

Grace Bible Fellowship Church

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

~ Approved by the Elders of Grace BFC Wallingford February 21, 2023 ~

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ADDITIONAL CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

Child Abuse Reporting Procedure
Discipline Involving Children and Youth
Volunteer Code of Ethics and Rules

CHILD PROTECTION FORMS

GBFC Application to Work with Minors
GBFC Child Protection Signature Page
GBFC Volunteers Staff Mandated Background Clearances
PA Consent / Release of Information – Authorization for PA Child Abuse History Certification
Reducing the Risk Application Checklist
GBFC Child Abuse Incident Report Form
GBFC Illness and Injury Report Form

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy, adopted by the Board of Elders of Grace Bible Fellowship Church, Wallingford, PA, is to provide a safe and secure environment for all children and youth entrusted to our care and to comply with Pennsylvania State Law.

We want to encourage our children, youth and their families to grow in their relationship with God and one another. 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 children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family.

SCOPE

This policy will apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who have responsibility for the welfare of children and youth when they are under our supervision.

DEFINITIONS

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

Child, Youth, and Minor - will be defined as any individual under the age of eighteen or comparable mental capacity.

Adult - will be defined as any individual at least eighteen years of age.

Worker - will be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors.

Junior Worker - will be defined as any worker under the age of eighteen enlisted to assist with the care of minors.

Volunteer With Significant Likelihood of Contact with Children – will be defined, as per BFC legislation and Elders definition, to be any person serving in a volunteer role in the church, whether a child / youth worker or not, who by the nature of their volunteer position comes in contact with minors in a context where a parent would have reasonable expectation of the child being under the volunteer's care or supervision.

Child Abuse - will be defined as sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. Abuse includes any recent act or failure to act which causes non-accidental serious physical or mental injury to a child. (see "Child Abuse Reporting Procedure" for extended definition)

Child Sexual Abuse - will be defined as any sexual activity with a child regardless of the location. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. 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. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent.

Child Protection Designated Representatives (Designated Reps) – will be defined as the persons appointed by the Elders to oversee and administer all Child Protection policies and procedures for the church. There must be at least two appointed representatives at all times, one of which must be a paid employee of the church.

Child Clearance Administrator – will be defined as the person responsible for running background checks and other administrative work related to child protection. The Child Clearance Administrator can be one of the Designated Representatives or can be a separate person appointed by the Elders and reporting directly to one of the Designated Representatives.

Clearances – will be defined as all clearances required by the state of Pennsylvania for any adult with responsibility over minors. These may include, but are not limited to, PA child abuse clearances, PA State Police criminal background checks, and fingerprint based federal criminal history checks.

Church Event – will be defined as any event that is sponsored and managed by Grace Bible Fellowship Church.

Guest Speaker – will be defined as any person who is not a worker but intends on administering a presentation to a group of children or youth for a special event or class.

Under Care – A person is considered to be “Under the Care of Grace BFC” when they have been assigned either an Elder, Host Team Member, or other Elder approved member of Grace that they are connected with for the purposes of personal and spiritual care, including walking with them as they connect to Grace. When a person is initially connected with someone to care for them, the office shall record the date and the person assigned to them. That “coming under care” date will be used for any waiting periods required for service in children's ministry.

ADULT CLEARANCES

All employees of Grace Bible Fellowship Church-must have the following clearances: State Criminal Background Check, Child Abuse Clearance, FBI Criminal History and any other clearances legally required.

All Workers, all Volunteers with a Significant Likelihood of Contact with Children, all Elders and all Deacons must have all legally required clearances on file with Grace Bible Fellowship Church; These currently include: State Criminal Background Check and Child Abuse Clearance. In addition, they must also get an FBI Criminal History completed if they have lived outside Pennsylvania within the last 10 years or they cannot swear in writing that they are not disqualified from serving pursuant to the conditions listed in the WHO SHOULD BE DENIED section of the law and has not been convicted of any of the enumerated offenses, or equivalents from another jurisdiction.

All clearance checks must be conducted by an appropriate agency recognized by the State of PA and verifiable copies must be provided to the church to keep on file. We require that initial clearance checks must have been run within the past 2 years to be accepted. Both employees and workers are required to renew their clearance checks in accordance with Pennsylvania state law. Note that PA State Law allows us to accept clearances run for employment elsewhere as part of our volunteer worker clearances but does not allow us to use clearances run for volunteer work elsewhere for any paid employee of the church.

