

GURNEE COMMUNITY CHURCH CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches us that God loves and values children. When his disciples tried to send the children away, Jesus welcomed them, and loved them.

In Mark 10:14 Jesus said, “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.

It is our desire to bring children to Jesus. We desire to do all that we can to create and maintain a safe and welcoming atmosphere in which to teach our children God’s love and care for them. Our goal is to model Christ-likeness to our children. Because we recognize that we are a reflection of God’s love to those in our care, we take seriously our responsibility to them. These guidelines are set forth to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we can bring our children closer to the Savior.

We view ourselves as partners with parents, seeking to provide the highest quality care and instruction in our children’s ministries. All of our guidelines are designed to protect and promote growth for each child and adult involved.

Everyone who teaches, helps, or cares for children on the premises or facilities of Gurnee Community Church (hereafter called GCC), or in the ministries or activities of GCC, must follow these policies and procedures. This Child Protection Policy represents minimum requirements applicable to all ministries or activities of GCC. Individual programs or activities may impose additional requirements as appropriate to their ministry setting.

This Policy supports the GCC mission through the extension of love and caring for our children, youth and adult volunteers and workers.

A. DEFINITIONS

Child: A person under the age of 18

Child Abuse: As defined by Illinois State Law

Approved volunteer or staff worker: An individual who has completed the

GCC Mission Statement:

It is the mission of this church to lead people to a growing faith in Jesus Christ, through love, service, and encouragement, as we journey toward full devotion to God.

Application for Service and has been released for service at GCC by an appointed Program Coordinator.

B. FACILITY PRECAUTIONS

1. Windows are installed in most classrooms in the Church. These windows are to remain unobstructed at all times. The door to any classroom or other room that does not have an unobstructed window in place must remain fully open at all times that children are present in the room.
2. Bathrooms for children ages three and younger have been installed in most rooms where such children are to meet. If adult assistance is required in the bathroom, the bathroom door must remain open at all times, until the adult departs the bathroom.
3. All doors to bathrooms shall be designed so that they cannot be locked from the inside.
4. Diaper changing shall be performed on appropriate diaper-changing stations.

C. CHILD SECURITY POLICIES

1. Drop Off Policy (Infant - Kindergarten)

Parent and child will receive identically numbered wristbands. At pickup, the volunteer and staff workers will match numbered wristbands of parent and child. If wristbands are misplaced or numbers do not match, the parent will be sent to locate the Program Coordinator who will verify the parent's identity (i.e. see their Driver's License) and issue a release of the child to the parent. Children will only be released to the parent who dropped off the child.

If numbered wristbands are not available. The church will instead use a "sign-in, sign-out" form. This procedure uses a single sheet per room with separate columns for the child's name, the parent's "sign-in" signature, and the "sign-out" signature and "sign-out" time. The parent must sign the child in when leaving him or her at the room. The volunteer and staff workers must only release the child to the parent who checked the child in, and must specifically verify that the sign-out signature matches the sign-in signature before releasing the child to the signatory's custody.

2. Volunteer and Staff Workers Identification Policy (Infant through 6th Grade)

All approved volunteer and staff workers are required to wear identification tags that clearly identify them as qualified volunteer and staff workers, authorized by the Church to work with children. Other than the children in the room and the children's parents, only individuals wearing an identification tag will be allowed into the classroom without specific permission of the GCC Program Coordinator.

3. Registration Policy (Infant through 6th Grade)

In order to ensure that children are in the classroom appropriate for their age or level of development, and to provide information such as address and phone number and special needs, all children, except visitors, must be registered. Registration forms will be completed by the parent or guardian, during August Registration or on any Sunday with the Coordinator.

Newly registered children will be given an admission card the day they register. This card informs the child/parent of the class and room and notifies the classroom volunteer and staff workers that the child is newly registered.

Visitors will also obtain an admission card that informs them of the classroom appropriate for their age or level of development and to notify the classroom volunteer and staff workers admitting the child that he/she is visiting.

The drop-off policy applies to all children (Infant - Kindergarten) including both registered and visitors.

4. Diaper Changing Policy.

Only approved volunteer and staff workers may change a child's diaper (other than a child's parent). Diaper changing must take place in the designated diaper changing area in full view of the classroom, as discussed in Section B of this Policy.

5. Bathroom Policy

Volunteer and staff workers must not be alone with children in the bathroom. When a child needs assistance in the bathroom, a door must remain open at all times.

D. STAFFING GUIDELINES

1. GCC attempts to exercise great care in recruiting and selecting children's volunteer and staff workers, therefore:

a) Any adult who will work with anyone under 18 years of age at GCC, with a church-

sponsored program, or on church property or premises, must be screened under this policy. Such screening procedure will include: 1) the completion and submission to the church by the potential volunteer and staff workers of the *Gurnee Community Church Application for Service*, 2) personal interviews, 3) reference checks, and where necessary 4) background checks. All applicants shall have attended GCC for at least six months, unless specifically approved by a Pastor as a result of personal knowledge of an applicant's background.

