by GPC, the following steps should be taken.

1. **Reporting to the church.** Staff or volunteers at GPC shall immediately, verbally report to a church officer, the Youth Leader, Nursery Coordinator, the Children's and Youth Sunday School Director or the Ministry Coordinator if:
 - They have reason to suspect child abuse or neglect;
 - They hear reports from others, including children or youth, that a child may have been abused or neglected; or
 - They become aware of any incident involving children under their care in which a child or youth might reasonably believe they experienced abuse or neglect from a staff person or volunteer, for whatever reason (e.g. accidental improper touching, injuries received in the course of games that might be construed as poorly supervised).

After the initial, verbal report is given, a written report ([Form E](#)) shall be completed within 24 hours, stating the time, place, and circumstances of the incident, together with the names of those involved and any witnesses and given to the Ministry Coordinator who shall (1) determine whether to make the mandatory report to the government, if the appropriate staff, volunteer, church officer or ministry leader has not done so already; (2) assist as necessary the person making the report to determine whether he/she should also make the mandatory report to the government, and (3) apprise the Senior Pastor of the situation, or if he is not available, the Associate Pastor. In the event that there is no pastor available or on staff, the Ministry Coordinator shall apprise the Clerk of Session.

2. **Mandatory reporting to the government.** As required by Virginia Law (Section 63.2-1509), whenever any GPC staff member or volunteer has "reason to suspect" that a child has been abused or neglected, he or she shall immediately report such abuse or neglect to the Child Protective Services Department of the county or city where the child's family resides, or to the Virginia Child Protective Services hotline at 800-552-7096. (The number for Fairfax County is 703-324-7400.)

Responding to Abuse or Neglect

Whenever an officer, Youth Leader, Ministry Coordinator, or Sunday School Director shall receive a report as outlined above, the Ministry Coordinator shall initiate an internal investigation into the situation, with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel, and prepare a written report for the session, which shall decide what action to take. If an allegation is made against the Ministry Coordinator, a member of session shall carry out the investigation, with all discussion and investigation involving legal counsel. Any church member or attender accused of abuse shall be suspended from participating in activities for children/youth while the investigation proceeds. Normally the following steps shall also be taken:

- Notifying the parents or guardians of an alleged victim.
- Notifying the parents or guardians of an alleged perpetrator (if a minor).
- Notifying ministry leaders involved in supervising an alleged perpetrator.
- Instructing trustees to notify GCP's insurer and attorneys.

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