Only the designated representatives and the child clearance administrator will have access to the criminal background check report. Recommendations will be given by these individual(s) to the appropriate ministry leader as to the qualification of the applicant.

To be cleared as a regular worker in children or youth ministries, an applicant must be under the care of Grace Bible Fellowship Church for a period of no less than six months. A written transfer of membership from another church, with references, may be an adequate reason to waive the waiting period. Exceptions to the required waiting time may be granted only by the Board of Elders. To be considered, the worker must have all appropriate background checks completed and references checked prior to being granted an exception.

All applications and clearances must be submitted to the church, all required training must be completed, and all forms must be reviewed by at least one of the Designated Representatives before final approval is given to work with minors. Any Worker, Volunteer with Significant Likelihood of Contact with Children, Elder, Deacon, Pastor or Employee of the church who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to serve in those positions.

JUNIOR WORKER CLEARANCE

All perspective junior workers must have submitted written permission from a legal guardian giving them permission to serve in our Children's Ministry and stating that there is no legal or other known reason that would prevent the junior worker from being allowed to work with minors. Junior workers will be approved by one of the designated representatives and complete training before serving.

APPLICATION TO WORK WITH MINORS

Any Worker, Volunteer with Significant Likelihood of Contact with Children, Elder, Deacon, Pastor or Employee of the church will be required to complete Application to Work with Minors, providing personal and confidential information necessary for us to clear them for ministry. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background and reference checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in these will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Whether disclosed voluntarily, or as a result of the security background check, the following items, although not an exhaustive list, may disqualify a worker from participating in the leadership, sponsorship, or supervision of any activities or programs with minors:

WHO SHOULD BE DENIED

- Anyone who is named in the statewide child abuse database as a perpetrator of a founded report committed within the last five years.
- Anyone whose PA State Police Criminal Background check OR FBI check reveals a conviction for any of the following at any time in the past:
 - Criminal homicide; aggravated assault; stalking; kidnapping; unlawful restraint; rape; statutory sexual assault; involuntary deviate sexual intercourse; sexual assault; aggravated indecent assault; indecent assault; indecent exposure; incest; concealing death of child; endangering welfare of children; dealing in infant children; prostitution and related offenses; obscene and other sexual materials and performances; corruption of minors; sexual abuse of children; OR the attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the above offenses;
- Anyone who's PA State Police Criminal Background check OR FBI check reveals a conviction for a drug or drug-related felony in the past five year.
- Anyone whom the Elders of Grace Church have found/determined to have committed nonconsensual sexual sin, or who the Elders determine is unfit for ministry to minors

All charges for these crimes, as well as any charges or convictions for other crimes not listed above, will be reviewed by the Designated Representative. The Designated Representative may also deem it wise to deny clearance to someone for items not listed above. In all cases of denial of worker status the reasons for denial should be documented in the applicants file, and the applicant informed of the reasons.

If questions arise from, or exceptions are proposed to, the above, they must be brought to the attention of the Board of Elders. All decisions of the Designated Representative can be appealed to the Board of Elders. The Elders shall be sure to consult all current BFC Child Protection legislation and local, state or federal Child Protection legislation. The Board of Elders' decision is final.

WORKER AND JUNIOR WORKER TRAINING

Every Worker, Junior Worker, Volunteer with Significant Likelihood of Contact with Children, Elder, Deacon, Pastor or Employee of the church will be required to read through the child protection policy, child abuse reporting procedure, the Discipline Involving Children and Youth policy, and the Volunteer Code of Ethics and Rules, and certify in writing that he or she has read the documents and is willing to follow the procedures outlined. They must also complete child protection training as prescribed by a designated representative. This training will include a review of the child protection policy and requirements for mandated reporters.

WORKER SUPERVISION

Church staff and volunteer directors will supervise workers on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.

All doors to rooms where children are participating in learning or play activities will remain open, be removed, or have a window large enough to view the activities from outside the room.

A minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs. Some classes or programs may have only one worker in attendance during the class or program session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three children with the worker. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.

All junior workers shall work with and be supervised by an approved adult worker.

INJURY OR ILLNESS

- Persons who are ill will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity. An approved substitute must be used to take the place of workers who are ill.
- Participants should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If this is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that will allow supervision to continue until the person can be returned to their parent or guardian.
- Reasonable steps should be taken to avoid contact by anyone with body fluids.
- Any coordinator/supervisor who becomes aware of an injury to a worker or participant will take steps to ensure proper medical attention is sought for the injured person.