It will be the responsibility of the GCC Program Coordinator with support from other Staff as assigned, to perform the following duties:

- Obtain a properly completed and signed screening application from the applicant, conduct personal interviews, and when necessary, perform background checks.
- Review the information provided on the application and check any irregularities, missing information, and/or information that raises questions or concerns of any sort about the fitness to work with children.
- Contacting references listed by the applicant on the screening application to question them about the applicant's fitness to work with children, and document the information in the Church's confidential files.
- Review the information elicited in the course of the screening process and determine whether to authorize the applicant to work with children.
- Verify that all steps in the screening process have been completed and have been properly documented in the church's confidential files.
- Inform the applicant that he/she is released for service as an approved volunteer and staff workers, make his/her assignment, issue an official name tag, and notify all who need to know of his/her approval. If an applicant is not approved, the GCC Program Coordinator will inform the applicant and others only on a need to know basis, seeking counsel from the Senior Pastor when appropriate.

b. GCC will conduct a Criminal Background Check through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services or Gurnee Police Department, for all paid employees of GCC who have contact with children..

c. Those who volunteer for special events or temporary service will be required to fill out and sign the Approval for Temporary Service Form. If approved by the GCC Program Coordinator, a Temporary name tag will be provided to the volunteer. These workers will always work under the direct supervision of approved workers, and will never have one on one access to children.

d. Youth Volunteers will be approved for service as described in Section I.(4).

e. **Exceptions to Screening and Background Checks:** There will be no exceptions allowed to any requirements of this section.

E. GUIDELINES FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT

1. Any physical contact between a volunteer and staff worker and a child that would provide or is intended to provide any form of sexual gratification is strictly prohibited.

Limited physical contact such as a pat on the back, or on the head, or a handshake or “high five” are permissible. Hugs are permissible within the sight of others. The volunteer and staff workers must avoid any prolonged hugs and must stop a hug immediately upon the request of the child.

2. Volunteers and employees shall not abuse children including but not limited to:

- (a) Physical abuse - e.g. strike, spank, shake, slap
- (b) Verbal/mental abuse - e.g. humiliate, degrade, threaten
- (c) Sexual Abuse of any kind, including inappropriate touching and exposure

3. *Guidelines for healthy discipline:*

(a) No form of punishment that involves physical pain or discomfort may be used. Children may be restrained if they are in danger of hurting themselves or others. Disruptive children may be removed from the group to another part of the room.

(b) Children who are disruptive should be taken to another side of the room, or if necessary into the hallway (leaving the door fully open and within sight of other people). The volunteer and staff workers should explain to the child that a particular behavior is unacceptable. The volunteer and staff workers may then pray with the child asking the Lord to help the child to control him/herself.

(c) If the disruptive behavior persists the parents should be asked to come and sit with the child in class the following week and for as long as necessary until the child can demonstrate he/she can control themselves. If the behavior continues, the child’s parents may be asked to remove the child from the classroom.

(d) We are committed to working with children to find out what they need in order to fully participate, but not to the detriment of other children in the class.

F. OFF-SITE / OVERNIGHT POLICY FOR GCC SPONSORED EVENTS:

A GCC sponsored event is an event that has been approved by the Board and /or Ministry Team of the sponsoring ministry. In addition, to the other applicable requirements of the Child Protection Policy, all GCC sponsored events off-site and/or overnight must satisfy the following three requirements:

1. It will require the presence of at least two unrelated volunteers or staff workers, both of which have been screened and approved for service in children's ministry following the requirements in Section D.
2. Written parental or guardian permission and a medical release form must be obtained for each participant for overnight or off-site events.
3. Parents will be given the agenda of the event, the address and telephone number of the place to which the children will be going (if possible), and the anticipated departure and return times (refer to Special Guidelines for Youth Ministry, section I. (3)).
4. Male and female children will be separated into different rooms for sleeping arrangements.

G: REPORTING PROCEDURE

Any violations of this Policy should be reported to the GCC Program Coordinator. Additionally, any volunteer or staff worker that has reason to be concerned about the safety or welfare of a child must bring his or her concerns to the GCC Program Coordinator, . The Senior Pastor and GCC Program Coordinator shall review any incidents or violations of policy. Violations of this GCC policy shall be evaluated to determine if the volunteer and staff workers should be removed from continued service in children's ministry.

H. RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Illinois State law requires the reporting of any suspected child abuse to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. This reporting is required whether the abuse occurred at GCC, during GCC sponsored activities, or it occurred completely separate from any Church involvement. For example, if a child communicates that he/she is being abused by a parent or other individual at home, GCC volunteers and workers are required by law to report the incident to the proper authorities. Upon discovery of any concern of any alleged or suspected child abuse, the following guidelines shall be followed:

1. Take appropriate steps to attend to the safety of the child.
2. The parents of any children involved shall be notified immediately.

