

Child and Youth Safety and Protection Policies and Procedures

Introduction

RCCG Grace Haven Chapel (Grace Haven) is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for children and youth participating in ministry activities. The Bible clearly shows the high value that God places on children.

In Mark 10:14 Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I tell you the truth; anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in His arms, put his hands on them and blessed them."

At Grace Haven, we desire to bring children and youth to Jesus in a safe, nurturing environment where the love of God can be seen and felt.

In order to do all that we can to protect the children and youth in our care, we place a high priority on the careful recruitment, screening, placement, and ongoing supervision/training of all of our staff and child/youth serving volunteers: teachers, caregivers, and leaders who serve in our children's and youth ministries.

Waiting Period

Volunteers in children or youth ministry will attend Grace Haven for a minimum of 6 months prior to volunteering in children or youth ministry. This waiting period allows potential volunteers to become an active part of the church and begin to understand the church's mission, vision and values. It also gives ministry leaders time to get acquainted with a potential volunteer, allowing a better match of ministry opportunity to volunteer interest and ability.

Waiting Period Exemptions (normal screening procedures still apply):

- 1) Volunteers who would like to assist "behind the scenes" with no direct contact with children/youth (i.e. cooking, setup, tear down, administrative work) may begin volunteering in these areas without waiting period – at the discretion of children/youth ministry staff and approved by their supervisor.
- 2) Volunteers who have previous volunteer experience within a church setting with children or youth and have begun attending Grace Haven for various reasons, including: moving to the Brighton area or attending college- may begin volunteering with children/youth without waiting period – at the discretion of children/youth ministry staff and approved by their supervisor. Additional screening will include that at least one additional reference be consulted (3 total), one of which must be from the individual's previous church.

Initial Volunteer Screening Procedures

Safety of children and youth is a priority of Grace Haven. As a result, great care must be given to help ensure that those who are placed in positions of trust, leadership and responsibility with children/youth are prepared and suited for such work. Children and youth volunteers must complete the following screening process prior to working with children/youth. Ministry staff responsible for recruiting and supervising volunteers are responsible for managing the following process:

- 1) Initial Questionnaire/Application: Questionnaire will include opportunity for the potential volunteer to share about themselves, their interest in volunteering and their experience.
- 2) References: Staff will contact and document at least 2 references who are not a part of Grace Haven given by a potential volunteer.
- 3) Personal Meeting/Interview: Potential volunteers meet personally with the staff person responsible for the ministry area in which they desire to serve. Every effort will be made to match an individual's interests and abilities with the ministry's need. In this meeting, the questionnaire will be reviewed, relationship with God discussed, child protection needs reviewed, and ministry expectations and needs will be explained.
- 4) Background Checks: Potential volunteers will undergo a background check by a provider selected by Grace Haven. Volunteers will be screened based on national recommendations for youth serving volunteers:

Convictions for the following crimes will prompt a determination that an applicant 'does not meet' the criteria to serve with children/youth at RCCG Grace Haven Chapel:

R1. Any felony (any crime punishable by confinement greater than one year)

a. Defined on the basis of exposure for the offense for which the defendant was convicted, pled guilty or pled nolo contendere. If pled down, then the crime to which the defendant ultimately pled.

b. Defined as all crimes punishable by greater than one year in jail or prison, regardless of how characterized by jurisdiction. If range, alternate sentencing, or indeterminate sentencing, outer range > one year.

R2. Any lesser crime involving force or threat of force against a person

R3. Any lesser crime in which sexual relations is an element, including "victimless" crimes of a sexual nature (including pornography)

R4. Any lesser crime involving controlled substances (not paraphernalia or alcohol)

R5. Any lesser crime involving cruelty to animals

R6. Any lesser crime involving a minor

Recommended Guidelines established by National Council of Youth Sports

5) Volunteers that do not meet the background check criteria or a volunteer that has an area of concern identified from the rest of the screening process (1-4) will not be approved to serve in children's/youth ministry. This includes a volunteer that may pose a threat to children or youth. Grace Haven maintains the right to decline potential volunteers or terminate an existing volunteer at any time for any reason.

6) Screening exceptions:

Youth Volunteers – Children's ministry may occasionally use youth volunteers. Grace Haven recognizes that youth volunteering with children can be valuable to both the youth and the children being ministered to. Youth volunteers must be screened; however, youth references may be from church members or staff. Whenever possible outside references should still be sought. Youth will also not show up on criminal databases, so background check is not required. Finally, parents of youth will be notified that youth may be used in a capacity with one adult. All other elements of screening should be completed.