- Persons who have received an injury, which is obviously minor, should be given first aid as needed at the time of injury. If any doubt to the extent of the injury the person's parent or guardian should be notified at the time of the injury and an incident report should be filed with the church.
- Any injury, which may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid, should be given immediate attention: the parent or guardian of the injured person should be immediately notified, and an incident report should be filed with the church. An ambulance should also be called immediately if warranted by the injury.
- If a participant in a ministry activity develops a communicable illness within 24 hours of the activity (i.e. measles) the other participants who attended that activity will be notified by the department head as soon as they are aware of the illness. Also, an incident report should be filed with the church.
- The church may at times put in place additional Health and Safety Policies (ex. Covid Policy). Those policies should be carefully reviewed by all workers and should be considered to be incorporated in and/or to supersede any of the above policies.

DISCIPLINE

The goal of the children and youth programs at Grace Bible Fellowship Church is to provide a safe and beneficial environment for the spiritual growth of children. Our desire is to work alongside the parents in the development of their children and to provide open and honest communication with regard to matters of discipline. Positive behavioral management strategies will be used to direct and redirect children. (See "Discipline Involving Children and Youth" policy)

If any child is misbehaving in a manner that puts other children or themselves in danger, that child will be safely kept away from the other children and the parents will be notified immediately to assist. We reserve the right to temporarily deny childcare services to any child who has and continues to pose a threat to themselves or others while under our supervision.

ADULT GUESTS

Occasionally, guest speakers outside of our normal Worker pool may be used for special events or classes. Guest speakers, whether a regular attendee of Grace or not, must be approved by one of the designated representatives. All special guests must be cleared to work with children either through Grace Church, through whatever agency or organization they represent, through their workplace, or by presenting written proof of proper background checks. The designated

representatives will check for proof of those clearances in advance. Guests who do not have Grace Church's child clearance will not be permitted to be responsible for the well-being of any children. There must be two adult workers, aside from the guest speaker, present at all times.

Legal guardians are permitted to stay in a class with their child. However, they will not be given responsibility for any other child(ren) unless they are cleared to be a worker.

TRANSPORTATION

Certain special events require the transportation of children to offsite locations. All children must obtain permission in writing from a legal guardian to travel in a car, van, or bus driven by any adult as part of a church sponsored event.

All drivers must be an adult and have submitted clearances to Grace Bible Fellowship Church or to their employer who is being used to hire drivers. No driver is permitted to be alone in a car with any minor during a sponsored event. We will aspire to have two adults in each vehicle for the protection of our children and workers.

Legal guardians are responsible for any transportation to or from the church. Legal guardians should use their own discretion when arranging transportation for their child. Workers must receive verbal or written permission from a legal guardian before driving any child before or after any church event or for any other reason.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Churches that screen employees/volunteers will generate a number of highly confidential documents. It is critical that the confidentiality of these documents be maintained. To insure confidentiality of all personnel forms the following will apply:

All confidential documentation pertaining to employee/ worker information will be kept in a locked file drawer in the church office and folders will be marked CONFIDENTIAL.

All documentation pertaining to reports of child abuse or other files directly related to child protection and safety will be kept in a locked file drawer in the church office and folders will be marked CONFIDENTIAL.

Information on former employees will be placed in a secured envelope and retained in a confidential file.

Church staff must be made aware of the location of all confidential files and warned that unauthorized access to any confidential information will be grounds for dismissal and possible

legal action.

The disposal policy for information relating to individuals who apply for but are not hired/permitted to volunteer will comply with EEOC and state laws requiring that they are retained for a period of three years.

All files relating to workers or junior workers that are approved to serve in our ministries shall be kept for as long as they are a part of our church or ministries, and for at least an additional three years.

All files relating to reports of child abuse or other similar claims shall be kept at least as long as all legal statute of limitations or sentencing related to those claims.

All confidential files that are to be disposed of must be shredded by someone with proper authorization to access and administer those files.

INSURANCE

Grace Bible Fellowship Church will obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. The church will have levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

All suspected child abuse or child sexual abuse MUST be handled immediately in accordance with Grace BFC's "Child Abuse Reporting" procedures (see separate document). This includes compliance with all Pennsylvania State Mandated Reporter laws and any other legal requirements.

REPORTING VIOLATIONS TO CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

Any violations to this Policy, including but not limited to unauthorized workers interacting with minors, policies not being upheld, suspected falsification of clearances, or charges against any worker that may disqualify them from working with children, should be reported to a Designated Representative who will be responsible to research the claims, follow-up with appropriate workers, place a written account in the Child Protection files, and report back to the Elders and the person making the original complaint.