3. Persons accused or suspected of child abuse or serious inappropriate behavior shall be suspended, with pay, from employment or removed from youth volunteer activities while the incident is being investigated.
4. Any investigation of alleged or suspected child abuse shall be referred to the appropriate civil authorities. Church officials shall not attempt to investigate alleged or suspected child abuse on their own.
5. The Moderator or in the Moderator's absence, the Moderator-elect shall designate a spokesperson to deal with questions directed to the Church from the media and congregation concerning an alleged incident of child abuse.
6. All efforts at handling the incident should be documented. An Incident Report Form shall be completed and placed in a confidential file in the Church office. A single file shall be established and maintained in the Church office documenting all communications and steps taken to respond to allegations of abuse.
7. Information about alleged or suspected incidents and the individuals involved shall be kept confidential. Information may only be shared with persons who either have been authorized by the Moderator or are required by law to receive such information.
8. Commission of child abuse, inappropriate conduct towards children and inappropriate relationships between adults and members of youth groups or children are grounds for dismissal from employment or removal from youth volunteer activities.
9. In instances where the Program Coordinator or Church leadership is unsure as to appropriate action to be taken, specialized legal counsel shall be contacted for further guidance. One source for such legal support is Jim Pluymert, Attorney from Robinson, Pluymert, Piercey, MacDonald & Amato, LTD at 2300 Barrington Road, Suite 220, Hoffman Estates, IL 60195. The phone number for this firm is (847) 310-0025.

I. SPECIAL GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY (6TH-through 12TH Grade)

It is the desire of GCC's Jr. and Sr. High ministries to provide opportunities where approved volunteer and staff workers serve alongside families with teens to promote progress in the youth's faith journey. Volunteer and staff workers in the Church's youth ministry must follow all the requirements established by this Child Protection Policy, including the following guidelines specifically applicable to the youth ministry:

1. General Guidelines

- (a) One-on-one contact. One-on-one contact with youth must only be in public settings.

(b) Driving. When a volunteer or staff worker is driving with youth, he or she should avoid being alone with them without the parent's or guardian's knowledge and approval. Whenever there is a possibility that a volunteer or staff worker will be transporting children or youth without a second unrelated adult present at all times, the leader must receive permission from a parent or guardian of each youth and must make specific arrangements for the transportation. The leader must let the parents know when he or she and the child will be leaving, how they will be traveling, when they expect to arrive at their destination, and when they will return. Three or more individuals should be in the vehicle at all times. Additionally, the driver must have a valid driver's license and current automobile insurance, in accordance with State Law. No youth under the age of 21 shall drive any vehicles on any Church sponsored events.

(c) Dating. At no time shall staff, volunteers, leaders, or assistants working with youth pursue a dating relationship with a youth. Volunteer and staff workers should always be sensitive to youths with "crushes."

2. Class and Small Groups at GCC

All classes and small group activity at GCC will have adult supervision in accordance with requirements in Section D. and I.

3. Informal Get-Togethers

(a) Appointments. One-on-one meetings must occur in public settings and with the knowledge of the parent/guardian or another approved adult volunteer and staff workers.

(b) Overnights. Planned Church overnight activities must be pre-approved by the Board and /or Ministry Team of the sponsoring ministry. The youth must have parental permission to participate. Overnight activities must follow the requirements of the Overnight Policy Detailed in Section F.

(c) Other Group Activities. Other Group activities in public or non-public settings must be approved by the Board and /or Ministry Team of the sponsoring ministry, must have a clearly stated agenda and must have at least two approved volunteer and staff workers present at all times. All other applicable guidelines within this policy shall be enforced for these events.

4. Youth Volunteer's Role in Children's Ministry.

GCC encourages the involvement of youth volunteers in assisting in church children's ministry. Volunteering youth will be trained and approved for service by the GCC Program Coordinator. When released by the GCC Program Coordinator for service, they will be assigned as assistants to adult volunteer and staff workers. An adult volunteer or staff worker

must always be present when youth volunteer and staff workers are participating in classroom activities. Youth must be at least 12 years old or in 7th grade to serve as youth volunteers in Children's Ministry.

J. HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

A parent permission/release form shall be on file for each registered child/youth. This form shall include emergency contact information, special health considerations, and parent instructions and/or preferences for treatment of an ill or injured child/youth.

K. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

An emergency preparedness plan (including a fire response and instructions for severe weather) will be posted in each classroom. An emergency evacuation plan delineating routes to the nearest exits will also be posted in each classroom.

L. EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In the event of a medical, disciplinary, or any other situation that would require a child to leave the classroom, the child will be accompanied to the appropriate destination e.g. the restroom, church office, etc. Attempts will be made to promptly notify the parent.

M. APPROVAL PROCESS

This policy shall be reviewed and endorsed by the Board of Christian Education, Board of Elders and Board of Trustees, prior to approval. The initial policy shall be approved by the Church Council.

N. PERIODIC POLICY REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed at least every three years, or earlier if the Program Coordinator determines a need for revision or update. Substantial revisions to the Policy require review and approval by the Board of Christian Education. Policy revisions shall be forwarded to the Board of Elders and Board of Trustees at least 30 days prior to implementation.

References:

Implementing a Child Protection Plan, with Jim Pluymert, Willow Creek Association, Copyright 2000

Elmbrook Church Child Protection Policy, Revised 6/98

First Presbyterian Church Protection Policy 1998

First Congregational Church Child Protection Policy, April 2002

North Shore Congregational Church Child/Youth Safety & Abuse Prevention Policy, November 2002