Criminal History – Grace Haven believes that redemption is possible and that in some cases an individual that has had a history of criminal activity may be appropriate to work with children. However, no registered sex offenders will be eligible to serve as an employee or volunteer with children or youth at RCCG Grace Haven Chapel due to insurance requirements- no exceptions will be made.

If a volunteer discloses a criminal history in their questionnaire and personal interview and a staff person would still like to use them as a volunteer with children/youth the following steps should be taken: a) disclosed history should be verified with the background check. b) 2 additional references (4 total, one may be from within Grace Haven) should be collected with favorable recommendations c) a specific supervision plan should be developed and documented for the individual d) exception should be reviewed and approved by the children's/youth ministry staff and approved by their supervisor. e) Ministers will be notified of any instances of utilizing a volunteer under this exception.

Employee, Elder and Emergency Response Team Screening Procedures

All employees, Ministers, and Emergency Response Team Members of RCCG Grace Haven Chapel must complete the background check.

Initial Child Abuse Prevention and Recognition Training

In order to raise awareness among all individuals working with children and youth on the issues surrounding child abuse and neglect, all Grace Haven background checked individuals are required to participate in a training session focused on recognizing the signs of child abuse and ways to change adult behavior in order to better protect children from abuse. Training may be completed online or face to face. Thorough training must be completed within 6 months of being hired or starting a volunteer ministry position.

Additionally, ministry staff will provide group or individual training specific to ministry needs.

Safety and Supervision of Children and Youth

Once children and youth ministry volunteers have been placed in an area of ministry, the following practices will be used to ensure the safety and security of children and youth under our supervision. The guiding principle for these guidelines is transparency in activities, programs, and individual situations with children/youth:

Children's Ministry (children 6 weeks – 6th grade):

- A minimum of two (2) screened adults will be present at every function or program involving children and sponsored by Grace Haven. This includes each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area. Youth volunteers should be assigned to classrooms where they are the third volunteer whenever possible. If this is not possible, the youth volunteer's parent should be made aware that the youth is serving as the second "adult" in a classroom. The youth volunteer and adult supervisor should adhere to all policies in place to protect youth and children as the youth volunteer is still a minor. For classes, events or activities that include a larger number of children, adult volunteers should be increased according to the needs of the group. Ministry staff will be responsible for monitoring how many volunteers are needed.
- Teachers should arrive at least 15 minutes before scheduled activity. Should children begin to arrive before both teachers, parents should be asked to remain until at least 2 screened adults are present.

- At least 2 screened teachers must remain at their assigned classroom or area until all children in their care have been picked up by a parent or other authorized person. Children should not be released to find their parents or wait unattended for transportation.

- Children will be accompanied to the bathroom by a teacher. Teachers will check the bathroom before children enter to ensure that no adults are in the bathroom. Teachers will remain near the bathroom door. Generally, teachers will not enter a bathroom stall to assist a child. For children over age 5 assistance will not be provided to children. For potty trained children 5 and under, parents should be asked if the child needs assistance and how much. Teachers need to maintain classroom ratios if leaving the room is required for a child to go to the restroom. All children should be taken to the bathroom as an alternative to leaving one adult alone with children.

- Children in diapers will be changed as appropriate with diapers provided by the parent. Volunteers should inquire to determine if a parent wants to change the child themselves.

- Room safety: Inside and outside windows should be clear of obstructions. Doors without windows will remain open unless there is a window next to the door.

- Volunteers and staff should maintain appropriate boundaries with children and refrain from any behavior that could be considered inappropriate contact with children.

- Children will always be accompanied by two or more adult volunteers when being transported by car. Adult volunteers cannot be alone transporting a child.

- Activities and conversations with children should occur in non-private areas. Activities should be observable and able to be easily interrupted.

- Any organization of activities or events should take place through the child's parents. Permission slips and emergency forms must be obtained for a child to participate in any activities off site and emergency contact information must be completed for all children attending any children's ministry programs.

- For ministry programs or events that may include an overnight (i.e. camping trip, missions trip, or conference), adults will not be alone with children in a room or tent. At least 2 adults will be present in a room or tent with children or 1 adult will be present in a room or tent with 3 children. Adults and children should be of the same gender.