ADMINISTRATION OF, EXCEPTIONS TO, AND CHANGES TO THIS POLICY

This policy shall be administered by the Designated Representatives. Any questions about the intent of this policy, requests for exceptions, or changes to the policy shall go to the Board of Elders, whose decisions are final. If any part of this policy is found at any time to be in violation of any local, state or federal laws, or if those laws require something not covered in this policy, those laws will supersede and replace the effected sections of this policy.

APPENDIX 1: Bible Fellowship Church Legislation Relating to Child Protection

Article 204-2.3, Personal Qualifications for the Ministry:

(7) A man convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for ordination or the position of minister at any church. Additionally, a man will be ineligible to maintain his ordination credentials or his position of minister at any church if convicted of sexual abuse.

Article 204-5, Church Staff:

204-5.2 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all church staff. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for employment in any church.

Article 204-1, Elders:

204-1.7 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all elders. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A man convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for the office of elder.

Article 204-4, Deacons:

204-4.5 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all deacons. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for the office of deacon.

Article 404, Choosing Leaders Other than Elders and Deacons:

404-5 The elders will ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all volunteers that have a significant likelihood of contact with children in their ministries. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for volunteer ministry where there is significant likelihood of contact with children. The elders shall define what “significant likelihood of contact with children” means in their context.

Article 407 - Miscellaneous Bylaws:

407-7 Child Protection Policy. The church shall maintain a written child protection policy, enacted and overseen by its Board of Elders. The elders will ensure that their policy complies with the laws of their jurisdiction (Suggested guidelines are included in the 2021 Yearbook, pp. 134-141).

VOLUNTEER CODE OF ETHICS AND RULES

Volunteer Copy

While acting in a volunteer in the children and youth programs of Grace Bible Fellowship a volunteer will endeavor to do the following.

1. Volunteers with minors will not abuse any minors, to include the following:
 - a. Any direct sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor;
 - b. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct toward a minor;
 - c. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor;
 - d. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind to a minor(s);
 - e. Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor;
 - f. Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of Grace Bible Fellowship Church;
 - g. Mental or emotional injury to a minor;
 - h. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of Grace Bible Fellowship Church;
 - i. The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal, illicit drugs;
 - j. The consumption of or being under the influence of alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors of Grace Bible Fellowship Church.
2. Volunteers will have a Criminal Background Check completed and approved every 5 years.
3. Volunteers must treat all people of all races, religions and cultures with respect and consideration.
4. Volunteers will not use or tolerate the use of profanity in the presence of minors.
5. Volunteers must be free of physical or psychological conditions that might adversely affect any minor's health including, but not limited to, contagious diseases.
6. Volunteers will portray a positive role model for minors by maintaining an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, and maturity.
7. Volunteers will be expected to act and respond with Christian love and understanding in all situations.
8. Volunteers will do everything in their power to avoid being put in a situation where they are alone with a minor other than their own.

DISCIPLINE INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The goal of the children and youth programs at Grace Bible Fellowship Church is to provide a safe and beneficial environment for the spiritual growth of children. Our desire is to work alongside the parents in the development of their children and to provide open and honest communication with regard to matters of discipline. The following are guidelines to help in this effort.

APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE: When behavioral problems occur, persons working with children should take the following course of action:

1. Communicate with the child at their level and talk to them in a calm quiet manner about what behavior is expected.
2. If misbehavior continues pre-school children may be put in "Time Out" (sitting them in a classroom chair for a few minutes of non-participation).
3. When disciplinary action is conducted the teacher should communicate the incident to the child's parents or guardians after class and also to the Ministry Supervisor.
4. If the child's behavior continues to be disruptive or dangerous the immediate assistance of the Ministry Supervisor should be sought or another adult to bring the child's parent or guardian to the class to remove the child.
5. In the event that the undesired behavior is happening off church property or at a time when the parents or guardians are not in building the parents will be called and a plan of action will be decided with the parent or guardian, ministry volunteer and the Ministry Supervisor.

INAPPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE: Any person working with children shall not engage in any of the following actions toward children:

1. Inflict corporal punishment in any manner upon a child's body (hit, spank, slap, beat, shake, pinch or any other measure that produces physical discomfort.)
2. Cruel, harsh, unusual, humiliating or frightening methods of discipline including threatening the use of physical punishment.
3. Placement of a child in an unsupervised place or locked and/or dark room.
4. Public or private humiliation, yelling or abusive or profane language.