- Note: The Whiz Kids program operates at Grace Haven and uses volunteers from Grace Haven, however, it falls under the guidelines of City Gospel Ministry regarding policies and procedures.

Youth Ministry (6th/7th grade – 12th grade):

Grace Haven recognizes that youth ministry is based on building relationships. This may lend itself to mentoring type relationships. Grace Haven encourages these relationships to be built with transparency and openness. The following policies should be maintained to increase this transparency:

- A minimum of two (2) screened adults or one (1) adult with 2 or more youth will be present at every function or program involving youth and sponsored by Grace Haven. This includes each classroom or other venues. For classes, events or activities that include a larger number of youth, adult volunteers should be increased according to the needs of the group. Ministry staff will be responsible for monitoring how many volunteers are needed.
- Adult leaders (screened) should arrive at least 15 minutes before scheduled activity. Should one youth to arrive while only one volunteer is present, parent(s) should be asked to remain until at least 2 screened adults or a minimum of 2 youth are present. If youth arrive on their own, youth and the screened adult should wait in the most visible and public area until another volunteer or youth arrives.
- At least two (2) screened adults or one (1) adult with 2 or more youth must remain with youth until all youth in their care have been picked up by an approved parent or obtain other parent approved transportation. In the case that only one screened adult is present during pick up both adult and youth will move to most visible and public place and will call the youth's parents to notify them that adult is alone with youth.
- Room safety: Inside and outside windows should be clear of obstructions. Doors without windows will remain open unless there is a window next to the door.
- Adults should maintain appropriate boundaries with youth and refrain from any behaviour that could be considered inappropriate contact with youth. (i.e. youth should not sit on adults laps, if hugs are given, they should be side hugs, etc).
- Activities and conversations with youth should occur in non-private areas. Activities and conversations should be observable and able to be easily interrupted.
- Phone conversations and electronic communications should take place with as much transparency and openness as possible. Youth often choose to communicate with leaders via phone, e-mail, and texting. Whenever possible the youth's parent should be informed and give consent for this communication to take place. Youth leaders should notify the designated ministry supervisor so that the communication remains transparent.
- Adult leaders will generally not be alone with youth in a vehicle. Adults transporting youth need to have at least 2 youth per adult or 2 adults per youth. Exception: In last minute situations a parent may give an adult leader verbal permission to transport a youth to or from a Grace Haven sponsored activity. This should not become routine transportation for youth.

- Permission slips and emergency forms must be obtained for a youth to participate in any activities off site and emergency contact information must be completed for all youth attending any youth ministry programs.
- For ministry events that may include an overnight (i.e. camping trip, missions trip, or conference), adults will not be alone with youth in a room or tent. Two adults or 1 adult and 2 youth and will be present in a room or tent with youth. Adults and children should be of the same gender.

Informal contact with children/youth

Informal contact refers to phone calls, electronic communication, transportation or one on one face-to-face contact between an adult staff or volunteer and a youth or child outside of Grace Haven children or youth ministry sponsored activities.

Generally, Grace Haven requests that all employees and volunteers would adhere to the “Safety and Supervision Policies” for youth and children even during informal contact, however Grace Haven recognizes that informal contact between adult staff or volunteer and youth/children may occur. For example, staff or volunteers may hire youth as baby sitters for their own children, or may see children during social events with the child’s family in the community. This interaction is usually legitimate and beneficial. However, workers should seek permission of parents before having informal contact with their youth. The worker should clearly let the parent know the nature of the contact and that it is not part of Grace Haven sponsored activities. Parents are responsible for monitoring this informal contact.

Supervision of Volunteers and Employees

All volunteers and staff will be assigned a supervisor who is responsible for monitoring ministry. Volunteers will also be monitored for adherence to safety policies. Volunteers or staff that do not follow established policies will be removed from ministry roles. Volunteers and staff will receive regular feedback about their role serving with children/youth from their supervisor. Volunteers are also asked to hold each other responsible for adherence to policy – if a volunteer is not following an established policy, the supervisor should be immediately notified.

Youth volunteers will be assigned to an adult volunteer as a co-leader for mentoring and supervision. Youth volunteers should be assigned to classrooms where they are the third volunteer whenever possible. If this is not possible, the youth volunteer’s parent will be made aware that the youth is serving as the second “adult” in a classroom. The youth volunteer and adult supervisor should adhere to all policies in place to protect youth and children as the youth volunteer is still a youth.

Related Adults that serve together: Grace Haven recognizes that it can be beneficial for families to serve together. This can be beneficial to children and youth as well as the family serving. When related family members serve together additional supervision may occur to ensure that safety of children/youth remains a priority.

Reporting Injury, Abuse or Neglect and Investigation

Grace Haven will make every effort to provide a safe environment for all children and youth. However, in case of injury or suspected abuse or neglect, the following policies will be followed:

If a child or youth is injured during a Grace Haven activity, volunteer or ministry staff must report the incident to the parent. This report should happen immediately if medical attention is needed or by the end of the activity if no medical attention is needed. Volunteers and staff should document the injury and the report made to the parent.

Ministry staff or volunteers who become aware of possible physical or sexual abuse or neglect of a child or youth participating in ministry, must ensure the child's safety. This could be abuse or neglect which has occurred within ministry or outside of the ministry. Suspected abuse or neglect should be immediately reported to the children's or youth minister and site minister. In most cases, ministry staff and the volunteer will contact authorities (police and/or child protective services). The allegation should be documented and the child's parents should be notified, unless there is a safety risk in doing so. If a report is made, the allegations should also be reported to the Senior Pastor or Family Pastor and Chairman of Trustees.

Note: If the volunteer or staff person is a mandated reporter/ key safeguarding officer, by law the above procedure should be followed, however this person is expected to report suspected abuse or neglect as determined by their mandated reporter status and applicable laws.

Additionally, If the subject of an allegation of abuse and/or neglect is a ministry volunteer or staff, the individual will be immediately removed from their position while an investigation is completed. The Chairman of the Grace Haven Ministers should be immediately notified and Grace Haven's insurance carrier should be notified.

Grace Haven staff and volunteers will cooperate fully with external investigations by police and/or child protective services. Ministry leaders will internally investigate, under the direction of the Ministers, all allegations and may make determinations as a result of the internal investigation regarding individuals continued employment or volunteer roles, up to and including removal for the role or termination of employment.

Confidentiality – the identity of the reporter and the alleged victim should be confidential as much as possible for the protection of those involved.

Communication with media – the Senior Pastor or Family Pastor or other Elder designee will be the spokesperson with the media if contacted regarding allegations. All other ministry staff and volunteers should refer all media to the Senior Pastor or Family Pastor or Elder designee.

Ongoing Screening and Training of volunteers

Periodically, Grace Haven will re-screen volunteers for criminal history. Generally this will occur at two years after the initial screening was completed. Volunteers will be asked to complete a new background screen every 3 years (or use the DBS online yearly renewal service) and to self-report any changes in their status that could affect their ability to volunteer prior to their volunteer responsibility.

Grace Haven will provide ongoing communication and training to volunteers regarding child/youth safety and protection policies. Ongoing training will take place at least once a year and will include review of child/youth safety and protection policies and ways to keep children/youth safe. This will be accomplished through regular ministry meetings/trainings and supervision as well as electronic communication.

Other Considerations for the Protection of Children **Registered Sex Offenders**

If Grace Haven is aware of a registered sex offender that attends or would like to attend Grace Haven, precautions will be taken to protect children and youth. A written agreement will be developed which will at minimum include: activities that the individual may and may not participate in; agreement regarding what access the individual will have to the building; designation of one or more background checked sponsors who will accompany the individual when on Grace Haven property or at Grace Haven sponsored events.

Confidentiality

Youth and children volunteers work to build relationships with participants as a result, volunteers maintain confidence of children or youth. Confidentiality will not be maintained in situations of the child being a danger to themselves or others or in cases of abuse.

Communication with Grace Haven Membership

When Child/Youth Safety and Protection policies are revised and approved by Grace Haven Ministers, policies should be sent to all Grace Haven Members.

Child/Youth Safety and Protection policies should be provided to parents when children/youth arrive for the first time to classrooms or activities or provide to parents via electronic communication or mail.

Once a year Child/Youth Safety and Protection policies or a summary of the policies should be mentioned in the Connection regarding where to find policies. Ideas about how Grace Haven keeps youth safe and tips parents can use to keep their kids safe in the community may also be included.

Child/Youth Safety and Protection policies will be posted on the Grace Haven website and easy to locate.

Policy Review and Updates:

Admin Team, 2021